

**THE LATE MING COURTESAN MA SHOUZHEN (1548-1604):
VISUAL CULTURE, GENDER AND SELF-FASHIONING
IN THE NANJING PLEASURE QUARTER**

**Monica Merlin
The Queen's College
D.Phil.
Hilary 2013**

Abstract

Ma Shouzhen (1548-1604) was a cultured courtesan who lived in the famous pleasure quarter along the Qinhuai River in Nanjing, the southern capital of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). She was talented in dance and music, painting and poetry, and surprisingly for her time, she was also a playwright. Although she was a celebrity of the prolific Nanjing cultural milieu and there is a good corpus of extant material by and about her, the particular contribution of Ma Shouzhen - her character and her work - have been marginalised, or even neglected, by the previous scholarship.

This thesis is a cross-disciplinary study of Ma Shouzhen and is the first in-depth scholarly investigation into the entirety of her activities. It employs material and methods traditionally pertaining to the disciplines of sinology, history, art history, literary and drama studies. The thesis has a dual aim: first, to provide a nuanced understanding of the courtesan, her cultural production and social practice; second, to reclaim the agency and legacy of her character within the cultural milieu of late Ming Nanjing and beyond. These aims will be achieved through two main research objectives: (1) recovering and re-evaluating visual and written sources by and about the courtesan; (2) investigating those sources in order to comprehend her modes of self-representation and strategies of self-fashioning, analysed especially through the lens of gender.

The main body of the thesis is composed of an introduction, five core chapters, and an epilogue; the chapters are structured so as to provide as complete a picture of Ma Shouzhen as possible. Chapter Two explores the space of the pleasure quarter, Ma's biography and its entwinement within the complexities of the historical moment. Chapter Three focuses on her painting, Chapter Four considers her poetry, and Chapter Five explores her theatre practice; Chapter Six extends the investigation to focus on the construction of Ma's historical character in later decades.

In its content and aims, this thesis contributes to women's and gender history, as well as to studies in visual culture and literature.

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Abstract

Ma Shouzhen (1548-1604) was a 'famous courtesan' (*mingji*) who lived in the renowned pleasure quarter along the Qinhuai River in Nanjing, the southern capital of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). She was an educated woman, trained to entertain the literati (*wenren*, men-of-letters), talented in performing dance and music, painting (mainly orchids and bamboo) as well as composing poetry. Moreover, even if she has been rarely recognised as such, Ma was also a playwright. Although she was a celebrity courtesan in the prolific Nanjing cultural milieu and there is a good corpus of extant material by and about her, the particular contribution of Ma Shouzhen - her character and her work - have been marginalised, or even neglected, by the previous scholarship.

This thesis is an in-depth study of Ma Shouzhen's cultural production and social practice. In the space of the pleasure quarter Ma Shouzhen partook in the public space and made herself visible to the literati who were potential friends, lovers and patrons. Ma lived in a historical moment characterised by an economic boom, a demographic explosion, urbanisation, the rise of a new merchant class, social mobility, the blooming of a commodity culture and the entertainment industry. The intellectual elite of these decades, literati who different from previous generations rarely obtained official titles through the civil imperial examinations, soothed the uncertainties and frustration of a new societal order by redefining values related to the expression of the self. In this climate, the courtesan was in an especially favourable position to create and expose her persona, negotiate gender/social boundaries and exert agency through building social networks. Thus, a study of Ma Shouzhen not only introduces the individual story of a

character who does not belong to the main historical narrative, but also contributes to explore the complexities of the late Ming.

This study is the first of its kind to investigate the entirety of Ma Shouzhen's activities, and in its cross-disciplinary approach will employ material and methods pertaining to the traditionally defined disciplines of sinology, history, art history, literary and drama studies. The thesis has a dual aim: first, to provide a nuanced understanding of the courtesan, her cultural production and social practice; second, to reclaim the agency and legacy of her character within the cultural milieu of late Ming Nanjing and in the following centuries. These aims will be achieved through two main research objectives: (1) recovering and re-evaluating visual and written sources by and about the courtesan; (2) investigating those sources in order to comprehend her modes of self-representation and strategies of self-fashioning, especially seen through the lens of gender.

The thesis will provide the most complete archival inventory on the courtesan thus far by discovering and examining visual as well as written sources by and about Ma Shouzhen. The sources have been gathered from digitalised archives of texts and images, as well as in libraries in the UK (Bodleian and SOAS) and China (especially at the rare books collections of the National Library in Beijing and the Shanghai Library). The texts by Ma Shouzhen include: the inscriptions on painting, letters, a piece of prose and more than eighty individual poems (including *shi* lyric poems and *ci* song lyrics) published in her individual poetry collection and anthologies from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. There are around sixty paintings attributed to Ma Shouzhen housed in museums and private collections in Europe, the US, mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, without counting those (authentic and counterfeit) which circulate in the art market. This wealth of different source material is extremely relevant to understanding the reception of the courtesan and her work, as well as her legacy and the construction of her image in the subsequent centuries. Besides investigating the work of Ma Shouzhen this thesis will also examine visual and written material about her. These sources, mainly created by literati, but also by literate women, date from the late sixteenth to the twentieth century and comprise paintings and woodblock printed illustrations as well as written sources, such as biographies, poetry, letters, 'note jottings' (*biji*) and gazetteers.

In the analysis of the visual and textual material, three main modes of investigation will be deployed: visual culture, gender and self-fashioning. Visual culture is used on the one hand to claim a distance from Western aesthetic preconceptions, and on the other to emphasise the importance of investigating the visual in order to understand ways of seeing and embodied social, cultural and gender values. Gender is employed as 'a useful category of historical analysis', following the feminist historian Joan W. Scott, and will be used mainly to explore expressions of subjectivity and ways in which social interactions are constructed and established. Both these aspects are strictly related to the third mode of investigation, the concept of self-fashioning, which is interpreted in a critical engagement with the work of Stephen Greenblatt. It is brought forward in mainly two ways: by investigating painting and gender as essential tools to both express and examine self-fashioning strategies.

The main body of the thesis is composed of an introduction, five core chapters, and an epilogue. The chapters are self-contained as well as mutually complementary in order to achieve a more complex and nuanced picture of the courtesan through the *fil rouge* of gender. Each chapter will investigate one specific aspect of Ma Shouzhen's life and practice, while the final core chapter will focus on the construction of her 'afterlife'.

Chapter One will introduce the research, its mission, methodology and approach. It will subsequently set the socio-historical backdrop against which to place Ma Shouzhen and also discuss the relevant secondary scholarship, both in English and Chinese, which has so far contributed to the understanding of late Ming dynasty courtesans, and women of the late imperial era, their role and activities.

Chapter Two will explore the geography of the Qinhuai pleasure quarter and the construction of its space in the late Ming dynasty, by deploying woodblock printed images and writings by courtesans and their guests. The chapter will then propose a reconstruction of the courtesan's biography by using only sources by Ma Shouzhen herself and her contemporaries, in order to keep the narrative as close as possible to her lifetime. In doing so it will explore known and unknowns about her, such as origins,

education and religious practice, which will prove useful also for wider discussions about late Ming courtesan culture. The final part of Chapter Two will place Ma Shouzhen in the wider context so as to emphasise the intertwinements between the story of the courtesan and the profound socio-cultural changes taking place in the second half of the sixteenth century.

Chapter Three will focus on one of Ma Shouzhen's talents and practices: painting. After a brief caveat on the issue of authenticity, the chapter will explore the formal aspects of her painting, her place in the history of painting, the significance of her chosen subject matter and her painting's visuality. The chapter will then discuss the social function of painting at the time and provide a close reading of Ma Shouzhen's painting inscriptions, which reveal precious information about the execution of the piece, the creator and her social nexus. The practice of painting as well as inscribing were commodities in the gift exchange between the courtesan and the surrounding literati, thus they were tools used to express and fashion the self and display social relationships.

Chapter Four will investigate Ma Shouzhen's poetry (both *shi* and *ci*) as well as the appreciation and inclusion of her poems in Ming and Qing anthologies. By providing original translations and close readings of selected verses, the chapter will discuss her poetic work against the tradition of literati poems in the female voice, and will especially explore two of the major themes in her poetic: the trope of parting and of the deserted woman. The chapter will then discuss the social function of poetry at the time, which was used as a self-fashioning strategy and a tool for the construction and display of social ties. The final section of this chapter will add a layer of complexity to Ma Shouzhen's production and performance of poetry by exploring the explicit erotic imagery expressed in a few selected song lyrics.

Ma Shouzhen is often remembered as talented in dancing and singing, yet her work as a playwright has been often neglected by the literature. Chapter Five will centre on both her performances and her writing for theatre; it will first provide the background of the late Ming practice of Southern songs and theatre; then it will propose an original translation and a preliminary analysis of the two extant scenes of her theatre play

chuanqi. The chapter will recover and discuss sources which prove that Ma Shouzhen herself became a fictional character in contemporary plays, and that she was strongly connected to important figures in the theatre milieu of the time.

Finally, Chapter Six will employ visual and written sources about Ma Shouzhen which date from after her death in 1604. Ma Shouzhen's 'afterlife' starts with the elegiac poetry written in her memory by her contemporaries, and is later constructed in the nostalgic writing of romantic loyalists at the dynastic turn; her image is visualised in posthumous portraits and her talent appreciated in a nineteenth-century vogue for the late Ming and its famous courtesans. These sources reveal a constant engagement with the character of Ma Shouzhen and her cultural production in the centuries following her death, and disclose the creation of Ma Shouzhen as a *lieu de mémoire* in the literati cultural memory.

The chapters individually and the thesis as a whole aim at providing a final complex and nuanced picture of Ma Shouzhen. She was a talented woman who capably constructed her fame through the display of her cultural capital and the creation of supportive literati networks. The thesis, in its mission and content, contributes to the neglected subject of Chinese women artists of the imperial era, and through its cross-disciplinary approach contributes to different fields of knowledge: visual culture, history, literature, drama and Chinese studies. Finally, the research proposes to see Ma Shouzhen afresh as the first relevant figure among the late Ming Nanjing courtesans; her agency and legacy are important to investigate broader themes of gender, self-representation, network building, visibility and history making in late imperial China.

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This thesis is dedicated to Paola Sandri (Vicenza 1977 – Beijing 2006), who could never complete her doctorate.

Chapter One

Investigating Ma Shouzhen: Old and New Questions

1.1 Research mission, aims and objectives

In 1988 at the Indianapolis Museum of Art the exhibition *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300–1912* set a milestone in museum history and the academic world.¹ This was a groundbreaking event for at least three reasons: it marked the first time Chinese women artists were exposed to the international public and academic eye; it produced the first comprehensive volume about Chinese women artists of the imperial era; it embodied a fresh scholarly interest in women within Chinese studies, interest which was about to bloom into a new historiography of Chinese women.² Until today *Views from Jade Terrace* remains the main reference in English for the study of Chinese women painters of the past.

Inspired by the mission of historical revisionism embodied by *Views from Jade Terrace*, this thesis proposes an in-depth journey into the life and artistic and social practice of one of the women featured in the Indianapolis exhibition: Ma Shouzhen 馬守真 (1548–1604), a ‘famous courtesan’ (*mingji* 名妓) who lived in the city of Nanjing 南京 in

¹ The exhibition ran from 3 September to 6 November 1988; Marsha Weidner ed., *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300–1912* (Indianapolis, 1988); the volume contains essays by Marsha Weidner, Irving Lo and Ellen Johnston Laing. It is worth mentioning that a smaller and less publicised exhibition of paintings by twenty-seven Ming and Qing women took place at the Palace Museum of Beijing in 2002, see the *Exhibition of Ming-Qing Women Painters’ Works* 明清女畫家精品展 on the Palace Museum’s website http://www.dpm.org.cn/www_oldweb/Big5/e/e9/index.htm [accessed 26 June 2010].

² Tani E. Barlow, ‘The Direction of History and Women in China’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 4.1 (Spring 2003), no page number [accessed in html via http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/toc/cch4.1.html].

the last century of the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644).³ As for many other women of the late imperial era, despite the availability of surviving sources by and about Ma Shouzhen, the scholarship has neglected the importance of studying her, and marginalised her role in the Nanjing cultural milieu of the late Ming (1550–1644).

The Chinese term *ji* 妓, which indicates female performers of dance and song, entertainers and prostitutes, is here translated as ‘courtesan’.⁴ In the early dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 edited in the second century, *ji* is defined as: ‘wife [busy in] petty things; woman skilled at singing, and reciting on tip-toes’ (婦人小物也。從女支聲，讀若跂行),⁵ which possibly meant performing a song. Thus, originally *ji* although it referred to women did not imply prostitution; it was rather related to the general word used for ‘performer’ (*ji*^A 伎)⁶, which bears the meaning of skill and ability and does not carry any gender specification.

This thesis acknowledges the definition of courtesanship ‘roughly as the social phenomenon whereby women engage in relatively exclusive exchanges of artistic graces, elevated conversation, and sexual favours with male patrons’.⁷ As Martha Feldman and Bonnie G. Smith have emphasised in their edited volume, the courtesan together with her artistic and social practices have to be analysed within the specificity of the time and geography to which she belonged; therefore the term ‘courtesan’ is employed allowing

³ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72.

⁴ *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大辭典 ‘Comprehensive Chinese Dictionary’ (Shanghai, 1986–1994) [hereafter HYDCD], 4–295B. The bi-syllabic *mingji* does not appear as a word in the dictionary.

⁵ Duan Yucai 段玉裁, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 ‘Annotated Shuowen Jiezi’ (Yangzhou, 1997), 12B.20b.

⁶ In order to distinguish the pinyin of *ji* 妓 from that of the homophone character *ji* 伎, the latter will be written *ji*^A.

⁷ See Martha Feldman and Bonnie G. Smith eds., *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (New York, 2006), 5.

specific social and cultural variants. ‘Courtesan’ stems from the Italian word *cortigiano* or French *courtier*, which designated a person connected to the court; yet, from the mid-sixteenth century it turned feminine and began to define court mistresses or female entertainers, usually prostitutes, who populated the pleasure districts of the main European cities.⁸ In a comparative perspective the ‘famous *ji*’ *mingji* corresponded to the talented *cortigiana onesta* (honest or honourable courtesan) of Renaissance Venice, who for social and cultural capital was opposed to the lower *cortigiana di lume*, comparable instead to the Chinese simple *ji*. The latter, rather than being a *ming* ‘famous’ *ji*, was usually referred to as *changji* 娼妓 ‘singing girl’ or *jinü* 妓女 ‘prostitute’, yet at times even those recognised to be *mingji* were merely classified as prostitutes.⁹

A brief biographical note which appeared in a printed edition of Ma Shouzhen’s personal poetry collection (*bieji* 別集) published in 1595 (ill. 1), introduces the courtesan as follows:

[Ma] Yuejiao, style name Xianglan, famous lady of the Old Compound, her romantic lure is unique among contemporaries;¹⁰ skilled in writing poetry, talented in [painting] orchids and bamboo; ¹¹ elegantly connected with the literati, she is of generous and tranquil character. Although she ended up in a brothel, ¹² it was not due to her own will.

月嬌號湘蘭，舊院名姬，風流絕代，工詩書，善蘭竹。雅與文人墨士交。性好恬靜。雖滯跡青樓非其志也。¹³

⁸ On the origins of the word *cortigiana* see Bonnie G. Smith ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History* (Oxford; New York, 2008) vol. 1, 496; Ma Shouzhen is not featured in the encyclopedia.

⁹ For the difference between the two kinds of courtesans see Margaret F. Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Chicago; London, 1992), 60-1; on this comparison see also Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-century China* (Stanford, 1994), 253. Other terms such as *changji* 娼妓 ‘singing girl/prostitute’ could have indicated entertainers of a lower level, see R.H. Matthews, *Matthews’ Chinese-English Dictionary* (Cambridge MA, 1945), n. 209. Other terms used to indicate courtesans will be discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁰ The meanings of *fengliu* 風流 are readdressed in Chapter Two.

¹¹ Ya 雅 also means ‘friendship’ or ‘relationship’, HYDCD, 11-819A.

¹² Here *qinglou* 青樓 is translated ‘brothel’; the term will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹³ Ma Shouzhen 馬守貞, *Ma Xianglan shiji* 馬湘蘭詩集 ‘Ma Xianglan’s Poetry Collection’, 2 *juan*, in Zhou Lüjing 周履靖, *Xiang lian shi* 香奩詩 ‘Perfumed Vanity Case Poetry’, 12 *juan* (Ming Wanli Meixu Zhou shi

From the above passage, it is possible to delineate the core aspects of the present dissertation: Ma Shouzhen's life as a courtesan, her cultural production – painting and writing – and her social practice, which included self-fashioning strategies, through naming and self-promotion, as well as social ties with the literati (*wenren* 文人 or *moshi* 墨士 'men of letters').¹⁴ The text does not mention that Ma Shouzhen besides being a painter and poet was, as required by the courtesan profession, a performer of music, dance and theatre, and was moreover a playwright: she wrote a romantic drama (*chuanqi* 傳奇, lit. tale of marvels).¹⁵ Previous studies of Ma Shouzhen have privileged one sole aspect of her cultural production, yet for the first time this research proposes to investigate the entirety of her activities so as to provide a more complete picture of her character.¹⁶ In order to do so this thesis adopts a cross-disciplinary approach to study the courtesan, and thus will engage with material and methods usually belonging to traditional disciplines such as sinology, art history, literary and drama studies.

In the investigation of Ma Shouzhen, the thesis has a dual aim: first, to provide a nuanced understanding of the courtesan, her cultural production and social practice;

jin xiang ben edition at the National Library in Taipei, cat n. 00522476), 1a. Ma Shouzhen's collection is in two *juan* 卷 'section', preceded by an index; the original pagination is consecutive, and here the two sections will be distinguished by 1 and 2, while the index will be '*mulu*' 目錄.

¹⁴ See on late Ming literati Chu-tsing Li and James C.Y. Watt eds., *The Chinese Scholar's Studio. Artistic Life in the Late Ming Period. An Exhibition from the Shanghai Museum* (New York, 1987), 1-2.

¹⁵ Hu Wenhuan 胡文煥 ed., *Qunyin leixuan* 群音類選 'A Multitude of Melodies, Classified and Selected', in *Zhonghua shuju* (Beijing, 1980), vol. 2, 929-33.

¹⁶ In the English-speaking scholarship Ma's painting practice is mainly treated in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72-81; for her writing, only three of Ma's poems have been translated in Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China: an Anthology of Poetry and Criticism* (Stanford, 1999), 230-1; Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Cambridge MA, 2004), 347-58. In the Chinese scholarship see Li Shi 李滢, 'Tan Mingdai nühuajia Ma Shouzhen hua lan 談明代女畫家馬守真畫蘭' (Discussing the Orchid Paintings of the Ming Dynasty Woman Artist Ma Shouzhen), *Wenwu*, 7 (1991), 81-3; He Junhong 赫俊紅, *Danqing qiba: wan Ming Qing chu de nü huihua* 丹青奇葩: 晚明清初的女性繪畫 'Precious Painting. Late Ming Early Qing Women Painters' (Beijing, 2008), 67-70, 116-157; Xu Wenmei 許文美, 'Wan Ming qinglou huajia Ma Shouzhen de lanzhu hua 晚明青樓畫家馬守真的蘭竹畫' (Orchid and Bamboo Paintings by the Late Ming Courtesan Painter Ma Shouzhen), *Gugong xueshu likan*, vol. 21, n. 3 (2004), 81-115.

second to reclaim the agency and legacy of her character within the cultural milieu of late Ming Nanjing and in subsequent centuries. These aims will be achieved through two main research objectives: (1) recovering and re-evaluating visual and written sources by and about Ma Shouzhen; (2) investigating those sources in order to comprehend her modes of self-representation and strategies of self-fashioning, especially through the lens of gender.

There is a vast corpus of material available by and about Ma Shouzhen, and this thesis will provide the most complete archival inventory on the courtesan thus far. The sources have been gathered from digital archives of texts and images¹⁷ as well as in libraries in the UK and China. The texts by Ma Shouzhen include: the inscriptions on painting, letters, a piece of prose and more than eighty individual poems published in her personal collection and anthologies from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. There are at least sixty paintings by Ma Shouzhen housed in museums and private collections in Europe, the US, mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan (table 2), without counting those (authentic and counterfeit) which circulate in the art market. In fact, among the sources retrieved and discussed there are possible forgeries. This thesis will acknowledge the cases in which the material is believed to be counterfeit and discuss it when relevant to the purpose of the research. However, due to the impossibility of accessing the majority of the original objects, it is not a prime concern of this research to examine the material in order to establish its authenticity.

¹⁷ Important digital archives for this study include the text-database of the McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project [<http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/mingqing/english/index.htm>], directed by Grace Fong (McGill University).

The sources about Ma Shouzhen will be analysed in order to understand the reception of the courtesan and her work, as well as her legacy and the construction of her image in the subsequent centuries. These sources, mainly created by literati, but also by literate women, date from the late sixteenth to the twentieth century. They comprise woodblock printed illustrations as well as paintings, and written sources such as biographies, poetry, letters, 'note jottings' (筆記 *biji*) and gazetteers. In the analysis of the visual and textual material, three main modes of investigation will be deployed: visual culture, gender and self-fashioning, which will be defined in the next section.

1.2 Three key modes of investigation: visual culture, gender and self-fashioning

Although the primary sources give reason to think that Ma Shouzhen was appreciated both as painter and poet, most of the secondary scholarship has mainly discussed her painting.¹⁸ This thesis does not attempt to assess Ma Shouzhen's paintings in terms of aesthetic quality, but rather to comprehend the embedded significance which the painted subject and the painting practice represented for the creator and its potential viewership. In so doing, it embraces the focal purpose of the concept and practice of visual culture, which is to contrast the hierarchical preconceptions of *art* and to understand 'the visual as a place where meanings are created and contested'.¹⁹ In discussing Ma Shouzhen's painting, this thesis will often use the term 'visuality', which

¹⁸ Beside those mentioned in fn. 15, in the Anglophone scholarship Craig Clunas has remarkably embedded Ma in the discourse of Ming visual culture in Craig Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China* (London, 1997), 158-60; and Craig Clunas, *Empire of Great Brightness: Visual and Material Cultures of Ming China, 1368-1644* (London, 2007), 123-6; also for a brief study of Ma and other courtesan-painters see Jean Wetzel, 'Hidden Connections: Courtesans in the Art World of the Ming Dynasty', *Women's Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal*, 31.5 (2002), 645-69.

¹⁹ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London; New York, 1999), 6.

refers to 'sight as a social fact',²⁰ and allows the investigation of modes of viewing and their entwinement with the social status and gender of the viewers. Moreover, following W.J.T. Mitchell, visibility implies the understanding of visual elements as embodiments and representations of constructed social values.²¹ This last interpretation will be especially useful to investigate Ma Shouzhen's painted subject matter within the literati tradition.

In the footsteps of scholars of Chinese women's history, the current research follows the feminist historian Joan W. Scott by employing gender as 'a useful category of historical analysis' or, as she has put it more recently, as 'a way of interrogating history'.²² Two of the main ideas emphasised by Scott are particularly useful for the purposes of this research: the fact that gender is key to the historical investigation of (1) the construction of social relationships; (2) subjective identity.²³ Gender is historically, culturally and socially constructed, thus its deployment as an analytical category allows us to explore how norms and individual behaviours related to being a man or a woman are created and maintained in a specific society, and how they change through time. More than ten years ago the art historian Evelyn Welch made a general statement which is still valid today, especially for Chinese art history: 'for as remarkable as the amount of scholarship centred on gender issues may be, the amount which ignores it completely is far

²⁰ Hal Foster ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle, 1988), ix; see also on the origins of the word and its employment in the British Empire in Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'On Visuality', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5.1 (2006), 53-79.

²¹ W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture', in Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey eds., *Art History, Aesthetics and Visual Studies* (Williamstown MA, 2002), 231-50.

²² Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review*, 91 (Dec 1986), 1053-75; Joan W. Scott, 'Unanswered Questions', *The American Historical Review*, 113.5 (2008), 1423. Dorothy Ko has referred to Scott in her work, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 5. For a recent assessment of the reception of Scott in Chinese studies, see Gail Hershatter and Wang Zheng, 'Chinese History: A Useful Category of Gender Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 113, n. 5 (December 2008), 1404-21.

²³ Scott, 'Gender', 1057, 1067-8.

greater'.²⁴ So, in researching Ma Shouzhen through the lens of gender, this thesis contributes to the study of the expressions of gendered subjectivity in painting and writing by Chinese women of the early modern era.

In discussing Ming dynasty gender constructions, this thesis will employ the emic terminology of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, which corresponds to cosmological principles associated respectively with: dark, moist, latent, feminine and bright, fire, active, masculine. Although the use of these terms might seem overrated, they are part of the indigenous discourse on femininity and masculinity, and thus are proper to discuss issues related to gender and its expressions.²⁵ The *yin-yang* device is intended not as a fixed dichotomy, but rather characterised by fluidity. It has been emphasised by the insightful work of Charlotte Furth in medical history, which has demonstrated how in the conceptualisation and social construction of the body – but not only the body – *yin* and *yang* are a continuum in constant flow.²⁶ Another major aspect of the *yin-yang* dyad is positionality, for which the same element can be *yin* or *yang* according to its physical or symbolic position.²⁷ The employment of *yin-yang* as a useful terminology and category for the investigation of gender constructions has led to insightful studies also in literature and drama, as represented by the work of Martin Huang, Roland Altenburger and Song Geng.²⁸

²⁴ Evelyn Welch, 'Engendering Italian Renaissance Art – A Bibliographic Review', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, vol. LXVIII (Hertford, 2000), 211.

²⁵ Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960–1665* (Berkeley, 1999), 11, 21-3.

²⁶ Furth, *A flourishing Yin*, 48-50.

²⁷ See Francesca Bray, *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, 1997).

²⁸ See Martin W. Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu, 2006), 3-4; Roland Altenburger, *The Sword or the Needle: the Female Knight-errant (xia) in Traditional Chinese Narrative* (New York, 2009), 32-4; Song Geng, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong, 2003), 14-17.

The third key mode of investigation employed in this thesis is self-fashioning, which is used here in a critical engagement with the concept developed by Stephen Greenblatt in his seminal *Renaissance Self-fashioning*.²⁹ This thesis embraces Greenblatt's general definition of self-fashioning as 'the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment'.³⁰ However, it takes forward Greenblatt's definition in two ways: by augmenting the scope of investigation through the analysis of painting, which with its system of meaning, like writing and literature is also a mode of self-fashioning; and, more importantly, by identifying gender as an important factor in the understanding of the self and its fashioning processes.

The concept of self-fashioning seems particularly relevant to Ming history, since Greenblatt has maintained that 'in the sixteenth century there appears to be an increased consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process'.³¹ This statement is also very true for the late Ming, which was a moment of great socio-economic changes and brought a new awareness of the self and its representations. New forms of expressions of the self have been discussed in different disciplines in relation to this period of history and are found for instance in a more individualistic painting manner, such as the one carried out by the controversial painter

²⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning. From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago; London, 1980). The concept has been used in Daria Berg, 'Female Self-Fashioning in Late Imperial China: How the Gentlewoman and the Courtesan Edited Her Story and Rewrote Hi/story', in Idem ed., *Reading China: Fiction, History and the Dynamics of Discourse. Essays in Honour of Professor Glen Dudbridge* (Leiden, 2007), 238-9. Although Xue Susu, the subject of Berg's essay, was a courtesan painter, Berg did not use painting as relevant research material.

³⁰ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, 3-4.

³¹ See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, 2.

and intellectual Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–1593),³² a new emphasis on portraiture and a blooming practice of autobiographical writing.³³

1.3 The historical context of late Ming Nanjing

This thesis is concerned with understanding the time and space in which Ma Shouzhen lived. The ‘late Ming’, which corresponds to the period from 1550 to 1644, has been identified by historians as a moment of profound economic, social and cultural changes, especially following the Jiajing 嘉靖 reign (1521–1566).³⁴ The ‘late Ming’ as a historical category is functional for a periodisation of the dynasty, which previous two hundred years are divided into early and mid-Ming periods. Yet, Chinese scholars tend to consider the third phase of the dynasty to be its very end (Mingmo 明末), meaning the last twenty years of the dynasty characterised by the Manchu conquest and the dynastic turn.³⁵

Ma Shouzhen lived in Nanjing, which in the Ming dynasty was called also, but not only, Jinling 金陵, Moling 秣陵 and Liudu 留都. Nanjing is located in the region of Jiangnan 江南 (literally south of the river), which is the Yangtze River delta region (see map 1).³⁶ The

³² On Xu Wei’s painting see Kathleen M. Ryor, ‘Fleshly Desires and Bodily Deprivations: The Somatic Dimensions of Xu Wei’s Flower Paintings’, in Wu Hung and Katherine R. Tsiang ed., *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture* (Cambridge MA; London, 2005), 121-46.

³³ Richard E. Vinograd, *Boundaries of the Self: Chinese Portraits, 1600-1900* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. Ch.2; Martin W. Huang, *Literati and Self-re/presentation: Autobiographical Sensibility in the Eighteenth-century Chinese Novel* (Stanford, 1995), 1.

³⁴ See the idea of *change* through seasons in Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley, 1998), where summer is from 1550 to 1664; also Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit: Social Change and Moral Order in Late Imperial China* (Princeton, 1991), 3.

³⁵ *Mingmo* tends to be coupled with *Qingchu* (early Qing), see for instance Tao Muning 陶慕寧, *Qinglou wenxue yu Zhongguo wenhua* 青樓文學與中國文化 ‘Qinglou Literature and Chinese Culture’ (Beijing, 1996), 170.

³⁶ George W. Skinner, ‘Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth-Century China’, in George W. Skinner and Hugh D.R. Baker eds., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1977), 212-3.

city was initially chosen as the only dynastic capital by its founder Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398, emperor Taizu 太祖 1368–1398),³⁷ but in 1421 during the reign of the Yongle 永樂 emperor (reign 1402–1424), Nanjing became the southern capital (indeed *nan* ‘south’ *jing* ‘capital’) and Beijing 北京 (lit. ‘northern capital’) was nominated imperial capital, primarily in order to control the troublesome northern borders. Most of the administration, together with the central court, moved to Beijing, leaving behind in Nanjing only some of the core institutions and political functions, such as the provincial civil examinations. Thus, from 1421 Nanjing became the secondary capital and lost some political significance, yet it maintained its role within the empire as a core commercial centre and a significant site of cultural production, where the intellectual elites were either based or often travelled to.³⁸

The urban life of Nanjing is well represented in the long handscroll ‘Thriving Southern Capital’ *Nandu fanhui tu* 南都繁會圖 (ill. 2), which today is housed in the National Museum of China (中國國家博物館).³⁹ This anonymous painting, probably made around 1600 by a professional painter under commission, depicts the city likely during a festivity celebration as the streets are filled with a procession of performers and acrobats in a joyful atmosphere.⁴⁰ Roads, buildings and bridges are crowded with people

³⁷ G.W. Mote, ‘The Transformation of Nanking 1350-1400’, in George W. Skinner ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1977), 119-20, 126-9.

³⁸ See on Nanjing and the management of the two capitals system in Edward L. Farmer, *Early Ming Government: the Evolution of Dual Capitals* (Cambridge MA, 1976), 51-7, 134-47.

³⁹ Painting reproduced in Yu Weichao ed., *A Journey into China’s Antiquity* (Beijing, 1997), vol. 4, 89-91. Another handscroll could be included in the same discussion, see Monica Merlin, ‘The Nanjing Courtesan Ma Shouzhen (1548–1604): Gender, Space and Painting in the Late Ming Pleasure Quarter’, *Gender & History*, 23.3 (Nov 2011), 631-3.

⁴⁰ The same scroll is discussed among other visual representations of Nanjing in Wang Cheng-hua 王正華, ‘Guoyan fanhua. Wanming chengshi tu, chengshi guan yu xiaofei wenhua de yanjiu 過眼繁華。晚明城市圖、城市觀與消費文化的研究’ (The Representation of Urban Life and the Cultural Consumption of Cityscapes in late-Ming China), in Li Xiaoti 李孝悌, *Zhongguo de chengshi shenghuo* 中國的城市生活 ‘Life

busy walking and observing the surroundings; there are temples for praying and shops for buying and selling. The scroll conveys the idea of the city as a prolific marketplace and provides readable characters of shop signs, so we know that among others, the local businesses offered wine, famous teas, shoes, pearls, goods from the north-west and even from the eastern and western oceans (*dong xi liang yang* 東西兩洋).

Nanjing was in the beating heart of the productive Yangtze coastal region, which was an important agricultural area for grains, salt, silk and cotton, and was very well connected internally as well as with the rest of the empire by water and overland routes. In the sixteenth century, due to the demographic boom and a process of urbanisation, the main cities of the Jiangnan area reached one million people, as happened to Nanjing itself during the Wanli 萬曆 reign (1572–1620).⁴¹ The creation of new routes of trade with the outer world, from the region's Asian neighbours to the European territory, augmented the demand for the production, both private and state controlled, of goods to be traded, such as ceramics, textiles, tea, spices and salt.⁴² Internally to the empire, a generalised higher flux of commodities increased from the 1550s as part of complex economic changes which saw the rise of a new merchant class and the creation of a strong commodity culture.⁴³

of Chinese Cities' (Taipei, 2002), 17, 21-9, 35-6. Wang has also noticed that women are included in the urban space, but has not made any further consideration on what their depiction could mean.

⁴¹ See on Nanjing population Han Dacheng 韓大成, *Mingdai chengshi yanjiu* 明代城市研究 'Research on Ming Dynasty Cities' (Beijing, 2009), 48-9.

⁴² When China demanded a larger quantity of silver, especially in response to the introduction in 1581 of a new taxation system known as the single whip which demanded taxes to be paid once a year in silver. Although China imported silver from Japan, a new trade began with the Europeans thanks to their new silver mines in Eastern Europe and the exploitation of resources in Mexico and Peru. See William Atwell, 'Ming China and the Emerging World Economy, c. 1470–1650', in Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, *Cambridge History of China. The Ming Dynasty 1368–1644* (Cambridge, 1998), vol. 8, 376-416. See also for the importance of silver in China and the early modern global economy Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, *China and the Birth of Globalization in the 16th Century* (Farnham, 2010), esp. II and III.

⁴³ Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, 190-228.

The scroll *Nandu fanhui tu* represents Nanjing's booming economy and society at a time when the boundaries among its traditional four groups (*simin* 四民) (officials, peasants, artisans and merchants) began to blur.⁴⁴ The merchants' new possibilities of gaining economic capital, through the trade of grains and goods of any sorts, allowed them to obtain a more relevant position in society, where they tended to adopt customs, behaviours and taste in emulation of the cultural elite, as in the case of the Hangzhou salt merchant and collector Wang Ranming 汪然明 (1577–1655), who became famous for his refined parties and high-level connections.⁴⁵ Moreover, *nouveau riches* could also gain the cultural capital needed to prepare, sit and pass the imperial examination. Thus, the competition to enter the bureaucratic system became fiercer than when the access to education belonged almost exclusively to members of officials and landholding elite families. In this increasing social flexibility, families and individuals could rise as well as descend the social ladder: merchants experienced new opportunities of raising their status, while many households which traditionally managed the bureaucracy saw their position endangered and often lost their family wealth and social position.⁴⁶

In a close viewing of the crowds represented in *Nandu fanhui tu*, it is interesting to note that the people who roam the streets and bridges, and enter the temples and buildings, are exclusively men, while women are depicted as confined in mainly two places: they occupy an elevated area to watch a stage performance (ill. 2.1), and look at the street

⁴⁴ On people's grouping in categories see Jiang Yonglin, *The Great Ming Code: Da Ming Lü* (Seattle, 2004), esp. lxxix-lxxxi.

⁴⁵ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 282-4.

⁴⁶ Brook, *The Confusion of Pleasures*, 153-237; for an early discussion on social mobility in the late Ming see also Ping-ti Ho, *The Ladder of Success in Imperial China: Aspects of Social Mobility* (New York, 1962), 181-3.

procession from the second storey of a building (ill. 2.2).⁴⁷ This demonstrates that in the late Ming women (also) belonged to the urban fabric and participated in the city life as part of their negotiation of the Confucian and Neo-Confucian framework condensed in the expression ‘women inner, men outer’ (*nü nei nan wai* 女内男外). The gender separation of spheres was an essential feature for the construction of space within family and society.⁴⁸

Traditionally women’s life and education was based on domesticity and adherence to the normative ‘woman’s way’, which included the concepts of the ‘three followings and the four virtues’ (*sancong side* 三從四德). They prescribed women to be subjected to their father first, then husband and son, while respecting the way of normative womanly propriety given by: woman’s virtue (*fude* 婦德), woman’s speech (*fuyan* 婦言), woman’s bearing (*furong* 婦容) and woman’s work (*fugong* 婦工). These values were believed to confer to women respectability and moral decency.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, in the late Ming there was an evident negotiation of those norms, which, as demonstrated by Dorothy Ko, took place primarily within the realm of the domestic space of the inner chambers, where women could empower themselves and negotiate orthodox precepts. Ko has also maintained that women were ‘oblivious’ of the patriarchal structures and the division of *spheres* in which they were embedded. However, a few years later Francesca Bray pointed out that women likely knew and accepted their position.⁵⁰ This thesis suggests

⁴⁷ In the section (a) of the scroll there are possibly some women depicted inside the houses next to the river.

⁴⁸ Bray, *Technology and Gender*, 169-72; on women in the scroll Wang Cheng-hua, ‘Guoyan fanhua’, 26-7.

⁴⁹ These are the precepts from the early woman-teacher Ban Zhao 班昭 (41 BCE–c.115)’s book *Nüjie* 女戒 ‘Instructions for women’ became part of the orthodox teaching for respectable women, see Robin Wang, *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty* (Indianapolis, 2003), esp. 177-88; 416-17; on *sancong* see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 6-7; on education of gentry women see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 53-9; 158-60.

⁵⁰ Bray, *Technology and Gender*, 146; Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 24.

instead that at least some women consciously negotiated the lines of their prescribed behaviours, space and identity with subtle and witty transgressions. Even though the present dissertation explores the case of a courtesan rather than a gentry woman, the analysis of Ma Shouzhen's sophisticated negotiations of normative boundaries and her active role in expressing and creating her gendered self illuminates some of the possible transgressions which could have been equally used by women of a different status.

The scroll *Nandu fanhui tu* depicts women as still and fixed rather than in movement, as if to convey the idea of their unchanging position in society and in the cityscape. Despite this representation, there is a wealth of late Ming sources which document that women negotiated space in both a physical and cultural-social sense. The contemporary Nanjing author Wang Shixing 王士性 (1574–1598),⁵¹ a specialist of geography, in a text titled 'Two Capitals' (*Liangdu* 兩都) published in 1598, eloquently observed that:

In the capitals, people love going out, especially women. Every new year on the first day [they] celebrate the festival. On the sixteenth, a superstitious custom [requires women] to go out to dispel the hundred illnesses, and lamps lighted all night long. For the lantern festival, the market is filled with lanterns, tall buildings are ornated with pearls and jade, streets are hectic so that shoulders rub each other. At the Qingming Festival, [they] go for country outings, examining the full moon from high bridges as if it was a painting.

都人好游，婦人尤甚。每歲，元旦則拜節。十六過橋走百病，燈光徹夜。元宵燈市，高樓珠翠，轂擊肩摩。清明踏青，高粱橋盤盒一望如畫圖。⁵²

As the above testifies, women walked the city roads, went out during festivities, and enjoyed going on excursions to the country and famous scenic spots, such as the West

⁵¹ See his biography in L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang eds., *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644* (New York, 1976) [hereafter DMB], 1405-6.

⁵² Wang Shixing 王士性, *Guang zhi yi* 廣志繹 'Broad Gazzetter', in *Yuan Ming shike biji congkan* (Beijing, 1981), 2.18; the first sentence translated also in Sarah Dauncey, 'Illusions of Grandeur: Perceptions of Status and Wealth in Late-Ming Female Clothing and Ornamentation', *East Asian History*, 25/26 (2003), 55-6.

Lake in Hangzhou.⁵³ Some women enjoyed an increased mobility due to their profession, such as itinerant teachers and nuns,⁵⁴ or by being women of lower classes who worked in marketplaces and helped in cultivating the fields, although those traditionally were male prerogatives.⁵⁵ Especially starting from the 1550s literate women, who were predominantly gentry women but also educated courtesans, began to publish their own poetry collections and writings, including prose, and began to be increasingly included in anthologies edited primarily by men, such as the collection of women's poetry *Shi nüshi* 詩女史 (Poetry by Literatae) edited by Tian Yiheng 田藝衡 (1524–?) and published in 1557.⁵⁶ Writing was a tool which allowed gentry women to negotiate the *private* and step into the *public* spheres, where courtesans were freer to move.⁵⁷ Although it is in the seventeenth century that women's networks and clubs became more visible, already in the sixteenth century women – through the means of writing letters and poetry to others, especially kin-women – were able to consolidate social relationships and create multiple networks of friends and relatives.⁵⁸

⁵³ Wu Renshu 巫仁恕, *Ming Qing shiqi Jiangnan funü de xiaofei wenhua* 奢侈的女人: 明清時期江南的婦女消費文化 'Sumptuous Women: Women in Ming and Qing Jiangnan Consumptuous Society' (Taipei, 2005), 38, 41-4.

⁵⁴ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 125-9.

⁵⁵ Bray, *Technology and Gender*, 183-5, 204, 216, 226; Brook, *The Confusion of Pleasures*, 201-4; on women's buying power, Wu Renshu, *Shechi de nüren*, 58-61.

⁵⁶ Tian Yiheng 田藝衡, *Shi nüshi* 詩女史 'Poetry by Literatae', in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* (Jinan, 1995-7); a different reading of the title could be *Shinü shi* 'History of women's poetry'; see also Kang-i Sun Chang, 'Ming and Qing Anthologies of Women's Poetry and their Selection Strategies', in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997), 147-70.

⁵⁷ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, esp. 136-42; also Maureen Robertson, 'Changing the Subject: Gender and Self-inscription in Authors' Prefaces and "Shi" Poetry', in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997), esp. 186-9.

⁵⁸ See Daria Berg, 'Negotiating Gentility: The Banana Garden Poetry Club in Seventeenth-Century Jiangnan', in Daria Berg and Chloë Starr eds., *The Quest for Gentility in China: Negotiations beyond Gender and Class* (London, 2007), 73-93; on Shen Yixiu 沈宜修 (1590–1635) and her network see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 202-9. In the Ming section in Hu Wenkai 胡文楷 and Wang Xiuqin 王秀琴 ed., *Lidai mingyuan wenyuan jian bian* 歷代名媛文苑簡編 'Literary World of Women of All Times' (Beijing, 2008), 29-44, there are many of the letters by women addressed to other women; see also dedicated poems by Lu Qingzi 陸卿子 (fl. 1590) in Chang, *Women Writers*, 245-9.

In the commoditised Jiangnan society women took part in both the production and consumption of products and services; women from landowning elites and newly enriched families possessed new buying power. They contributed to spread trends and fashions in the lower Yangtze region, which usually migrated from the urban to the rural and often were originated in the city pleasure quarter, such as the new taste for folding fans.⁵⁹ Women, as well as men, in order to be fashionable required *new* objects and fuelled the production of some luxurious accessories, such as embroidered shoes and elaborated hairpins;⁶⁰ women were also among the consumers of painting and antiques, markets which increased sharply during the late Ming.⁶¹ In thinking about the production and consumption of culture from the mid-sixteenth century, literate women, besides writing, were also a relevant part of the readership of didactic texts, especially of fiction but also almanacs, letter-writing manuals and even erotic novellas.⁶²

Cultured courtesans, on the other hand, contributed to the production of urban entertainment. In the commoditised Jiangnan society, it was a common practice among men to frequent brothels and pleasure districts; officials and elites tended to prefer the company of talented courtesans rather than prostitutes. According to the Ming legal code, for which prostitution was legal, all entertainers were (or at least were on paper)

⁵⁹ On rural-urban women see Wu Renshu, *Shechi de nüren*, 52-3; for the fan vogue see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 259; more on fashion and the pleasure quarter in Chapter Two.

⁶⁰ On general women consumption see Wu Renshu, *Shechi de nüren*, 44-51; for the shoe fashion see Dorothy Ko, *Cinderella's Sisters: a Revisionist History of Footbinding* (Berkeley, 2005), esp. 182-6.

⁶¹ Brook, *The Confusion of Pleasures*, 219-29; see on women and the painting market James Cahill, 'Paintings Done for Women in Ming-Qing China?', *NanNü: Men, Women, and Gender in China*, 8.1 (2006), 1-54.

⁶² See Richard G. Wang, *Ming Erotic Novellas: Genre, Consumption, and Religiosity in Cultural Practice* (Hong Kong, 2011), 98, 116-17; a drama which encountered a particularly enthusiastic appreciation by women was the cult novel 'The peony pavilion' *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭, the happy ending love drama by Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616), which preface dates 1598, see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 82-6; see also on the new female readership Anne E. McLaren, 'Constructing New Reading Publics in Late Ming China', in Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley; London, 2005), 161-3.

considered to belong to the commoners or 'debased people' (*jian* 賤), which included all those persons who were not 'honourable' (*liang* 良), namely imperial family members, officials' and landowning families. The legal system tended to keep the two prescribed parts of the population as distant as possible.⁶³ However, as laws are usually made to correct existing behaviours, or at least to envisage their likelihood, article 398 of the 'Ming Code' titled 'Officials or functionaries sleeping with entertainers' (*guanli su chang* 官吏宿娼) says:

In all cases where officials or functionaries sleep with entertainers, they shall be punished by 60 strokes of heavy stick. As for the go-betweens, the penalty shall be reduced one degree [ten strokes less].⁶⁴

Thus, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, courtesans have to be distinguished from simple prostitutes. Although there was a degree of porousness and overlapping between the two, it is possible to identify three main differences: namely their legal position, education and clientele. As Matthew Sommer in his study of legal cases has pinpointed, the *mingji* 'famous courtesans', unlike prostitutes, never appear in court cases for having engaged in sexual relations with officials.⁶⁵ Even if they were not 'official courtesans' (*guanji* 官妓) hired by the government to entertain civil servants, the Ming legal system did not punish *mingji* for having relationships with officials or functionaries, thereby implicitly accepting them as non-prostitutes; they were registered in the Bureau of Instruction and paid taxes as any other citizen.⁶⁶ Second, there are no historical sources left by prostitutes as they were likely to be illiterate, even though they possibly knew how to sing and dance for entertainment. Conversely, courtesans

⁶³ As remarked in Harriet Zurndorfer, 'Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Confucian Moral Universe of Late Ming China (1550–1644)', *International Review of Social History*, 56 (2011), 200-1.

⁶⁴ Jiang, *The Great Ming Code*, 217.

⁶⁵ Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 2000), 210.

⁶⁶ Palace and military courtesans were established in the Tang dynasty, see Victor Xiong, 'Ji^A Entertainers in Tang Chang'an', in Sherry J. Mou ed., *Presence and Presentation* (New York, 1999), 150-2.

received enough education to be able to keep company to the male elite through reciting and composing refined poetry and music, and engaging in witty conversations during drinking games. They often wrote their own rhymes and produced paintings, some became renowned poets and painters highly appreciated by their male peers, and there are numerous extant visual and textual sources by them which document their talent. Thus, the clienteles of prostitutes and courtesans likely differed in cultural and social status.⁶⁷

As discussed in the previous scholarship, courtesans occupied an ambiguous social and cultural position; in theory they were to be considered commoners, but they could exceed what was prohibited to commoners, such as wearing brocade, silk and satin, head ornaments, and golden or jade hairpins.⁶⁸ Thus, courtesans are a very good model through which to reflect upon social mobility and the crossing of boundaries, be they based on legal, social or gender categories. As this thesis will demonstrate, Ma Shouzhen's character, talent and cultural production are representative of the late sixteenth century and the new negotiation of boundaries and increasing cultural agency of women at that time.

⁶⁷ On late Ming courtesans' activities see Wai-yee Li, 'The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal', in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997), 46-73; Paul S. Ropp, 'Ambiguous Images of Courtesan Culture in Late Imperial China', in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997), 17-45.

⁶⁸ On courtesans' ambiguity see Ropp, 'Ambiguous Images', 19-20; Yuan Zujie, *Dressing the State, Dressing the Society: Ritual, Morality and Conspicuous Consumption in Ming Dynasty* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2002), 71.

1.4 The courtesan in the secondary scholarship: old and new questions

The study of courtesans belongs to what in Chinese is called *qinglou wenhua* 青樓文化 ‘green building culture’, which encompasses all the cultural products related to courtesans, by and about them. *Qinglou*, which literally means ‘green building’,⁶⁹ was used to indicate multi-storey mansions (possibly painted in green) where women used to live. At least since the Liang 梁 dynasty (502–557) the term *qinglou* was deployed as a euphemism for brothels and courtesans’ houses; despite the fact that the latter were of higher status, they were still part of the prostitution industry.⁷⁰ Although courtesans belonged to the educated female population, there is a strong tendency in the scholarship to distinguish them from gentry women, as demonstrated by the most recent collection of essays on women of the late imperial era, *The Inner Quarters and Beyond*, in which Maureen Robertson proposes to identify gentry women’s writing as a form of ‘minor literature’, and thus implicitly excluded courtesan’s writing from the definition.⁷¹

The fascinating image of the courtesan, a mix of beauty, culture, sexuality and moral integrity, has been the subject of vernacular stories and dramas since the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907), when courtesan culture bloomed in the capital Chang’an 長安 and

⁶⁹ *Qing* is a dark colour in between green and blue, Zamperini in her recent study on novels about courtesans has preferred to use blue bower or mansion, see Paola Zamperini, *Lost Bodies: Prostitution and Masculinity in Chinese Fiction* (Leiden; Boston, 2010), 7, 9.

⁷⁰ In the HYDCD, 11-553A, an early reference to *qinglou* as brothel dates back to the southern dynasties 南朝 (420-589). Other terms such as *honglou* 紅樓 or *zhuanglou* 妝樓 were also used (as will be discussed in Chapter Two).

⁷¹ Minor literature, as explained by Robertson, is intended following the definition of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as mainly defined by ‘its potential of historical change’, Maureen Robertson, ‘Literary Authorship by Late Imperial Governing-class Chinese Women and the Emergence of a “Minor Literature”’, in Grace Fong ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond* (Leiden; Boston, 2010), 382.

literati were their major clientele.⁷² Yet, in Chinese history the pinnacle of courtesanship history is represented by the late Ming courtesan of the Nanjing Qinhuai pleasure quarter. Still today references to the beauties of Nanjing are part of pop products, such as novels, blogs and TV dramas.⁷³ The historical and academic interest in late Ming courtesans is spread across disciplines and belongs especially, but not exclusively, to Chinese history broadly speaking, women's history, history of art, literary and drama studies. This section will provide an overview of the relevant Chinese and English-speaking secondary scholarship through a chronological excursus of key names, publications and ideas, which from the early twentieth century have contributed to the development of the understanding of courtesans.

In China after the fall of a millennial empire in 1911 and the establishment of the Republic, new cultural and intellectual movements, which developed especially between 1915 and 1927, often known as 'the May Fourth movement', called for 'a new culture' in a total rejection of the patriarchal system and the Manchu oppression, as well as advocating a new liberal modernising attitude.⁷⁴ Yet, in the first half of the twentieth century, a pervasive moralised attitude towards the 'submissive woman' of the past and the prostitution market limited the scholarship on courtesans of the imperial era, and the only publication worthy of notice here is Wang Shunu's 'The History of Chinese Singing-girls' *Zhongguo changji shi* 中國娼妓史.⁷⁵

⁷² For a study of Tang pleasure quarter's cultural and social life see Ping Yao, 'The Status of Pleasure Courtesan and Literati Connections in T'ang China (618-907)', *Journal of Women's History*, 14.2 (2002), 26-53; on Tang courtesans see Tao Muning, *Qinglou wenxue yu Zhongguo wenhua*, 7-54.

⁷³ See more on this in Chapter Seven.

⁷⁴ See Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 1-2; Charlotte Furth, 'Intellectual Change: from the Reform Movement to the May Fourth Movement, 1895-1920', in Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-fan Lee, *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (New York, 2001), 13-97.

⁷⁵ On the 'May Fourth' intellectuals' attitude towards women of the past see Ellen Widmer, 'The Rhetoric of Retrospection: May Fourth Literary History and the Ming-Qing Woman Writer', in Milena Dolezelová-

In the following Maoist era (1949–1976) scholarly research was heavily subjected to the governmental agenda, and since the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the All China Women’s Federation (ACWF), a body controlled by the government, has been in charge of supervising the large spectrum of research on women. Although the ACWF has supported the claim of the role played by women during the revolution, and has promoted the publication of articles on women, it is only in the 1980s that the political conditions allowed the development of the study of women and their history.⁷⁶ For instance, the massive study on women’s writing of the past carried out by Hu Wenkai in his ‘Research on Women’s Writing of All Times’ *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考,⁷⁷ had to wait until its second edition in 1985, after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, to make an impact on the Chinese and international scholarship.⁷⁸

While in China the Cultural Revolution slowed down scholarly research, in the English-speaking academe a new interest in Chinese women’s history driven by the feminist agenda of historical revisionism is exemplified by two early works: the 1975 volume *Women in Chinese Society* edited by Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke,⁷⁹ and Paul Ropp’s

Velingerová and Oldrich Král, eds., *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital. China’s May Fourth Project* (Cambridge, 2001), 193; Wang Shunu 王書奴, *Zhongguo changji shi* 中國娼妓史 ‘The History of Chinese Singing-girls’ (Shanghai, 1935). It has been republished in 1988, 1992 and 2004.

⁷⁶ See also Barlow, ‘The Direction of History and Women in China’; on the action of ACWF see Hershtatter, ‘Chinese History’, 1413-5.

⁷⁷ Hu Wenkai 胡文凱, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao* 歷代婦女著作考 ‘Research on Women’s Writing of All Times’ (Shanghai, 2008). After the second edition in 1985 which was unaltered, a new edition published in 2008 has an added appendix of texts.

⁷⁸ See on this also Widmer, ‘The Rhetoric of Retrospection’, 219.

⁷⁹ Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke eds., *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford, 1975). This volume is an early feminist claim of the necessity of including women in Chinese social history and anthropological research; it remarkably begins by saying ‘until recently, the role of women has been largely ignored or, worse, considered irrelevant to an understanding of Chinese institutions’, idem, 1.

1976 article 'The Seeds of Change',⁸⁰ both of which brought attention to the importance of raising the question of women in Chinese history. Nonetheless, an undeniable interest in Chinese women of the imperial era, including courtesans, can be found prior to the 1970s in studies of history, literature and history of art.⁸¹ It is germane to remember that often those investigations were motivated by exotic orientalist fascination, such as exemplified by the controversial research on the Chinese history of sex by the diplomat and scholar R.H. Van Gulik (1910–1967), first published in 1961.⁸² As for the study of Ming dynasty women painters, it is worth drawing attention to one early publication which remarkably declared the neglected place of women painters in the scholarship: the 1955 article by Tseng Yuho Ecke (b.1925) on the late Ming courtesan painter Xue Susu 薛素素 (c.1575–1637).⁸³ However, despite Tseng Yuho's claim, it is only in 1988, at the dawn of a new historiography of Chinese women, that *Views from Jade Terrace* took the first major step towards the understanding of women in the history of Chinese visual culture.

⁸⁰ Paul Ropp, 'The Seeds of Change: Reflections on the Condition of Women in the Early and Mid Ch'ing', *Signs*, 2.1 (Autumn, 1976), 5-23.

⁸¹ See for instance two early histories of Chinese women which both included courtesans: Eloise Talcott Hibbert, *Embroidered Gauze; Portraits of Famous Chinese Ladies* (London; Woking, 1938), 30-1; and Florence Ayscough, *Chinese Women Yesterday and Today* (London; Toronto, 1938), 93; there are references to women painters called 'paintresses' including the concubine Lin Yin 李因 (1616–1685) in Friedrich Hirth, *Scraps from a Collector's Note Book; Being Notes on Some Chinese Painters of the Present Dynasty. With Appendices on Some Old Masters and Art Historians* (Leipzig, 1905), 18, 25, 41; and Ma Shouzheng appears for the first time in Arthur Waley, *An index of Chinese artists represented in the Sub-department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (London, 1922), 68.

⁸² On the controversy see Charlotte Furth, 'Rethinking Van Gulik Again. A Review Article', *NanNü: Men, Women, and Gender in China*, 7.1 (2005), 71-78; R.H. Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: a Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (Leiden; Boston, 2003); see an instance of orientalism in Verity Wilson, 'Studio and Soirée. Chinese Textiles in Europe and America 1850 to the Present' in Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner eds., *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (Berkeley, 1999), 229-42.

⁸³ Tseng Yu-ho Ecke, 'Hsüeh Wu and Her Orchids in the Collection of the Honolulu Academy of Arts', *Arts Asiatiques*, 2.3 (1955), 198.

From the above, it is noticeable that the scholarly interest on Chinese women, which from the late 1980s spread into varied academic disciplines, moved in a delayed synchrony with the studies on European women's history. In the 1970s feminist academics had already begun to firmly reclaim women's agency in history and visual culture, as demonstrated by the work of historians and art historians, such as Joan Scott and Linda Nochlin.⁸⁴ The delay in Chinese women's studies can be addressed to two major factors: the small number of scholars researching China, and the twentieth-century Chinese political events which greatly limited the accessibility to sources until the 1980s.⁸⁵ In addition, many disciplines within Chinese studies, such as history of art, were born at the end of the nineteenth century in a colonialist attitude and a certain level of conservatism has become ingrained and rather hard to dispel. Thus new questions, such as those brought by feminism, took longer to become relevant and included in the study of China.

In the 1980s with access to Chinese libraries, archives and research in loco, new research on Chinese women's history was thus possible by both Chinese and foreign scholars. Despite an early and successful attempt to bring feminism into Chinese academia by Du Fangqin, one of the most prolific Chinese feminist historians,⁸⁶ there have been evident restrictions to the development of thinking and action by feminist (or presumed to be feminist) scholars. This is mainly due to the fact that part of the feminist agenda can be described as 'political', and thus not acceptable in the one-party

⁸⁴ Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York; London, 1978); Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been no Great Women Artists?', *Art News*, 69 (Jan 1971), 22-39; in occasion of the homonymous exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the following catalogue was published: Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists 1550–1950* (New York, 1976).

⁸⁵ See on this also Herschatter, 'Chinese History', 1405.

⁸⁶ She is the author of the seminal volume: Du Fangqin 杜芳琴, *Nüxing guannian de yanbian* 女性觀念的衍變 'The Evolution of the Female Concept', in *Funü yanjiu congshu* (Zhengzhou, 1988).

government of the People's Republic of China. Later the concept of gender (in Chinese *xingbie* 性别 'sex, gender'), which was officially introduced into China in 1993 during the Symposium of Women's Development, provided a refreshing academic label for studies on women and sexuality. This event marked the starting point of a new scholarship, which has reflected also in the establishment of new university courses and institutions finally dedicated to this kind of research.⁸⁷ In the words of Du Fangqin: 'since the early 1990s, China has witnessed a drastic paradigm shift: from a dominant class analysis that erased gender relations, to the rise of gender as a legitimate category of analysis and a simultaneous eclipse of class analysis'.⁸⁸ It is since this shift from a predominantly Marxist approach that scholars have been working to redefine new paradigms for the understanding of Chinese history.⁸⁹ In the last fifteen years amongst the many scholars of gender and women's history worth signalling here for the study of 'qinglou culture' are Tao Muning and Gong Bin,⁹⁰ and for the anthologising of women's poetry Shen Lidong and Ge Ruxiang.⁹¹ In Hong Kong and Taiwan the research on Chinese women's history, which for the same reasons also began to flourish from the 1980s, has developed at an even faster pace than in mainland China,⁹² and in the last fifteen years scholars in greater China have significantly contributed to the international research on

⁸⁷ Du Fangqin and Zheng Xinrong eds., *Women's Studies in China: Mapping the Social, Economic and Policy Changes in Chinese Women's Lives* (Seoul, 2005), 178; see also Tani Barlow, 'The Direction of History'.

⁸⁸ Du Fangqin, *Women's Studies in China*, 1418.

⁸⁹ See the review article Clara W.C. Ho, 'Toward a Redefinition of the content of Chinese Women's History: Reflections of Eight Recent Bibliographies', *NanNü: Men, Women, and Gender in China*, 1.1 (1999), 145-60.

⁹⁰ Tao Muning, *Qinglou wenxue yu Zhongguo wenhua*; Gong Bin 龚斌, *Qing you qianqian jie: qinglou wenhua yu Zhongguo wenxue* 情有千千结: 青楼文化與中國文學 'Love has a thousand knots: Qinglou Culture and Chinese Literature' (Beijing, 2001); but also Sun Qingdong 孔庆东, *Qinglou wenhua* 青楼文化 'Qinglou Culture' (Beijing, 2008); Liu Suping 柳素平, *Wan Ming mingji. Wenhua Yanjiu* 晚明名妓 'Late Ming Famous Courtesans. A Cultural Research' (Wuhan, 2008).

⁹¹ Shen Lidong 沈立東 and Ge Ruxiang 葛汝相, *Lidai funü shici jianshang cidian* 歷代婦女詩詞鑒賞辭典 'Dictionary of Women's Poetry of All Times and their Appreciation' (Beijing, 1992).

⁹² Li Yu-ning 李又寧 and Zhang Yufa 張玉法 eds., *Zhongguo funü shi lunwen ji* 中國婦女史論文集 'Essays on Chinese Women's History' (Taipei, 1981).

women's history, including courtesans, especially the Taiwanese Wu Renshu, Yan Ming and Hua Wei.⁹³

In the Anglosphere, from the 1990s in an initial response to major sociological and philosophical debates of post-modernism, post-structuralism and post-feminism, scholars of Chinese women's history began a profound engagement not only with the re-evaluation and recovery of sources by and about women, but with new queries challenging the construction of dominant and hierarchical systems throughout history.⁹⁴

The invaluable research carried out in this period by scholars such as Dorothy Ko, Susan Mann, Francesca Bray,⁹⁵ Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang,⁹⁶ Wai-yee Li and Paul Ropp⁹⁷ – to mention some of the most relevant names for this thesis. In a similar fashion, other scholars of China demonstrated a novel critical engagement with the previous scholarship, as evident in refreshing studies such as Angela Zito and Tani Barlow's *Body, Subject & Power*; Craig Clunas' *Pictures and Visuality in Early Modern China*, and Timothy Brook's *The Confusions of Pleasure*.⁹⁸

In 1999 the creation of the peer-reviewed journal *NanNü: Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China*, with editor in chief Harriet Zurndorfer, has finally provided a new

⁹³ Wu Renshu, *Shechi de nüren*; Yan Ming 嚴明, *Zhongguo mingji yishushi* 中國名妓藝術史 'The History of the Chinese Famous Courtesans' Arts' (Wenjin, 1992); and Hua Wei 華瑋, *Ming Qing funü xiqu chuanzuo yu piping* 明清婦女戲曲創作與批評 'Ming-Qing Women's Drama Production and Criticism' (Taipei, 2003).

⁹⁴ Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham, 2004), 15-36

⁹⁵ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*; Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, 1997); Bray, *Gender and Technology*.

⁹⁶ See the remarkable collection of essays Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997); the first comprehensive collection of women's writing of the imperial time is Chang, *Women Writers*; prior to this there had been one other anthology of translated women's writing, Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung trans. and eds., *The Orchid Boat: Women Poets of China* (New York, 1972).

⁹⁷ Li, 'The Late Ming Courtesan'; Ropp, 'Ambiguous Images'.

⁹⁸ Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow eds., *Body, Subject & Power in China* (Chicago, 1994); Clunas, *Pictures and Visuality*; Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*.

and periodical platform for scholarship and debates on the Chinese history of women and gender. In the 1990s scholars were mainly concerned with redefining patriarchy and emphasising the women's question via a recovery of sources by and about women in order to reevaluate their position. At the same time they established some preliminary discussions about gender and the construction of womanhood. More recently, even though the discovery of sources concerning women is still ongoing, the major scholarly interests have shifted towards an analysis of gender relations, the construction of gendered self, identity, body and space.⁹⁹ Despite previous and recent research on late Ming courtesans, such as Daria Berg's study on the courtesan Xue Susu,¹⁰⁰ and Sarah Dauncey's on fashion,¹⁰¹ many aspects of their life and production still require further historiographical research as well as critical analysis. The next section will announce how this thesis contributes to the current scholarship.

1.5 Research structure and contribution

Following Chapter One, the main body of the present thesis is composed of five further chapters concluded by an epilogue (Chapter Seven). The chapters are self-contained as well as mutually complementary in order to obtain a more complex and nuanced picture of the courtesan especially through the *fil rouge* of gender. Chapter Two will focus on the

⁹⁹ See for instance the 2004 publication on masculinity, gender and the 'docile body': Song, *The Fragile Scholar*.

¹⁰⁰ Daria Berg, 'Amazon, Artist, and Adventurer: A Courtesan in Late Imperial China', in Ken Hammond ed., *Human Tradition in Modern China* (Lanham; Boulder, 2008), 24-6; Daria Berg, 'Cultural Discourse on Xue Susu. A Courtesan in Late Ming China', *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 6.2 (2009), 189-91.

¹⁰¹ Dauncey, 'Illusions of Grandeur'; Sarah Dauncey, 'Sartorial modesty and genteel ideals in the late Ming', in Daria Berg and Chloe Starr eds., *The Quest for Gentility in China: Negotiations beyond Gender and Class* (New York, 2007), 134-54. Other recent studies which have contributed to the understanding of the reception of Ming women in the Qing dynasty are Anne Gerritsen, 'Searching for gentility. The Nineteenth-Century Fashion for the Late Ming', in Daria Berg and Chloe Starr eds., *The Quest for Gentility in China: Negotiations beyond Gender and Class* (New York, 2007), 188-207; Zamperini, *Lost Bodies*. The ongoing scholarly interest is also demonstrated by doctoral theses entirely about, or which include, late Ming women and courtesans, such as Ying Zhang, *Politics and Morality during the Ming-Qing Dynastic Transition (1570–1670)* (unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Michigan, 2010).

space of the pleasure quarter where Ma Shouzhen lived, her biography and the intertwinements of her life, profession and practice with the surrounding cultural milieu. The following three chapters will present and discuss Ma's activities and propose a close reading of her painting (Chapter Three), poetry (Chapter Four), and her theatre practice (Chapter Five); all Ma Shouzhen's cultural products will be examined emphasising expressions of gendered subjectivity and their social function. Although the chapters are divided according to her activities, they equally and simultaneously belong to Ma Shouzhen's practice as an educated woman and courtesan. Chapter Six will extend the scope of the investigation to explore the different modes of engagement with the character of Ma Shouzhen found in visual and written sources following her death and into the Qing dynasty. To conclude, Chapter Seven will briefly summarise the major findings and main arguments of the thesis.

The scope of this investigation is Ma Shouzhen's historical character and 'afterlife', thus the enquiry is not temporally limited to her lifetime, rather it branches into the modern era. Moreover, in order to achieve a fuller comprehension of Ma, the thesis will encompass discussions of topics relevant to the understanding of the historical period and courtesan culture. Nonetheless, it will not include in-depth explorations of other courtesans' biographies and practice, nor will it examine other cities' pleasure quarters. Further research to trace cultural and social patterns in late Ming courtesans' activities in more comprehensive terms would benefit the field. This thesis, as a case study of one famous Nanjing courtesan, can be used for future research about, but is not limited to, the history of courtesans and courtesan culture. Further studies could consider more case studies in order to understand patterns in courtesans' expressions of gendered subjectivity and modes of self-fashioning.

In its cross-discipline approach, this research will contribute to different areas of knowledge. It will provide a fresh historiographical insight into Ma Shouzhen's biography, and introduce a new understanding of her painting, which will be examined not only in its subject matter but also as a strategy of self-fashioning in the construction of supportive social ties. The role of Ma Shouzhen as a poet has been underplayed in the secondary literature, both in Chinese and English, possibly due to a poor judgement of its literary quality; this thesis is concerned with her poetry as a means of self-expression and self-promotion through the engagement or rejection of traditional poetic tropes. The fact that Ma Shouzhen was a dramatist and was greatly involved in theatre production has been completely overlooked until a recent seminal article by Hua Wei.¹⁰² This thesis will translate the two extant scenes of Ma's drama and contextualise her role in the social nexus of surrounding literati, who themselves produced and appreciated theatre.

This thesis contributes to enhance the existing scholarship in mainly four ways. First, it recovers and re-evaluates Chinese visual and textual sources which have been little studied or not studied at all, and provides translations – in most cases completely original – which are always by the author unless otherwise stated. This re-discovery of relevant source material is a major contribution to sinological studies and to the historical investigation of women and their artistic practice during the late Ming. Second, this study of Ma Shouzhen brings forward the previous literature on courtesans by creating a nuanced understanding of the history of late Ming courtesanship. The

¹⁰² Hua Wei 華瑋, 'Ma Xianglan yu Mingdai houqi de xitan' 馬湘蘭與明代後期的戲壇 (Ma Xianglan and the Late Ming Theatre World), *Xiqu xuebao*, 2 (Dec 2007), 55-82.

previous scholarship has often treated late Ming courtesanship as one invariable historical phenomenon and thus neglected to explore changes throughout time and differences of individual case studies. Ma Shouzhen who lived in Nanjing at the end of the sixteenth century is here investigated against the specific time and place; this aims especially to distinguish her from later famous courtesans who lived during the dynastic transition, a very different socio-political climate from the late sixteenth century. The third main contribution of this research is given by the theoretical framework through which the material and the figure of Ma Shouzhen are understood. The courtesan used many sophisticated tools to build her own fame and character; the employment of gender and self-fashioning brings fresh insights to understanding the construction and fashioning of the self, the expressions of gendered subjectivity, the strategic uses of artistic practice and the creation of supportive social networks. The use of visuality within the frame of visual culture adds a new layer of complexity to the investigation of Ma's painting and its subjects. Finally, the fourth major contribution of this study is, in broader terms, to reclaim female agency in the making of history,¹⁰³ and emphasising through the case study of Ma Shouzhen the need to comprehend the ways in which the legacy of women of the early modern world has been construed throughout time.

¹⁰³ See the mission statement in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard eds., *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism* (Berkeley, 2005), 1-25.

Chapter Two

Mapping the Courtesan: the Space of the Qinhuai Pleasure Quarter and Ma Shouzhen in the Late Sixteenth Century

2.1 Place, space and time

In painting inscriptions Ma Shouzhen used to place herself at a water kiosk or pavilion by the Qinhuai River (於秦淮水榭).¹ Her biographical entries in late Ming and early Qing sources state that she was a Nanjing courtesan (*Jinglin ji* 金陵妓),² alternatively defined as a Nanjing or a Qinhuai person (*Nanjing ren* 南京人,³ *Qinhuai ren* 秦淮人).⁴ The practice of creating an association with the place of provenance or residence is part of the construction of a sense of locality, of individual identity and group belonging.⁵

In imperial China people used to designate themselves as belonging to a certain city or region; in the case of Ma Shouzhen there is a profound and indissoluble relation between her, the Qinhuai pleasure quarter and the city of Nanjing, an association which is expressed by herself as well as by her contemporaries, and it is further maintained in later centuries (as discussed in Chapter Six).⁶ In order to understand who Ma Shouzhen

¹ This is found in several painted pieces, see examples in Chapter Three.

² Jiang Shaoshu 姜绍书 ed., *Wusheng shishi* 無聲詩史 'History of Silent Poems', 7 *juan*, in *Huashi congshu* (Shanghai, 1963), 5.83.

³ Wang Duanshu 王端淑 ed., *Mingyuan shiwei chubian* 名媛詩歸初遍 'Classics of Poetry by Notable Women. Initial Section' (Qingyin tang printed edition, 1667) [accessed via McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project, Harvard Yenching Library ID: FC5580], 24.3a.

⁴ Zhao Shijie 趙世杰 ed., *Gujin nüshi* 古今女史 'Literatae of Past and Present', 12 *juan* (Wenqige printed edition, 1628–1644) [accessed via McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project, Harvard Yenching Library ID: T5236.07/4844], 28.16a.

⁵ This is explored in social geography as in Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge, 1994), 115-73.

⁶ For a discussion of place, belonging and identity see the case of Wen Zhengming in Craig Clunas, *Elegant Debts. The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470–1559* (London, 2004), 93.

was and what she did, it is necessary to comprehend the *place*, meaning the city and the area of the Qinhuai pleasure quarter at that specific time. In addition, Nanjing and its pleasure quarter were the *space* in which Ma Shouzhen existed and acted, and *space* is intended not only in physical terms, but as ‘the product of relations which are active practices, material and embedded, practices which have to be carried out, space is always in a process of becoming. It is always being made.’⁷ So *space* is created by the interactions with that surrounding geography where subjectivities are expressed and fashioned, and social relations are constructed and made visible. This chapter will interweave the story of Ma Shouzhen and her biography with the geographic, social and cultural *space* of the pleasure quarter in the late Ming Nanjing.

This chapter will start by employing Ming visual and textual sources to explore the *space* of the Qinhuai pleasure quarter, its history and geography, its landmarks and their meaning within courtesan culture and literati writing. The second section will focus on Ma Shouzhen and attempt a reconstruction of her biography by using only sources authored by her and her contemporaries, so as to keep the narrative as close as possible to her actual life. In investigating her life, further aspects of courtesanship will be discussed, such as the courtesan’s education, naming practice in brothels, and the legal implications of the profession. Later sources engaging with the figure of Ma Shouzhen will contribute to the discourse of the construction of the courtesan’s historical character and will be examined in later chapters, especially in Chapter Six. After having introduced the space of the Old Compound and the individual Ma Shouzhen, the final section will use some key aspects of Ma’s biography to widen the discussion to the

⁷ Doreen Massey, ‘Spaces of Politics’, in Doreen Massey et al., *Human Geographies Today* (Cambridge, 1999), 283.; see also for the notion of place a more recent volume Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London, 2005), 5-6.

socio-cultural landscape of the late sixteenth century when, in a climate of profound socio-economic changes, literati and literate women, including courtesans, were involved in redefining social and gender boundaries. This final part aims to create a more nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural milieu in which the courtesan lived and acted, and to create a better sense of what Ma Shouzhen achieved and represented.

2.2 The Nanjing entertainment district

At the beginning of his reign the emperor Hongwu redesigned the capital city space, created a new imperial palace in the east side, constructed new walls, streets, markets and bridges. The 'Hongwu Atlas Gazetteer of the Capital City' *Hongwu jingcheng tuzhi* 洪武京城圖志 published by the court in 1395 spread to the whole empire the grandeur of its capital, and showed that besides new streets and markets, also sixteen entertainment buildings (*jiulou* 酒樓) were erected in the city, both inside and outside the city walls (see ill. 3).⁸ Moreover, Hongwu established within the south-east section of the city walls the pleasure quarter *Fuleyuan* 福樂園 'The Compound of Abundant Pleasure'.⁹ Later in the 'Historical Atlas of Nanjing' *Jinling gujin tukao* 金陵古今圖考 published in 1516 by Chen Yi 陳沂 (1469–1538), the map of the city shows the pleasure district usually called Old Compound (*jiuyuan* 舊院) placed along the Qinhuai River, just across from the Examination Hall (*gongyuan* 貢院) and the Imperial College (*taixue* 太學), which are next

⁸ See the reproduction of a Qing dynasty printed edition in Wang Junhua 王俊華, *Hongwu jingcheng tuzhi* 洪武京城圖志 'Hongwu Capital Atlas', in *Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan* (Beijing, 1988), the list of the sixteen buildings is at 56a-57b; on the atlas see also Si-yen Fei, *Negotiating Urban Space: Urbanization and Late Ming Nanjing* (Cambridge MA, 2009), 132-5.

⁹ Wang Junhua, *Hongwu jingcheng tuzhi*, 58b.

to the Temple of Confucius (Kongzi miao 孔子廟) where the major imperial ceremonies used to take place (ill. 4).¹⁰

Yet, as a Ming author maintained, the first emperor 'Taizu constructed the sixteen buildings to entertain the merchants coming from the four corners; [though] officials and literati (*shidaifu*) were not prohibited to employ the official courtesans (*guanji*)' (太祖造十六樓，待四方之商賈。士大夫用官妓無禁).¹¹ In fact, looking at the geography of the urban space, it is evident how the organisation of the city was functional to the interplays between the political core of the capital and its Qinhuai entertainment industry. Moreover, if we look at the map of the city (ill. 4) and think about the consumption and production of culture, the pleasure quarter was very close to the Three Mountains Street (Sanshan jie 三山街) which, as discussed by Lucille Chia, was the main area for publishers and book stores in Nanjing.¹² The concept of space defined by Doreen Massey 'as the product of interrelations', 'existence of multiplicity' and 'always under construction'¹³ is crucial here to comprehend the geography of the city of Nanjing and how different city quarters were interconnected and essential for each other's existence. The communities of officials, examination candidates, literati and courtesans interacted, overlapped and defined the urban space of the Qinhuai area.

¹⁰ Chen Yi 陳沂, *Jinling gujin tukao* 金陵古今圖考 'Images of Jinling Past and Present', in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* (Jinan, 1995-7), 86; for a discussion on urban roaming see Fei, *Negotiating Urban Space*, 172-9.

¹¹ Zhou Hui 周暉, *Jinling suoshi*, *Xu Jinling suoshi*, *Erxu Jinlin suoshi* 金陵瑣事, 續金陵瑣事, 金陵瑣事 'Trivia about Nanjing', 'Sequel of Trivia about Nanjing', 'Second Sequel of Trivia about Nanjing', in *Nanjing xijian wenxian congkan* (Nanjing, 2007), 191.

¹² Lucille Chia, 'Of Three Mountains Street: Commercial Publishers in Ming Nanjing', in Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, 2005), 107-51.

¹³ Massey, *For Space*, 9.

Although at the foundation of the dynasty Hongwu erected sixteen buildings, later sources testify to the presence of fourteen buildings, such as the text titled ‘The fourteen buildings’ 十四樓 by Gu Qiyuan 顧起元 (1565–1628) extracted from his urban account ‘Superfluous Chats from the Guest’s Seat’ *Kezuo zhuiyu* 客座贅語 published in 1617 :

At the beginning of the empire in the city there were sixteen buildings, erected to host the official courtesans (*guanji*). But the Southern capital gazetteer [listed] only fourteen called: the Southern city-market (Northeast of Doumen bridge), the Northern Market (Northeast of Qiandao Bridge), Minghe (West of Guanzhong Street North), Zui Xian (West of Guanzhong Street South); Qingyan (West of Guannan Street); Dan Fen (in front of Qingyan House); Cuiliu (West of Guanbeijie); Mei Yan (in front of Cuiliu House); Ouge and Gufu (outside the Shicheng Gate, facing each other); Laibin (west outside the Jubao Gate), Zhongyi (east outside the Jubao Gate); Jixian (west of the Waxie dam), Lemin (north of the Jixian house). [...] There are collected writing describing the sixteen buildings, including also Qingjiang and Shicheng. However, in the Yongle reign [1402–24], the poem ‘Jinling spring evening’ said: ‘in the splendid spring along the river there are fourteen buildings’. Today only the southern market survives, and the north market at the northeast of Qiandao Bridge looks like a pigs market, and it disagrees with what is recorded to be the Fuleyuan in Liu Chen’s ‘Remains of the Early Empire’, even though it is in the same place.

國初，市之樓有十六，蓋所以處官妓也。而南畿志止十四，曰南市，【斗門橋東北。】北市，【乾道橋東北。】鳴鶴，【西關中街北】醉仙，【西關中街南。】輕煙，【西關南街。】澹粉，【與輕煙樓對。】翠柳，【西關北街。】梅妍，【與翠柳樓對。】謳歌，鼓腹，【石城門外，二樓相對。】來賓，【聚寶門外之西。】重譯，【聚寶門外之東。】集賢，【瓦屑埧西。】樂民。【集賢樓北。】[.]有集句詠十六樓，中有清江、石城二樓。晏振之永樂中金陵春夕詩又曰，「花月春江十四樓」，則知相沿已久。今獨南市樓存，而北市在乾道橋東北，似今之豬市，疑劉辰「國初事蹟」所記富樂院，即此地也。¹⁴

From the above text it is evident that there was not complete agreement on the naming of the *jiulou* and entertainment districts throughout time; yet, probably the great majority of the brothel buildings survived in their very structure, or at least their names did, until the seventeenth century. By looking at the map of the sixteen buildings from

¹⁴ Gu Qiyuan 顧起元, *Kezuo zhuiyu* 客座贅語 ‘Superfluous Chats from the Guest’s Seat’, in *Nanjing xijian wenxian congkan* (Nanjing, 2009), 174-5.

the 'Hongwu Atlas' (ill. 3), it is clearly visible that most of the brothels were placed outside the west city walls. Moreover, Gu Qiyuan maintained that in the southern part of Nanjing, where the Old Compound was situated, there were 'six buildings' (*liuyuan* 六院).¹⁵ This is further confirmed by Ma Shouzhen herself,¹⁶ the contemporary scholar-official Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578–1642),¹⁷ and the literatus Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1645) in his novella on the courtesan Du Shiniang 杜十娘.¹⁸ This could indicate that by the end of the sixteenth century there was a cluster of six buildings in the Old Compound where the famous courtesans lived. The recent research on the Qinhuai pleasure quarter conducted by the Japanese scholar Ōki Yasushi has not mentioned the presence of the 'six buildings'.¹⁹

The nature of Nanjing courtesanship changed over the course of the Ming dynasty. Slowly the entertainment industry became privatised, nonetheless the central administration still controlled it through the Bureau of Entertainment (*Jiaofang si* 教坊司), where courtesans were registered and had to pay taxes.²⁰ The literatus Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567–1624), author of 'Five Miscellanies' *Wu zazu* 五雜俎 published in 1606,

¹⁵ Gu Qiyuan, *Kezuo zhuiyu*, 23; translated as 'pleasure quarter' in Fei, *Negotiation Urban Space*, 260.

¹⁶ See the expression used in Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, 'Zhi Wang Baigu Shu' 致王百穀書 'Letter to Wang Baigu', in Hu Wenkai 胡文楷 ed., *Lidai mingyuan shujian* 歷代名媛書簡 'Letters by Women of All Times', unpublished manuscript of the Republican time 1912-49, National Library of China (cat. n.: 002376050), 268-270. This letter is not found in previous sources and could be a forgery.

¹⁷ Shen Defu 沈德符, *Ye huo bian* 野獲編 'Unofficial Records', 30 *juan*, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 23.34a-b; see Shen Defu's biography in DMB, 1190.

¹⁸ Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (edited by Li Tianyi 李田意), *Jing shi tong yan* 警世通言 'Stories to Caution the World', 40 *juan*, in *Jingyin zhenben Song Ming huaben congkan* (Taipei, 1958), 32.16b; see Feng's biography in DMB, 450.

¹⁹ Unable to read the Japanese original – Ōki Yasushi 大木康, *Chūgoku yūri kūkan: Min Shin shinwai gijo no sekai* 中國遊里空間: 明清秦淮妓女の世界 (Tokyo, 2002) – I refer to the Chinese translation, Ōki Yasushi 大木康 (Xin Ruyi 辛如意 trans.), *Feng yue Qinhuai: Zhongguo youli kongjian* 風月秦淮: 中國遊里空間, 'Fascinating Qinhuai: the Space of the Chinese Pleasure Quarter' (Taipei, 2007). On the sixteen and fourteen buildings see Ōki, *Fengyue Qinhuai*, 46-52.

²⁰ Yu Huai 餘懷, *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記 'Diverse Records of Wooden Bridge', in *Nanjing xi jian wenxian congkan* (Nanjing, 2006), 9.

maintained that 'nowadays prostitutes are everywhere' (今時娼妓滿布天下), and stated that from the beginning of the Xuande 宣德 reign (1426–1435) the prostitution industry began to see prohibitions and the city responded by establishing private houses for courtesans. Their taxes were called 'rouge and powder money' (*zhifen qian* 脂粉錢), while courtesans in their private residences were called 'private nests' (*si kezi* 私窠子).²¹

Until the late sixteenth century there are not many texts about Nanjing courtesans nor by courtesans themselves; however, there are visual representations of entertainers, such as those by fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century painters especially famous for their depictions of beauties: Wu Wei 吳偉 (1459–1508), Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470–1524) and Qiu Ying 仇英 (1494?–1552).²² The scroll 'Dancing and singing' *Gewu tu* 歌舞圖 by Wu Wei (ill. 5), who frequented the Nanjing pleasure quarter, depicts a scene of enjoyment of female company by some officials. The space of the scroll is halved between the image and the inscriptions, first of which is the calligraphy by the painter and frustrated scholar Tang Yin. He informs us that the painting is done to praise the nine-year-old Li Nunu 李奴奴, skilled in the arts of entertainment. The little courtesan is depicted as a child, while of the other two women, one looks at her with sympathy; the other plays the clappers with a sulky expression, almost not paying attention to the surroundings. The scene does not convey a sense of eroticism, but rather of sincere appreciation of talent.

²¹ Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, *Wu zazu. Wan Ming biji* 五雜俎。晚明筆記 'Five Miscellanies: Late Ming Brush Notes', 16 *juan*, in *Guoxue zhenben wenku* (Shanghai, 1935), 8.330.

²² See an examination of his expression of eroticism in Ellen Johnston Laing, 'Erotic Themes and Romantic Heroines Depicted by Ch'iu Ying', *Archives of Asian Art*, 49 (1996), 68-91.

From the late sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century, there were contrasting attitudes towards courtesans by both the literati and gentry women. Lara Blanchard in her discussion on the changing perception of female entertainers from the Song to the Ming dynasty has identified the late fifteenth century as the shifting moment in which courtesans were depicted differently from the previous eras, when they were mostly connected to an idea of eroticism and urbanity, rather than being emblems of culture and refinement. A close reading of 'Taogu presents a Poem' *Tao Gu zengci* 陶穀贈詞 (ill. 6) by Tang Yin, the painter who was unfairly accused of examination fraud and could not obtain an office, reveals an intimate atmosphere in which the courtesan embodies values of integrity, reclusion and unrecognised talent.²³ In the late Ming, gentry women also befriended courtesans, as happened between Xue Susu and the gentry woman Xu Yuan 徐媛 (fl. 1590), who was a respected Suzhou poet.²⁴ There are only later but not contemporary sources reporting women's comments on Ma Shouzhen, although it is not excluded that she might have had some direct connections with gentry women – and further research could bring to light new evidence.²⁵ On the other hand, some women from elite families feared the licentiousness of the pleasure quarters and the erotic allure attributed to courtesans, or perhaps their cultural power, and thereby cautioned their men against going to the entertainment district.²⁶

²³ See how the courtesan's representation changes throughout time in Lara C.W. Blanchard, 'A Scholar in the Company of Female Entertainers: Changing Notions of Integrity in Song to Ming Dynasty Painting', *NanNü: Men, Women, and Gender in China* (2007), 9.2, 234-8.

²⁴ Berg, 'Cultural Discourse on Xue Susu', 193; also see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 266-270.

²⁵ In a few letters addressed to Wang Zhideng, which texts are reproduced in, she recorded to have sent gifts to his wife, *Lishi wenxian* 歷史文獻 'Historical Documents' (Shanghai, 2008), vol. 12, 14-21.

²⁶ Kathryn A. Lowry, *The Tapestry of Popular Songs in 16th and 17th Century China: Reading, Imitation, and Desire* (Leiden; Boston, 2005), 56-7.

The Chinese scholar Wang Shunu, who in 1935 wrote what is today still one of the most authoritative volumes on Chinese courtesanship, came to the conclusion that it is from the Jiajing and Longqing 龍慶 reigns (1567–1572) that Nanjing courtesans started to be recognised as accomplished in writing and executing poetry, as poems were usually sung and accompanied by musical instruments as an integral part of entertainment.²⁷ Chinese literary history since the Han dynasty is dotted with talented courtesans skilled in different styles of poetry, as demonstrated by the collection dedicated to courtesan poets, ‘Stylish Verses from the Green Buildings’ *Qinglou yunyu* 青樓韻語 (1616).²⁸ It is interesting to note that the chronology for *mingji* painters, according to the eighteenth-century ‘The History of Calligraphy from Jade Terrace’ *Yutai shushi* 玉臺書史, begins instead with the Tang dynasty.²⁹ Nevertheless, extant textual sources by Ming courtesans date mainly from after the 1560s when the earliest generation of talented Nanjing courtesans started to flourish.³⁰ Some of them were known as ‘the twelve golden hairpins’ (*shier jinchai* 十二金釵)³¹ or ‘the four beauties of the Qinhuai’ (*Qinhuai si mei* 秦淮四美). The latter is a collective name attributed by the late Ming scholar Mao Bolin 冒伯麟 (1633–?) to the Nanjing courtesans Ma Shouzhen and her contemporaries Zheng Ruying 鄭如英 (style name Rumei 如美 or Wumei 無美), Zhao Caiji 趙彩姬 (style name Jinyan 今燕) and Zhu Taiyu 朱泰玉 (style name Wuxia 無瑕), whose precise dates

²⁷ On the courtesans’ music performance see Judith T. Zeitlin, “Notes of Flesh” and the Courtesan’s Song in Seventeenth-Century China’, in Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon eds., *The Courtesan’s Arts: Cross-cultural Perspectives* (New York, 2006), 75-99.

²⁸ Zhang Mengzheng 張夢徵 and Zhu Yuanliang 朱元亮 eds., *Qinglou yunyu* 青樓韻語 ‘Stylish Verses from the Green Buildings’, 4 *juan*, in *Guoxue zhenben wenku* (Shanghai, 1935). See translation of the preface by Huayin shangren 花烟上人 in Chang, *Women Writers*, 744-6.

²⁹ Sections dedicated to *mingji* are in Li E 厉鹗 ed., *Yutai shushi* 玉臺書史 ‘The History of Calligraphy from Jade Terrace’, 1 *juan*, in *Meishu congshu* (Shanghai, 1936), 67a-76b; Tang Souyu 湯漱玉 ed., *Yutai huashi* 玉臺畫史 ‘The History of Painting from Jade Terrace’, 5 *juan*, in *Huashi congshu* (Shanghai, 1963), 5.1a-5.13a.

³⁰ Some exceptions from the Zhengde 正德 reign (1491–1521) including Zhu Dou’er, see Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 ed., *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan* 列朝詩集小傳 ‘Short Biographies Attached to the Collection of Poetry of All Times’, in *Zhongguo wenxue cankao ziliao xiao congshu* (Shanghai, 1957), 763.

³¹ See a discussion on this later in Chapter Two.

are not known, but they were all active in the 1570s and are well known to be talented poets and performers.³²

In the Wanli reign, scholars and officials from the whole of Jiangnan frequented the Nanjing pleasure quarter to enjoy the company of its talented courtesans. The Suzhou calligrapher, poet and aficionado of the Old Compound Wang Zhideng 王穉登 (style names Bogu 伯谷 or Baigu 百谷)³³ wrote in 1591 in the preface to the poetry collection of Ma Shouzhen:

Moling [Nanjing] is the land of beauties, in between brothels (*qinglou*) and their alleys feelings and passions are inscribed on peach leaves, and willow branches intertwine with sorrow. [Women] dressed so beautifully to look like goddesses would please Dengtu's eyes, while the games of clouds and rain [sex],³⁴ would make Song Yu lose his mind/heart.³⁵ Indeed it is a rare place filled with pretty and coquettish [women], an exquisite home for tenderness.

秣陵佳麗之地，青樓狹邪之間，桃葉題情，柳絲牽恨，胡天胡帝，登徒於焉怡目。為雲為雨，宋玉因而蕩心，誠妖冶之奇境，溫柔之妙鄉也。³⁶

As we understand from Wang Zhideng's words, the Qinhuai was for courtesans a theatre in which to display their beauty and elegant clothes, perform their skills, and create bonds with literati who could have been potential clients, friends, husbands and patrons.³⁷ The Qinhuai was a place of love and passion, as well as bondage and sorrow,

³² Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 766-7.

³³ Wang Zhideng in DMB, 1361-3.

³⁴ The expression 'clouds and rain' *yunyu* 雲雨 is a common euphemism for sex, see Matthews' Chinese-English Dictionary, n.7750.

³⁵ Song Yu 宋玉, third century BC poet, wrote a rhapsody in which he defended himself from the accusation of being a lecher, and Master Dengtu being the lecherous man of the rhapsody, HYDCD, 3-1339A.

³⁶ Wang Zhideng preface quoted in Qian Qianyi 钱谦益, *Liechao shiji* 列朝詩集, 'Collection of Poetry of All Times', 81 *juan*, in *Siku jinhui shu congkan* (Beijing, 2000), 4.68.a; see alternative translation in Chang, *Women Writers*, 737.

³⁷ Patronage is intended here in loose terms as supportive and promotional actions in favour of the courtesan, which possibly involved payments in cash or were part of the gift-exchange system common amongst the elites. For more on patron–artist relationship see James Cahill, 'Types of Artist–Patron Transactions in Chinese Painting', in Li Chu-tsing et al., *Artists and Patrons: Some Social and Economic Aspects of Chinese Painting* (Kansas City, 1989), 7-20.

as Paul Ropp has also discussed.³⁸ Often those feelings of love and sorrow were expressed in poetry by courtesans themselves:

At the Qinhuai in the second month, the new willows become yellow;
A broken willow [branch] is given to someone who is heartbroken.
Pitiable, delicate and slender, the Qinhuai willows,
Today once again in the hand of who is parting.
秦淮二月新柳黃，折柳貽人人斷腸。
可憐裊裊秦淮柳，今朝又上離人手。³⁹

With these verses the abovementioned famous courtesan of the Old Compound, Zheng Ruying, voiced the sadness of departure from one of her lovers, possibly a scholar or an official. A broken branch was traditionally a token of parting, but the willow was a euphemism for the courtesan, so both lovers are heartbroken; yet, as the poem recites, the willow-courtesan is in the hands of the parting lover.⁴⁰ Although writings by courtesans are extremely useful sources to explore their perceptions and emotional engagement with the space of the pleasure quarter (see Chapter Four), descriptions of the Old Compound are mainly found in literati prose writing, which will be thus used in this section to understand the geography and organisation of the entertainment area.

Wang Zhideng in the above extract provides us with some of the keywords for the pleasure quarter in the eyes of the literatus: the brothels *qinglou* 'green buildings', the mixture of feelings and passions given by the polysemic word *qing* 情, together with sex, usually referred to in Chinese literature as the 'game of clouds and rain' (*yunnyu* 雲雨). There is a vast Ming vocabulary for sex and sex-related activities found in erotic and pornographic novels and novellas, which thrived especially from the sixteenth century;

³⁸ Ropp, 'Ambiguous Images', 31-41.

³⁹ Zheng Ruying 鄭如英, *Qinhuai bie yuan shi zeng Qi Liansheng* 秦淮別怨詩贈期蓮生 'Lament poem of farewell by the Qinhuai. Presented to Mr Qi Lian', in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.71b; for an integral translation see Chang, *Women Writers*, 234.

⁴⁰ On the willow and the courtesan see Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Late-Ming Poet Ch'en Tzu-lung: Crises of Love and Loyalty* (New Haven; London, 1990), 94-5.

nonetheless, the vast majority of the texts examined in this thesis do not employ overly sexual expressions referring to Ma Shouzhen or other courtesans, but rather use euphemisms and poetic lexicon at times with strong erotic allusions (as it will be further explored in Chapter Four in discussing poems by Ma herself).⁴¹

The peach leaves mentioned by Wang Zhideng likely made reference to the Peach Leaf Ford 桃葉渡. This was, and still is, a spot by the Qinhuai River (see map 2) which name stems from the story of Taoye 桃葉 ‘Peach Leaf’: a courtesan in a love affair with the famed calligrapher Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344–388). Wang Xianzhi used to depart from his beloved Taoye at that ford along the Qinhuai, until he took her as a concubine. So the ‘peach leaf’ represents both a romantic trope of love and a real geographical place. In the Ming dynasty the same place continued to be one where often lovers met and bid farewell.

Ma Shouzhen in her personal poetry collection defined herself (or was defined by the collection editor) as a ‘Taoye girl’ (*Taoye nǚlang* 桃葉女郎);⁴² while her contemporary courtesan-poet Jing Pianpian 景翩翩 (style name Sanmei 三昧),⁴³ who was active in the 1570s, in the poem ‘Taoye song’ even identified herself with the ‘peach leaf’. In the last line Jing emphasises the transitory nature of her relationships and profession, which mirrors the temporary life of blossoms. By ‘peach leaf’ (*taoye*), she possibly indicated the ford (*Taoye du*) where she welcomed and said goodbye to her guests, where she herself ceased and began a new love, over and over again:

⁴¹ There is an interesting glossary of love, sexual and erotic words and phrases at the end of Ōki, Shan’ge, 326-579 ; see a discussion on sexual life and language during the Ming mainly based on sex handbooks and erotic albums in Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, Chapter 10.

⁴² Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 1.1a.

⁴³ On Jing Pianpian see Ropp, ‘Ambiguous Images’, 21-5.

I call myself 'Peach Leaf',
I just look like a peach blossom.
Blossoms are easy to fall
And I will spend the night in whose house?
儂自喚桃葉，儂只似桃花。
花花容易落，郎去宿誰家？⁴⁴

Among the several literati accounts about the pleasure quarter, which mainly date from the mid-seventeenth century, 'Miscellaneous Records of the Wooden Bridge' *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記 composed by the poet Yu Huai 餘懷 (1616–1696), who lived through the dynastic transition, is one of the best sources of information on the Nanjing entertainment industry. *Banqiao zaji*, a nostalgic journey into the southern capital's realm of courtesanship, provides useful material about around thirty courtesans, some of whom Yu claims to have known personally. According to Yu Huai, the Old Compound was only one of the three main areas dedicated to entertainment and prostitution in late Ming Nanjing. The other two were the Pearl Market (*Zhushi* 珠市) by the Inner Bridge (*Neiqiao* 內橋), and the Southern Market (*Nanshi* 南市). This thesis will deal only with the Old Compound, which was where Ma Shouzhen and the most talented courtesans lived.⁴⁵ Other names were used to indicate the Old Compound: *quzhong* 曲中 'in the winding-alleys', as well as more general terms. A recurrent term is *yanhua* 煙花 'the realm of mist and flowers', which alludes to the suggestiveness of beauty and lust, as well as the ephemerality of pleasure. Often the pleasure quarter is referred to as *Pingkang* 平康 or *Beili* 北里, which were the names of the first urban entertainment

⁴⁴ Jing Pianpian 景翩翩, 'Taoye ge' 桃葉歌 'Peach leaf song', in Zhong Xing, *Mingyuan shigui*, 31.16a; also translated in Chang, *Women Writers*, 226; and Paul Ropp, 'Love, Literacy, and Laments: Themes of Women Writers in Late Imperial China', *Women's History Review*, 2.1 (March 1993), 114. Peach can also symbolise the female genitalia and here a different interpretation of the poem could be plausible.

⁴⁵ Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, 7.

district established during the Tang in the capital Chang'an 長安,⁴⁶ and which hence became literary synonyms of 'pleasure quarter'.

The space of the Old Compound covered a vast area which stretched from Wuding Bridge (*Wuding qiao* 武定橋) to Chaoku Street (*Chaoku jie* 鈔庫街) (ill. 7).⁴⁷ Along the river and in the surrounding alleys there were the brothels, which in literary sources were often called *qinglou* (as seen above), 'music households' (*yuehu* 樂戶) or simply 'courtesans' houses' (*jijia* 妓家); they were also called 'red building' (*honglou* 紅樓), 'river houses' (*hefang* 河房) and 'rouge-and-powder building' (*zhuanglou* 妝樓).⁴⁸ In the text 'Records of what seen and heard in Liudu [Nanjing]' *Liudu jianwen lu* 留都見聞錄, written in 1642–1643 by Wu Yingqi 吳應箕 (1594–1645), the author described the Old Compound as follows:

The Nanjing river brothels [*hefang*] are residences along the Qinhuai River. With their green windows and vermilion doors, they shine on both banks, and [their women] leaning on the balustrades or poking through the curtains, are resplendent. In the summer moon the river is filled with painted boats which roam at the sound of flutes and drums deep into the night. It is indeed the most stunning scenery.

南京河房，夾秦淮而居。綠窗朱戶，兩岸交輝，而倚檻窺帘者，亦自相輝映。夏月淮水盈漫，畫船簫鼓之游，至於達夜，實天下之麗觀也。⁴⁹

As the above source documents, the river was used for transport as well as for the entertainment as 'painted boats' (*huafang* 畫舫) or 'lantern boats' (*dengchuan* 登船), and for gatherings and parties. The river was the most important marker of the Old

⁴⁶ See Xiong, 'Ji^A Entertainers', 152-3.

⁴⁷ Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, 9.

⁴⁸ *Zhuanglou* can also indicate the women's bedchamber or boudoir. See *zhuanglou* in Zhou Qiong 周瓊's poem *Qiuri shu huai* 秋日書懷, in Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1935), 2.44.

⁴⁹ Wu Yingqi 吳應箕, *Liudu jianwen lu* 留都見聞錄 'Records of What Seen and Heard in Liudu', in *Nanjing xijian wenxian congkan* (Nanjing, 2009), 25.

Compound, but several other landmarks defined its space, such as the abovementioned Peach Leaf Ford and the Long Wooden Bridge (*Chang ban qiao* 長板橋) used by Yu Huai in his book title. The Long Wooden Bridge, also called only Long Bridge (*Changqiao* 長橋), was one of the most significant spots of the pleasure quarter. According to Yu Huai it:

was several dozens of steps beyond the walls of the [Old] compound [...]. The Huiguang and Jiufeng Temples guarded it on either side and the Eastern Garden, which belonged to Zhong Shan Prince, was in its front while the Zhuque Bridge on the Qinhuai River was at its rear.
長板橋在院牆外數十步[..]。迴光、鸞峰兩寺夾之中山東花園互其前，秦淮朱雀桁繞其后 [..]⁵⁰

The area around the Long Bridge and the Eastern Garden (see map 2), can be seen as an extension of the stretch of the Old Compound along the main branch of the river. The woodblock printed image 'Admiring Beauties on the Long Bridge' (ill. 8) from *Jinling tuyong* published in 1624 illustrates the area around the bridge: the Jiu Feng 九峰 Temple in the upper part and the Huiguang 迴光 Temple at the bottom of the image define the space of water and gardens, while people are busy walking, playing and transporting baskets. According to the text accompanying the image:

Two *li* [about 1 km] south-east of the Prefectural Government, in between the two bridges Wuding and Wende, from the beginning of the dynasty it was the place of the entertainment buildings, merchants for their amusement would go to crouch on the [Long] bridge and watch. The Jiufeng Temple is by the side of the water. In its best time, visitors enjoyed watching the banquets which went on until dawn without stopping. Today the splendour of singing stages and the dancing pavilions have been covered by moss and the bridge has been going under constant reparation, but is gradually sinking. So going to the brothels has diminished, only a handful of smelly grass and one-sixth of the beauties [has been left].
在府治東南二里，武定文德二橋之間，國初置伎館以娛商旅橋踞城隅。鸞峰寺側積水之上。勝時游樂觀宴達旦不休。今歌臺舞榭強丰□為茂草，而橋側屢經脩漸治，就狹小惟故跡猶，傳足微佳麗之一端六尔。⁵¹

⁵⁰ Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, 9.

⁵¹ Zhu Zhifan 朱之蕃, *Jinling tuyong* 金陵圖詠 'Illustrated Gazetteer of Nanjing', 3 *juan*, in *Zhongguo fangzhi congshu* (Taipei, 1983), 86.

The above extract gives a new dimension to the extended pleasure quarter as a spectacle, where the Long Bridge was a strategic point to watch banquets for those who could not participate, since officials or scholars were the usual guests of courtesans. The Long Bridge is one of the landmarks of the pleasure quarter, together with other bridges such as the Wende Bridge (*Wende qiao* 文德橋), which was the main bridge connecting the pleasure quarter with the other river bank where the Temple of Confucius and the Examination Hall were located (map 2).⁵² The following account from ‘Trivia about Nanjing’, a miscellanea of vignettes about the city published in 1610 by the scholar Zhou Hui 周暉, reports:

In the fourteenth year of the Wanli reign [1586] a new bridge was built in front of the academy, the Wende Bridge. In the year *dingyou* of Wanli [1597] the bridge was damaged. The censor Chen Zizhen built it again using stone rather than wood, and under the bridge in the mud put chains with two rings so as to bring people good fortune.

萬曆十四年，府學前建一板橋，名文德。至萬曆丁酉，橋圯。提學御史陳子貞更建，以石易木。橋下泥中，得鎖子甲兩領，人以為吉兆。

53

The population of the Qinhuai in the late sixteenth century was significant of the cultural life of the city. Scholars who were intellectuals, poets, painters, connoisseurs, at times collectors, mingled with literate courtesans, who were also painters and writers, and represented the most visible part of the educated female population in the urban fabric. Courtesans used their visibility to display their body and new fashions, as Gu Qiyuan in his *Kezuo zhuiyu* maintained:

[All the] literati travelling there and refined guests compete with one another for money and luxurious styles. Further, the sandalwood fragrance and the extravagant fashions of the six buildings inoculate common people, they follow and imitate [courtesans] with ointment on lips and dazzling head [styles].

⁵² For other relevant spots in the Qinhuai pleasure quarter see Ōki, *Fengyue Qinhuai*, 71-110.

⁵³ Zhou Hui, *Jinglin suoshi*, 119.

游士豪客，競千金裘馬之風，而六院之油檀裙屐，浸染於閭閻。膏唇耀首，仿而效之。⁵⁴

Some conservative literati of the period, such as the late Ming author Shen Defu, expressed their preoccupation with the fact that sumptuary laws were seldom followed by their contemporaries. Shen identified three groups of people who transgressed the clothing regulations: young sons of noble families, eunuchs at court, and:

the last group is women. Besides the scholars' wives and daughters who continue wearing gowns and ribbons, undoubtedly across the country there is a bad custom. In the capital [women] follow extremely unusual [fashions]. From the unrighteous [women] like servants to the polluted ones, such as the women from the Department of Entertainment, there is no one who doesn't wear a beaded coronet and patterned brocade robes, even with [designs of] *baize*, *qilin*, flying fish or sitting dragon.⁵⁵ Even while sitting in sedan chairs they open the curtains to show themselves when crossing the road of senior court officials' vehicles. Even the escort guards would not scold or stop them, nor would the highest officials censor them. It shows indeed a huge disharmony between Heaven and Earth.

其一為婦人，在外士人妻女，相沿襲用袍帶，固天下通弊，若京師則異極矣，至賤如長班，至積如教坊，其婦外出，莫不首戴珠箍，身被文繡，一切白澤麒麟、飛魚、坐蟒，靡不有之。且乘坐肩輿，揭帘露面，與閣部公卿，交錯於康途，前驅既不呵止，大老亦不詰責，真天地間大災孽。⁵⁶

As previously mentioned, the late sixteenth-century money economy and consumption culture often saw courtesans as the catalysts of new fashions. While lower-class singing-girls were seen as the emblem of vulgarity in wearing opulent cloths,⁵⁷ courtesans of the Old Compound represented the idea of refinement since, according to some, they preferred simple elegance to lavish appearance. In the words of Yu Huai:

Clothing and make-up [of women] in the southern pleasure quarter (*nanqu*) are restrained; people follow their style as the priority is given to elegance and simplicity, with no effort made to wear rare cloths or flashy damasks. The 'first breaking of the melon' [defloration] is called

⁵⁴ Gu Qiyuan, *Kezuo zhuiyu*, 23.

⁵⁵ See Yuan, *Dressing the State*, 63. *Baize* and *qilin* are mythical creatures which patterns were reserved exclusively for people at the court.

⁵⁶ Shen Defu, *Ye huo bian*, 5.27b-28a.

⁵⁷ See a partial translation of the same Yu Huai's passage in Dauncey, 'Illusions of Grandeur', 58.

‘combing the hair’, if the girl is already mature then it is called ‘doing the hair in a bun’;⁵⁸ cloths and accessories are all provided by the guest. Their artful patterns and new cuts are suggested by the brothel matrons, who would then use whatever was left. Hence the brothel matrons although advanced in age would wear magnificent make-up and beautiful clothing, so radiant to provoke [a reaction in the surrounding] people; the upper garment could be short or long, the sleeves short or long, whenever necessary they would change into simple [cloths] and who see them said they were the fashion of the time (*shishizhuang*).

南曲衣裳妝束，四方取以為式，大約以淡雅樸素為主，不以鮮華綺麗為工也。初破瓜者，謂之梳攏，已成人者，謂為上頭，衣飾皆客為之措辦。巧樣新裁，出於假母，以其余物自取用之。故假母雖年高，亦盛妝艷服，光彩動人。衫之短長，袖之大小，隨時變易，見者謂是時世妝也。⁵⁹

The idea of elegance and taste, which will be discussed further later in this chapter, is also found in the very fact of roaming within the space of the pleasure quarter, as is expressed by Yu Huai in the title of the first section of his book, ‘elegant roaming’ (*yayou* 雅游), in which the author describes the atmosphere and the surrounding environment of the entertainment district.⁶⁰ Some courtesans were emblems of refinement, but others passed into history for having transgressed all the rules of clothing and practised cross-dressing, such as the later celebrity Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1618–1664). Liu, according to the anecdote of her first appointment with Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664), wore the scholar’s clothes, but cunningly exposed her bound feet as visible markers of her female gendered body.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Expression used for a girl of marriageable age, HYDCD, 1-296B.

⁵⁹ Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, 11.

⁶⁰ The second part (*juan zhong* 卷中) of *Banqiao zaji* is titled *lipin* 禮品 ‘beauty parade’ or ‘beauty commodities’ and is dedicated to biographies and anecdotes about beautiful courtesans; the third *juan* is ‘anecdotes’ *yishi* 軼事.

⁶¹ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 278-9.

The pleasure quarter was, in the thriving commerce of the city of Nanjing, a marketplace for beauty, talent, entertainment and sex. Moreover, courtesans were themselves consumers, especially of fashionable and refined objects, as Yu Huai narrates:

The market in the pleasure quarter was clean and extraordinary. [There were] perfumed sachets, embroidered shoes, famous spirits, fine teas, sweets and delicacies, flutes, lutes and zithers, they were all superior items. The guests would buy them and the girls were [always] presented with expensive and not at all vulgar things.

曲中市肆，清潔異常。香囊、雲舄、名酒、佳茶、錫糖、小菜、簫管、琴瑟，并皆上品。外間人買者，不惜貴價；女郎贈遺，都無俗物。⁶²

In the commoditised Jiangnan society, the cultivation of talented courtesans was enhanced by the privatisation of the entertainment business, which responded to the demand of literati and officials. In turn, talented courtesans had the opportunity to develop their skills in conversing, playing musical instruments, dancing and singing – which were the normative activities for entertainers – but also to express their subjectivity and social persona through writing and performing poems, as well as painting.

According to Gu Qiyuan, the decline of Nanjing courtesanship had already started by the time his book was published in 1617. In a section dedicated to ‘brothels’ (*nüsi* 女肆), which literally means ‘women shop’, he maintained:

Before the tenth year of the Wanli reign (1582) the [courtesans’] houses flourished with famous beauties, who filled countless streets and alleys. [...] At the Long Bridge misty waters, the clear winding streams surrounding it and reflecting the irregular shapes of green poplars and red peonies, it was the best place for [attending] singing and dancing [performances]. At that time in the South Compound there were still about ten brothels and in the West Compound three or four houses with courtesans waiting for guests. After about not even ten years, in both the South and West Compounds, have [now] become moss and grass, and half of the buildings of the Old Compound have been destroyed. Recently I

⁶² Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, 11.

have heard that after having built the Huiguang Temple, the Bureau [of Entertainment]'s profit does not match the past ones. The singing houses and dancing pavilions have become abandoned wells and desolate ponds, merely in about the past twenty years.

在萬曆十年前，房屋盛名麗，連街接弄，幾無號地。長橋煙水，清泚灣環，碧楊紅藥，參差映帶，最為歌舞勝處。時南院尚有十余家，西院亦有三四家，倚門待客。其后不十年，南西二院，遂鞠為茂草，舊院房屋，半行拆毀。近聞自葛祠部將回光寺改置后，益非其故矣。歌樓舞館，化為廢井荒池，俯仰不過二十余年間耳。⁶³

Although according to Gu Qiyuan the apogee of the pleasure quarter had already declined by the late 1610s,⁶⁴ talented courtesans continued to flower in the last decades of the dynasty and the glamour of the Nanjing pleasure quarter did not cease to fascinate, as Yu Huai demonstrates. Yu could still enjoy its allure, although he admitted to have not been able to see the ‘famous courtesans of the pleasure quarter (*quzhong*) Zhu Dou’er,⁶⁵ Xu Pianpian⁶⁶ and Ma Xianglan’ (曲中名妓，如朱斗兒、徐翩翩、馬湘蘭者)⁶⁷, who were known for their literary and painting skills. It is germane to point out that according to the extant sources Zhu Dou’er and Xu Pianpian seemed to have been far much less celebrated than Ma Shouzhen in the late Ming and also in the following centuries. However, for Yu Huai the three names represented an early generation of talented courtesans, and this testifies that in the mid to late seventeenth century, when Yu was alive, Ma Shouzhen was believed to be one of the celebrities representative of the Nanjing courtesan milieu. The next section will attempt a reconstruction of her biography.

⁶³ Gu Qiyuan, *Kezuo zhuiyu*, 201.

⁶⁴ See also Fei, *Negotiating Urban Space*, 173.

⁶⁵ Zhu Dou’er (style name Su’e 素娥) was renowned for her landscape painting, Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 24.5a.

⁶⁶ Xu Pianpian (alternative names Feiqing 飛卿, Yuehui 月慧 and Jinghong 驚鴻), see Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 19.7a; not to be confused with Jing Pianpian.

⁶⁷ Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, 12.

2.3 Mapping Ma Shouzhen's life

Ma Shouzhen did not leave an autobiography and, as for most of women in Chinese history, no official *nianpu* 年譜 (chronicle) was edited for her.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, Ma's biography was written just after her death in 1605 by her main patron and lover, the Suzhou scholar Wang Zhideng.⁶⁹ It is possible to gather some relevant dates and facts from Ma's own writing, including letters, poetry, and inscriptions on paintings, and from other sources written by contemporaries about her. Although she was connected with several literati, Ma Shouzhen's main documented relationship is the one with Wang Zhideng, who besides being a poet and calligrapher was a painting and theatre connoisseur, as well as a writer of drama himself.⁷⁰ Moreover, he was a leader of the painting forgery market.⁷¹ Wang Zhideng was a key actor in the cultural scene of late Ming Jiangnan, yet his role and the intricacies of his character have not yet received the scholarly attention they deserve. Wang was connected, possibly intimately, to other Nanjing courtesans, and this is demonstrated by his public praising of their skills, as for the case of Jing Pianpian. Jing was originally from Jiangxi, but often travelled to Jian'an 建安 in Fujian and was mistaken by Wang to be 'a Fujian girl' (*minzhong nüzi* 閩中女子). He wrote for her a poem, the first quatrain of which says:

In Fujian there is a girl whose best skill is poetry;

⁶⁸ The tradition of *nianpu* writing began in the Song dynasty, but for women most of the *nianpu* were written from the late Ming dynasty. A collection of *nianpu* of twenty-six women, not including Ma Shouzhen but other late Ming famous courtesans such as Dong Xiaowan (?–1642) and Liu Rushi in Zhang Aifang 張愛芳, *Lidai funü mingren nianpu* 歷代婦女名人年譜 'Chronicles of Famous Women of All Times' (Beijing, 2005).

⁶⁹ Their love affair is reported also in his biography in DMB, 1361-3.

⁷⁰ DMB, 1363; Fu Xihua 傅惜華 ed., *Mingdai chuanqi quanmu* 明代傳奇全目 'Complete List of Ming Dynasty *Chuanqi*' (Beijing, 1959), 87-9.

⁷¹ Wang Zhideng 王穉登, *Wujun danqing zhi* 吳郡丹青志 'Suzhou Gazette on Painting', in *Huashi congshu* (Shanghai, 1963), in which he lists and comments upon contemporary painters including Miss Qiu 仇氏 (active in mid to late sixteenth century), daughter of the acclaimed Qiu Ying. See on her Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 70-2; on other of Wang's activities see Julia K. Murray, *Mirror of Morality: Chinese Narrative Illustration and Confucian Ideology* (Honolulu, 2007), 106, 152.

She sent me one copy of [her collection] 'Scattering Flowers Songs'.
Although I have not yet seen her celestial face,
[Her] lovely words are just as eating lychees.
閩中有女最能詩，寄我一部散花詞。
雖然未見天女面，快語堪當食荔枝。⁷²

Wang probably knew also the famous Xue Susu, who was originally from Suzhou too, since he composed the preface of her poetry collection.⁷³ Wang, besides being a promoter of courtesans' talents, also functioned as matchmaker in the Qinhuai pleasure quarter, as Wang Duanshu reported in the comment after a short biography of the courtesan Zheng Yuji 鄭玉姬:

Native of Jiangdu [Suzhou] daughter of a respectable family, at the age of eleven both her parents died; her uncle Hong Si sold the girl to the house of the courtesan Xue Meiqing. At sixteen her name was important, then she returned to Suzhou with Lü Junsheng. Duanshu comments: it can be said that Yuji and Lu Sheng were a perfect match (*jiā'ou*). [...Wang] Baigu made the refined scholar an even more agreeable 'yellow cloak'⁷⁴ guest.

江都人，良家女，年十一父母雙亡，其叔洪四將姬賣與妓女薛媚卿家。年十六名重一時。後歸吳江呂雋生。[...] 端淑曰：玉姬呂生可謂佳耦矣。百穀以才子作黃衫客更韻。⁷⁵

This passage, besides providing some relevant information about the courtesan Zheng Yuji, places Wang as the one who contributed to creating her scholar-beauty match. Courtesan Zheng, in turn, showed her connection with Wang by dedicating to him a poem titled 'Farewell to Wang Baigu'.⁷⁶

Wang Zhideng wrote 'Lady Ma's Biography' *Ma ji zhuan* 馬姬傳,⁷⁷ where *ji*^A 姬, not to be confused with the previously mentioned *ji* 妓, means: lady, beauty, imperial concubine

⁷² Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 804; see on Wang and Jing also Idema, *The Red Brush*, 364-5.

⁷³ See Berg, 'Cultural Discourse on Xue Susu', 39.

⁷⁴ 'Yellow cloak' stands for a chivalrous and honest person, HYDCD, 12-982A.

⁷⁵ Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 19.10a-b; Zheng wrote a poem dedicated to Wang, Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 19.11a.

⁷⁶ Zheng Yuji 鄭玉姬, *Song Wang Baigu* 送王百穀, in Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 19.11a.

⁷⁷ Wang Zhideng 王稭登, *Ma ji zhuan* 馬姬傳 'Lady Ma's biography', in Pan Zhiheng 潘之恒, *Genshi Chao* 亘史鈔 'Extended History', 116 *juan*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* (Jinan, 1995-7), 4.1.a-4.4.b.

or female singer, thus it conveys a sense of respectability. *Ma ji zhuan* is the most detailed source of information on Ma Shouzhen's life, although it provides only one date, the one of her death in 1604, the year *jiachen* 甲辰 of the Wanli reign. Since Wang maintained that she passed away at the age of forty-eight *sui*, which corresponds to her being forty-seven years old, so it is calculated that she was born in 1548, the twenty-seventh year of the Jiajing reign. The text of *Ma ji zhuan* was used to shape later biographies of the courtesans,⁷⁸ and during the Ming dynasty it was reproduced in 'Extended History' *Genshi chao* 亘史鈔, edited by Pan Zhiheng 潘之恒 (1536–1621) and published in 1626, and possibly also in 'Literatae of the Green Window' *Lüchuang nüshi* 綠牕女史, edited by the unidentified Qinhuai Guest (Qinhuai Yuke 秦淮寓客) and published between 1620 and 1644.⁷⁹

The text of *Ma ji zhuan* is 1,513 characters long and due to its length only some parts, selected for their significance, will be translated in this thesis. The biography can be divided into ten parts: (1) a historical preface; (2) a brief introduction of Ma Shouzhen with reference to her names, celebrity and residence. Then Wang goes into the details of her life and recounts (3) details of when he helped her after a corrupt official unfairly requested the courtesan to pay a large amount of money. This anecdote is followed by (4) the episode of a young man who was crazily in love with Ma and did not want to leave her house. Subsequently Wang adds a few lines on (5) the story of a thief who robbed her residence, then focuses on (6) their relationship and the celebrations of his

⁷⁸ Especially see Ma's biography in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.68.a. which in turn has been widely used in subsequent centuries, discussed also in Chapter Six.

⁷⁹ Pan Zhiheng, *Genshi chao*, 4.1.a-4.4.b. I was unable to find the original text of *Lüchuang nüshi* 綠牕女史, but a recent publication is a sort of a simplified version of the original in Wang Jinling 王金玲 et al eds., *Nüshi. Jiema gudai guige simi* 女史. 解碼古代閨閣私密 'Literatae. Decoding the Ancient Secrets of the Boudoir' (Nanjing, 2010); it includes an informal version of Ma's biography written by Wang, 317-9.

birthday organised by Ma in Suzhou. In a flashback (7) he remembers travelling together with Ma to the West Lake in Hangzhou and then returns to discuss (8) the courtesan, her young demeanour and (9) the moment of her death. Finally, he concludes (10) with a panegyric about her painting and writing skills. The language is rich in literary and historical references and Wang employs the flattering rhetorical language found in commemorative texts. The biography begins as follows:

In the Jiajing era (1522–1566), while peace reigned and the empire was prosperous, Jiangnan was the most plentiful land and Jinling [Nanjing] the richest city. For a long time, in the pleasure quarter (*Pingkan*) there had been many courtesans, seductive beauties as well as pretty and coquettish girls, wearing black and yellow make-up, many of them were beautiful enough to cause the fall of a state. Before Lady Ma there had been Liu, Dong, Luo, Ge, Duan and Zhao; they, together with Ma and her contemporaries He, Jiang, Wang, Yang and Chu, in the green buildings they were called ‘the twelve hairpins’.

嘉靖間，海宇清謐，朝野熙熙，江左最稱饒富，而金陵為之甲。平康諸姬先後若而人。風流豔冶，鵲黑鴉黃，傾人城國者何限。在馬姬先者，劉、董、羅、葛、段、趙；與姬同時者，何、蔣、王、楊、馬、褚，青樓所稱十二釵也。⁸⁰

Wang placed Ma within the Nanjing courtesanship tradition, but did not specify which period in history he referred to. He grouped the courtesans under the name of the ‘twelve hairpins’ (*shier chai* 十二釵), where the hairpin *chai* 釵 is a synecdoche for a ‘beautiful woman’. The fact that he only listed the surnames of the ‘twelve hairpins’ leads one to think that potential readers knew who they were, or conversely did not know and ignored the issue. Other sources also referred to the ‘twelve hairpins’ as in the seventeenth century text *Jingzhiju shihua* 靜志居詩話 by Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709), quoted in the twentieth-century sequel to Yu Huai’s *Banqiao zaji*; however, none of them specified the full names of the twelve women.⁸¹ Only in a passage

⁸⁰ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.1a.

⁸¹ Jin Sifen 金嗣芬, *Banqiao zaji bu* 板橋雜記補 ‘Addendum to *Banqiao zaji*’, in *Nanjing xijian wenxian congkan* (Nanjing, 2006), 136. Wang Shunu mentioned the twelve hairpins, but did not investigate who they were, Wang Shunu, *Zhongguo shi*, 230-1.

reproduced in the 1920s collection on the 'Qinhuai Encyclopaedia' are some of the courtesans' full names revealed:

In the years of Wanli, there were twelve hairpins, female collators who were recorded as the twelve hairpins, they could have been: Liu xx, Dong Gui, Luo Guilin, Ge Yufang, Duan xx, Zhao Liancheng, He xx, Jiang Qiaoru, Wang Xiaoyi, Yang Mei, Ma Shouzhen, Zhu Qianying.

萬曆年間有十二釵，女校書錄十二釵可考為：劉□□，董桂，羅桂林，葛餘芳，段□□，趙連城，何□□，蔣翹如，王小奕，楊美，馬守真，褚茜英。⁸²

The idea of the twelve Nanjing beauties does not seem to have had a very solid tradition, or at least it did not until the same expression 'twelve hairpins' was used in the famous novel 'The Dream of the Red Chamber' *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (?–1763), which was published in the eighteenth century. The novel's 'twelve beauties' have apparently nothing to do with those listed by Wang, however it is worth noting that the number twelve in Chinese tradition conveys the idea of cycles as well as continuity in time. Twelve are the terrestrial branches (*jia* 甲) in the sexegenary cosmological cycles, and in literary and visual sources twelve flowers are associated to each of the twelve months of the solilunar calendar, while flowers are often emblems for beautiful women.⁸³ A further discussion of the symbol of the hairpin, which is also used in Ma Shouzhen's drama 'Three Lives – The Story of the Jade Hairpin', will be addressed in Chapter Five.

After the historical premise, Wang Zhideng continues the biography by introducing Ma Shouzhen:

⁸² Some of the characters are missing in the original text, see Miao Quansun 繆荃孫 comp., *Qinhuai guangji* 秦淮廣紀 'Qinhuai Encyclopaedia' (Shanghai, 1924) [original printed edition in the Rare Books Collection of the Shanghai Library, cat. n. 305031-34], 3.8a. For two of the three incomplete names, a likely guess is: Duan Dongmei 段東, who lived in the Tang dynasty, Zhao Shijie, *Gujin nüshi*, 5.29a; and the Ming dynasty He Yuluan 何玉鸞, see Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1935), 4.120.

⁸³ See Wu Hung, 'The Twelve Beauties in Qing Court Art and the Dream of the Red Chamber', in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997), 306-65.

Ma was the fourth girl from the same mother (*tongmu*), so, since little, she was called Si Niang (Fourth Sister); her childhood name was Xuan'er, her personal name was Shouzhen, her sobriquet Yuejiao and, since she excelled in painting orchids, her style name was Master Xianglan (Orchid of the River Xiang). [Ma] Xianglan was so famous that regardless who, officials at the imperial palace, dukes, princes and nobles, the guards outside the city, the peddlers or the servants, even chiefs of the tribes Wuwan and Tuge, there was nobody who did not know who Ma Xianglan was.

馬氏同母姊妹四人，姬齒居四，故呼四娘，小字玄兒，列行曰守真，又字月嬌，以善畫蘭，號湘蘭子。而湘蘭獨著，無論宮掖戚畹、王公貴人，邊城戍士、販夫廝養卒，雖烏丸屠各番君貊長之屬，無不知馬湘蘭者。⁸⁴

In imperial China it was a usual practice for literate people to carry more than their own personal name (*ming* 名), and acquire childhood names (*xiaoming* 小名), style names (*hao* 號) or courtesy names (*zi* 子), which could increase and vary in the course of their life.⁸⁵ As seen in the above passage, Ma Shouzhen adopted different names which she used also to sign on her paintings (see table 3), with the exception of Fourth Sister which, according to the existing sources, was never directly used in writing by Ma herself. Ma's first name was Shouzhen 守真, which could be translated as 'pursuing purity'; purity can also be 'virginity' and although this would have been a paradox for a prostitute, it was accepted for a respected courtesan, especially in the late Ming when the courtesan embodied values of virtue and culture.

The name Xuan'er 玄兒 was assigned to Ma when she was a child; the character Xuan 玄 bears different meanings, but the idea of 'delicate' or 'fine' is here preferred over the ones of 'mysterious' or 'obscure'. Moreover, Xuan'er appears also in the variant Xuanxuan 玄玄, which Wang did not mention, probably due to the fact that in Chinese

⁸⁴ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.1a.

⁸⁵ In a study on contemporary rural Hong Kong, Watson explores the importance of names in the gender structure of villages, where married women tend to be nameless, see Rubie. S. Watson, 'The Named and the Nameless: Gender and Person in Chinese Society', *American Ethnologist*, 13. 4 (Nov 1986), 619-31.

doubling the same character – or adding *er* after the character – have the same cutifying effect. Yuejiao 月嬌 (Lunar Beauty or Charm) was a romantic and suggestive name for a courtesan, as the moon (*yue* 月) is highly associated with *yin* and femininity and *jiao* 嬌 indicates a charming, frail and young female beauty.

Yuejiao as well as Xianglan 湘蘭 (Orchid of the Xiang River) were likely to have been chosen as style names by Ma Shouzhen herself or suggested by people in her surroundings.⁸⁶ At times she was also called only Xiangjun 湘君 as seen in the calligraphy of a letter by Wang Zhideng addressed to her (ill. 9), in which the character *jun*, which usually means ‘gentleman or prince’, renders the idea of ‘darling’ – as husband and wife would call each other.⁸⁷ This practice was employed possibly on the one hand to show respect and intimacy, while on the other to highlight a certain perceived ‘manliness’ of courtesan women. In the Chinese literary tradition, Xiang indicates the celebrated river which runs in today Guangxi province, and is a recurrent literary and pictorial trope. Yet, Xiang could also stand for the Hunan province; hence Howard Levy in a pioneering translation of Yu Huai’s *Banqiao zaji* translated Ma’s name as ‘Hunan Orchid’.⁸⁸ Yet, the first interpretation of Xianglan is more likely, since Wang Zhideng in the preface text to her poetry collection said that in Nanjing ‘there is a beauty of unsurpassable charm (*fengliu*) if you ask about her family name is like Beijing finest horses which value a thousand pieces of gold; if you ask about her name is like the

⁸⁶ No difference is made here between *zi* or *hao* as sources do not clearly distinguish the two; Yuejiao and Xianglan are indicated both as *zi* and *hao*.

⁸⁷ Wang’s calligraphy is included in *Mingdai shuzha xuancui* 明代書札選萃 ‘Ming Dynasty Letters Selection’ (Tianjin, 2001), vol. 7, 7 (National Library of China, Beijing, ref. n. J292.26).

⁸⁸ Howard S. Levy, *A feast of Mist and Flowers; the Gay Quarters of Nanking at the End of the Ming* (Yokohama, 1966), 48 and fn.70.

nine acres of grasses by the Xiang River' (有美一人，風流絕代。問姓則千金燕市之駿，托名則九畹湘江之草)。⁸⁹

Ma Shouzhen in adopting the name Xianglan created a strong association also with the legendary goddesses of the Xiang River, who embodied the romantic idea of loyalty.⁹⁰ According to Wang's passage, above, Xianglan expressed Ma's recognised ability in painting orchids, although she seemed to have adopted it since the very beginning of her career, when she possibly was trained at painting orchids. The earliest surviving painting done by Ma is a hanging scroll dated 1563, when she was only fifteen (ill. 10), representing a monochrome ink rock in front of which grow a tall thin bamboo and a delicate plant of orchids. The scroll carries the following inscription written in small regular calligraphy (*kaishu* 楷書):

Although companion to small grass,
A secluded fragrance is emanated from the valley.
A pure heart is entrusted to a gentleman,
And immediately sweeps a clear breeze.
Written in the mid-third month of *guihai* [1563] at the Qinhuai pavilion.
Xuanxuan zi, Xianglan, Ma Shouzhen.
雖與小草伍，幽芬出谷中。
素心拖君子，時刻拂清風。
癸亥穀雨寫於秦淮水榭。玄玄子湘蘭馬守真。⁹¹

These penta-syllabic lines convey the idea of 'seclusion', typical of the literatus, and 'fragrance' strongly associated with feminine erotic allure. Ma Shouzhen signed using her style name Xianglan, thus the association with orchids, both in her name and as painted subject matter, was established since the beginning of her career.

⁸⁹ Wang Zhideng quoted in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.68b. See alternative translation in Chang, *Women Writers*, 736-8.

⁹⁰ See the story of the goddess of the Xiang River in Xiaoshan Yang, *Metamorphosis of the Private Sphere: Gardens and Objects in Tang-Song Poetry* (Cambridge MA, 2003), 78.

⁹¹ See translation also in Weidner, *View from Jade Terrace*, 72.

Ma Shouzhen constantly identified herself with (and was simultaneously associated with) the city of Nanjing and its Qinhuai River pleasure quarter, where she lived and worked her whole life. Although sources identify Ma as a ‘Nanjing person’ (as discussed at the beginning of this chapter), her place of birth is uncertain. Ma Shouzhen made an explicit reference to Suzhou as her place of origins, or possibly that of her family, in one occasion only: a poem reproduced exclusively in the nineteenth-century collection ‘Selection of Writing from the Palace Inner Chambers’ *Gonggui wenxuan* 宮閨文選, edited by Zhou Shouchang 周壽昌 (1814–1884). The hepta-syllabic quatrain by Ma Shouzhen is titled ‘Passing by Wumen [Suzhou] in an autumn day and remembering the past’ *Qiuri guo Wumen ganjiu* 秋日過吳門感舊. The fact that this poem was published only in a late nineteenth-century collection leads to question its authenticity.

I arrived in my native place, but now I am just a guest;
In my heart at the moonlight, we are on the same boat.
身到故鄉翻是客，心惟明月許同舟。⁹²

The surname Ma 馬, which means ‘horse’, is not an indigenous Han Chinese surname but rather belongs to the Hui Muslim ethnic minority.⁹³ This of course does not imply that Ma Shouzhen was a Muslim, but that her predecessors possibly descended from Hui blood. Interestingly, several talented Nanjing courtesans carried the surname Ma and although there is no documentation about a Ma lineage in courtesanship, it is worth noting that contemporaries of Ma Shouzhen, or women who lived just after her, carried Ma as a surname: Ma Jiao 馬嬌,⁹⁴ Ma Chaocai 馬晁采, Ma Shu 馬姝⁹⁵ and Ma Yueqin 馬

⁹² Zhou Shouchang 周壽昌, *Gonggui Wenxuan* 宮閨文選 ‘Selection of Writing from the Palace Inner Chambers’, 26 *juan* (Xiaopenglai shanguan edition, 1846) [accessed via McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women’s Writings Digitization Project], 20.19b-20a. The authenticity of this poem could be doubted since it appears only in a much later anthology.

⁹³ This is demonstrated also by the fact that a collection of poems by Ma Shouzhen reproduced from different anthologies (misleadingly titled *Xianglanzi ji*), has been included in Wu Haiying 吳海鷹 ed., *Huizu dianzang quanji* 回族典藏全書 ‘Complete Writings of the Canon of the Hui Minority’ (Ningxia, 2008), 77-103

⁹⁴ Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, 19.

月琴, the latter being particularly known for her talent in playing the zither (*guqin* 古琴).⁹⁶ Moreover, Ma could have been an adopted surname to signal belonging to a certain courtesan house. For instance, the late Ming courtesan Ma Ruyu 馬如玉, style name Chuyu 楚嶼 whose original surname was Zhang 張, adopted her matron's surname Ma when she moved from the Southern Market to a brothel in the Old Compound.⁹⁷

There are many unknowns around Ma Shouzhen's origins and childhood, which can only be answered with historically reasonable explanations since there is no direct evidence. To begin with, how did she end up in a brothel? We know that often little girls were sold to brothels by poor families, when orphans, as for the case of the aforementioned Zheng Yuji and Wang Wei 王薇 (style name Xiuwei 修薇, ca 1600-47);⁹⁸ or when their families suddenly lost their wealth, as could happen in the late Ming great social mobility and commodity culture.⁹⁹ According to the Ming Code, whoever sold or bought honourable *liang* people – thereby someone coming from an official family or landowning household – in order to employ them as entertainers, musicians or dancers, was punishable with one hundred strokes of a heavy stick and had to return the girl to the family of origins.¹⁰⁰ Alternatively, it was possible that daughters of entertainers grew up in courtesanship, although pregnancy was not desirable while working in the pleasure district. We know that at least some gentry women practised contraception,

⁹⁵ Jin Sifen, *Banqiao zaji bu*, 116.

⁹⁶ Jin Sifen, *Banqiao zaji bu*, 117.

⁹⁷ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 768; also quoted from *Zhong xiang ci* in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 58.

⁹⁸ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 760.

⁹⁹ Ropp, 'Ambiguous Images', 32-41.

¹⁰⁰ Jiang, *The Great Ming Code*, 217, art. 399.

and sterilisation or resorted to abortion, and it is plausible to assume that the similar methods could have been used by courtesans.¹⁰¹

Other questions, such as how much a girl was sold for or how much Ma Shouzhen was bought for, can only be tentatively answered. Historical sources rarely give information about how much girls were valued at in the courtesan market, and it is unclear how girls entered the higher or lower prostitution circles, but it is possible that it varied according to their demeanour or their seller's connections. The scholar Tan Youxia 譚友夏 (1586–1637) reported in a letter to his brother that he was looking for two maids he could buy for twenty or thirty ounces of silver each, as long as they were not too ugly.¹⁰² In the sixteenth century an ounce of silver was enough to buy half a bolt of precious silk; one-tenth of an ounce was enough for a meal. Talented courtesans could have been bought for impressive amounts, as in the case of the scholar Gong Dingzi 龔鼎孳 (1615–1673) who paid 1,000 ounces of silver for marrying the celebrity courtesan Gu Mei 顧眉 (1619–1664).¹⁰³ Fictional sources, such as novels and novellas from the late Ming, furnish us with some information on prices for talented girls who became courtesans, information which, within the fictional narrative, could be hyperbolic or conversely be close to reality in order to better appeal to their readers.

¹⁰¹ Bray, *Technology and Gender*, 302, 321–5. The debate on abortion has been recently revised by Sommer who has rectified some of the assumptions made by the previous scholarship on the frequency and efficacy of this practice; Sommer instead proposes that abortion was a dangerous, unreliable, and expensive emergency treatment; see Matthew H. Sommer, 'Abortion in Late Imperial China: Routing Birth Control or Crisis Intervention?', *Late Imperial China*, 31.2 (2010), 97–165.

¹⁰² Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 263. The currency used was usually cash money, such as the *liang* 兩 *tael* which corresponded to one ounce of silver, which is approximately twenty-eight grams.

¹⁰³ Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, on prices of things see also 128–34, 118.

The short story 'The Oil Seller Takes Sole Possession of the Queen of Flowers' *Maiyoulang duzhan huakui* 賣油郎獨占花魁 written by Feng Menglong, a younger contemporary of Ma Shouzhen, recounts the vicissitudes of Yaoqin 瑤琴, a beautiful and talented girl from an impoverished gentry family who was sold to a brothel for fifty taels (ounces of silver). Yaoqin's first night was paid three-hundred taels, while her evening entertainment was valued at ten taels.¹⁰⁴ Although girls were very likely sold to the brothels at a very young age, they were officially entering the entertainment industry possibly around thirteen after having acquired the right skills, such as playing a musical instrument, singing and dancing, but also reciting poetry and painting.¹⁰⁵ According to article 390 of the Ming Code, sex was not allowed with girls before the age of twelve, and in case it happened, the punishment was strangulation or 'if it is not consummated, the penalty shall be 100 strokes of beating with heavy stick and life exile to 3,000 *li*' for the man, while it specifies that the woman was not to be punished. Therefore, the punishment was quite heavy (the same penalty as that which would have been incurred in a case of injuring women's external genitalia).¹⁰⁶

In Ma's biography, Wang Zhideng maintained that she was called Fourth Sister because she was the fourth born of the *tongmu* 同母, literally the 'same mother'. *Tongmu* could be the adoptive mother, so her daughters were then sisters by blood or adoption, as Susan Mann has suggested.¹⁰⁷ Since the Tang dynasty, as reported in the ninth century account on courtesans *Beilizhi* 北里志 ('Record of the Northern Ward'), the courtesan's

¹⁰⁴ Patrick Hanan, *Falling in Love: Stories from Ming China* (Honolulu, 2006), 30, 38.

¹⁰⁵ The Ming courtesan Zhao Yanru 趙燕如 was registered at the Entertainment Bureau when she was thirteen, in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 803.

¹⁰⁶ Jiang, *The Great Ming Code*, see art. [2] and [3], 214, and art. 325 [2], 179.

¹⁰⁷ Mann, *Precious Records*, 139; Mann (141) maintains that courtesans past their twenties disappeared from the historical records, but this is in fact not the case for Ma Shouzhen and many others.

mother is often called stepmother or fostering mother and she is what Paola Zamperini has defined the ‘mother-cum-madam’, who is usually depicted as an opportunistic woman related to acts of violence against the girls in the brothel.¹⁰⁸ Ma Shouzhen exceptionally mentioned her mother in the preface she wrote for the *chuanqi* drama ‘Lady Red Thread’ *Hongxian nü* 紅線女, a revised version of the Tang heroines’ story by her friend playwright Liang Chenyu 梁辰魚 (1519–1591).¹⁰⁹ On that occasion she stated: ‘[in my situation many] would desire to die, but who would then my elderly mother rely upon? 欲墜樓者孰依矣, 而高年之母孰依’.¹¹⁰ In this case the mother could have been her brothel stepmother, rather than her biological parent, but regardless this extract testifies to Ma Shouzhen’s filial attitude towards the woman who she recognised as her mother.

Other sources document the ways in which the brothel’s environment, which was in effect the house where courtesans and apprentices grew up and lived together, resembled some of the mechanisms typical of a household. For instance, the use of family names within brothels recreated family ties, as we are reminded by Yu Huai in his *Banqiao zaji*. In the following passage he gave some information about the appellation system used within the brothel:

In the courtesans’ house the servants called them [the courtesans] *niang* ‘sisters’, while outsiders would call them *xiaoniang* ‘misses/prostitutes’; the *jiamu* ‘stepmother’ calls them *niang’er* ‘daughters’. Some guests call themselves *jiefu* ‘brother-in-law’, some call the matron ‘maternal grandmother’.

¹⁰⁸ See Zamperini, *Lost Bodies*, 77-89; and Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-century Shanghai* (Berkeley, 1997), 463-98.

¹⁰⁹ Liang Chenyu 梁辰魚, *Hongxian nü* 紅線女 ‘Lady Red Thread’, in Idem, *Liang Chenyu ji* 梁辰魚集 ‘Liang Chenyu’s Collected Works’ (Shanghai, 1998), 425-39; on the play see Cyril Birch, *Scenes for Mandarins: the Elite Theater of the Ming* (New York, 1995), 63; on Hongxian’s tale see Altenburger, *The Sword or the Needle*, 60, 71-2, 216-21.

¹¹⁰ Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, ‘Hongxian chuan qi xiao yin’ 紅線傳奇小引 ‘Little introduction to the story of Lady Red Thread’, in Zhao Shijie, *Gujin nüshi*, 9.11a-b. See the integral translation in Chapter Five.

妓家，仆婢稱之曰娘，外人呼之曰小娘，假母稱之曰娘兒。有客稱客曰姐夫，客稱假母曰外婆。¹¹¹

Brothels functioned for courtesans as residences functioned for gentry women; it was not only the place for them to grow up, but where they received an education. It is reasonable to think that courtesans had to learn some of the basic woman's skills, such as embroidery and sewing, together with the courtesans' arts of singing, dancing and impersonating roles, as well as conversing and entertaining elite men during banquets and elegant gatherings. At the same time, they were taught poetry, calligraphy and painting,¹¹² but also engaged proactively in learning, as shown by the late Ming Hangzhou courtesan Liang Xiaoyu 梁小玉, also known as Yuji 玉姬, who was a prolific writer and also a dramatist.¹¹³ In the preface to her 'Poems on history' *Yongshi lu* 詠史錄 she stated:

What I love the most is reading history. Because its net of manifestations [can fit] in the head, and the game of the ages [can fit] in one's own palms; nothing is like [history] books. It can bring delight and astonishment, fear and pity, I gathered all in a long song to be recited.

余最愛閱史。以為羅萬象於腦中，玩千古於掌上，無如是書。有可喜可愕，可怖可憐之事，輒長歌以詠之。¹¹⁴

Only little is known about the methods in which courtesans were educated, and it probably varied according to the brothel, although it is likely that the transmission of knowledge was mainly maintained from woman to woman.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, there were

¹¹¹ Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, 9.

¹¹² See the playwright and scholar Li Yu 李漁 (1610–1680); on education Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 264–66.

¹¹³ Together with Ma, Liang was one of the few known women dramatists of the Ming, see Hua Wei, *Ming Qing funü xiqu chuanzuo yu piping*, 31.

¹¹⁴ Liang Xiaoyu 梁小玉, *Gujin yongshi lu* 古今詠史錄序, in Zhao Shijie, *Gujin nüshi*, 3.25a; see original text also reproduced in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 161–2; and fully translated in Robertson, 'Changing the Subject', 188.

¹¹⁵ This is documented for the case of Liu Rushi, see Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 100; James Cahill, 'The Painting of Liu Yin', in Marsha Weidner ed., *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting* (Honolulu, 1990), 106.

cases in which courtesans learnt painting from male masters, such as the Old Compound courtesan Lin Nu'er 林奴兒, who lived in the Chenghua 成化 reign (1465–1487) and learnt to paint from the landscape painters Shi Tingzhi 史廷直 (also known as Shi Zhong 史忠),¹¹⁶ and Wang Yuanfu 王元父 (Mengren 孟仁), although her brush was believed to be more 'clear and moist' (*qingrun* 清潤).¹¹⁷ Interestingly, a woodblock printed image published in *Lüchuang nüshi* represents a Nanjing brothel as a learning environment, in which women are busy carrying books, teaching and learning, as well as preparing and serving tea (ill. 11). We know that Ma Shouzhen at some point in her career was also involved in teaching, as Wang Zhideng maintained:

She taught theatre to her girl-apprentices as a proper theatrical troupe and every day they entertained guests at banquets; the drums mingled with the sound of *pipa* and with those of gold strings and sandalwood clappers
教諸小鬟學梨園子弟，日為供帳燕客，羯鼓胡琵琶聲，與金縷紅牙相間。¹¹⁸

Many aspects of courtesan culture in late Ming Nanjing deserve further research, such as the transmission of knowledge or the naming system used to express ties among different people living in the brothel, such as the matron and other managerial figures, apprentices, servants and courtesans of different ages and levels. The current study is concerned with emphasising, rather than solving, some of the unknowns about courtesanship in late Ming Nanjing.

¹¹⁶ Xu Qin 徐沁, *Minghua lu* 名畫錄 'Catalogue of Ming Painters', 8 *juan*, in *Huashi congshu* (Shanghai, 1963), 3.37.

¹¹⁷ Jiang Shaoshu, *Wusheng shishi*, 5.83; Lin is said to have been taught only by Shi Zhong, see Ellen J. Laing, 'Women Painters in Traditional China', in Marsha Weidner ed., *Flowering in the Shadows: Women in the History of Chinese and Japanese Painting* (Honolulu, 1990), 84. On Wang, see Xu Qin, *Minghua lu*, 3.41.

¹¹⁸ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.1.a; see alternative translation of this passage in Idema and Grant, *The Red Brush*, 366.

Although we know that Ma Shouzhen was a courtesan her whole life, it is not known exactly when she officially entered the courtesans' realm, but she must have been already a courtesan by the time she was fifteen, as the previously mentioned 1563 painted scroll testifies. According to the imperial collection catalogue *Shiqu baoji sanbian* 石渠寶笈三遍, there is a text inscribed on Ma Shouzhen's album leaves by the famous painter Zhou Tianqiu 周天球 (1514–1595), who was a close friend of Wang Zhideng.¹¹⁹ Although the Chinese scholar He Junhong believes the album to be a forgery, with the benefit of doubt it still deserves to be considered and will be further discussed in Chapter Three.¹²⁰ The text gives reason to think that Zhou Tianqiu, who was celebrated for painting orchids, was possibly an early patron of Ma Shouzhen. According to *Shiqu baoji sanbian*, Zhou wrote on one of her album leaves:

Xianglan, after Lady Wen¹²¹ and Guan [Daosheng] is the only [talented] one. She lives in Jinling and excels in the 'women's skills' enough to be the first of the pleasure quarter. She has not rivals in painting orchids and bamboo at her time, she is without equals. Now, this album has been done for Mr Peng Kongjia [Nian], who treasures it like [an ancient] jade disc. I have been asked to inscribe it. It is with these superfluous words that I return it.

湘蘭，文姬管夫人之后一人也，居金陵，精於女技，亦足擅平康之長，寫蘭竹獨步一時，無出其右。今此冊為彭孔加先生所作，寶之如拱璧也。命題，是以復贅數語以歸。¹²²

Peng Nian 彭年 (1505–66) was an older Suzhou scholar¹²³ and, as Marsha Weidner has pointed out, since the undated album was given to him, it must have been done before Peng's death in 1566 when Ma was eighteen; thus it shows that already at an early age she had achieved fame among important literati.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ See on Zhou and Wang, DMB, 1363.

¹²⁰ He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 138-9; this will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

¹²¹ Wen ji 文姬 stands for Cai Yan 蔡琰 (176?–early third century), talented daughter of a statesman, who was kidnapped and sent as wife to a Xiongnu chief, see Chang, *Women Writers*, 22-3.

¹²² Hu Jing 胡敬 et al. eds., *Shiqu baoji sanbian* 石渠寶笈三遍 'Catalogue of the Stone Canal Collection' (Taipei, 1986), vol. 5, 2120. See alternative translation in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72.

¹²³ See Peng Nian's biography in, DMB, 1117-18.

¹²⁴ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72.

In the attempt to create a chronology of Ma's life, the only dated sources by or about her until the 1580s are her paintings, which confirm her painting activity but do not reveal specific information on biographical events. The first dated source about the courtesan is a special celebration composition written in 1587 by Wang Zhideng in occasion of her fortieth birthday. The text, which was included only in one of his personal collections, reveals that the two probably met in the 1570s.¹²⁵ He wrote as follows:

Frosting cold at Taoye Ford, idle flow of Qinhuai water, the moon pokes from the Jinling walls and illuminates by the side the women in the green buildings. The girls in the green buildings with their alluring demeanour are more beautiful than the moon. Today it has been ten years and [you] have not changed in ten years. Ten years ago I passed by your house by poplars and willows, and there you were listening to the *pipa*, talking while standing by the screen window and teaching your parrot a poem about peach blossoms written on a silk fan. At times, while the moon was on the Long Wooden Bridge, I halted my horse to say goodbye to your beauty.

霜寒桃葉渡，潮落秦淮水，月出金陵城，偏照青樓女，青樓女顏色，比月共嬋娟，今來十年後，不改十年前。十年前度過卿家垂楊，繫馬聽琵琶，語隔紗窗教鸚鵡，詩題紈扇詠桃花，有時長板橋頭月，立馬與卿嬌上別。¹²⁶

In the above text Wang confirmed that Ma in 1587 was living in the pleasure quarter with the Peach Leaf Ford and the Long Wooden Bridge as its landmarks. Wang said he had known Ma already for ten years, which takes us back to 1577. In the biography, he stated that thirty years earlier they promised to have an appointment in Suzhou, but it happened only in 1604. So they had met at some point in the 1570s, although it is hard to know exactly when. The earliest extant painting which carries Wang's inscription is a hanging scroll depicting ink orchid with bamboo and rock, dated 1572 (ill. 12); however,

¹²⁵ See on this also He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 123.

¹²⁶ Wang Zhideng 王穉登, *Nanyou tang shiji* 南有堂詩集 'Poetry Collection from the Nanyou Hall', 10 *juan* (1636, microfilm accessed at Hong Kong University Library ref. n. CMF 25425), 2.12b-13b.

his calligraphy on this piece is undated, thus it could have been added later. Ma Shouzhen's inscription on this hanging scroll is composed by two penta-syllabic lines and indicates place and time:

Emerald shadows sway on the Xiang River,
While a pure fragrance flows from secluded valley.
Written in 'Pure Peace' [fourth month] of the Renshen year [1572], from
the small pavilion on the Qinhuai River. Master Xianglan, Xuanxuan, Ma
Shouzhen.

翠影拂湘江，清芬瀉幽谷。

壬申清和寫於秦淮小閣。湘蘭子玄玄馬守真。¹²⁷

In Ma Shouzhen's social networks there were many elite men with whom she entertained friendship or perhaps love affairs, as is demonstrated in the following chapters by an investigation of her painting, poetry and drama. However, the relationship with Wang was the most famous, and possibly the strongest. Wang Zhideng strangely omitted in the biography an important piece of information: in 1591 Ma published her collection of individual poems in two *juan* 'chapters' (table 5), titled 'Ma Xianglan Poetry Collection' *Ma Xianglan shiji* 馬湘蘭詩集. The original text must have been seldom reprinted,¹²⁸ but many extracted poems were collected in other anthologies, as will be discussed primarily in Chapter Four (see table 6). A preface to the collection written by Wang Zhideng was quoted in Qian Qianyi's *Liechao shiji*,¹²⁹ thus Wang contributed to raise the literary profile of Ma's poetry and possibly functioned as patron. Yet, in the only retrievable surviving copy, housed in the collection of the National Library in Taipei, another name appears as the man who contributed to its

¹²⁷ See alternative translation in Weidner, *View from Jade Terrace*, 72.

¹²⁸ The only existing copy to my knowledge is kept in the National Library 國家圖書館 in Taipei (Republic of China), see Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, *Ma Xianglan shiji*. I owe its retrieval to Xu Wenmei who has also discussed and reproduced some of the collection poems in Xu Wenmei, 'Wan Ming Qinglou Huajia', 97, 99, 101.

¹²⁹ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao Shiji*, 4.68.a-b; see integral translation in Chang, *Women Writers*, 736-8.

publication, that of Zhou Lüjing 周履靖 (1542–1633),¹³⁰ a prolific Jiangnan scholar who never achieved an official title but was a poet, painter and dramatist belonging to the same cultural elite as the better known names of Zhou Tianqiu, Li Rihua 李日华 (1565–1635)¹³¹ and Wen Zhengming's youngest son Wen Jia 文嘉 (1501–1583).¹³² The little-studied figure and cultural production of Zhou Lüjing have been recently rediscovered by J.P. Park in his *Art by the Book*.¹³³ Yet, Park has not mentioned that Zhou Lüjing was connected to the celebrity courtesan Ma Shouzhen and possibly functioned as her patron (this will be further discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four).¹³⁴

The relationship between Ma and Wang Zhideng is further proved by ten surviving letters attributed to the courtesan, all addressed to Wang. Only one letter was included in a Ming dynasty collection,¹³⁵ while eight of them in their original calligraphy have been collected on a long handscroll assembled by the renowned collector Wu Hufan 吳湖帆 (1894–1968) at the beginning of the twentieth century, and one appears only in modern anthologies.¹³⁶ The long scroll – almost ten metres – collected by Wu Hufan is today part of the Rare Books Collection of the Shanghai Library; moreover, it includes a

¹³⁰ For Zhou see DMB, 1297.

¹³¹ See Li Rihua's biography in DMB, 826.

¹³² See about Wen Jia in Clunas, *Elegant Debts*, esp. 161-7; and James Cahill, *Parting at the Shore: Chinese Painting of the Early and Middle Ming Dynasty, 1368-1580* (New York; Tokyo, 1978), 248-9.

¹³³ J.P. Park, *Art by the Book. Painting Manuals and the Leisure Life in Late Ming China* (Seattle; London, 2012), esp. 50-2, 69-70.

¹³⁴ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 1.1a; 2.1a.

¹³⁵ Ma Shouzhen, 'Ji Wang Baigu shu' 寄王百穀書 'Letter sent to Wang Baigu', in Zhao Shijie, *Gujin nüshi*, 8.50a.

¹³⁶ See Ma's letter reproduced with a brief comment and notes in Wang Zhaoxiang 王兆祥, *Qinghai xizhu. Qing'ai pian* 情海洗珠. 情爱篇 'Washing Pearls in a Sea of Passions. Love Section', in *Lidai mingren mingjian* (Taiyuan, 2003), 220-2.

coloured portrait of Ma Shouzhen¹³⁷ and several colophons written in the twentieth century mainly by Wu (ill. 13). All the letters are written in small cursive-style calligraphy on simple and natural coloured paper, except three: one letter has in the upper and lower parts two decorative bands depicting stylised orchids in red ink, and two others are of light-blue paper framed by a woodblock printed blue ink decoration with typical literati designs: peach blossoms, fungi, bamboo and pine. Embedded in the decorative frame it is possible to recognise the name of the papermaker Zhang from Suzhou (Wumen Zhangshi 吳門張氏).¹³⁸ Unfortunately none of the surviving letters are dated, but they are useful to trace some episodes of their originators' lives and relationships, especially if matched with the six letters written by Wang Zhideng to Ma Shouzhen and mostly collected in his *Mouye ji* 謀野記.¹³⁹ Some of the letters seem to be related to one moment of profound difficulty experienced by the courtesan probably in the late 1580s, when a corrupt official accused her of alleged tax fraud and demanded that she pay a huge amount of money (as also reported in *Ma ji zhuan*). Ma explained the situation to Wang using the following words:

I became famous thanks to the many princes and lords who donated me gifts in exceptional measure; I have become known as the richest of the six buildings. For this, those who admire me are many, nor missing are those who envy me. [...] Unworthy petty officials unexpectedly found me guilty; with that excuse they did a punitive expedition to reclaim debt and frightened me to be arrested; they came many times, and claimed lots of my money.

¹³⁷ The painted portrait is executed in a stylised manner and was possibly copied from the woodblock printed image of the courtesan included in the volume *Qinhuai bay yan tuyong*, ill. 84.

¹³⁸ The handscroll carries some inscriptions added by Wu Hufan, as well as a coloured portrait of the courtesan which will be discussed in Chapter Six. The text of the letters and most of the inscriptions are in the Shanghai Library's own publication *Lishi wenxian*, vol. 12, 14-21.

¹³⁹ There are five letters in Wang Zhideng 王穉登 and Tu Long 屠隆, *Tu xiansheng pingshi mouye ji* 屠先生評釋謀野集 'Mr Tu's Comments and Mouye Collection', 4 *juan*, in *Siku jinhui shu congkan* (Beijing, 2000), 2.8a, 3.18a-b, 4.22b-23a, 4.24b-25a, 4.31a; and one letter in its original calligraphy reproduced in *Mingdai shuzha xuancui*, vol. 7, 7.

時妾少負盛名，謬承公子王孫，獎飾逾恒，推為六院之冠。以是豔羨者固多，而嫉妒者也不乏其人。[..] 不肖吏胥，橫施強暴，借索逋為詞，以逮捕相恫，索詐數度，攫金半千。¹⁴⁰

In another undated short letter, Ma urged Wang to help her in solving a difficulty which is not explained, but possibly referred to the same trouble as above:

Yet, many circumstances are difficult to solve, and entirely rely upon you, if even the smallest thing is not done properly, my life could be in peril.
但千鈞之擔，皆賴於君，小有不妥，則命不可保，望君終始周旋。¹⁴¹

In Ma's biography Wang mentioned the same episode, explaining that:

There was a corrupt official from the Ancestral temple¹⁴² who summoned Ma and threatened to arrest her; she gave him half a thousand gold (coins). Yet not satisfied, he asked for more. I happened to pass by her house and Ma received me with her hair undone and barefoot, her eyes were swollen from crying; her guests did not know what to do besides getting ready to wear white [mourning] clothes and hats to accompany her through the Qinhuai. I then went to the Xitai Censor, bringing eight pieces of calligraphy to ask for his mediation and obtained his intervention. 祠郎有墨者，以徵遣逮捕之，攫金半千，未厭，捕愈急。余適過其家，姬被髮徒跣，目哭皆腫，客計無所出，白衣冠送之渡秦淮。會西臺御史，索余八分書，請為居間，獲免。¹⁴³

This narrative reveals a relaxed attitude towards the episode, which was solved thanks to Wang's talent and fame as a calligrapher and poet. Nonetheless, the situation required more than a nonchalant action, but rather a planned intervention which involved letter writing to Censor Chen (Chen *shiyu* 陳侍御). In his collection of letters, Wang included two epistles, one of almost desperation written to the censor imploring him to intercede and help Ma Shouzhen, a courageous woman he had known for already fifteen years, so supposedly this episode had taken place in the mid to late

¹⁴⁰ Ma Shouzhen, 'Zhi Wang Baigu shu', 268-9.

¹⁴¹ *Lishi wenxian*, vol. 12, 17.

¹⁴² *Cimiao* 祠廟 is the ancestral temple, HYDCD, 7-906B.

¹⁴³ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.2a.

1580s. The second letter to Mr Chen is to thank him for having solved the situation and praise the censor for having saved Ma Shouzhen.¹⁴⁴

It is possibly after this episode that the courtesan wrote to Wang Zhideng and, with an almost ironic attitude, reminded him of having refused to marry her:

I was relieved and grateful, as I would have not been able to protect myself; I secretly thought you loved me, so I wanted to entrust myself to you. But you said: 'How could I expect to have you after having rescued you? Are those who expect a reward after saving people from peril any different from those who put people in peril? If Gu Yaya¹⁴⁵ was still alive, would he not stab my chest?' Ah! It is so amiable and these are words of benevolence. Your thoughts are fine and kind, but my heart/mind is firmly tied [to you].

妾欣幸之餘，無以克報，竊思郎既有心於妾，妾惟委身於郎。而郎謂：“余豈欲得汝而援手乎？脫人之危，而因以為利，去厄之哉幾何？古押衙而在，匕首不陷於胸乎？”噫嘻！是藹然仁者之言也。郎意良厚，我心維堅。¹⁴⁶

The marriage proposal and refusal could have been just a game between Ma and Wang, part of the performance between the courtesan and the scholar, a real-life romance being acted out. Admitting that the proposal was true, it can be argued that probably Ma Shouzhen aspired to leave the pleasure district and be part of an elite family, as marriage seemed to be a common goal among courtesans.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, it is hard to establish whether the marriage narrative had been intentionally constructed by Wang and Ma as a rhetorical mechanism adopted to fashion their selves.

According to some of the letters between Ma and Wang they attempted to meet up on several occasions when Wang was in Nanjing, but due to unforeseen circumstances they regularly failed to see each other. In one instance Wang had some other sudden affairs

¹⁴⁴ Wang Zhideng, *Yu Chen Shiyu* 與陳侍御 'To Censor Chen', in Idem, *Mouye ji*, 2.8a-b.

¹⁴⁵ Gu Yaya was a character emblematic of moral rectitude, from a Tang story, HYDCD, 3-21A.

¹⁴⁶ Ma Shouzhen, 'Zhi Wang Baigu shu', 269-70.

¹⁴⁷ See on marriage and poetry also Chapter Four.

to take care of, another time Ma was severely ill and did not have the strength to see him.¹⁴⁸ In a letter mounted in the previously mentioned long scroll written on an undated '14th day of the month of the Dragon Boat Festival, between 5 am and 7 am' (端陽月十四日卯時) Ma Shouzhen wrote:

Last year I intended to travel by river to Suzhou during this spring in order to fulfil a long-cherished wish, but because of unexpected reasons I could not meet you and talk heartedly. What a pity! What a pity! Around mid autumn, despite the severe rain and wind, it won't spoil my enthusiasm in coming to Suzhou.

客歲擬今春准游吳中，以遂夙愿，不意竟為勢阻，不克舒遂鄙懷，奈何奈何。[...] 中秋前后，縱風雨虎狼，亦不能阻我吳中之興也。¹⁴⁹

In Ma's biography Wang Zhideng tells of a young wealthy man from Wushang 烏傷 who travelled to Nanjing to visit the Imperial College and once met Ma Shouzhen. The young man gave her many gifts and paid the guests who she could not entertain, and even bought her a house by the Qinhuai. He was eventually obliged to leave when a high government official (*jiju* 祭酒) intervened.¹⁵⁰ It is the late Ming author Shen Defu who gives more details about this episode and tells us that it was the year 1597 when a certain wealthy Mr Shu 舒 fell in love with Ma, and donated to Ma a large sum of money with which to build a house.¹⁵¹ Possibly after this episode, Ma wrote to Wang Zhideng the following:

I built a house by the Qinhuai River, a little nest after so much wandering. I hired a few girls to take care of the guests. Charming scholars and wealthy young men [come here to] take pleasure in poetry and wine almost every evening. They linger in my boudoir which enjoys outstanding fame. The guests are so many that I had to build an extra veranda. [There is] a water pavilion, [where the river] is quiet and clear, planted flowers and trees [in the garden] to attract butterflies; the balcony is quiet and secluded and there is a clean winding path to receive fine guests.

¹⁴⁸ *Lishi wenxian*, vol. 12, 15-17.

¹⁴⁹ *Lishi wenxian*, vol. 12, 15.

¹⁵⁰ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.2.a-b.

¹⁵¹ Shen Defu quoted in Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.2.4b.

妾秦淮筑室，小住萍蹤。略蓄雛環，聊供肆應。乃風流學士，裘馬少年，詩酒流連，幾無虛夕。盤桓妝閣，竟引為殊榮。是以再拓隙地，更建回廊。池館清疏，蒔花木以招蛺蝶；樓臺幽靜，掃曲徑而延嘉賓。¹⁵²

With these words Ma Shouzhen described her residence. Although the original building where Ma used to live does not exist any more, in front of Wanyue Bridge (玩月橋) in Bailuzhou (白鷺洲) Park - alias the Eastern Garden discussed above -, there is a house signalled as the 'Xianglan's residence' (Xianglan yuan 湘蘭苑) (ill. 14). This two-storey building with an internal courtyard and surrounded by a garden possibly stands in the same site where Ma's residence originally was. This geographical spot in front of Wanyue Bridge has been recognised as the site where courtesan used to live at least since the second half of the nineteenth century, when the text *Jinling daizheng lu* 金陵待徵錄 (1876) was published.¹⁵³ Ma Shouzhen in her paintings placed herself by the Qinhuai River in a water pavilion, usually called *shuixie* 水榭 or *shuige* 水閣, which could have been a simple kiosk as well as a residence. It is possible that she initially lived in one of the brothels by the riverside and that, in a mature stage of her career, she moved into a private residence. Ma Shouzhen at a point in her life was probably a completely independent courtesan, who worked as a private professional; from that time onward she possibly lived the rest of her life in what has been described as 'a beautiful spot along the Qinhuai river'.¹⁵⁴

As in all narratives, also in the reconstruction of Ma's life there is one main contradiction to be highlighted. Wang Zhideng stated in the biography that they did not see each

¹⁵² Ma Shouzhen, 'Zhi Wang Baigu shu', 268-70.

¹⁵³ Jin Ao 金鰲, *Jinling dai zheng lu* 金陵待徵錄 'Collected Records from Jinling', in *Nanjing xijian wenxian congkan* (Nanjing, 2009), 86.

¹⁵⁴ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.68.a. I visited the residence during my fieldwork in summer 2011.

other for sixteen years, supposedly from 1588 until 1604 when she went to visit him in Suzhou for the celebration of his seventieth birthday. However, Shen Defu in his ‘Unofficial Records’ (*Yehuo bian* 野獲編), which has an original preface dated 1606, maintained that in 1597 Ma Shouzhen and Wang Zhideng appeared as characters in the ‘mixed play’ (*zaju* 雜劇) ‘White Silk Skirt’ *Bai lian qun* 白練裙, a two-handed work written by the contemporary playwright Zheng Zhiwen 鄭之文 in collaboration with another *chuanqi* writer Wu Zhao 吳兆,¹⁵⁵ yet the play is often attributed only to Zheng. The *zaju*, which will be further discussed in Chapter Five, satirised on the relationship between Wang and Ma, deriding the fact that despite their age – he was almost seventy and she was in her fifties – they still had a relationship. Therefore, the assumption is that they still enjoyed each other’s company in the 1590s, a fact which contradicts Wang’s statement.¹⁵⁶

The *zaju* demonstrates that despite her advanced age Ma Shouzhen did not cease to be a celebrity in the pleasure quarter. At times she was called ‘old courtesan’ (*laoji* 老妓), as the contemporary Fujian poet Yao Lü 姚旅 (?–1623?) (style name Yuanke 園客),¹⁵⁷ who was likely acquainted with Ma, listed her among the most celebrated people of Nanjing. Yao Lü, with an ironic hint, wrote:

In the year *renyin* [1602] in Jinling [Nanjing] there were ten very busy people: Zhu Shilin was busy doing calligraphy, He Xueyu illustrating books, Wei Kaoshu was busy painting, Wang Yaoqing was busy to continue the generation, Xue Lang was busy being a monk/nun, Ma Xianglan was busy being an old courtesan, Meng Xiao’er was busy practising medicine, Gu Chunqiao boxing incense, Lu Chengshu was busy demanding debt repayments, and Cheng Yanzhi was busy doing nothing.

¹⁵⁵ See Wu Zhao in Xu Qiu 徐鉉, *Ben shi shi* 本事詩 ‘Storied Poems’, 12 *juan*, in *Siku jinhui shu congkan* (Beijing, 2000), 6.5b.

¹⁵⁶ Shen Defu in Miao Quansun, *Qinhua guangji*, 2.2, 4b.

¹⁵⁷ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 464.

壬寅金陵有十忙：祝石林寫字忙，何雪漁圖書忙，魏考叔畫畫忙，汪堯卿代作忙，雪浪出家忙，馬湘蘭老妓忙，孟小兒行醫忙，顧春橋合香忙，陸成叔討債忙，程彥之無事忙。¹⁵⁸

In another late Ming source, the diary *Huhuan riji* 呼桓日記 written by Xiang Dingxuan 項鼎鉉, there is a reference to an episode which involved an older Ma Shouzhen, together with the courtesan Xue Susu, the previously mentioned scholar Shen Defu (whose alternative name was Jingqian) and the chancellor of the Nanjing National University, Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 (style name Juqu 具區, 1546–1605),¹⁵⁹ which goes:

When Ma Xianglan was over fifties, her fame was still as prosperous as when she was young [...] When Jiao'er [Ma Shouzhen] with her pipa went in front of the Hall, the old matron with just two words ridiculed her; Ma was greatly disheartened, [and] Xue Susu was there [so] Shen Jingqian [Defu] received Xue only; that time Jingqian requested a Northern harmony; the guests down on their knees made fun of him, so Feng Juqu [Mengzhen] said: 'Shen bid farewell already long ago, this is the song to be sang'.

馬湘蘭踰五旬時，名猶盛一少年，[。]有琵琶下嬌兒去□□堂前，老母單二句嘲之，馬大沮喪薛素素為沈景倩所收薛亦。年長時景倩就試北雍，客復舉膝下語以嘲馮具區云：沈作別已久，此曲唱兒。¹⁶⁰

This passage testifies to the fact that even though Ma Shouzhen was older and famous, she could still be ridiculed and refused to perform in literati gatherings. This text also proves that Ma and Xue Susu likely knew each other personally, and that the literatus Shen Defu was not on top of the current fashionable music taste, when Southern tunes and melodies were preferred over the Northern ones.

When Ma Shouzhen was in her fifties, possibly in 1603 or 1604, she wrote the letter, partly translated above, in which she enthusiastically anticipated to Wang Zhideng her trip to Suzhou:

¹⁵⁸ Yao Lü 姚旅, *Lu shu* 露書 'Dew book', 14 juan, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 12.6b.

¹⁵⁹ See references to Feng Mengzhen in DMB, 343, 1324, 1559.

¹⁶⁰ Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.3.7b.

I have heard that on the 15th of the ninth month it will be your birthday. When the time is ready I will buy a houseboat and for the occasion bring some beauties to Suzhou to celebrate your longevity. I haven't started the journey yet, but my spirit is already with you! It will be not long before I meet you, I send you my sincere regards and wish you good fortune.

並聞菊秋望日，為檀郎壽辰。屆時妾當買樓船，載嬋娟，專赴吳門，捧觴上壽也。身未登程，神已馳依左右矣。釋晤非遙，虔候晉福。¹⁶¹

These words give evidence to the courtesan's capacity to own material goods and to her mobility. Ma Shouzhen kept her promise to Wang Zhideng, bought a boat and travelled to Suzhou; sources document that on the way there or back she stopped for a performance in Yangzhou (see Chapter Five).¹⁶² In the same year, possibly prior to her trip to Suzhou or just after it, according to the official gazetteer *Fu zhi* 府志 quoted in the imperial encyclopaedia *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成, Ma participated in a grand event organised by the imperial family member and poet Zhu Chencai 朱承綵 (style name Guohua 國華):

In mid-autumn of the *jiachen* year of Wanli [1604], the king's nephew Zhu Chengcai inaugurated a big society club in Jinling [Nanjing]. Famous scholars from all over the country, people of the calibre of Zhang Youyu [Xianyi], to receive hundreds of important people, [including] the Qinhuai performer Ma Xianglan [...] People in Baixia [Nanjing] until today remembered it as a great event.

萬曆甲辰中秋，朱王孫承彩開大社於金陵。胥會海內名士，張幼于輩，分賦授簡百二十人，秦淮伎女馬湘蘭[.]。白下人至今艷稱之。¹⁶³

The birthday celebrations that Ma Shouzhen organised for Wang Zhideng in Suzhou are also remembered as a great event by Wang himself, who described it as follows:

Although Ma and I decided to have a romantic appointment in Wumen [Suzhou] long before, it happened only about thirty years later. Last autumn of the *jiachen* year [1604] when I reached seventy years old, Ma bought a house-boat, hired many beauties and visited me in the 'Flying willow

¹⁶¹ Ma Shouzhen, 'Zhi Wang Baigu shu', 269-70.

¹⁶² Feng Mengzhen (1548–1605) accounted the event in his diary, which will be discussed in Chapter Five. Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎, *Kuaxue tang ji* 快雪堂集 'Collected Work from the Kuaxue Hall', 64 *juan*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congjian* (Jinan, 1995-7), 61.9a-9b.

¹⁶³ *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成 'Compendium of Texts of Past and Present' (Taipei, 1964), 114 冊, 667 卷, 433; the same passage is quoted in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 471.

catkins' (Feixu) Garden to celebrate my birthday; the guests were many, men and women enjoying each other's company, shoes filled the steps and the seats were all taken, from late night until morning there was singing and dancing, the scent of women's rouge pervaded everything and their perfume impregnated the boats, while the moon floated in the mist above the river water.

先是姬與余有吳門煙月之期，幾三十載未償。去歲甲辰秋日值余七十初度，姬買樓船，載嬋娟，十十五五，客余飛絮園，置酒為壽，絕纓投轄，履舄繽紛，滿四座，丙夜歌舞達旦，殘脂賸粉，香溢錦帆，涇水彌月煙煨。¹⁶⁴

Following the party, Ma Shouzhen returned to Nanjing and, shortly after, she fell ill and passed away. The moment of her death has become highly symbolic of her life. Although it is unlikely that Wang personally assisted Ma in those final days, in her biography he described the situation:

Not long after we separated, she was already ill but her illness seemed stable and it was not foreseeable that she could die; the doctor gave her medicines recklessly and for half a month she could not talk, move, eat nor drink. Already in her house there was a Buddhist shrine¹⁶⁵ for adoration, golden Buddha statues filled the building, during the night the lamps were lit until the next morning as she had been a vegetarian adept for already seven years. Several days before she died, she called some Buddhist nuns to do the ceremony of the Repentance of [Emperor] Liang of Wu¹⁶⁶, to burn camphor and sandalwood; she gave the proper vegetarian food to priests and monks, made her servants assist and go for errands. [Then Ma] knelt down on a lion throne¹⁶⁷ and prayed incessantly for days and nights. Prompted by an urge [she] prepared a wooden fox-like headed implement,¹⁶⁸ then took a bath, wore garments made of cotton, seated for a while, closed her eyes and passed away. This is not comparable to what even eminent errant monks could achieve in years. Ma in one day could transcend and awake, she believed her body¹⁶⁹ was made of food, skeleton and flesh, which were unclean, so she abandoned them like worthless things.

歸未幾，病已、病滯下皆不在死法中，醫師妄投藥，絕口不能進粥糜水食者幾半月。先是姬家素佞佛龕事，黃金像滿樓中，夜燈朝磬，奉齋已七年。將逝之前數日，召比丘，禮梁武懺，焚旃檀龍腦，設桑門

¹⁶⁴ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.2a-b.

¹⁶⁵ Kan is a Buddhist shire or box, it could also indicate a coffin. W.E. Soothill, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms* (Gaoxiong, 1994), 487.

¹⁶⁶ The litany was performed by Liang Wu Ti for his wife, who then became a devī so the repentance was named after him. Soothill, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 353.

¹⁶⁷ Typical seat for a bodhisattva or a high monk. Soothill, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 359.

¹⁶⁸ Translation conjectural.

¹⁶⁹ In Buddhism the body is made of the Four Elements: earth, water, fire and wind, Soothill, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 173.

伊蒲之饌，令小娟掖而行遶，猊座胡跪膜拜，連數晝夜不止。趣使浴木狸首具矣，然後就湯沐，袒服、中羣悉用布，坐良久，瞑然而化，此高僧道者功行積歲所不能致。姬一旦脫然超悟，視四大為粉妝骷髏革囊盛穢，棄之不翅敝屣。¹⁷⁰

The above text describes Ma Shouzhen as a Buddhist devotee, as an enlightened being aware of the end of her time and ready to ‘transform’, as death is in Buddhist terms. The connection between courtesans and Buddhism is recurrent. It has been previously noted in the literature that there is a link between the prostitute and the Bodhisattva of Mercy, Guanyin, especially through the legend of Mr Ma’s Wife, who gave her body out of compassion and freed men from sexual desire to then be recognised as a Bodhisattva; and the story of the Bodhisattva female form ‘Guanyin with the fish basket’ *Yulan Guanyin* 魚籃觀音, who was a seductive fishmonger.¹⁷¹ In the late Ming the two figures, whose legends are intertwined, were both used as subjects of plays, which highlights the fascination with the intriguing association between sexuality and religion.¹⁷² This connection is further proved by the fact that often temples were seen as promiscuous places used for sexual encounters.¹⁷³ A comparison with Japanese courtesanship, as explored by Timon Screech, could be fruitful in understanding the way in which ‘the courtesan and the Buddha were proposed as alike, for both eschewed home, procreation, filiality, and established karmic ties’.¹⁷⁴

Wang Zhideng, in the last paragraph of the courtesan’s biography, concluded by saying:

¹⁷⁰ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.2.b.

¹⁷¹ Chun-Fang Yu, *Kuan-yin, the Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara* (New York, 2001), Ch. 10 ‘Feminine Forms of Kuan-yin’, esp. 421-5, 427-30.

¹⁷² Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 433-6.

¹⁷³ There is a straightforward connection between Buddhist temples and sex, see Luo Xiaoxiang, *From Imperial City to Cosmopolitan Metropolis: Culture, Politics and State in Late Ming Nanjing* (Ph.D. Thesis, Duke University, 2006), 57-8, 120-2.

¹⁷⁴ Timon Screech, ‘Going to the Courtesans: Transit to the Pleasure District of Edo Japan’, in Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon Smith eds., *The Courtesan’s Arts: Cross-cultural Perspectives* (New York, 2006), esp. 255-9, here 259.

She desired to be the Wang's family Taoye and Taogen,¹⁷⁵ but I made the effort to follow the example of [Wang] Chuzhong¹⁷⁶ and could not fulfil [her desire]. For this I let her down, what a pity! Despite her fragrant chivalrous being, unlike the cicada, she couldn't get rid of the mud.
欲作王家桃葉桃根，余強學吾宗處仲解事，事遂不諧，以此負姬，惜哉！俠骨雖香，不逮蟬蛻污泥耳！¹⁷⁷

It is hard to tell whether Wang intended to express with these words a sincere feeling of regret and sympathy or whether he proposed the ultimate expression of the performance between the scholar and the courtesan, where the unhappy ending confirms the reality of things, in his viewpoint at least. Wang was the one who could have saved Ma from the bondage of courtesanship, but did not; she was the one who wanted to escape, but could not. In the last sentence Wang remarked Ma's chivalrous attribute. The moment of Ma's death, as described above, has been seen by Wai-yee Li as the courtesan's ultimate detachment from materiality and the demonstration of her chivalric attitude testified by the fact that she died as a devoted Buddhist.¹⁷⁸ Although Ma never attributed to herself the word *xia* (gallant, chivalrous) or *nüxia* 女俠 'female knight' (as the courtesan Xue Susu did, for instance¹⁷⁹), several scholars besides Wang among her contemporaries attributed the term to her. Other late Ming courtesans were called (or called themselves) *nüxia* as they embodied principles of unconventionality, bravery or generosity.¹⁸⁰ While in the introduction to Ma's poetry collection Wang mentioned her detachment from things by maintaining that, 'she disregards money as

¹⁷⁵ Taogen was Taoye's sister and also a courtesan, HYDCD, 4-984A.

¹⁷⁶ Chuzhong probably indicates Wang Dun 王敦 (266–324) a powerful Jin general, possibly a symbol of stubbornness.

¹⁷⁷ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.2.b.

¹⁷⁸ Li, 'The Late Ming Courtesan', 61-2.

¹⁷⁹ Chang, *Women Writers*, 227

¹⁸⁰ Also translate 'female knight-errant' in Giovanni Vitiello, 'Exemplary Sodomities: Chivalry and Love in Late Ming', *NanNü: Men, Women, and Gender in China*, 2.2 (2000), 207–58; more on late Ming *nüxia* courtesans in Altenburger, *The Sword or the Needle*, 155-6.

dirt, unexpectedly she is Zhu Jia in a green robe' (輕錢刀若土壤，居然翠袖之朱家)¹⁸¹

– where Zhu Jia is in Chinese literary history 'a generous patron for knights-errant in need'¹⁸² – in the biography her chivalry is expressed by the fact that:

although the brocade silk piled up on beds and filled tables, golden phoenix hairpins, jade bangles, pomegranate skirts, and purple coats often ended up at the pawnbroker. She was given so many gifts that she did not want to keep them all.

雖纏頭錦堆床滿案，而金鳳釵、玉條脫、石榴裙、紫襠，常在子錢家，以贈施多，無所積也。¹⁸³

A chivalrous attitude was perceived as a masculine quality, which added lure to a woman. This is further testified by a text written by the late Ming–early Qing authors Lu Yingyang 陸應陽 and Cai Fangbing 蔡文炳 (1626–1709), in which they controversially encompassed Ma Shouzhen in a section titled 'exemplary women' (*Lienü* 烈女) of the Jiangnan area. *Lienü* was used to indicate exceptional women who often passed into history as martyrs who died to defend their virtue, their chastity or virginity.¹⁸⁴ The authors described Ma as a lofty person whose 'nature was gentle and chivalric like a scholar' (性輕俠捧如士). The text recounted also that in the occasion of Wang Zhideng's seventieth birthday since he could not go to Nanjing she organised a celebration for him in Suzhou, after which she returned to her city and prepared to die as a Buddhist.¹⁸⁵ The association of chivalry with women was not new, as mythical heroines and women warriors were numerous in Chinese literary and historiographic

¹⁸¹ As to say that she is a female version of Zhu Jia, in Wang Zhideng's preface quoted in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.68a.

¹⁸² Chang, *Women Writers*, 737.

¹⁸³ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.2.b.

¹⁸⁴ The book *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 'Biographies of exemplary women' was used for pedagogical purposes in women's education since the Han; for a discussion on its late Ming illustrated editions and reception, see Katherine Carlitz, 'The Social Uses of Female Virtue in Late Ming Editions of *Lienü Zhuan*', *Late Imperial China*, 12.2 (1991), 117-48.

¹⁸⁵ Lu Yingyang 陸應陽 and Cai Fangbing 蔡方炳, *Guangxing ji* 廣輿集 'Guangxing Collection', 24 *juan*, in *Siku jinhuishu congkan* (Beijing, 2000), 2.17b-18a.

tradition, nevertheless the association with courtesans is a late Ming product.¹⁸⁶ The attribution of the ideals connected to chivalry, such as generosity and courage, has to be understood in the wider context of the mid-sixteenth-century new ideas of womanhood, gender negotiations and changing attitudes towards women, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.4 From Ma Shouzhen to the wider context: gender in the late sixteenth century

The study of Ma Shouzhen and her biography leads to reflection on some concepts relevant to understanding the specific instance of the courtesan, and to comprehending the wider socio-cultural context of the late sixteenth-century Jiangnan. As seen at beginning of the chapter, the investigation of the space of the pleasure quarter illuminates the social geography of the city of Nanjing and its communities. The interplays between the entertainment industry, the political core and the production of culture are particularly evident when we look at the city map. The intertwinements between courtesans, literati and officials add a layer of complexity to the understanding of the city, where space was constantly made and negotiated.

Many aspects of Ma Shouzhen's life cannot be understood as isolated phenomena: the practice and visibility of an erudite woman, the expression of *qing* (feelings and passion) as seen in the romance with Wang Zhideng, the creation of a persona through public exposure, the adoption of names and appellatives, and finally the tension between the pleasure of wordly life and chivalric attitude. The current section will explore themes related to the biography of Ma Shouzhen in order to discuss the changing notion of

¹⁸⁶ Altenburger, *The Sword or the Needle*, 155.

gender expressed in new attitudes towards the *feminine*, as well as the more relevant position which literate women, including courtesans, began to occupy in the social and cultural discourse during the late Ming.

An adjective which is often associated with Ma Shouzhen, but also literati of this period, is *fengliu* 風流, which literally means 'wind flowing'. *Fengliu* carries different connotations: distinguishable, elegant, stylish, romantic, but it could also mean 'to make love'.¹⁸⁷ *Fengliu* is strictly connected to the concept of *qing*, the engine of courtesan culture. The sixteenth-century emphasis on *qing* stems, as scholars such as Martin Huang have highlighted, from the complexities of a new socio-cultural situation for the intellectual elite and it mirrors the literati frustration and the consequent creation of new ideas about individuals and society.¹⁸⁸

Inspired by the idealist Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472–1529) and his ideas of the 'school of mind/heart' (心學 *xinxue*),¹⁸⁹ philosophers such as He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517–1579) and his follower Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602), Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610) and his two brothers Yuan Zongdao 袁宗道 (1560–1600) and Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道 (1570–1624), were particularly influential in the formulation of new thoughts about human nature, the self and its expressions.¹⁹⁰ There is an extensive amount of writing by the above thinkers, but this section will focus on the concept of

¹⁸⁷ HYDCD, 12-611B, 612A; on the sex meaning see Ōki Yasushi and Paolo Santangelo, *Shan'ge, the Mountain Songs: Love Songs in Ming China* (Leiden; Boston, 2011), 370.

¹⁸⁸ For an insightful discussion on *qing*, its origins, distinction from 'desire' *yu* 欲, and role in late Ming literature see Huang Martin, 'Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of Qing in Ming-Qing Literature', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Article, Reviews (CLEAR)*, 20 (1998), esp. 164-5.

¹⁸⁹ See Antonio S. Cua, *The Unity of Knowledge and Action: a Study in Wang Yang-ming's Moral Psychology* (Honolulu, 1983).

¹⁹⁰ See William T. De Bary, *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York, 1970), 145-248.

tongxin 童心 ‘the child heart/mind’, which, as Li Zhi maintained, corresponds to the ‘genuine heart/mind’ (*zhenxin* 真心). In his famous essay titled *Tongxin shuo* 童心說 ‘The childlike-heart/mind speaks’, Li Zhi invited the childlike-heart/mind – the most innocent and pure part of each individual – to prevail. At the same time he questioned the validity of the classics and Confucian texts affirming that no ultimate truth could be valid forever. He highlighted the necessity of refusing dogmatism and employing new ideas generated by the *tongxin*: ‘the Six Classics, *The Analects*, and Mencius have become a pretext for those “learners of the Tao” and a haven for all hypocrites, and should never be considered as equal to expressions of the mind of a child’.¹⁹¹

The emphasis on the *tongxin* brought to a re-evaluation of sensibility and feelings in what has been called a ‘cult of *qing*’.¹⁹² Emotions, passions and love were attributed to the *yin* and feminine part of each individual, and their power was traditionally associated with women’s behaviours. Thus, literati who emphasised their instinctual and emotional side *feminised* (but not effeminised) themselves and their attitudes, and expressed it in painting, letter writing, poetry, drama and short stories.¹⁹³ In literature and drama a recurrent narrative device used to express *qing* was the beauty-scholar romance (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人), in which the beauty was often a devoted courtesan who emblematised the ultimate expression of *qing*.¹⁹⁴ Good research has been carried

¹⁹¹ The Six Classics predate Confucius (551–479 BC); Mencius is a Confucian thinker; see full translation in Yang Ye, *Vignettes from the Late Ming: a Xsiao-p’in Anthology* (Seattle, 1999), 26-8.

¹⁹² Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, esp. 110-12.

¹⁹³ In fiction the feminine not effeminate is praised, see Huang, *Negotiating Masculinities*, 7, 148-54.

¹⁹⁴ See T’ien Ju-K’ang, ‘Scholars Frustration and roundabout way of Emotional Expression’, in Idem, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity: A Comparative Study of Chinese Ethical Values in Ming-Ch’ing Times* (Leiden, 1988), 90-113.

out on the *caizi jiaren* narrative dynamics;¹⁹⁵ however, almost nothing has been said about writings by female counterparts, as Ma Shouzhen also used the beauty-scholar device as an expression of *qing* in her own drama (see Chapter Five).

The association of literati with *qing* and the discussion of their masculinities and femininities were also voiced in the ways in which they saw and perceived women. Many literati, such as the playwright and painter Xu Wei, who repeatedly failed the provincial examinations and thus to access an official career, felt a new societal pressure and the frustration of failure which accompanied a sense of inadequacy in the old system and the desire of embracing new values.¹⁹⁶ Xu Wei, who suffered heavy depression most of his life, is a very emblematic figure to comprehend the sixteenth-century literati redefinitions of identity and gender.¹⁹⁷ Xu Wei called women who were distinguished by high moral values *nü zhangfu* 女丈夫, which literally means 'woman-husband/gentleman', and also called himself 'female gentleman hermit'.¹⁹⁸ As discussed above, talented courtesans, such as Ma Shouzhen, were often called or adopted for themselves the term *nüxia* and were strongly associated with the values of chivalry and generosity, which conventionally marked the gentleman. Thus, the necessity of creating neologisms encompassing both the word *woman* and *man*, or using old words with new attributed meanings, reveal the need of representing new gendered identities, which did not fit into the traditional stereotypes or language.

¹⁹⁵ Huang, 'Sentiments of Desire', 161-72; Keith McMahon, 'The Classic "Beauty-Scholar" Romance and the Superiority of the Talented Women', in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow eds., *Body, Subject & Power in China* (Chicago, 1994), 227-9.

¹⁹⁶ See on Xu Wei also Chapter Three and Chapter Five; see also Huang, 'The case of Xu Wei', in *Negotiating Masculinities*, 53-71.

¹⁹⁷ See on Xu Wei also in Chapter Three.

¹⁹⁸ Zhou Zuyan, *Androgyny in Late Ming and Early Qing Literature* (Honolulu, 2003), 35. Xu Wei as a painter and playwright will be discussed further in Chapter Three and Chapter Five.

In this scenario, it is not difficult to understand why literate women also started to use new ways for fashioning their *selves* in the public scene through painting and writing, and adopting gendered appellatives. Ma Shouzhen referred to herself as *nüdi* 女弟, which is often translated as ‘younger sister’,¹⁹⁹ but interestingly its literal meaning is ‘female younger brother’, or it could mean ‘female disciple’ (*dizi* 弟子). *Nüdi* was used also by Ming gentry women, such as Lady Yang 楊夫人,²⁰⁰ as well as other famous courtesans, such as Liu Rushi.²⁰¹ Another appellative that Ma Shouzhen often used in signatures and seals is *nüshi* 女史, which literally means ‘woman-historian’, and appears for instance in the inscription of the album leaf dated 1576 (ill. 15b), and on the undated hanging scroll of Rijksmuseum (ill. 16).

Nüshi originally was an official title at court attributed to the ‘instructress’; its meaning seems to have shifted during the Ming, when it started to refer to cultured and educated women.²⁰² *Nüshi* began to appear in Ming titles of women’s writing collections, edited by men, such as *Shi nüshi* edited by Tian Yiheng and published in 1557 or *Gujin nüshi* 古今女史 collected and prefaced by Zhao Shijie 趙世杰 during the Chongzhen era (1628–1644).²⁰³ *Nüshi* was not only used by men in reference to women, but also employed by women themselves probably in order to promote their cultural position; possibly it was women using and appropriating this appellative that was a catalyst to change the word’s use and meaning. Besides the courtesan Ma Shouzhen, other women in the late Ming also used *nüshi* on their paintings. This was the case with the gentry

¹⁹⁹ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 78.

²⁰⁰ Li E, *Yutai shushi*, 54b.

²⁰¹ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 278.

²⁰² On *nüshi* as an official title see Julia K. Murray, ‘Who Was Zhang Hua’s Instructress?’, in Shane McCausland ed., *Gu Kaizhi and the Admonitions Scroll* (London, 2003), 100–06.

²⁰³ Tian Yiheng, *Shi nüshi*; Zhao Shijie, *Gujin nüshi*.

woman Wen Shu 文淑 (1595–1634) and with Li Yin 李因 (1616–1685), a courtesan turned concubine of the famous scholar Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–1695).²⁰⁴ Given the different social backgrounds of these three women as individuals coming respectively from the courtesan environment, from an aristocratic family or as a woman who entered the elite by marriage, the term *nüshi* puts the emphasis on talent and culture over class provenance. As in the case with many other Chinese terms, translating *nüshi* is not an easy task. It has been rendered in English as ‘woman-scholar’,²⁰⁵ but in order to create a parallel with the corresponding male term *literatus/i*, yet acknowledging their evident differences, it is proposed here to translate *nüshi* by the female gendered Latin word: *literata/ae*.

In the late sixteenth century the cult of *qing* was brought to its transgressive extreme in a profound interest for sexuality, both hetero and homo, eroticism and pornography. Erotic novellas, novels and prints began to spread especially from the 1570s,²⁰⁶ and courtesans (but not only courtesans) were often chosen as titillating characters, since they were icons of licentiousness and eroticism. This stands in an evident and paradoxical contrast with the image of the chaste or devote courtesan who also populated the literature. However, because the courtesan occupied a particularly

²⁰⁴ For Wen Shu see Li shi 李滉, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu* 明清閨閣繪畫研究 ‘Research on Ming and Qing Dynasty Paintings by Women’ (Beijing, 2007), 242; for Li Yin, Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 102, 227; Li Yin was a courtesan before becoming concubine of Ge Zhengqi, in Wai-yee Li, ‘Women Writers and Gender Boudaries during the Ming-Qing Transition’, in Grace Fong ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond* (Leiden; Boston, 2010), 186; see also Grace Fong, *Herself an Author. Gender, Agency, and Writing in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu, 2008), 108-19.

²⁰⁵ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 117; Ko, ‘The Written Word’, 80.

²⁰⁶ Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, 324.

ambiguous cultural and social position, so her character could easily be shaped in fiction to fit different ideals.²⁰⁷

In the sixteenth-century commoditised society, there were numerous tensions growing within the cultural elite between spending and saving, between the pleasures of a worldly life and reclusion, the cultivation of the group identity and the importance of the self. This is epitomised in a letter that Yuan Hongdao wrote to a friend in 1595 in which he praised 'Life's five pleasures' (*Rensheng wu le* 人生五樂): (1) the enjoyment of beauty (*se*) in people and nature together with sounds, silence and taste; (2) men and women banqueting with music in the background and romance at candlelight; (3) reading, writing and sharing intellectual conversation with peer-literati; (4) leisure trips with friends and entertainers, and at last Yuan Hongdao maintained:

However, if one in life could enjoy all this at its extreme, it was not for more than ten years, as they would consume all their wealth and lands. Afterwards, one would be in a tight situation, not being able to make to the end of the day. Then they would have to beg in the pleasure quarter and share food from lonely old people's plates, they would not feel ashamed in front of their fellow villagers. This is the fifth pleasure. A scholar needs only one of the pleasures, to live with a clear conscience and die as an immortal.

然人生受用至此，不及十年，家資田地蕩盡矣。然后一身狼狽，朝不謀夕，托鉢歌妓之院，分餐孤老之盤，往來鄉親，恬不知恥，五快活也。士有此一者，生可無愧，死可不朽矣。²⁰⁸

From the above, we see that the stress on pleasure and the enjoyment of the worldly life is balanced by the final idea of immortality. The idea of enjoying *se*, which means colour

²⁰⁷ For the courtesan as ambivalent icon see the insightful article by Hsu-ping Ching, 'Courtesans and Scholars in the Writings of Feng Menglong: Transcending Status and Gender', *NanNü: Men, Women, and Gender in China*, 2.1 (2000), 40-77; and Allan Barr, 'The Wanli Context of the "Courtesan's Jewel Box" Story', *Harvard Journal of Asian Studies*, 57.1 (June 1997), 107-41.

²⁰⁸ Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道, 'Gong Weichang xiansheng 龚惟长先生' 'To Mr Gong Weichang', in Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道, *Yuan Hongdao ji jianjiao* 袁宏道集箋校 'The Collation of the Collected Works of Yuan Hongdao', in *Zhongguo gudian wenxue congshu* (Shanghai, 1981), 205-6. See alternative translation in Xiang Gao, 'The Rise of a New Tradition', 16; for a discussion on pleasure (*le*) in the Ming see Clunas, *Empire of Great Brightness*, ch. 5.

and appearance but also sexual allure, is accompanied by the intellectual engagement with lofty peers. In the case of Ma Shouzhen, there is also a negotiation among worldly and lofty, given by the negotiation between her profession, which involved *se* – beauty, appearance and sexuality – at its topmost level, with her aforementioned Buddhist belief and detachment from things.

In the late Ming, the lofty desire of being detached from the world, of becoming a Daoist or a recluse was manifested through different strategies including the building of private gardens. The garden, such as the famous one belonging to the scholar-official Qi Biaoja 祁彪佳 (1602–1645), was an oasis of seclusion within the city for the enjoyment of nature and solitude, but also a public display of wealth and power as well as a social space where the owner controlled social activities and interactions.²⁰⁹ Other literati adopted less lavish strategies for fashioning their selves as ascetics, by employing meaningful style names: for instance Yuan Hongdao was ‘The Hermit of the Stone’ (*Shitou jushi* 石头居士), Wang Zhideng was ‘Mountain Person of Jade Shade’ (*Yuzhe sharen* 玉遮山人) and Xu Wei ‘A blue Wisteria Daoist’ (*Qingteng daoren* 青藤道人).²¹⁰

The balance between these aspirations, as Wai-yee Li has suggested, was:

sometimes achieved through the activities of the collector and the connoisseur. This balance represents the aspiration of the late-Ming cultural elite to sustain intensity of experience while maintaining equilibrium of the self as well as the coherence of the socio-political order.²¹¹

Thus it is not surprising that many literati engaged in collecting and connoisseurship, practices which contributed to create a sense of socio-cultural identity and distinction

²⁰⁹ Joanna F. Handlin Smith, ‘Gardens in Ch’i Piao-chia’s Social World: Wealth and Values in Late Ming Kiangnan’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 51.1 (1992), 55-81.

²¹⁰ Wai-yee Li, ‘The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility’, *T’oung pao*, 81 (1995), fn. 26, 284.

²¹¹ Li, ‘The Collector’, 286

through the display of *taste*. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) has discussed *taste* as an essential marker of social distinction because it embodies cultural and social behaviours constructed within specific groups and classes.²¹² In Chinese history, as Craig Clunas and Wai-yee Li have demonstrated, *taste* and its mechanisms reveal issues of identity and representation particularly evident for the literati elite.²¹³

The need to define *taste* so as to create social distinction can be found in texts such as ‘Eight Discourses on the Art of Living’ published in 1591 by the playwright Gao Lian 高廉, a guide on self-cultivation, tasteful and proper living. This was followed in the seventeenth century by texts such as ‘Treatise on Superfluous Things’ published around 1620 by the Suzhou poet and painter Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585–1645).²¹⁴ The literati apprehension for consuming, collecting, displaying and writing about taste and objects epitomised the uncertainties of their changing social status, and their threatened position of owners of legitimate culture. Literati life was ruled by an apparently shared understanding of decorum, appropriateness and elegance, which in the late sixteenth century were merged with the concern of creating a group identity, while also expressing an individual selfhood (as discussed above). Elite courtesans shared with the literati the taste for refined objects as well as the engagement with their favourite intellectual activities, such as writing poems, playing the zither, enjoying Southern drama and painting. Moreover, as seen above, courtesans could be the embodiment of elegance, and in literati writing there is a strong sense of the elegant *ya* as opposed to

²¹² See Pierre Bourdieu, translated by Richard Nice, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984).

²¹³ Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, esp. ch. 6; for discussions on literati taste see Wu Renshu, *Pingwei shehua*, on furniture 205-46; on food, 249-88.

²¹⁴ On Gao Lian see Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, esp. 15-20. Wen Zhenheng will be discussed in Chapter Three.

the vulgar *su*, which are constantly associated respectively to literati themselves and the rest of people. At the same time, many literati complained about the vulgar lavishness of the elite, which brought concerns within the same class and in the administration with the promulgation of new sumptuary laws.²¹⁵

As seen through the instance of Ma Shouzhen, literate women from the mid-sixteenth century participated more visibly in the cultural discourse, as producers and consumers of culture. In so doing they appropriated spaces usually belonging to men. A recent study by Zhou Zhuyan has investigated the ways in which the male elite expressed novel interpretations of the individual and the gendered self in drama writing. Zhou has remarkably discussed the literati *gender crisis* and the creation of androgyny in the late sixteenth century in some of the major theatrical works.²¹⁶ Studies about drama and theatre have been markedly concerned in unravelling issues of gender and its representations on stage, and have also discussed how courtesans and male actors were competitors in the making of femininity.²¹⁷

However, despite great achievements in the secondary scholarship on women and courtesans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some of the literature on courtesans has perhaps failed to emphasise sufficiently the profound importance of the literati identity crisis and gender redefinition of this period.²¹⁸ Gentry women and

²¹⁵ See on sumptuary laws and complaints on extravagance Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 147-55.

²¹⁶ Zhou, *Androgyny*.

²¹⁷ Sophie Volpp, 'Gender, Power and Spectacle in Late Imperial Chinese Theatre', in Sabrina P. Ramet ed., *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures: Anthropological and Historical perspectives* (London; New York, 1996), 138-47.

²¹⁸ Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 117 mentions a 'gender confusion', but has not directly discussed the ways in which the intellectual elite redefined their identity and gender. Ropp 'Ambiguous Images' just mentions the socio-economic context; Li, 'Late Ming Courtesans' and Berg, 'Cultural discourse' have mentioned the literati cultural context, but not changing notions of gender.

courtesans could negotiate their position because of the changing social environment and the cultural debates occurring from the mid-sixteenth century, and because there were profound rediscussions about gender taking place amongst the male elite. Scholars such as Zhou Zuyan have used the expressions 'gender ambiguity' or 'androgyny' to describe the changing notions of gender, but this thesis will label it 'gender redefinition'. This choice is based on the very meaning of *gender*, a cultural and social construction which is constantly defined and redefined in concomitance with cultural and social changes.

The feminisation of the literati expressed by the cult of *qing*, together with the fascination for the courtesan and the scholar-beauty romance, a novel appreciation for women, and a new interpretation of sensibility and ideas of selfhood, were mirrored by what has been called a masculinisation of women. In this climate of evident porosity of social boundaries – of a new understanding of femininities and masculinities – the redefinition of gender contours saw men emphasising their *yin* side, while women appropriated spaces and modes of expression traditionally belonging to men. In this mutual acceptance of crossing the traditional notion of gender roles, a woman like Ma Shouzhen, who shared the same intellectual space as some of the most eminent literati, played an important role in negotiating her own *space*. As the next chapters will discuss, Ma Shouzhen was connected to some of the most representative intellectuals of the time, such as Xu Wei, or Liang Chenyu the initiator of the Southern style of theatre, and the acclaimed playwright Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616). Courtesans played an important role in redesigning the contours of gender and its expressions, and Ma Shouzhen was one of the first Nanjing famous courtesans to be in the position of

negotiating *space* and enacting new strategies of self-fashioning, which encompassed modes of expressions of gendered subjectivity in painting (see Chapter Three), writing (Chapter Four) and performing (Chapter Five).

Chapter Three

Painting the Courtesan: Tradition, Self and Gender

3.1 Ma Shouzhen and the authenticity issue

According to the late Ming text on painters 'History of Silent Poems' *Wusheng shishi* 無聲詩史, Ma Shouzhen was 'skilled in painting orchid and bamboo' (能寫蘭竹).¹ There are at least sixty surviving pieces attributed to her and numerous textual sources discussing her painting. Pieces attributed to Ma Shouzhen are housed in museums and private collections around the world (table 2), yet more pieces circulate in the art market. The auction business is not oblivious to Ma Shouzhen's painting, as four lots were sold by one of the world's leading auction houses, Christie's, in the last fifteen years,² and recently several pieces were auctioned by the newly established Beijing International Poly Auction Ltd.³ Due to the impossibility of carrying out a proper investigation on the Poly Auction pieces, they will not be discussed in detail in this thesis.

Before proceeding to explore Ma's painting activity and production, a caveat on the issue of authenticity ought to be given. As the studies carried out by Wen Fong, James Cahill and Jerome Silbergeld have demonstrated, authenticity in Chinese painting is a

¹ Jiang Shaoshu, *Wusheng shishi*, 5.83.

² See *Christie's Auction Catalogues*, Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy, 4 June 1993 New York, lot 44; Fine Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy, 22 March 1995 New York, lot 59; Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art 27 April 1997 Hong Kong, lot 171; Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy, 25 April 2004 Hong Kong, lot 340.

³ See the Beijing International Poly Auction 北京保利国际拍卖有限公司 website http://www.polypm.com.cn/index_zh.php which provides a list of dozens of paintings attributed to Ma Shouzhen sold in auctions <http://artso.artron.net/2012/index.php?keyword=马守真>

complicated and controversial topic.⁴ As mentioned in Chapter One, assessing authenticity of Ma Shouzhen's works through connoisseurial criteria is not amongst the main objectives of this thesis; nonetheless it is important to discuss the concept of authenticity in relation to the idea of authorship. In the case of Ma Shouzhen, it is the author that makes a piece original and thus inscriptions and signatures are of primary importance in the assessment of authenticity. Of the surviving pieces listed in table 2, some are of dubious authorship and some have been argued by the two main scholars who investigated Ma's painting – Li Shi and He Junhong – to be counterfeits.⁵ The hanging scroll in the collection of the Östasiatiska Museet (Stockholm) depicting monochrome ink chrysanthemums with dotted stems is a good instance of forgery (ill. 18). Although in the 1950s it was mistaken as original by Osvald Sirén,⁶ its subject matter and 'dots' painting technique are unusual, and its inscription is very unlikely to be by Ma Shouzhen due to its writing style, content and calligraphy. Moreover, its signature carries a variant of the character *zhen* 真, which is supposedly the original character.

Ma Shouzhen used to sign her paintings with a style name and her first name, but some paintings carry the character *zhen*^A 真 in the 'Shouzhen' of the signature. It is unlikely that she used the two variants of *zhen* for her name, and moreover, as the piece in the Östasiatiska Museet some others which have been labelled as forgeries

⁴ See the collection of essays Judith G Smith and Wen C. Fong, *Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting* (New York, 1999); and a more recent article co-authored James Cahill and Jerome Silbergeld, 'Chinese Art and Authenticity', *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 55.1 (Autumn, 2001), 17-36.

⁵ On Ma's painting forgeries see also He Junhong 赫俊紅, 'Mingdai nühuajia Ma Shouzhen huazuo zhenwei kaojian' 明代女畫家馬守真畫作真偽考鑒 (Investigating the Authenticity of Paintings by the Ming Dynasty Woman Painter Ma Shouzhen), *Shoucangjia*, 2 (1998), 35-8; He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 129-40.

⁶ See Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting: Leading Masters and Principles* (London, 1956–8), vol. V, 71-2. Sirén provides a full translation of the inscription.

due to their inauthentic date or style, the character *zhen*^A is used in the signature. This has led Chinese scholars to establish that *zhen*^A is a marker of forgery, as for the case of the long handscroll in the Palace Museum in Beijing (ill. 17), in which nine plants of monochrome ink orchids are scattered against the empty background of the scroll.⁷

This chapter will consider Ma's forgeries only when they are relevant to the aim of the present discussion or when their authorship could be further assessed; yet, copies and counterfeits of her paintings, which were done mostly in the Qing dynasty, are part of the posthumous construction of her historical character and will be investigated in Chapter Six. Different rationales can be used to understand whether a piece is likely to be a forgery, yet it is still problematic to be absolutely certain about Ma Shouzhen's genuine authorship. Two main criteria can be applied to detect forgery: first, when the inscribed date is undoubtedly earlier or later than her lifespan, which has been established to be from 1548 to 1604; it is unlikely that Ma Shouzhen herself chose to inscribe paintings with the wrong date. Nonetheless, it is possible to think of self-fashioning strategies related to the temporal dimension as it will be discussed in relation to her poetry in Chapter Four. The second criteria used to assess the authenticity of Ma's work is based on the painting's formal features: undeniable spurious brushwork, signatures or seals are indicative of a forged painting.⁸

This chapter is in debt to the important research on late imperial women painters carried out by scholars such as Marsha Weidner, Ellen Johnston Laing, Li Shi, He

⁷ This scroll has been discussed in detail in Li Shi 李滢, "'Shiqu Baojian" zhulu Ma Shouzhen "Hua lan tu" juan kao' 《石渠寶鑑》著錄馬守貞《畫蘭圖》卷考 (Examination of the Ma Shouzhen's 'Orchids' scroll recorded in Shiqu Baojian), *Palace Museum Journal*, 4.144 (2009), 50-63

⁸ See Ma's seals in *Zhongguo shuhuajia yinjian kuanshi* 中國書畫家印鑑款識 'Seals and Signatures of Chinese Painters and Calligraphers' (Shanghai, 1987), vol. 1, 711-2; a more complete list is given in table 3.

Junhong and Xu Wenmei.⁹ Yet, the idea initially developed in the English-speaking scholarship about courtesans living in a secluded world¹⁰ needs to be further challenged in the light of a complex realm of social connections and patronage in which courtesans were deeply involved, also by means of painting. The focus of this chapter is threefold: first, it aims to provide a nuanced investigation of Ma Shouzhen's painting practice and production with reference to its style and subject matter. Second, it proposes to use gender to understand the employment of recurrent visual elements which are perceived as a means of self-expression as well as part of the contemporary visibility. The concept of visibility is employed in order to investigate the subjects of her painting as constructed images of social, cultural and gendered values. Finally, the third aim of this chapter is to emphasise Ma Shouzhen's use of painting as a self-fashioning strategy as well as a tool in the construction and consolidation of her social network.

3.2 The courtesan painter: reception, style and visibility

Ma Shouzhen practised painting from a young age; her depictions of orchids and bamboo achieved recognition among contemporaries and in succeeding centuries.¹¹ As mentioned in Chapter Two, her earliest dated painting is the 1563 hanging scroll which was made when she was fifteen (ill. 10); it is a delicately balanced composition of elegant monochrome ink orchids with long leaves growing together with a thin and tall bamboo in front of a rock set on the ground. Yet, there is an earlier handscroll painted

⁹ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*; Laing, 'Women Painters in Traditional China'; Li Shi, *Mingqing guige huihua yanjiu*, and He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*; Xu Wenmei, 'Wan Ming qinglou huajia'.

¹⁰ Laing, 'Women Painters in Traditional China', 82.

¹¹ Orchid is here used for the flower corresponding to the botanical name of cymbidium, which is usually of the colours white, light green and yellow, and has five petals. See for general meanings associated with orchids Bartholomew Terese Tse, *Hidden Meanings in Chinese Art* (San Francisco, 2006), 66-7.

by Ma in 1556 when she was only eight recorded in a nineteenth-century collection catalogue.¹² Not only might this be too early, as He Junhong has suggested, for a courtesan to begin painting, but moreover its dubious origins are testified to by the fact that in the text the signature is reproduced with the character *zhen*^A, thus raising the possibility for the painting itself to be a forgery.¹³ Therefore, Ma's first dated painting officially remains the 1563 hanging scroll.

It is not known from when, by whom or how Ma Shouzhen was trained in painting. The painting activity was for the courtesan a personal cultivation and a means of self-expression, as can be gathered from a statement Ma Shouzhen made in a commentary written to the story of 'Lady Red Thread' by her friend Liang Chenyu: 'It is relieving to entrust [myself] to painting, my pure heart is placed in between secluded orchids and thickets of bamboo' (用是托諸丹素，見冰心於幽蘭叢竹之間).¹⁴ Painting as well as poetry, music and theatre were shared interests and practices between late Ming cultured courtesans and literati, and Ma Shouzhen in one of her poems recalled the enjoyment of looking at paintings with her friend and lover Wang Zhideng. In a nostalgic tone she remembered:

Sick bones dragged in the long days,
Mr Wang loved me tenderly.
Time after time we faced orchids and bamboo,
Night after night we collected poetic works.
病骨淹長晝，王生曾見憐。
時時對蘭竹，夜夜集詩篇。¹⁵

¹² Zhang Dayong 張大鏞, *Ziyyue zhai shuhualu* 自怡悅齋書畫錄 'Record of Painting and Calligraphy from the Ziyyue Studio' (Yushan Zhangshi edition, 1832) [accessed at the Ancient Books Dept, National Library of China, Beijing, ref. n. 15670], 4.11a-b.

¹³ He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 129.

¹⁴ Ma Shouzhen, 'Hongxian chuanqi xiaoyin', 9.11a-b.

¹⁵ Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, 'Chuang bie' 愴別 'Heartbreaking farewell', in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.68.b.

Although in this poem Ma did not explicitly mention painting, it is plausible to think that the orchid and bamboo referred to here were those she had painted, possibly even those she painted for or with him, as discussed in the next sections. In several texts Wang Zhideng himself manifested his admiration for Ma's writing and painting talent; in her biography he stated: 'in painting orchids she was the most talented, equally to Zhao Wuxing [Mengfu and] Wen [Zhengming], she was unique among her contemporaries' (然畫蘭最善，得趙吳興文待詔絕代).¹⁶ With these words, Wang Zhideng included Ma Shouzhen in the wider literati painting tradition, in which the early Yuan famous official painter and poet Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322)¹⁷ as well as the Ming dynasty Suzhou celebrity painter and member of an official landowning family Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470–1559)¹⁸ were commonly considered to be two of the greatest masters.

Besides Wang Zhideng, many other of Ma's contemporaries recognised her painting abilities; for instance the Nanjing literatus Gu Qiyuan wrote in 'A Supplement to the Ranking of Painters' (畫品補遺) within his *Kezuo zhuiyu* published in 1617 that Ma Shouzhen's ability to paint orchids made her famous even abroad.¹⁹ The same statement was also reported in the abovementioned text *Wusheng shishi*: 'her paintings not only are treasured by refined people, but are also famous overseas as the

¹⁶ Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.4.b.

¹⁷ The most recent resource on Zhao is Shane McCausland, *Zhao Mengfu. Calligraphy and Painting for Khubilai's China* (Hong Kong, 2011).

¹⁸ See Wen's biography in DMB, 1471.

¹⁹ The supplement was to a section contained in *Jinling suoshi*, Gu Qiyuan, *Kezuo zhuiyu*, 182; see a full translation of the passage in Clunas, *Empire of Great Brightness*, 135–6.

Siamese (*Xianluoguo*) ambassador knew and bought her painted fans to be collected’ (其畫不惟為雅者所珍，且名聞海外暹羅國使者，亦知購其畫扇藏之).²⁰

The anecdote of Ma being famous abroad was employed in subsequent centuries to assert her fame as a painter, such as in the catalogue with commentary of women’s painting *Yutai shushi* edited by Li E 歷鶚 (1692–1752) and in its nineteenth-century sister-collection ‘Jade Terrace History of Painting’ *Yutai huashi* 玉臺畫史.²¹ In *Yutai shushi* Ma Shouzhen is appreciated for her orchids painted with the double outline technique (*shuanggou* 雙鉤), for which the contours are drawn by ink lines (as in the 1563 hanging scroll, ill. 10) rather than using one single brushstroke (as in ill. 12). This brush method together with dwarf bamboo (*xiaozhu* 篠竹) and speckled rocks (*tanshi* 痰石) are said to reach ‘superb spirit resonance’ (*juejia qiyun* 絕佳氣韻).²² Spirit resonance (*qiyun*) is a complex metaphysical concept used in aesthetics and painting criticism since the pre-Tang period. It was indicated as one of the six principles of painting by Xie He 謝赫 already in the fifth century. It corresponds to the vitality of the painting, its ability to exert an agency on the viewership and convey the ‘principle’ (*li* 理) of the subject represented, rather than its physical resemblance.²³

In painting Ma Shouzhen used four formats: handscrolls, hanging scrolls, folding fans and album leaves. Her only medium is paper, either simple or enriched by small golden speckles and flakes. The great majority of them depict orchids, bamboo and

²⁰ Jiang Shaoshu, *Wusheng shishi*, 5.83.

²¹ Li E, *Yutai shushi*, 44.23a-b; Tang Souyu, *Yutai huashi*, 5.4a-b. See also Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 72.

²² Li E, *Yutai shushi*, 44.23a.

²³ Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge MA, 1985), 39-40.

rocks rendered in a variety of compositions, and many include also fungi, narcissus and/or small grasses (see table 2). There are only a few exceptions to these motifs, such as an uncatalogued handscroll at the Shanghai Museum depicting coloured flowers and insects,²⁴ and several album leaves which will be discussed later in this chapter. Despite being particularly praised for the double outline technique as mentioned above, Ma Shouzhen also used the single brush method for the depiction of orchids. At a close analysis of the ways in which she painted orchids (see table 4), it is noticeable that the plants are composed of long leaves and a minimum of two orchid flowers facing different directions. She used at least four patterns to compose the orchids: (1) both flowers and leaves have clearly defined lines as in the 1566 and 1576 handscrolls (ills. 46 and 50); (2) a few flowers seem to timidly hide amongst the many leaves as in the 1563 hanging scroll (ill. 10) or the 1572 one in the Guangdong Museum (ill. 39); (3) the flowers are visually more prominent than the leaves (as in ills. 52 and 61); or (4) the plant is made of several flowers which contours interweave with the lines of the leaves forming an intricate pattern, as in two 1604 handscrolls (ills. 22 and 28). In considering the brush techniques, it can be inferred that orchids painted in the single brush convey the idea of immediacy, while those in the double outline technique deliver the idea of a more accurate and meticulous brushstroke.

Ma Shouzhen employed the *xieyi* 寫意 ('depicting ideas') style, as is typical of the literati tradition, an abstract and prevalently monochromatic way to represent reality as opposed to the detailed and coloured *gongbi* 工筆 'worked brush' style, which implied professional brushwork and attitude towards painting (such as in *Nandu*

²⁴ There is not a reproduced image of the handscroll in question, which I viewed at the Shanghai Museum in August 2011.

fanhuitu, ill. 2). Nonetheless, in several paintings she also used light colours as in the 1592 hanging scroll (ill. 51) in which she painted thin ink lines to define the contours of the orchids' details and filled the space in between with delicate yellow and green pigments (ill. 51a).²⁵ In the Ming dynasty, the idea of painting done in amateurial terms as an elegant pursuit rather than as a job, and done by a man of letters with a superior intellectual understanding of reality, was typical of the scholar-painter practice. The prolific painter and theorist Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636) asserted that in painting:

the narrow path of sweetness and vulgarity should be avoided altogether. His painting will then have to scholarly breath [*shiqi* 士氣]. Otherwise even if a work shows high technical competence, it falls into the pernicious way of professional artisans.
絕去甜俗溪經，乃為士氣。不爾，縱然及格，儼已落畫師魔界。²⁶

The typical literati rhetorical stance on painting as an amateurial practice is visible in Ma's work; as seen above, she perceived painting as a place where to entrust her pure heart. In doing so she dismissed any professional attitude towards the painting practice and fashioned herself as belonging to the fiction of 'art for art's sake' of the literati.²⁷

Ma Shouzhen's painting style varied, and He Junhong has suggested to divide her work into two main style periods, the second of which is, in turn, composed of two subperiods. The first style period is from the beginning of her career until roughly her thirtieth birthday (1578), and is characterised by a refined brushstroke in double outlined or single brush orchid, small bamboo, and rocks with not yet a precise style.

²⁵ Due to the impossibility of accessing most of the original pieces or good quality coloured images, this thesis will not discuss in detail the use of colours in Ma's work.

²⁶ Quoted from Wai-kam Ho ed., *The Century of Tung Ch'i-ch'ang, 1555–1636* (Seattle; London, 1992), vol. 1, 49.

²⁷ For an early discussion on the 'amateurization of painting' see Cahill, *The Painter's Practice*, 5-11.

Looking at two pieces from this period, the 1563 hanging scroll (ill. 10) and the 1572 one in the Anxi Museum (ill. 19), it is clear that their composition matches: the orchid is placed in front of the rock from which the bamboo grows – yet its roots are hidden to the viewer; the style of the double outline orchids and their leaves is also similar, but the bamboo is more elegant, thinner and taller in the earlier piece.

The second period of Ma's painting practice begins, according to He, during her forties, when the courtesan developed her individual style in depicting orchids. In the first phase of her second painting period, it is already noticeable that she achieved a new manner in the depiction of the orchids' floating leaves, while the flowers are almost coarse, the bamboo looks more natural, and the rocks are in the shape of lake rocks (*hushi* 湖石), which are elongated and porous. This can be seen in the 1590 fan (ill. 20) in which Ma Shouzhen crowded the left hand side with the rock and bamboo, while the orchids grow in the central part of the fan and their leaves branch out to embrace the remaining space on the right of the fan.

In the last period of Ma's painting practice, from the end of the 1590s until 1604, she painted the same subjects and, regardless of the method used, she expressed a distinct sense of continuousness (*lianxuxing* 连续性), together with a spontaneous and vivid sense of vitality (*qiyun*).²⁸ These features are evident in the 1599 hanging scroll today in the Hong Kong Museum of Art (ill. 21): the orchid leaves are intertwined with bamboo branches, both painted in the single brush technique, the lines' composition create an intricate pattern which tends upwards.

²⁸ He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 140-9.

This periodisation of Ma's painting emphasises change in her work and the achievement of artistic maturity through the creation of an individual style. In addition, it can be said that many of the paintings in the first period the verticality of the composition is emphasised by the towering bamboo as in the 1563 hanging scroll (ill. 10). Paintings from this period seem to follow a similar and rather static composition, in which the orchid plant and the bamboo have common roots by a rock usually painted using the brush technique of 'flying white' (*feibai* 飛白) for which a flat brush leaves white streaks. The sense of vitality in works made in the last phase of her painting activity is visible not only in the manner in which the orchid leaves are rendered, but in the composition and in the vivid sense of movement, which in handscrolls is given by the changing direction of the structural lines. For instance, in the 1604 handscroll at the Palace Museum in Beijing (ill. 22), the ground on which orchid plants, bamboo and rocks are placed raises up steeply, while the leaves and bamboo drop from the upper part and intertwine with the following group of plants and fungi.

In the periodisation of Ma's oeuvre, He Junhong does not explain the gap between the first and the second period. There are no surviving dated paintings from those ten years (1579–1588). However, this cannot be taken as proof that she did not paint at all in that period. It is indeed possible that none of the dated paintings from that period survived, or that some of the undated ones were in fact made then (see table 2). There is also the possibility that Ma Shouzhen painted less, as in the late 1580s she experienced the distressing episode of the corrupt official who threatened her.²⁹ Alternatively, we could think that since her poetry collection was published in 1591,

²⁹ See Chapter Two.

she possibly dedicated herself more to writing, perhaps even to the composition of her drama, which was realised before 1593-96.³⁰

Each period's description indicates a generalised trend within those years, as in fact there are dated pieces which are believed to be authentic but fit better in a previous or later period, or do not qualify for any of them. For instance, the hanging scroll dated 1604 and now in Tianjin Museum (ill. 23), has the compositional style of the first period although it was made in the last year of her life: next to a tall bamboo, the orchids and their leaves executed in the double outline technique seem quite stiff in contrast with the more floating style of her later pieces. Therefore, the above periodisation has to be understood as indicative of the major trends in the painting of a specific moment of Ma's life, yet allowing differences and variations. The fact that Ma Shouzhen painted in different formats and compositions, using varied techniques as well as monochrome ink and colours is highly significant when we consider painting as a self-fashioning strategy. In her work she demonstrated eclectic painting skills to potential viewers, while her stylistic choices were possibly related to how she fashioned her self in the specific circumstance of a painting. It could be hypothesised that with the double outline technique she displayed a more patient and time-consuming attitude towards painting, while using the single brush method highlighted her ability to comply with the quick and skilled brushwork of the literati. However, it cannot be excluded that her choices could have been influenced or even dictated by the requests of commissioners or patrons.

³⁰ This is because that is the date of the collection in which the extant scenes are included; Hu Wenhuan, *Qunyin leixuan*.

Due to the lack of information on the circumstances of the production of most of the pieces, it is hard, or rather impossible, to establish patterns between style or other formalistic features and the function of her paintings. Nonetheless, due Ma's consistent choice, her subject matter will be the main focus of this chapter: the meaning of orchids and their combination with bamboo and rocks will be analysed through the concept of visibility. The latter emphasises the socio-cultural value of these subjects in the history of Chinese painting and in the late Ming period, and moreover highlights their gendered or gendering function.

In conclusion, Ma Shouzhen is the first Ming courtesan (and woman) to be recognised as a talented painter of orchids and her style is unique in its elegant rendering of the movement of the orchids and their leaves. The most striking feature in her painting production is a quasi obsession with the theme of orchids, and the construction of their symbiotic relationship with bamboo and rock. These iconographic features of her work will be further discussed in the following sections in order to understand their meaning within the courtesan's painting practice and life, as well as in the visual culture of the late Ming.

3.3 Past and present in Ma's painting: intervisibility

In Chinese visual culture orchids, bamboo and rocks have a long tradition, which saw them painted since the Tang dynasty, although it is in the Northern Song (960–1127) that they became typical literati visual tropes.³¹ As in literature and poetry tradition,

³¹ Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037–1101) to Tung Ch'ü-ch'ang (1555–1636)* (Cambridge MA, 1971), 34–5, 97–111, 102; Bush, *Early Chinese Texts*, 272–80.

allusions to past poems and legendary stories (典故 *diangu*) were part of the lyrical creative process, so in Chinese painting there is a strong element of visual literacy and intervisuality. Painters, who were traditionally trained by copying old master's painting, often continued to demonstrate in their painting practice an engagement with the visuality of the past.³² This created not only a sense of continuity, but also multilayers of significance in which the dialogue with the past could assume new values for the creator and its present time. Intervisuality is a term which has become more used thanks to the theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff who has employed it in discussing visual culture in the globalised era, and defined it as 'interacting and interdependent modes of visuality'.³³ Here the term is deployed retroactively to understand sixteenth-century Chinese painting practice and is mainly perceived as the engagement with past visualities, rather than with other visual media (intermediality).

The concept of intervisuality is relevant when we consider that Ma Shouzhen overly engaged with the tradition of painting by maintaining to have been inspired by masters of the past and to follow their styles. On two of her paintings she stated to pursue the manner of the early Yuan woman painter Guan Daosheng 管道升 (1262–1319), famous for her ink bamboo and for being the wife of the previously mentioned Zhao Mengfu (ill. 24). By the Ming dynasty Guan Daosheng was the most celebrated and renowned woman painter.³⁴ On an undated handscroll now in the Palace Museum in Beijing, Ma Shouzhen depicted black ink orchids and bamboo with narcissus in the

³² On the painter's training in copying past masters see Park, *Art by the Book*, 27-9.

³³ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews* (London; New York, 2000), 7.

³⁴ On Guan Daosheng see Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 66-70; and Jennifer Purtle, 'The Icon of the Woman Artist: Guan Daosheng (1262–1319) and the Painting of Female Power at the Ming Court circa 1500', in Rebecca Brown and Deborah Hutton eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Asian Art* (Chichester, 2011), 290-319; also Chang, *Women Writers*, 126-31.

double outline method and inscribed it by saying: 'Following Lady Guan [Daosheng]'s three friends' (臨管夫人三友) (ill. 25). The style as well as the composition of this scroll, in which a tall and thin bamboo dominates in its verticality, closely resemble the hanging scrolls Ma made in 1563 (ill. 10) and 1572 (ill. 12), thus it could have been done in the first period of her painting practice. In another instance, on the 1571 handscroll now in the Xubaizhai collection of the Hong Kong Museum of Art, Ma stated again that she sought to imitate (*fang* 倣), or was inspired by, Guan Daosheng's *biyi* 筆意 'brush-idea' (ills. 26 and 26a) in her depiction of double outline orchids with elegant slanting leaves, set on the ground together with bamboo and rocks.

Besides Guan Daosheng, Ma Shouzhen also stated that she followed (*fang*) the style of the Southern Song celebrity painter of orchids Zhao Mengjian 趙孟堅 (style name Zigu 子固, 1199–1267), famous for his double outline method which (ill. 27), as already seen, was also employed by the courtesan, and for which her painting was particularly appreciated. In the Shanghai Museum handscroll dated 1604 and mounted with Xue Susu's 1601 orchid painting, Ma put together a lively composition of two clusters of orchids which combined both the double outline technique (ill. 28b) and the single brush method (ill. 28c); their leaves overlap conveying a sense of continuity in the space of the scroll .

In addition to extant paintings, there is textual evidence for other pieces by Ma Shouzhen in which she explicitly referred to painters of the past, but their authenticity has been called into question. In the catalogue of the Qing imperial collection *Shiqu baoji sanbian* published in 1816, there is the record of an album by Ma Shouzhen with

eight leaves depicting ink orchids, bamboo and rocks. The text claims that there are two inscriptions by the respected literatus and painter Zhou Tianqiu, and He Junhong has pointed out that Zhou in one inscription says it was made in 1580 (*gengchen* 庚辰 year) while in another dedicated the album to Peng Kongjia 彭孔加, style name of Peng Nian who died in 1566. Therefore, given the dates mismatch, the album is considered a forgery.³⁵ It needs to be said that the two inscriptions are on two separate leaves, and according to the text one is placed at the beginning of the album (*qianfu ye* 前附葉), while the second one is on a page after the album (*houfu ye* 後附葉). Thus, the inscriptions could have been made at a different time and even if they were counterfeited they do not necessarily dismiss the album's genuine origin.³⁶

Shiqu baoji sanbian maintains that on the fourth leaf Ma Shouzhen stated to copy (*mo* 摹) her relative (*jia* 家) Ma Wenbi 馬文璧, better known as Ma Wan (c.1325–1365), a late Yuan landscape painter.³⁷ She probably associated herself with Ma Wan via their common surname rather than through an aesthetic reference to his work. In the fifth leaf of the album she maintained to have studied (*xue* 學) Guan Daosheng, and in the sixth to imitate (*fang*) the official Northern Song painter Wen Tong 文同 (Wen Huzhou 文湖州, 1019–1079), who was extremely famous for his bamboo painting.³⁸ Although paintings by Guan Daosheng and possibly by Ma Wan were in circulation in Jiangnan in the late sixteenth century, original pieces by the past masters Wen Tong and Zhao Mengjian were probably extremely rare in the sixteenth century.

³⁵ He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 138; on the collection text see Hin-cheung Lovell, *An Annotated Bibliography of Chinese Painting Catalogues and Related Texts* (Ann Arbor, 1973), 56-7.

³⁶ Hu Jing, *Shiqu baoji sanbian*, 2119.

³⁷ Ankeney Weitz, *Zhou Mi's Record of Clouds and Mist Passing Before One's Eyes: an Annotated Translation* (Boston, 2002), 31.

³⁸ See Wen Tong in Barnhart, *Three Thousand Years*, 140, 178, 190-1.

In late Ming painting criticism there were lively debates around how to reconcile the necessity of individualism and self-expression while following the example of past masters. Statements such as ‘a painter who takes the ancient as masters has already achieved superiority’ (畫家以故人為師，已自上乘)³⁹ are very common in Ming dynasty painting criticism. Nonetheless, there were evident changes in aesthetics from the mid-sixteenth century. For instance, the celebrated Song painter Su Shi’s 蘇軾 (1037–1101) famous statement, ‘if anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness, their understanding is nearly that of a child’,⁴⁰ could not have worked in the late Ming literati culture. This was due to mainly two reasons: not only formal likeness was valued in some respects, but moreover, as discussed in Chapter Two, the child mind/heart was for many scholars considered to be the only genuine way to understand and express reality. Ma Shouzhen, by stating that she followed the styles of iconic figures of the history of painting, such as Guan Daosheng and Zhao Mengjian, attributed authority to her oeuvre, confirmed her as belonging to the traditional visual culture, and at the same time asserted the existence of a female legacy of painting that she herself also belonged to. This reminds us that the practice of referring to relevant names in the history of painting was meaningful for what those names symbolised rather than for their actual painting style.⁴¹ The next section will discuss how Ma Shouzhen subtly negotiated the literati visual tradition with her individual expression of subjectivity and, in so doing, she not only conformed to the new cultural trends of the time but also set a mode of self-representation for contemporary and future generations of women and courtesan painters.

³⁹ Ho, *The Century of Tung*, vol. 1, 50.

⁴⁰ Bush, *Chinese Literati*, 32.

⁴¹ Park, *Art by the Book*, 96-7.

3.4 Orchid with bamboo: late Ming visuality and Ma's oeuvre

Even if the orchid occupies a key position in Chinese history and visual culture, a thorough and complete study dedicated to this flower as cultural signifier, its meanings and representations is yet to be done.⁴² This section will discuss the significance of the image of orchids especially in relation to the late Ming cultural milieu and Ma Shouzhen's painting practice. There is a strong association between the orchid and the scholar-gentleman which, in literary history, dates back to Confucius 孔子 (551–479 BC) and the 'Songs of Chu' *Chuci* 楚辭, with its main author the semi-legendary official Qu Yuan 屈原 (339–278 BC). Confucius compared himself to an orchid flourishing alone in a field:

Indeed the orchids are the perfume of kings, even if now they grow dense in solitude, they are companion to common grass. It can be compared with the virtuous men, when they cannot meet, they relate with common people.

夫蘭當為王者香，今乃獨茂，與眾草為伍，譬猶賢者不逢時，與鄙夫為倫也。⁴³

From this quotation the expression 'the perfume of kings' (*wang zhe xiang* 王者香) has become a synonym of the orchid, an emblem of nobleness and tenacity of character. Moreover, Confucius deployed the image of the fragrant orchid to represent real friendship, as he said: "to befriend a man of virtue was to enter a room fragrant with orchids. After some time one does not smell them [but smell of orchids oneself]".⁴⁴ The poet Qu Yuan in his *Li Sao* 離騷 known as 'Encountering Sorrow', written to express the disappointment towards his ruler which eventually led to his suicide, said:

⁴² Briefly on orchids in poetry see Huang Yung-wu, 'Four Symbolic Plants in Chinese Poetry', *Renditions* (Spring 1978), 74-6; for a general view on flowers and their significance in China, see Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge, 1993), 347-86.

⁴³ HYDCD, 4-459A.

⁴⁴ Norman Kutcher, 'The Fifth Relationship: Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 105, n. 5 (Dec 2000), 1619.

‘I pick autumn orchids to use them as ornaments’ (紉秋蘭以為佩) and again ‘I grow nine fields⁴⁵ of orchids and also one hundred *mu* of melilot’ (余既滋蘭之九畹兮，又樹蕙之百畝).⁴⁶ Thus orchids typically used by women as ornaments become the symbol of the intellectual roaming in solitude, of a ‘fragile scholar’ whose disappointment is expressed in a feminine yin fashion since he placed himself in respect to his ruler as a wife to her husband.⁴⁷

In art historical discourse orchids tend to constitute a category *per se* and do not strictly belong to the group of birds-and-flowers (*huaniao* 花鳥). In the late Ming a brief painting manual exclusively dedicated to orchids titled ‘Lingering Beauty of Nine Acres’ (*Jiu wan yi rong* 九畹遺容) was published in Nanjing by the aforementioned Zhou Lüjing, a literatus with no office who was interested in music, poetry and lifestyle, and was a painter himself.⁴⁸ Besides being connected with celebrated figures of the Nanjing intellectual elite, Zhou was also acquainted with Ma Shouzhen as demonstrated by their collaborative poems included in her individual poetry collection, which was published with his contribution. An introductory text placed at the beginning of the second *juan* says: ‘The Peach leaf [ford] girl (*nülang*) Ma Yuejiao Xuan’er is the author; Luoguanzi Zhou Lüjing Yizhi edited it and sent it over to the publisher’ (桃葉女郎馬月嬌玄兒著，螺冠子周履靖逸之校梓).⁴⁹ Zhou collaborated to publicise Ma’s collection by inserting it in his *Xiang lian shi*, and actually intervened by

⁴⁵ One *mu* 畹 corresponds to thirty mu 亩.

⁴⁶ Qu Yuan 屈原, *Chuci xuan* 楚辭選 ‘Selection of Chu Songs’, in *Jingdian de huisheng* (Beijing, 2001), 2.6.

⁴⁷ See Rotzer, *Articulated Ladies*, 32; Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, 51-60; on orchids and their literary history see also Xu Wenmei, ‘Wan Ming qinglou huajia’, 100.

⁴⁸ On this and other of Zhou’s painting manuals see Park, *Art by the Book*, esp. 56-67, 200-2.

⁴⁹ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 2.13a.

publishing and printing her poetry, besides sharing with the courtesan a deep interest in orchids.

Zhou Lüjing's manual traced back the cultural significance of orchids and makes a direct reference to the *Chuci* and Qu Yuan, discussed above. But the manual's main concern seems to have been to illustrate different styles and methods for painting orchids – from their buds, petals and leaves to their environment (ill. 29).⁵⁰ Together with twenty-nine pictures, Zhou gives instructions on how to paint orchids and other surrounding elements:

Stones must be in the *feibai* method, with one or two [orchids] drawn by the side; in front some grass, while the ground if sloping can [give a sense of] peace; alternatively add emerald bamboo, one or two stalks; thorny thistles growing by the side, can help its appearance. To follow Songxue [Zhao Mengfu] is the way to achieve the correctness for this subject.

石須飛白，一二傍盤；車前等草，地坡可安；或增翠竹，一竿兩竿；荊棘旁生，能助其觀。師宗松雪，方得正傳。⁵¹

This evidently resonates with Ma Shouzhen's painting described above and, moreover, this exact same passage was quoted with no variation, and yet no reference, in the special section on orchids (*lanpu* 蘭譜) of the highly regarded and still greatly used early Qing 'Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual' *Jieziyuan hua zhuan* 芥子園畫傳.⁵² In a brief art-historical excursus on the subject of orchids, the author Wang Gai 王槩 (1677–1705) identified some of the past masters who excelled in their monochrome ink painting of orchids: the Yuan dynasty painter Zheng Sixiao 鄭思肖 (1239–1316) and the previously mentioned Zhao Mengjian (or Yizhai 彝齋) and Guan Daosheng (or

⁵⁰ Zhou Lüjing 周履靖, *Jiuwan yirong* 九畹遺容 'Lingering Beauty of Nine Acres [of Orchids]', 1 *juan*, in *Congshu jicheng chubian* (Shanwu, 1936). This manual is not discussed in details in Park, *Art by the Book*, 66.

⁵¹ Zhou Lüjing, *Jiuwan yirong*, 3.

⁵² Wang Gai 王槩, *Jiezi yuan huazhuan* 芥子園畫傳 'Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual', in *Gonghe shuju* (Shanghai, 1914), 1.4.

Zhongji 仲姬), who was usually remembered for her bamboo. Wang Gai did not include Guan's husband Zhao Mengfu who often painted orchids; for instance in his 1299 self-portrait there is an orchid plant placed next to a rock in the lower left corner of the painting, symmetrically opposite to a bearded Zhao (ill. 30). If we consider the river as axis of symmetry, the composition seems to suggest identification between the orchids and the painter, who stands amongst a bamboo grove with a melancholic and isolated attitude.⁵³

Wang Gai discussed Ming dynasty painters of orchids who he divided into two groups (*pai* 派): the literati (*wenren* 文人) and talented women (*guixiu* 閨秀), 'both of which reached marvel' (各臻其妙). Wang Gai listed their representatives using their style names, here their first names are also provided: Zhang Jingzhi 張靜之 or Ning 寧 (*jinshi* 1545),⁵⁴ the famous collector also painter Xiang Zijing 項子京 (Yuanbian 元卞, 1525–1590),⁵⁵ a certain Wu Qiulin 吳秋林, Zhou Tianqiu, Cai Jingming 蔡景明 or Yihuai 一槐 (*jinshi* 1559)⁵⁶, the landscape painter Chen Gubai 陳古白 or Yuansu 元素⁵⁷, Du Zijing 杜子 or Dashou 大綬 (1567–1615),⁵⁸ Jiang Lengsheng 蔣冷生 or Qing 清,⁵⁹ Lu Baoshan 陸包山 or Zhi 治 (1496–1576)⁶⁰, and He Hengzhi 何淳之 or Zhongya 仲雅 (*jingshi* 1586).⁶¹ Surprisingly he did not mention other famous artists who often painted orchids, such as the members of the notable Wen family Wen Zhengming, who

⁵³ McCausland does not identify the orchid with Zhao in McCausland, *Zhao Mengfu*, 284-8.

⁵⁴ Yu Jianhua 俞劍華, *Zhongguo meishujia renming cidian* 中國美術家人名辭典 'Dictionary of Chinese Artists' (Shanghai, 1981), 866.

⁵⁵ His dedicated biography in DMB, 539-44.

⁵⁶ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 1367.

⁵⁷ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 991.

⁵⁸ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 335.

⁵⁹ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 362.

⁶⁰ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 972.

⁶¹ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 253.

was Zhou Tianqiu's master, followed by his sons Wen Peng 文彭 (1498–1573) and Wen Jia (see ill. 31–34).⁶²

Wang Gai then discussed women painters of orchids who, according to him, followed Guan Daosheng: Ma Xianglan (Shouzhen), Xue Susu (ill. 35),⁶³ and two less-known Nanjing courtesans Xu Pianpian active at the beginning of the Wanli reign,⁶⁴ and Yang Wan 楊宛, who was good at cursive calligraphy and appreciated by important figures such as Dong Qichang and who married the scholar official Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (1594–1640).⁶⁵ Wang Gai added that they 'were all born beauties from the realm of mist and flowers (*yanhua*), and painted secluded and fragrant [orchids]' (皆以煙花麗質，繪及幽芳).⁶⁶ Moreover, among the illustrations of different styles of orchids, Wang Gai included 'ink small orchids' (*shubi xiaolan* 數筆小蘭) (仿馬湘蘭法) (ill. 36).⁶⁷ However, does this 'à la Ma Shouzhen' mirror the actual way in which the courtesan painted orchids? By comparing the woodblock printed book illustration of Ma's orchids (ill. 36) with her extant paintings (see table 4), it is possible to infer that the painting manual reproduced more faithfully the long leaves rather than the orchid flowers. Nonetheless, the inclusion of the courtesan in 'Mustard Seed Garden Painting Manual' demonstrates that Ma Shouzhen's – alleged – style was appreciated also decades later and that her name deserved to be included in the canon and in the trainee-painters' pedagogical path.

⁶² See in DMB references to Wen Peng, 180, 405, 1467, 1473.

⁶³ Tang Souyu, *Yutai huashi*, 5.5a-b.

⁶⁴ Jiang Shaoshu, *Wusheng shishi*, 7.133.

⁶⁵ Jiang Shaoshu, *Wusheng shishi*, 7.134; Li E, *Yutai shushi*, 76a-b.

⁶⁶ Wang Gai, *Jiezi yuan*, 1.3.

⁶⁷ Wang Gai, *Jiezi yuan*, 2.2.

Later in the nineteenth-century *Yutai huashi*, one of the best sources for imperial women painters, heavily based on *Yutai shushi* with additional texts, catalogued women painters by status and dynasty, usually specifying their favourite subject matter. By surveying *Yutai huashi*, it is noticeable that some women painted orchids often with bamboo and rocks, among other subjects such as birds and flowers, or landscape and Buddhist subjects. Amongst the fifty-one gentry women (called ‘notable women’ *mingyuan* 名媛) listed under the Ming dynasty three painted orchids; amongst concubines (*jishi* 姬侍) none painted orchids, (Gu Mei is listed as a Qing dynasty woman); and finally, out of twenty-nine famous courtesans (*mingji*) of the Ming dynasty, fifteen are recognised as painters of orchids. From this data, it can be easily observed that courtesans favoured orchids more than other women (concubines and wives).

Amongst Ming courtesans who reached fame for their orchid painting were Bian Sai 卞賽, who lived in the final decades of the dynasty and eventually became a Daoist nun,⁶⁸ and the talented Gu Mei (ill. 37), who lived during the dynastic turn and married the official Gong Dingzi 龚鼎孳 (1615–1673).⁶⁹ Gu Mei, according to the late Ming author Yu Huai, ‘was skilled at painting orchids, she followed Ma Shouzhen[’s style] and surpassed her in demeanour, [but] for the contemporaries [Ma] remained the best one of the Southern quarter; (善畫蘭，追步馬守真而姿容勝之，時人推諉南曲第一).’⁷⁰ Even later during the high Qing (1750–1850), the renowned Suzhou scholar Shen Qinhan 沈欽韓 (1775–1832)⁷¹ wrote an inscription on a painting by Gu Mei,

⁶⁸ Li E, *Yutai shushi*, 74a.

⁶⁹ Tang Souyu, *Yutai huashi*, 4.5a-b; 6a.

⁷⁰ Yu Huai, *Banqiao zaji*, 15.

⁷¹ Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing Dynasty (1644–1912)* (Washington, 1943–4), 640-1.

alternatively called lady Heng Bo 橫波夫人, in which he referred to Ma Shouzhen, and possibly mistook the two as contemporary:

Powder dyed of rouge and fragrant, unique among contemporaries,
Red orchid was in the end a predecessor.
In the wind branches are slender and graceful, they want to dance in harmony,
Deadly jealous of those years and Ma Shouzhen.
粉印脂香絕代人，紅蘭大抵是前身。
風枝孌娜瀲要舞，妬殺當年馬守真。⁷²

Not only Gu Mei, but also another Nanjing courtesan Zhu Wudian 朱無瑕, known by her style name Taiyu 泰玉, was skilled in poetry and painting, and was said to follow Ma Shouzhen's orchid style.⁷³ The above sources show that Ma Shouzhen was appreciated as a painter and since the seventeenth century she was considered a major painter of orchids of the Ming dynasty. The fact that she is used as a term of comparison for other courtesans confirms that she represented a specific style in painting and more importantly that her name had a legacy which was worth being associated with, also in subsequent centuries, as seen in Chapter Six.

In order to comprehend the reasons behind the employment of orchids, as well as their significance in the late Ming, it is important to consider the surrounding place of orchids and who else, besides courtesans, painted them in the Ming. To answer this last question, a survey carried out on two comprehensive catalogues of Chinese painting *Zhongguo meishu quanji* 中國美術全集 and *Gugong shuhua lu* 故宮書畫錄 has revealed that before the Ming dynasty paintings of orchids are rather rare, but from the sixteenth century the presence of orchids becomes more evident, even

⁷² Shen Qinhan 沈欽韓, *Youxue tang shi gao* 幼學堂詩稿 'Collected Poetry from the Youxue Hall', 17 *juan*, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 4.14a.

⁷³ Tang Souyu, *Yutai huashi*, 44.24.b; two poems by Zhu were collected in Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 24.9b-10a.

though landscape and bamboo are far more common subjects.⁷⁴ It can be further observed that the creators of orchid painting, besides courtesans, were a special class of literati: the earliest was Wen Zhengming, then his sons Wen Peng and Wen Jia, his disciple Zhou Tianqiu, and Xu Wei, who were all eminent intellectuals with no high official title.

As seen in Chapter Two, Xu Wei tried in vain to obtain a bureaucratic role, and this was similarly the case for his predecessor Wen Zhengming. Although Wen Zhengming's father obtained the *jinshi* title in 1472, he repeatedly failed the imperial examination, but under recommendation was able to obtain a minor official role at the court in Beijing for a few years. Clunas has suggested that Wen 'formed the perfect role model for the generation born after 1520s, "the frustrated scholar" who perceived themselves living in a decadent age'.⁷⁵ The non-official recognition of talent in the failure of the imperial examinations placed many literati in a difficult social position; this feeling of frustration and desire to detach themselves from official life was expressed by *yin* elements in poetry and theatre, and in painting it took also the shape of the orchids, among others such as 'restless landscapes'.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ The survey results in brief; *Zhongguo meishu quanji* 中國美術全集 'Complete Catalogue of Chinese Art' (Beijing, 1984–1989): from the Liang to the Yuan dynasty vols. 4-5: there are three orchid paintings listed, two of which by Zhao Mengjian and Zhao Mengfu; in the Ming, but from the sixteenth century, vols. 7-8 there are nine painters who produced orchids, two of which are courtesans. In *Gugong shuhua tu lu* 故宮書畫圖錄 'The Palace Museum Catalogue of Painting and Calligraphy' (Taipei, 1994): there are no orchid paintings recorded from the Song and Yuan dynasty, although we know that Zhao Mengjian did paint orchids; in the Ming: Shen Zhou, vol. 6, 233; Zhang Ningsui, vol. 6, 295; Wen Zhengming, vol. 7, 161; Xiang Yuanbian, vol. 8, 155; Sun Ke, vol. 8, 183; Yang Wencong vol. 9, 55; Zhou Tianqiu vol. 19, 281-4; Chen Chun (1484–1544) vol. 19, 177-8 ; Xu Wei, vol. 19, 301; Ma Shouzheng, vol. 20, 39.

⁷⁵ Clunas, *Elegant Debts*, 167.

⁷⁶ Landscape also in the Ming is the most appreciated subject and its representations are symptomatic of changing socio-cultural, aesthetic values and modes of self-expression, see the 'innovative masters' in James Cahill ed., *The Restless Landscape: Chinese Painting of the Late Ming Period* (Berkeley, 1971), 57-62.

This interpretation of the orchid is confirmed by Wen Zhengming's son Wen Jia, who obtained only the title of *shengyuan* 'tribute student' and minor official appointments, but failed further examinations. His 1561 handscroll (now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, ill. 33) represents a composition of two plants of orchids with floating leaves growing by the side of a rock together with short bamboo; it is noticeable that the orchids' leaves are similar to those painted by his father (ill. 31). The painting is inscribed with four poems by his friend Wang Zhideng, who was tied to the Wen family by marriage.⁷⁷ This testifies to how the Jiangnan circle of intellectuals and literati was the same as Ma Shouzhen herself belonged to. As Song Geng has discussed, 'fragile scholars' corresponded more to the *caizi* 才子 'talented man' or 'romantic scholar' rather than the *junzi* 君子 'gentleman',⁷⁸ and here it is proposed that they possibly employed orchids to visualise their selves in a feminine fashion and to express the need of praise for their talents which had not been recognised by the traditional bureaucratic system.

Yet, did the orchids painted by the literati – or found in other sources by them – carry the same meaning as those painted by the courtesan? Xu Wenmei has proposed to interpret Ma Shouzhen's painted orchids differently from the values they embodied in traditional literati visual culture, because she was a courtesan thus the expression of her emotions was different. Although for Xu Wenmei the orchid is a symbol of elegance typical of the Wu school painters,⁷⁹ she has suggested that orchid leaves and

⁷⁷ Alice R.M. Hyland, *The Literati Vision: Sixteenth Century Wu School Painting and Calligraphy* (Memphis, Tenn, 1984), 42, 50-1; on Wang and the Wens see Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 174-5.

⁷⁸ This is the main idea of Song Geng, who has explored the tension between the two types in Song, *The Fragile Scholar*, esp. 87-124.

⁷⁹ Differently from Xu, this thesis does not employ the division of schools, see Xu Wenmei, 'Wan Ming qinglou huajia', 93-100

flowers are ‘the tender expression of an introverted and kind character’ (陰柔的傳情形象)⁸⁰ typical of a woman. Further, she has added: ‘it can be said that Ma Shouzhen’s orchid paintings represent the tradition of courtesans’ lyrical expression of the self voice’ (馬守真的畫蘭，可說是明代青樓女子以詠物詩表達自我心聲的傳統).⁸¹ Although this interpretation based on seeing painting as an emotional outlet and expression of sentiment should not be discarded, here it is proposed to think about the orchids in a more nuanced and layered way.

As seen above, orchids have been strongly associated with the idea of fragrance – a unique hidden fragrance – and, in turn, fragrance is linked with female beauty, the scent of rouge and powder as well as the perfume of the body after bathing, which are common erotic motifs.⁸² Flowers often symbolise women, beauties and courtesans in the particular; furthermore, attributes of flowers, such as impollination and opening, can be associated with women’s genitalia, especially when it comes to peach and plum blossoms, and peonies. In thinking about the courtesan, whose figure was characterised also by sexual availability, it seems obvious to attribute to the orchids a clear erotic meaning as Daria Berg in her article on the courtesan Xue Susu, who also was renown for painting orchids, has concluded that ‘the orchid epitomizes the courtesan’s mixture of feminine eroticism with masculine erudition’.⁸³ However, as John Berger has suggested, ‘the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe’,⁸⁴ and in the cultural framework of reference the orchid was not an

⁸⁰ Xu Wenmei, ‘Wan Ming qinglou huajia’, 101.

⁸¹ Xu Wenmei, ‘Wan Ming qinglou huajia’, 102.

⁸² See the scent of orchids in early poetry, see Anne Birrell, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace. An Anthology of Early Chinese Love Poetry, Translated with Annotations and an Introduction* (Boston; London, 1982), 21.

⁸³ Berg, ‘Cultural Discourse on Xue Susu’, 184

⁸⁴ John Berger ed., *Ways of Seeing* (London, 1972), 8.

immediate symbol of women's sexuality, but rather resonated with purity, seclusion and unrecognised talent, as explained above.

Despite the above, the orchid was connected the women's spaces; the boudoir, among many other namings, was also called *lanfang* 蘭房 'the orchid chamber'. In a poem published in 1616 in the collection of courtesans' poetry 'Rhymed Verses from the Green Buildings' *Qinglou yunyu*, Ma Shouzhen herself wrote: 'In my boudoir (*lanfang*) the incense cools down, while the night passes slowly' (蘭房香冷夜迢迢).⁸⁵ Ma called her boudoir *lanfang*, but at the same time 'orchid room', also *lanshi* 蘭室, indicates an elegant room and a scholar's studio.⁸⁶ The ideas of seclusion and hidden talent associated with orchids in a cosmological terminology are *yin* elements, which are connected with the feminine, along with the moon, the water and many others. In the late sixteenth century all these associations surely appealed not only to courtesans, but also to the 'fragile scholar' who emphasised the *yin* in his writing, taste for poetry, prose, theatre and music. On the other hand, in thinking about erotic titillation, an excess of *yin* could reverse into a *yang* expression of erotic energy and *se*.

A case which shows the ambivalent role of orchids either as erotic or a purity visual metaphor in the late Ming is that of the 1640 printed illustrated edition of the extremely popular Song dynasty drama 'The Romance of the Western Chamber' *Xi xiang ji* 西廂記. In this instance the late Ming illustrator rather than visually expressing the erotic hint of the orchid fragrance which, in the text, is emanated from the boudoir

⁸⁵ Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, 'Zhen shang oucheng' 枕上偶成 'Random on the pillow', in Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1935), 4.137.

⁸⁶ See *lanfang* and *lanshi* in HYDCD, 9-628B, 629B; on this see also Xu Wenmei, 'Wan Ming qinglou huajia', 99.

of the protagonist Yingying 鶯鶯, decided to place the orchid far from the bedchamber. This conveys, as Li-Ling Hsiao has noted, the idea of 'dignity and solitude' usually attributed to orchids (ill. 38).⁸⁷ From what has been said thus far, it is possible to infer that in the late Ming the orchid maintained its value as a symbol of purity and frustration for unrecognised talents, yet its fragrance was an erotic symbol, it triggered the senses and turned orchids into a sexually charged element.

Orchids were a theme in poetry by women and courtesans since the Tang and, in the sixteenth century, Miss Wen 文氏, who we know little about, reinterpreted Qu Yuan's *Lisao*. The text (rarely reproduced) is found in Xie Wuliang's 謝無量 (1884–1964) history of women's literature, which was first published in 1916. There is a whole section dedicated to Miss Wen's *Lisao* (文氏之離騷), in which she clearly identified herself as a woman writer, and used the verses to express her solitude and indignation for the misfortune of her life, since she lost her husband very early and found relief in reading and learning.⁸⁸ This demonstrates that women in the late Ming (re)appropriated poetry in the female or feminine voice created by the literati, as will be further discussed in Chapter Four.

In her own poetry Ma Shouzhen made reference to orchids, such as in 'Chanting orchids' *Yong lan* 詠蘭 and 'Facing the orchids I am filled with emotions' *Dui lan you*

⁸⁷ See this in Li-Ling Hsiao, 'The Allusive Mode of Production: Text, Commentary and Illustration in the Tianzhang ge Edition of *Xi Xiangji* (The Story of the Western Wing)', in Daria Berg ed., *Reading China: Fiction, History and the Dynamics of Discourse. Essays in Honour of Professor Glen Dudbridge* (Leiden, 2007), 65-6.

⁸⁸ Xie Wuliang 謝無量 ed., *Zhongguo funü wenxue shi* 中國婦女文學史 'History of Chinese Women's Literature' (Zhengzhou, 1992), 5.22-30, here 5.29. For a full translation see Chang, *Women Writers*, 179-87.

huai 對蘭有懷, both included in her poetry collection. *Yong lan*, a hepta-syllabic quatrain, goes:

The Chu orchids profuse the room,
Their silent shadows next to the jade balcony.
A cool breeze blows until the horizon,
I wish their secluded fragrance came back again.
楚蘭紛遶室，啞影傍瑤臺。
清風天際至，願度幽香來。⁸⁹

In these lines, it is possible to read the orchids as a metaphor of her own self; their alluring scent is secluded in the room as she is in her boudoir, while the balcony represents access to the rest of the world, and the recognition of their 'secluded fragrance' (*youxiang* 幽香) can be read as a metaphor of the recognition of her talent. Within the fashion for orchids popular among the Jiangnan cultural elite, Ma Shouzhen created for herself a strong and indissoluble association with the flower and the *yin*, not only as painted subject matter, but also through her style names Orchid of the River Xiang and Lunar Beauty, thus identifying herself with the orchid and the moon. She also adopted in seals the name of Jiuwan Zhongren 九畹中人 'person amongst nine fields [of orchids]', recalling Qu Yuan and his poetry, similarly to what Zhou Lüjing did in his painting manual. As seen in Chapter Two, already since the beginning of her career she inscribed her paintings with orchid-themed poetic lines, as she did also on other paintings such as the 1572 hanging scroll in the Guangdong Provincial Museum, depicting orchids in the double outline method, while bamboo is rendered in an expressionist manner with quick and thick brushwork and rocks are in the *feibai* style (ill. 39). The inscription reads:

Indifferent to gain I carry the secluded solitary [orchids];
their profound connection lies in the forest.

⁸⁹ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 1.3a-b. This poem is also discussed in Xu Wenmei, 'Wan Ming qinglou huajia', 99.

A pure scene for whom is satisfying?⁹⁰
Its simple fragrance is yet self-fulfilling.
Renjia [year 1572] painted at *huazhao*⁹¹ the Qinhuai water pavilion.
Xuanxuan zi Xianglan, Ma Shouzhen.
恬淡抱幽獨，結契在林麓。
清況許誰兮，素芬還自足。
壬申花朝肯寫於秦淮水榭。玄玄子湘蘭馬守真。⁹²

In this poem Ma implied the orchid, although she did not mention the word *lan* or *hui* 蕙 for orchids, but rather some of its canonical attributes: seclusion and fragrance. She made the visual necessary to the textual, and the textual in turn added a layer of lyricism to the visual. In the poems she inscribed on her paintings Ma Shouzhen often made reference to orchids, and in so doing she created a totalising vision of the orchid in a painting-calligraphy-poetry combination. The practice of inscribing painting with poetry through the means of calligraphy, which had started since the eleventh century, was particularly in vogue in the Ming dynasty and represented a further layer of self-documentation on the space of the painting.⁹³

In terms of style and brush technique, Ma Shouzhen's contemporary literati who painted orchids, such as the abovementioned Wen Jia and Zhou Tianqiu, used only the single brush technique (ills. 33 and 34). If we compare their orchids with those done by Ma Shouzhen (see table 4) using the same technique (see especially ills. 22, 25, 46 and 50), it is evident that the style is very similar: monochrome small orchid flowers and long floating leaves. It is especially striking to note the close resemblance in style of Ma's orchids in the 1604 handscroll (ill. 22) or the undated hanging scroll (ill. 25) in the Palace Museum in Beijing with those painted by Zhou Tianqiu in the long handscroll

⁹⁰ Translation conjectural.

⁹¹ *Huazhao* could stand for *Huazhaojie* 花朝节: the birthday of flowers celebrated on the 12th day of the second month or the early morning of a spring day, HYDCD, 9-298B.

⁹² Transcription of the inscription from He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 142.

⁹³ The intimate relationship between poetry and painting deserves further study, see Jonathan Chaves, *The Chinese Painter as Poet* (New York, 2000).

dated 1580 (ill. 57). Ma Shouzhen differentiated herself from her contemporaries by often using the double outline method. This visual engagement with the famous master Zhao Mengjian could be interpreted as a strategy to strengthen her connection with the history of literati painting; moreover, we could read Ma's choice as a statement of her painting ability and as an attempt to create her own painting profile distinguished - or distinguishable - from that of her contemporaries.

In exploring the gendered features of the subjects painted by Ma Shouzhen, the focus is on the choice of those subjects and the fact that they are painted primarily in monochrome ink as in the literati tradition. The brush techniques, besides belonging to a predominantly male tradition of painting, do not seem to carry a specific gendered meaning and the idea found in the literature of a 'feminine brushstroke' typical of female painters is here discarded.⁹⁴ The orchid is a feminine *yin* element due to its cultural constructed value rather than to the brush method used for its depiction. Differently from how Norman Bryson has interpreted representations of still life by sixteenth and seventeenth-century European male painters, paintings of orchids during the late Ming should not be seen as an 'alien' representation of a feminine space, but rather as a tool for the expression of femininity by both male and female painters.⁹⁵

In Ma Shouzhen's painting the orchid is very often coupled with the bamboo; since the Yuan dynasty these two elements were painted together, often grouped with chrysanthemum (*ju* 菊) and plum blossoms (*mei* 梅), and all together these are called

⁹⁴ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 26.

⁹⁵ Norman Bryson, 'Still Life and 'Feminine' Space', in Idem, *Looking at the Overlooked. Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London, 1990), 172-3.

the 'four gentlemen' (*si junzi* 四君子) by late Ming scholars, such as He Lianghou 何良俊 (1506–1573) and Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639).⁹⁶ Bamboo, the evergreen plant which grows in great quantity and varieties in China, has long been associated with the rectitude of the *junzi* 'gentleman', able to bow and bend without ceasing to be loyal and morally proper. The association with the gentleman dates back to the 'Classic of Poetry' (*Shijing* 詩經),⁹⁷ but according to a fourteenth-century author, paintings of ink bamboo had possibly spread already in the Xuanzong 宣宗 reign (713–756) of the Tang dynasty.⁹⁸ Nonetheless it became very popular in the Northern Song, when Su Shi wrote about Wen Tong, by then the most famous painter of bamboo (ill. 40):

The ink gentlemen [bamboo] on the wall cannot speak, /But just seeing them can dissipate one's myriad grieves;/ And further, as for my friend's resembling these gentlemen,/ The severity of his simple virtue defies the frosty autumns.⁹⁹

In the mid-sixteenth century the enduring association bamboo-*junzi* was very much alive, as when Wen Zhengming wrote: 'a pure person is like a tall bamboo, a thin bamboo is like the noble man'.¹⁰⁰ Yet, the fact that bamboo exclusively belonged to the male tradition of painting and represented the gentleman with his qualities of morality and rectitude is challenged mainly by two facts: part of the traditional literature attributed the first painting of bamboo to the painter and poet Lady Li (Li Furen 李夫人 active c.925), who in sorrow and anxiety for the invasion of her state took delight in sketching the shadows of bamboo on the window screen in the moonlight.¹⁰¹ Second, the abovementioned elite woman Guan Daosheng became

⁹⁶ Mai-mai Sze, *The Way of Chinese Painting: its Ideas and Technique: with Selections from the Seventeenth Century Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* (New York, 1956), 96.

⁹⁷ Bush, *Chinese Literati*, 102.

⁹⁸ Bush, *Early Chinese Texts*, 272.

⁹⁹ Bush, *Chinese Literati*, 35.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Edwards, *The Art of Wen Cheng-ming (1470-1559)* (Ann Arbor, 1976), 130

¹⁰¹ Purtle, 'The Icon of the Woman Artist', 295; Tang Souyu, *Yutai huashi*, 2.2b.

extremely famous for her bamboo painting, not for depicting subjects considered to be stereotypically feminine, such as flowers and butterflies.¹⁰² Stemming from these considerations, Jennifer Purtle has recently confronted the conventional notion of bamboo as a male visual trope by proving evidence for Guan Daosheng as an inspirational icon in a moment of female power exerted at the Ming court by empress Zhang 張皇后 (1470–1541), consort of the Hongzhi 弘治 emperor (reign 1488–1505).¹⁰³ Purtle’s argument is persuasive, and the present thesis embraces it and brings it forward in a gendered reading of its coupling with the orchids, as discussed in the next section.

3.5 Engendering the painting: the game of orchids, bamboo and rock

Gender understood as a flexible combination of masculinities and femininities, which are socially and culturally determined, serves here to understand the employment of orchid and the appropriation by women of bamboo, a traditionally male visual subject. To do so, the investigation will begin with one of the most famous married couples of painters of Chinese history: Guan Daosheng and Zhao Mengfu. Zhao, the latter who ‘suggested bamboo as an appropriate subject for ladies when he compared the bamboo’s beneficent effect to those of the Lady of Wei playing state airs (rather than popular tunes) in antiquity’.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, his wife Guan Daosheng seemed to have been aware of stepping into a male tradition as she inscribed a bamboo handscroll with the following words:

¹⁰² In McCausland, *Zhao Mengfu*, 279-283.

¹⁰³ Purtle, ‘The Icon of the Woman Artist’, 292-6; for empress Zhang and her role in Daoist rituals see the insightful D.Phil. Thesis by Yu-ping Luk, *Empresses, Religious Practice and Imperial Image in Ming China: The Ordination Scroll of Empress Zhang (1493)* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Oxford, 2010), esp. chs. 4 and 5.

¹⁰⁴ McCausland, *Zhao Mengfu*, 281-2.

To play with brush and ink has never been a female task (*nügong*), however by nature I love it and cannot refrain myself; I showed in secret this ink bamboo to [my husband] Songxue.

操弄筆墨故非女工，然而天性好之，自不能已，見吾松雪精此墨竹。¹⁰⁵

Given Guan and Zhao's painting practice, it can be argued that bamboo rather than representing a male value stands for a masculine attitude usually attributed to men, and indeed belonging to a male-dominated visual culture, but also applicable to women and employable by women.

If we read the bamboo as *yang* and orchids as *yin*, the Guan–Zhao narrative becomes clearer and more complex. Although the traditional understanding of marriage conceived the husband as *yang* and the wife as *yin* – mainly in terms of their normative positionality and power¹⁰⁶ – in this case of a bold and strong woman and her sensitive official husband, who shared devoted and profound love as well as the practice of painting and poetry, it seems almost reversed. A contemporary commented on a scroll in which bamboo painted by Guan was paired with orchids by Zhao: 'Looking at her use of brush, the stalk is hoary and vigorous, without the slightest similarity to traditional female (styles of painting). The brushwork used in the orchid flowers was supple and pliant, without the slightest of masculine airs.'¹⁰⁷ In a gendered reading of the above, it is possible to recognise an awareness of the visual encoding of *yin* and *yang* as expressions of femininity and masculinity. There is a conscious game of gendered attributes, the bamboo which usually embodied the literatus takes the dimension of masculinity and *yang*, and becomes something which is possessed and

¹⁰⁵ Li E, *Yutai shushi*, 51b-52a; see translation of a similar passage in Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 67; and Purtle, 'The Icon of the Woman', 300.

¹⁰⁶ For an early text on the correspondence *yin-yang* wife-husband see Wang, *Images of Women*, 418.

¹⁰⁷ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 67-8.

expressed by a woman; while the *yin* element of orchids represents the more feminine side of Zhao. Similarly, it is possible to hypothesise that Ma Shouzhen was aware of the gendered characteristics of the subjects she chose to paint, the fact that orchids belonged to the literati tradition of painting and represented a *yin* feature within that same male tradition; simultaneously, within the space of the painting she played with the erotic aura of the orchids' perfume. Moreover, Ma added a further layer of meaning to the depiction of orchids, since she was herself the 'Orchid of the River Xiang'.

The third visual element, which the literature on Ma Shouzhen since the late Ming seems to have almost ignored, is the rock. Rocks as actual geomorphic formations were collectibles for the scholar's studio as well as an essential element in gardens, and especially appreciated when in an unusual shape.¹⁰⁸ As painted visual elements in the literati tradition, rocks also have played an important role since the Song dynasty, although they were usually depicted with old trees or bamboo, 'the three beneficial friends',¹⁰⁹ rather than alone. The rock symbolises the earth or a mountain in a microcosmic version, it represents stability and can be both *yin* and *yang*.¹¹⁰ In the case of its association with orchids and bamboo, it could be seen as a *yin-yang* equaliser in order to reach harmonious perfection in the cosmology of aesthetics. For instance this balance can be seen in the 1604 hanging scroll (ill. 23): the 'angle' composition is towered by the bamboo while the orchids leaves convey a sense of movement and the rocks constitute the firm basis from which the other elements develop. Nonetheless, as discussed in a following section, Ma Shouzhen exceptionally painted a handscroll

¹⁰⁸ See John Hay, *Kernels of Energy, Bones of Earth: the Rock in Chinese Art* (New York, 1985).

¹⁰⁹ Bush, *Early Chinese Texts*, 201.

¹¹⁰ Hay, *Kernels of Energy*, 54, 88.

made almost exclusively of rocks (ill. 42) thus attributing to them a value which was independent from other aesthetic elements.

The painting manuals indicated the depiction of bamboo and rocks as appropriate to complement the orchids, and if we accept the notion that visual tropes correspond to social ones,¹¹¹ then the recurrent use of the three visual elements of orchids, bamboo and rocks in Ma Shouzhen's work deserves further investigation. The scholarship has explored some of the significance of bamboo, orchids and rocks, but it has not yet explored the social or gender meaning, or the combination of the three. The earliest examples of orchids, bamboo and rock paintings seem to have appeared in the work of Zhao Mengfu, who varied the genre of 'old trees, bamboo and rocks' substituting the old tree with orchids. He painted 'Bamboo, Rock and Secluded Orchids' *Zhu shi youlan* 竹石幽蘭 (ill. 41) possibly in the later part of his life.¹¹² Although Zhao adopted the visual trio, his wife Guan Daosheng painted mainly bamboo and rock, or orchids alone, and thus according to surviving visual and written sources she did not use the three together.

A few other painters in the Yuan dynasty used the same grouping, but the trio was revived almost two centuries later by the influential figure of Wen Zhengming, who had a large repertoire of subject matters, but especially after the 1530s often painted bamboo, rocks and orchids, not necessarily all together.¹¹³ Invoking Zhao Mengfu in the handscroll (now part of the Worcester Art Museum collection) (ill. 31), Wen

¹¹¹ Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing', 231.

¹¹² McCausland, *Zhao Mengfu*, 265. Here it is translated 'secluded' rather than 'lonely' for the character *you* 幽.

¹¹³ Clunas, *Elegant Debts*, 20-1, ch. 4, 164.

painted the group of orchids, bamboo and rock; although the bamboo's thick black leaves visually dominate the scroll, it is the orchid plant to be placed in its central point with long tentacle-like leaves which seem to be moved by a gentle breeze. Here the representation of the orchids can be interpreted as an expression of Wen's desire for recognition, his attempt as a *caizi* to reach the outer world in the same way in which the orchid leaves are branching out.

According to Zhou Lüjing and his painting manual, bamboo and rock function almost as decorative elements for the orchids. However, due to their significance in Chinese visual culture it seems more reasonable to understand the three as a grouping in which each visual element has its own function, although there is a clear predominance of orchids in Ma Shouzhen's work. Elite courtesans were exposed to their contemporaries' painting and possibly appropriated literati visuality in order to be included in the same cultural discourse, and enhance their image with the literati consensus. Therefore, the correspondence between social values and visual ones, where there was not only a social construction of the visual, but also a 'visual construction of the social',¹¹⁴ the appropriation by a courtesan of themes emblematic of the male painting repertoire can be seen as a strategy of self-fashioning and a shared social and gender visual encoding.

In order to understand how the visuality of orchids, bamboo and rocks was employed by both literati and courtesans, or other women painters, it is necessary to embed its discussion in the climate of redefinition of gender contours evident especially from the second half of the sixteenth century. The new literati sensibility and consciousness in

¹¹⁴ Mitchell, 'Showing Seeing', 231.

music, poetry, drama and literature emphasised their feelings (*qing*) and their *yin* side; so in painting literati as well as literate women expressed their self especially through *yin* elements. Orchids embody the *feminine* rather than the *female*, and were adopted especially in this period to represent the self in a *yin* fashion, which reflected the new gender values of the late Ming *caizi*.

In a cosmological understanding of nature and the human body, the principles of *yin* and *yang* cover an important function in understanding the universe in terms of vital breath or energy (*qi* 氣), its forms and flows.¹¹⁵ These same principles were adopted in the aesthetics lexicon where *yin* and *yang* are often used to describe paintings and their elements, also in terms of energy and spirit resonance.¹¹⁶ It is now easier to comprehend why in the self-expression trends and the gender redefinition of the sixteenth century, the combination of orchids, bamboo and rock was meaningful: it gave voice to the feminine *yin*, and also identified with the frustration of unrecognised talent possibly experienced by both literati and courtesans, and visualised the moral strength *yang* of the literatus or the courtesan, as well as seeking a harmonious cosmological equilibrium through the stability of the rock.

3.6 Revealing exceptions in Ma's oeuvre

Although Ma Shouzhen's painting production seems to be regulated by a strong attachment to the same subjects and the creation of unique pieces, there are a few

¹¹⁵ For a discussion of *qi* and the body see Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, esp. 21, 28, 47-8.

¹¹⁶ For the language of painting and body see John Hay, 'The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source for Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy', in Susan Bush ed., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton, 1983), 74-102.

exceptions in which she chose unusual subjects and by an interesting case of her painting doubles. According to the visual and textual evidence available, it is plausible to conclude that paintings with subjects other than orchid, bamboo, rocks and narcissus were very rare in Ma's work; she painted orchids with other elements, but rarely other subjects alone. This obsessive representation of orchids can be read as a self-fashioning strategy for which the courtesan strongly displayed herself – the Orchid of the River Xiang– through the representation of orchids.

The attempt to comprehend the exceptions in her oeuvre contributes not only to providing a more complex vision of her painting practice, but also allows us to reflect upon two important issues in the study of Chinese painting: the acceptance of diversity within an artist's work and the issue of multiples. In the Jilin Museum there is a handscroll by Ma Shouzhen dated 1602 (ill. 42) painted in ink only, mainly with *feibai* rocks of different shapes and a few thin thorny stalks; this barren scenery is interrupted in the middle of the second half of the scroll by what looks like an orchid plant immediately followed by a bamboo. According to the inscription, the painting was made in summer and was dedicated to a certain Yanwen 彦文. The subject and composition convey a sense of solitude and aridity, in which there are only a few signs of life. This is a unique case in the surviving work of Ma's, which reveals that different compositions were possible and accepted. At the same time, this suggests that Ma Shouzhen could have used subjects other than orchids and bamboo with rock as a self-fashioning strategy.

The few exceptions to the subjects of orchids, bamboo and rock are mainly found in Ma Shouzhen's album leaves. The Tokyo scroll (ill. 15), which is an album leaf mounted

on a scroll represents a good instance of Ma's ability to depict a landscape. The painting suggests a reference to the trope of the Red Cliff, a place of a battle along the Yangtze River in the Hunan province, which was visited by the poet-official Su Shi during his political exile. After he commemorated it in his poetry, the 'red cliff' became a visual topos in Song painting.¹¹⁷

Later in the Ming period the theme was visually interpreted by Wen Zhengming in his 'Boating under the red cliff' (dated 1552) now in the Smithsonian Museum of Asian Art (ill. 43). As shown in Wen's piece, the 'red cliff' is the background to homo-social outing to visit a memorial site, while in Ma's album leaf there is no sense of togetherness: at the centre of the space, on a solitary boat, there is a small stylised human figure, probably a scholar (given the hairstyle) with his head turned to look at the shore. He is not completely alone, as on the other side of the boat a man wearing a humble large hat is rowing towards or away from the shore. The right edge of the painting is framed by the rocky cliff, and an inhabited shore with vegetation and trees growing around two simple houses. On the left-hand side of the painting the space is not defined, thus conveying a sense of openness and the infinite, which is eventually interrupted by Ma's small regular calligraphy saying 'Wanli *bingzi* year [1576] spring, second month, painted at the Qinhuai water kiosk, Xianglan literata (*nüshi*) Ma Shouzhen' (萬曆丙子春二月書於秦淮水榭，湘蘭女史馬守真).

Clunas has interpreted the painting through the lens of *se*, which means colour, appearance as well as sexual appeal or sexual appetite. The courtesan, whose image

¹¹⁷ See on this Jerome Silbergerd, 'Back to the Red Cliff: Reflections on the Narrative Mode in Early Literati Landscape Painting', *Ars Orientalis*, 25 (1995), 19-38.

and personality were typically charged with sexuality, possibly attempted to eliminate her *se* by reducing the painting's *se*, its colours and details to the minimum terms.¹¹⁸ Not only is Clunas' interpretation viable, but it could also be said that while sexual *se* can be seen as a *yang* factor, the presence of water, which occupies almost half of the album leaf, increases the *yin* of the painting.¹¹⁹ Following the leaf is Wang Zhideng's colophon in cursive calligraphy, which reads as follows (ill. 15.1):

[Ma] Xianglan is not known for painting *shanshui*. During the Qingming festival,¹²⁰ I sat with Xianglan at the Qinhuai pavilion to enjoy the rain. Xianglan suddenly made this album which moreover [recalls] Ni [Zan]. Because it is like Ni [Zan], it is the most outstanding piece; contemporaries rarely study [him], also who studied [him] rarely reached his [painting] beauty. Today this miscellaneous album is purely in Ni's style, in the end who could distinguish it? Xianglan has already reached sophistication, Xianglan has this [painting] ability so she does not need to only paint orchids; hence [how not to] recognise Xianglan's fame?

湘蘭不聞其作山水也，是日清明，與湘蘭坐秦淮閣賞雨。湘蘭忽作此冊，且又倪也。倪為清品之最，儕輩尠學，學亦尠佳。今雜此冊真倪中，竟不辨其誰何。湘蘭進矣。湘蘭有此技，而不用而唯作蘭，故所以擅湘蘭之名歟？

The above colophon testifies to the appreciation of Ma's painting talent and her fame in the second half of the 1570s, told through the voice of a key intellectual figure and painting connoisseur in Jiangnan. Wang Zhideng regarded Ma to be so talented in depicting landscape, traditionally called *shanshui* 山水, that he compared her style to the one of the Yuan dynasty master Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301–1374), who was considered by some literati during the late Ming to be an example of individualism.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Clunas, *Empire of Great Brightness*, 123-6.

¹¹⁹ On water as *yin* see also Lee Hui-shu, *Empresses, Art, & Agency in Song Dynasty China* (Seattle, 2010), 225-8.

¹²⁰ Qingming Festival also known as Tomb Sweeping Day is celebrated on the first day of the fifth month of the traditional calendar.

¹²¹ On Ni Zan see James C.Y. Watt, *The World of Khubilai Khan: Chinese Art in the Yuan Dynasty* (New York, 2010). There were diverse views on Yuan painters, see Susan E. Nelson, 'Late Ming Views of Yuan Painting', *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 44, n. 2/3 (1983), 202, 206.

Although landscape, which traditionally was the highest of literati subjects in painting, was seldom painted by Ming women, there are several exceptions, such as the concubine Li Yin and the courtesan-then-concubine Liu Rushi.¹²² As women hardly discussed painting or aesthetic theories in their writing, it is hard to know precisely the reasons behind the gendered practice of landscape painting. A simple explanation could be that landscape was truly a 'man's-work', and the transgression of that conventional boundary was only for the bravest women. It seems also that many of the landscape paintings by women, as by Ma and Liu Rushi (ill. 44),¹²³ are done in the format of album leaves, which could then have been seen as a freer format. In thinking about a famous courtesan, such as Ma Shouzhen, who had to maintain a high public image and a supportive network of literati, it would have been probably too risky to dedicate herself to the practice of landscape painting, or simply it did not appeal to her as a means of self-expression.

Despite landscape was not a prime choice, Ma Shouzhen painted small landscape pieces in the format of album leaves, as in two of the eight sold by Christie's in Hong Kong in 2004.¹²⁴ This album was made in collaboration with Wang Zhideng, who wrote several inscriptions. One leaf (ill. 45a) represents a kiosk by the water where bamboo is growing, while a mountain towers above it. An inscription in the upper right corner by Wang Zhideng in regular style, almost too regular to be by Wang, says: 'The water flows, everything is unstable; the mountains are joined, you cannot see the peak' (水勢全無定，山連不見峰). In another leaf (ill. 45b), a lonely house by a bamboo grove is depicted with two cranes among grass at its front. Although the crane tends to be

¹²² Cahill, 'The Painting of Liu Yin', 103-22.

¹²³ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 99-102.

¹²⁴ Four of the eight leaves are reproduced in *Christie's Auction Catalogue*, 25 Apr 2004, HK, lot 340.

related to royalty, here the attention is on the pairing of the birds, which could stand for marital union, couple happiness or simply companionship; the cranes epitomise the caring relationship between Wang and Ma as well as the sharing of the practice of painting and calligraphy, which can in turn be seen as a social space.

The other type of exception in Ma's oeuvre is that of two almost identical paintings: two long handscrolls, both considered authentic,¹²⁵ one in the Mactaggart collection dated 1566,¹²⁶ and the other made in 1604, which is today housed in the Indianapolis Museum of Art (ills. 46 and 47).¹²⁷ They both represent a sequence of ink and coloured orchids, mushrooms (*lingzhi* 靈芝), bamboo, rocks and other plants with berries in a natural setting. As Marsha Weidner has discussed, the compositions are extremely similar, but there are some differences in the details of rocks and flowers; the Mactaggart piece shows a higher cohesion between the different elements on the scroll, and the brightness of colours is much crisper in the Indianapolis Museum piece.¹²⁸ Although Weidner has hinted that the 1604 scroll could be the original and the 1566 scroll a spuriously predated counterfeit; here it is proposed to think of them as both authentic and multiples, as it cannot be excluded that painters might have been asked, especially under commission, to reproduce the same or a similar piece. This consideration of course undermines the amateurial attitude of the courtesan towards painting and highlights the fact that she in fact painted for someone and likely under remuneration. The close similitude between the two pieces could be justified by

¹²⁵ At least by He Junhong, 'Mingdai nūhuajia', 38.

¹²⁶ Tsang Ka Bo, *Brilliant Strokes: Chinese Paintings from the Mactaggart Art Collection* (Edmonton, 2008), 8-11.

¹²⁷ Yutaka Mino and James Robinson, *Beauty and Tranquillity: the Eli Lilly Collection of Chinese Art* (Indianapolis, 1983), 324-5.

¹²⁸ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 78-81.

the practice of preparing a sketch (*fenben* 粉本) on thin paper to be used as compositional pattern, especially useful in the case of long handscrolls; that sketch could have then been kept and reused for other paintings. The practice of *fenben* is an interesting yet understudied issue in Chinese painting, and the instance of Ma Shouzhen proves the need for further research.¹²⁹

3.7 Painting for others: building social networks

When in 1972 Michael Baxandall in discussing Italian Renaissance art maintained that ‘a 15th century painting is a deposit of a social relationship’,¹³⁰ he probably did not consider that his statement was also applicable to late Ming painting. Although in the sixteenth century a market economy was slowly replacing the traditional practice of gift giving, in the elite circles a complex system of gifts and counter-gifts was still in use. The rules of giving and counter-giving were regulated by unwritten social practices, of which understanding was accessible almost exclusively to those who belonged to the same social group. Among the many commodities to be exchanged, paintings and calligraphy pieces were often used as gifts, as scholars such as Craig Clunas¹³¹ and Anne Burkus-Chasson¹³² have discussed.

Paintings can be seen as perfect gifts as they could be tailored for the recipient and could be made (at times very quickly) purposely for specific festivities, for

¹²⁹ See a complex case of multiple in Maxwell K. Hearn, ‘An Early Ming Example of Multiples: Two Versions of Elegant Gathering in the Apricot Garden’, in Judith G. Smith and Wen C. Fong, *Issues of Authenticity in Chinese Painting* (New York, 1999), 221-58.

¹³⁰ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: a Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford, 1972), 1.

¹³¹ Clunas, *Elegant Debts*, esp. 10-13, 31-3, 39-43.

¹³² Anne Burkus-Chasson, ‘Elegant or Common? Chen Hongshou’s Birthday Presentation Pictures and His Professional Status’, *Art Bulletin*, 26.2 (June 1994), 279-300.

remembering a special occasion, or a simple encounter between friends. In the case of courtesan painters, and of Ma Shouzhen in particular, paintings were often made *for* others, possibly as part of a gift-exchange economy in which the currency was entertainment of some kind in exchange for visibility, recognition and patronage, as well as material gifts. Elite courtesans' entertainment service included the courtesan's normative practices of singing, dancing and theatrical performances, together with rhyming during drinking games, composing poetry and most likely sex.

Chinese paintings, especially fans and handscrolls, due to their small size (their maximum measurement is around fifty centimetres) were easily transportable objects (ill. 48). Folding fans, which became very fashionable objects in the mid-Ming, were probably imported from Japan at some point during the tenth century.¹³³ Fans had multiple functions: they were used by men and women to keep cool, to hide their face in challenging or embarrassing situations, as well as being used in dancing or just for display. In Chinese painting, female beauties are often depicted carrying a fan, which might assume an eroticising or romanticising function (ill. 49), and also in texts about and by courtesans there are recurrent references to fans.

Although a later source, the cultural significance of fans is epitomised in the famous Southern drama 'The Peach Blossom Fan' *Taohua shan* 桃花扇, written by Kong Shangren 孔尚任 (1648–1718) and published in 1699. The story takes place in Nanjing during the years of the Ming–Qing dynastic turn and narrates the love adventures between the historical courtesan Li Xiangjun 李香君 (1624–?) and the famous scholar

¹³³ Ka Bo Tsang, *More than Keeping Cool: Chinese Fans and Fan Paintings* (Toronto, 2002), 9–10.

official Hou Fangyu 侯方域 (1618–1655).¹³⁴ In scene 23, ‘The Message on the Fan’, the fan which was a gift of betrothal to Li by Hou was painted with peach blossoms and stained with drops of her blood. The courtesan decided to use it instead of a letter to express her profound love for Hou. Li Xiangjun told her singing teacher Su and the scholar Yang: ‘Though my thoughts and emotions are boundless, I have not been trained to express them in writing [...] All my fears and sorrow are associated with this fan. Perhaps it will suffice if you merely take it to him [Hou].’¹³⁵ The written language is thus replaced by the semantics of the object’s materiality together with its visuality; peach blossoms were a common trope for love and a symbol of the woman. The fan in this instance represents the courtesan herself in a dramatic fashion, since it carries her own body represented by the blood.

In the late Ming dynasty, the use and appreciation of fans as paintings and collectibles were shared between courtesans and literati; their surfaces were often painted and inscribed by male and female painters with a variety of subject matters and poetic themes. In a brief letter addressed to Wang Zhideng, Ma Shouzhen wrote: ‘I will return the fan to you in a little while’ (尊扇少頃完上), meaning that a fan was given to her by Wang to be appreciated, inscribed or painted. Ma Shouzhen painted many fans with her favourite subject matters: orchids, bamboo and rocks or fungi, although she did not usually inscribe them with poems, but just with simple inscriptions indicating the time and place of their making, and in some cases were also explicitly dedicated to a recipient.

¹³⁴ On Li Xiangjun and her house, which is a museum in Nanjing, see Ōki, *Fengyue Qinhuai*, 122-5.

¹³⁵ Kong Shangren (translated by Chen Shih-hsiang and Harold Acton with the collaboration of Cyril Birch), *The Peach Blossom Fan* (Berkeley, 1976), 174.

Among the pieces attributed to Ma Shouzhen seven fans, six handscrolls and three hanging scrolls were certainly dedicated to a specific (and specified) recipient. Unfortunately many of the recipients still remain unidentified as the names provided by the courtesan, possibly their style names, do not match with individuals documented in historical sources – although it cannot be excluded that further historiographic research might reveal their identity. The scholarship on Chinese painting has not yet dedicated enough research to the social aspects revealed by paintings' inscriptions as well as their visuality, and further investigation, also within this thesis, will contribute to illuminating the role of painting in the representation of the self and of social ties.

Paintings confirm that Ma Shouzhen's main social relationship was with Wang Zhideng, since a few pieces were done for him, and some others were done with him, as already seen in the previous section and further explored in the next one. The first extant painting dedicated to Wang is a short handscroll dated 1576, today housed in the Mactaggart Art collection (ill. 50). It depicts ink orchids, some of which are in the double outline technique, bamboo rocks and fungi (*lingzhi*) placed on the ground, where at times small grasses and little stones are visible. The simple inscription provides the spatio-temporal coordinates: '[On a] spring day of *bingzi* year [1576], sketched by young sister (*mei*) Shouzhen for the older brother Baigu' (丙子春日妹守真為百穀兄寫). In this instance she addressed Wang as *xiong* 兄 'older brother', as to express respect as well as a certain degree of vicinity.

However, the appellatives used for Wang Zhideng varied and they could have been indicative of the strength of the tie between Ma and Wang at different times, as we know that they met in the 1570s and remained in a close relationship until Ma died in 1604. The hanging scroll dated 1592 (ill. 51) depicts two clusters of orchids placed symmetrically opposite one another on the golden paper; they are painted using the double outline technique and filled in with light colours of green and yellow. Their leaves are branching out as if to reach each other, similarly to the style used also in her other paintings and which recalls Wen Zhengming's rendering of the orchids leaves.

The inscription says:

The *renchen* year [1592] of the Wanli reign, in the long summer sitting at the Qinhuai water pavilion, I painted this for the society brother Wang Baigu [Zhideng] for correction. Xianglan, younger sister (*nüdi*), Ma Shouzhen.

萬里壬辰長夏，坐秦淮水榭畫王百穀社兄正，湘蘭女弟馬守真。

In this instance Ma called Wang *shexiong* 社兄 'society brother', and in so doing she displayed respect towards Wang, consolidated their close relationship and ultimately reified their belonging to the same *she* 社, which in Ming terms meant 'society' in the sense of group or club. The two orchid plants seem to mirror each other, they are close but distant at the same time and they seem to reach towards each other, just as two lovers have the desire of being together while apart. The pairing of the orchids could thus represent a couple or indicate companionship; they could be seen as visual metaphors of the giver and the recipient who are represented as similar but simultaneously different, and both belonging to the same space, which is visual and social. The reading of this piece reveals a degree of intimacy between Ma and Wang Zhideng at the beginning of the 1590s when they had already been acquainted for about twenty years.

The expression *xiong* ‘older brother’, which originally implied a family tie but was commonly used in Ming society in reference to friends, shows respect as well as vicinity; it was possibly used by courtesans to address their guests or at least those they felt quite close to. There are several instances in which Ma Shouzhen used the word *xiong*, alone or combined with other characters to address the recipient of her paintings. On the 1602 handscroll now in the Jilin University collection (ill. 42), the inscription says that it was made for a certain older brother Yanwen (Yanwen *xiong* 彦文兄), whose identity remains obscure. In the 1604 orchid handscroll, mounted together with a Xue Susu handscroll also depicting orchids and held in the Shanghai Museum Collection (ill. 28), the inscription reads: ‘*Jiachen* [year 1604] on a summer day at the pine pavilion I painted orchids following [the style of] Zhao Zigu [Mengjian] as a present to older brother Yanke’ (甲辰夏日，在松院，倣趙子固畫蘭，贈彦可兄).¹³⁶ Yanke was the style name of Wen Congjian 文從簡 (1574–1648), a member of the Wen family, grandson of Wen Zhengming, himself a painter and poet, and father of the woman painter Wen Shu. Interestingly Ma called Wen Congjian ‘older brother’ although he was of a generation younger and only thirty years old in 1604, while Ma was already fifty-six. Thus, this demonstrates that *xiong* was used to indicate a social bond and respect, which was not necessarily based on an age hierarchy.

Ma Shouzhen often named the recipient of her paintings using a combination of *xiong* with other qualifying characters, as seen for *shexiong* in reference to Wang Zhideng. She dedicated the 1566 long handscroll with ink and coloured orchids, and bamboo

¹³⁶ This handscroll has often been mistaken to be a collaboration between the two courtesans, who very likely knew each other; the dates on the two handscrolls are 1601 for the Xue Susu (Painted by Xue Susu in the second month of the *xinchou* [1601] year 辛丑二月薛素素寫) and 1604 for the Ma Shouzhen.

rocks with fungi depicted in a natural setting, now in the Magtaggart Collection (ill. 46) to a certain Ming Yang 溟陽, who she called ‘sworn brother’ (*qixiong* 契兄). This appellation was used to indicate a strong tie and curiously was also employed to address the older partner within male homosexual relationships.¹³⁷ Ming Yang must have been a close friend of Ma’s at the beginning of her career, possibly a patron.

In another instance of a fan (ill. 52) now in the Manpukuji Temple in Kyoto, Japan, the inscription by Ma reads: ‘Yinwu [1570] on a summer day painted for the long-time friend (*changxiong*) Han Wu’ (庚午夏日，為漢五長兄寫), thus Ma emphasised the length of their acquaintance. She did something similar on an undated fan at the Tianjin Museum which she inscribed: ‘painted for the long friend Taifeng, Xianglan Ma Shouzhen’ (湘蘭馬守真，為泰峰長兄寫) (ill. 53). *Changxiong* is how she referred to a certain Fanghu 方壺 on the 1589 fan now in the Shanghai Museum, which could be the style name of Yang Rucheng 楊汝成 (*jinshi* 1625);¹³⁸ likewise she addressed a certain Mingqing 明卿 on a 1599 fan painted with orchids, bamboo with rock (ill. 54). Mingqing possibly identifies the high official Wu Guolun 吳國倫 (1524–1593, *jinshi* 1550), who was retired from his office in the Hunan province (歷官湖南參政) and a friend of Jiangnan literati as seen later in this chapter.¹³⁹ From the above, we understand that in Ma Shouzhen’s social network there were also powerful officials; as we know, the Nanjing pleasure quarter was placed across the river from the examination hall and the Temple of Confucius and was easily accessible to officials and exam candidates.

¹³⁷ Wu Cuncun, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (New York; London, 2004), 41.

¹³⁸ This is based on the inscription transcribed in He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 152-3; on Yang Rucheng see *Zhongguo lidai renming cidian*, 255.

¹³⁹ His name appears in Zhou Tianqiu’s long orchid scroll, *Gugong shuhua mu*, vol. 19, 290.

On one occasion only did Ma Shouzhen state in the inscription the reason for dedicating the piece to a specific recipient; it is the case of the 1593 fan (ill. 55) in the Wuxi Museum, in which she wrote: 'In the twelve month of *guiyi* [year 1593] recalling the third day, composed for celebrating Zhu Zishan's birthday' (癸巳十二月念三日，寫祝子山詞宗壽). Although there is no documentation of a Zhu Zishan living in the Ming, this fan testifies that Ma Shouzhen, as a contemporary literati, also gave paintings to commemorate special celebrations, possibly under commission or as a personal present. In this case Ma wished him longevity by presenting a group of mushrooms (*lingzhi* 靈芝), together with orchids, bamboo and rock; the strangely shaped mushrooms which often appear in Ma's painting not only are supposed to have great medicinal properties, but are a traditional emblem of immortality, which seems particularly apt for birthday wishes.¹⁴⁰

Another fan today housed in the Yale University Art Gallery (ill. 56) can also be seen as a special memorial record. She painted simple single-brush orchids elegantly slanting from one corner, and wrote the following inscription: 'Feeling the autumn, Xiang resents aging, a fragrant heart/mind entrusts an extraordinary simplicity. *Jiachen* [year 1604] second day after mid-autumn¹⁴¹ sketched at Feixu Garden' (感秋湘怨長，芳心托豪素。甲辰中秋后二日，於飛絮園寫意). The garden Ma referred to was the one close to Suzhou where the epic celebrations for Wang Zhideng's seventieth birthday took place. In the poem, she expressed the sadness felt for the ageing of her friend, or possibly for her own.

¹⁴⁰ See on the *lingzhi* mushrooms (*Ganoderma lucidium*) Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 80.

¹⁴¹ Mid-autumn is on the fifteenth day of the eighth month of the traditional calendar.

In two instances Ma Shouzhen addressed her painting's recipient *xiansheng* 先生, which means Sir or Mr; in the undated hanging scroll now at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam she inscribed: 'Dedicated to Mr Jingzhai from the Qinhuai pavilion, Xianglan literata Ma Shouzhen' (靜叢先生命垂, 於秦淮水閣, 湘蘭女史馬守真) (ill. 16). Jingzhai could be the style name of Lei Jian 雷澗, a scholar from Fujian also known as a poet and flower painter.¹⁴² *Xiansheng* was possibly used in more formal situations when the degree of intimacy was quite low and the strength of tie rather weak. In this instance Ma Shouzhen highlighted her status of literata, and there is in fact a display of visual literacy in this piece which greatly resembles a painting by Guan Daosheng in the National Palace Museum (ill. 24), and it is likely that its visual engagement with Lady Guan was obvious for a contemporary viewer. In another painting, a hanging scroll now conserved in the Xubaizhai Collection at the Hong Kong Museum of Art (ill. 21), Ma Shouzhen wrote: 'Painted in a spring month of *yigai* [year 1599] for Mr Xuelin. Xianglan Ma Shouzhen' (已亥春月, 寫寄雪林先生, 湘蘭馬守真). Her calligraphy is placed on the rock almost hidden among the orchid leaves, while on the upper right corner Mr Xuelin left his counter-inscription about 'the emerald bamboo and the secluded orchids' (翠竹幽蘭) and concluded 'written by Xuelin Zhang Shan, governor at Xunyang' (雪林張山題於潯陽官署). His biographical details remain unknown, yet this painting can corroborate the idea that Ma Shouzhen was connected not only to literati, but also to high officials and thus people within the bureaucratic milieu who possessed political capital and power; these could have resulted as useful connections for a famous courtesan and tax-payer like Ma.

¹⁴² Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 1149.

Besides a few instances in which there seems to be a direct correspondence between the receiver of the painting and its depiction, most of the paintings Ma dedicated to others do not show a detectable association between the painted subject and its recipient. However, it can be said that the orchids with bamboo and rock have a multiple function: they were a self-representation of Ma Shouzhen, they implied her belonging to the literati visual culture and her inclusion in the current fashion for orchids and the *yin*. Moreover, orchids could carry the meaning of friendship and can thus be interpreted to add a layer of symbolism for the relationship with her *xiong*.¹⁴³ Paintings of orchids within Ma's oeuvre could ultimately be read as a 'by-name picture' *biehao tu* 別號圖 - a representation of an alternative name of the painter - since her style name was 'Orchid of the River Xiang'. The practice of the *biehao tu* was in vogue in the sixteenth-century literati painters' circles, as for the famous cases of Wen Zhengming and Tang Yin.¹⁴⁴ Yet, whereas literati usually painted places or properties, such as their studio or garden, Ma Shouzhen could have employed the abstract idea of the *biehao tu*: through the orchid she represented her self and reinforced the connection with the *yin* and the male painting tradition.

3.8 The practice of inscribing painting: social space and self-fashioning

Reading a painting and its inscriptions is important in order to investigate the biography of the object itself. Chinese paintings are extremely rich and layered

¹⁴³ For the interpretation of orchids as friendship symbol in the work of Gu Mei see Ying Zhang, *Politics and Morality*, ch. 6.

¹⁴⁴ See a discussion on *biehao* for Wen Zhengming in Clunas, *Fruitful Sites*, 153-66 ; and for Tang Yin in Clapp, *The Painting of T'ang Yin*, 192-5.

documents; inscriptions and seals allow not only to understand how an object came to life and what happened to it soon after, but also to trace its existence in time and space, as well as the changes of its status.¹⁴⁵ It was a common practice among the Chinese elites to leave a praising comment usually in the form of a poetic composition on a friend's or master's painting or on a collected piece, and thus inscriptions not only by the painter but also the painter's contemporaries contribute to our understanding of the work. While the previous section has focused on Ma Shouzhen's own inscriptions, this section will analyse the writings left by the courtesan's contemporaries on her paintings in order to explore the reception of her work as well as the expression of the inscriber's social tie – when existent – with the courtesan.¹⁴⁶

For a courtesan like Ma Shouzhen it was desirable to have inscriptions left on her paintings by contemporary celebrities as a display of their connection or the appreciation of her talent. This can be seen as a tool used to enhance her own celebrity and authority as a painter, to confirm her social status and her belonging to the cultural elite. In turn, since Ma Shouzhen especially from the 1580s was herself extremely renowned, she also could have added a layer of respectability or fame to those who were connected to her.

Ma Shouzhen was not particularly praised for her calligraphy, and the small regular style which she used was the most common style of calligraphy. Yet, Wang Zhideng in the eulogies for Ma wrote: 'on red paper [her] fresh strokes look gentle like rosy clouds,

¹⁴⁵ The reference is to the anthropological approach to material culture exemplified by Arjun Appadurai and others, see Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things' Commoditization as Process', in Arjun Appadurai ed., *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in a Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), 64-91.

¹⁴⁶ Further observations on collectors will be made in Chapter Six; yet due to the impossibility of accessing the original objects and carrying out a thorough research on seals, this will not be treated in detail in this thesis.

[her] small characters like fly-heads are fine and slanting' (紅箋新擘似輕霞，小字蠅頭密又斜).¹⁴⁷ There is only one known instance in which she inscribed someone else's painting: it is Zhou Tianqiu's long orchids handscroll in the National Palace Museum which inscription – by the painter himself – dates it 1580 (ill. 57). The scroll is crowded with about eighty poetic inscriptions themed around the image of the orchid and set among eleven groups of single-brushed orchid plants. The inscriptions are by Zhou's contemporaries, likely to be all his acquaintances, and they could have been added before or after Zhou's inscription. The inscribers were mostly men and most of them were holders of an official title, such as the above mentioned Wu Guolun, or famous literati such as the painter and calligrapher Mo Shilong 莫是龍 (1537–1587) and the author Tian Yiheng,¹⁴⁸ who edited a women's poetry anthology. There are only two women included, and tellingly both were courtesans famous for their orchid painting: Ma Shouzhen and Xu Pianpian (style name Ruifang 蕊芳).¹⁴⁹ Ma Shouzhen inscribed the scroll with the following hepta-syllabic quatrain (*jueju* 絕句) in cursive calligraphy (行書):

I carry a few orchid plants in my hands.
 During the day a warm wind blows and they open one after another.
 I sit for a long time without noticing their fragrance in the room.
 But when I open the window, butterflies fly in.
 手攜蘭蕙兩三栽，日暖風和次第開。
 坐久不知香在室，推窗時有蝶飛來。¹⁵⁰

In this poem, Ma emphasised the fragrance of the orchid to which butterflies were instinctively drawn. There are mainly two ways of interpreting these verses: through

¹⁴⁷ Wang Zhideng, 'Ma Xianglan wan geci' 馬湘蘭挽歌詞 'Song to mourn Ma Xianglan', in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.69b.

¹⁴⁸ DMB, 1287-8.

¹⁴⁹ See a transcription of the inscription on the National Palace Museum online catalogue http://painting.npm.gov.tw/npm_public/System/View.jsp?ObjectID=6814&type=1 [accessed, 22 March 2011].

¹⁵⁰ *Gugong shuhua tulu*, vol. 19, 288.

the parallel often drawn between the orchid fragrance and a talent which is not immediately recognised, possibly referring to her own self. Alternatively, the fragrance stands for her erotic lure and the butterflies for her clients or admirers. Ma Shouzhen's inclusion in Zhou Tianqiu's 'orchid network' is significant in terms of social power and can be seen as part of her self-fashioning, even if in this circumstance she signed as Ma Shouzhen and used the seal Mashi Yuejiao 馬氏月嬌 rather than Ma Xianglan, the Orchid of the River Xiang. The presence of Ma in Zhou Tianqiu's scroll can be understood in mainly two ways: she was included because she was a famous courtesan and a socialite so she contributed to his self-fashioning; or because she was considered a woman-like-man as she shared the same activities and taste of the surrounding literati. In any case, this inclusion likely boosted her fame and appreciation in the Nanjing cultural circle.

There is abundant visual and textual evidence of inscriptions written on Ma Shouzhen's paintings written by contemporary luminaries, famous figures of the Nanjing intellectual elite, and this section will champion some in order to give a sense of the variety of characters in her social network, as understood through her paintings and their inscriptions. The prolific painter and playwright Xu Wei recorded in his collection that he had inscribed one of Ma Shouzhen's fans (書馬湘蘭扇), which did not survive, and provided an interesting detail by saying that before his inscription there were nine others, by courtesans (前有九妓題詠). The poetic composition reads:

In the South talents are not less than a myriad; but skilled in poetry like
literati, are [only] nine of them. Talent is rare, can we not say that?
南國才人，不下千百，能詩文者，九人而已。才難，不其然乎？¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Xu Wei 徐渭, *Xu Wei ji* 徐渭集 'Xu Wei's Collected Works', in *Zhongguo gudian wenxue jiben congshu* (Beijing, 1983), 1056-7.

There is a high probability that Xu Wei was acquainted with Ma Shouzhen, and there is definitely enough evidence to confirm that Xu admired her, as in the poem simply titled 'Painting orchids' ('Hualan' 畫蘭), he said:

Intoxicated by the skirts painting sobers me up, it is spring after all;
A hundred flowers on branches regain vitality.
Since I painted after [Ma] Xianglan,
even more so I cannot leisurely inscribe it as a vulgar man.
醉抹醒塗總是春，百花枝上掇精神。
自從畫得湘蘭后，更不閒題與俗人。¹⁵²

From these words, we can conclude that Xu Wei not only esteemed Ma's painting style, but even followed her as if he recognised her to be a master painter. If Xu Wei was a potential connection of Ma Shouzhen to the theatre scene, he was not the only one. There is evidence that Ma was intimate with the literatus Zhang Xianyi 張獻翼 (alternative names Youyu 幼于 and Mi 敕) since she dedicated poems to him, but he also inscribed a leaf of a painted album of plum blossoms, bamboo and orchids. Zhang Xianyi's brother was the renowned playwright Zhang Fengyi 張鳳翼(1527–1613), and he left an inscription on the same album which reads: 'In *guiyou* [1573] leap month, sitting while it rains and look at Lady Ma painting orchids I quickly write this for fun' (癸酉閏月齋坐雨閱馬姬畫蘭走筆戲題).¹⁵³ There is evidence to think that Zhang Fengyi knew Ma Shouzhen, as further discussed in Chapter Five, not least because he was also a close friend of Wang Zhideng, who too inscribed the same album. Zheng

¹⁵² Xu Wei 徐渭, *Xu Wenchang yi gao* 徐文長逸稿 'Xu Wenchang's Lost Writings', 24 *juan*, in *Mingdai lunzhu congkan* (Taipei, 1977), vol. 1, 8.3a.

¹⁵³ Guan Mianjun 關免鈞, *Sanqiu ge shuhua lu* 三秋閣書畫錄 'Sanqiu Studio's Record of Painting and Calligraphy', 2 *juan* (Cangwu guanshi edition, 1928) [accessed at the Ancient Books Dept, National Library of China, Beijing, ref. n. 16201], 1.54-55.

Fengyi was possibly an aficionado of other talented courtesans as well as Ma, as he also left an inscription on Xue Susu's painting.¹⁵⁴

Besides literati writing on courtesans' painting, as suggested by the example of Xu Wei in the above text, courtesans possibly wrote on each other's paintings as part of their artistic and social practices. They possibly collaborated in painting as well as composing poetic rhymes and songs. Unfortunately there is little evidence to establish which kind of relationship existed among Nanjing courtesans, whether friendship prevailed over competition, and what kind of hierarchy organised their community. In the Wuxi Museum there is a handscroll dedicated to Wang Zhideng, a collaborative painting between Ma Shouzhen and other three courtesans named Wu Juanjuan 吳娟娟, Lin Xue 林雪 and Wang Dingru 王定儒 (ill. 58).¹⁵⁵ Although catalogues of Chinese painting assessed this as an original piece, He Junhong has argued quite convincingly for its non-authenticity due to the fact that the four women were unlikely to be contemporary.¹⁵⁶ However, this section discusses the scroll in order to raise questions about the biographies of the other three women and emphasise the need for further historiographic research on late Ming women painters. If this was to be an authentic piece, it would represent a fascinating instance of a collaborative painting among courtesans.

¹⁵⁴ Pei Jingfu 裴景福, *Zhuangtao ge shuhualu* 壯陶閣書畫錄 'Zhuangtao Studio's Record of Painting and Calligraphy', 22 *juan* (Shanghai, 1937), 11.38a.

¹⁵⁵ See a detail of Ma Shouzhen's painting and Ma's inscription published in *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tu mu* 中國古代書畫圖目 'Catalogue of Ancient Chinese Calligraphy and Painting' (Beijing, 1986), vol. 6, 6-041. A reproduction of the painting without initial and final inscription in *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, vol. 8, n. 66.

¹⁵⁶ He Junhong, 'Mingdai nühuajia', 35-8. Interestingly, although her later book reports all the other arguments from the mentioned article, the discussion on the Wuxi scroll is left out.

The Wuxi scroll is a series of four flowers or plants, each accompanied by the painter's signature and seal placed next to the painted image. The signature and seal are placed on the right hand side of the painted subject for the first two and on the left of the painted image for the last two, creating a symmetrical composition. The scroll is introduced by Ma's inscription (ill. 58b) and, according to *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, followed at the end of the scroll by a Wang Zhideng inscription dated 1576.¹⁵⁷ The scroll opens with narcissus painted by Wu Juanjuan, whose seal is Meixian 眉仙; then there are the coloured orchids with rock and fungi by Ma Shouzhen who signed as such (see in detail, ill. 58a). Ma's depiction is made using a rather unusual style in her work: the *mogu* 莫骨 'boneless' style for which the colour is applied with no ink outline. The third depiction is a branch of chrysanthemums with flowers and leaves made by Lin Xue, who signed her name and added her seal Xue 雪; and last, Wang Dingru, who painted plum blossoms, signed with her courtesy name Wang Ruimei, and used the seal Mei 梅, which means plum blossoms. Narcissus, chrysanthemum, orchids and plum blossoms were common subjects for painting; excluding the narcissus, the other three flowers are, together with the bamboo, known as 'the four gentlemen' (see above); yet the courtesans by replacing the bamboo with a spring flower which symbolises marital happiness, conveyed the idea of four skilled beautiful 'flowers' looking for companionship .

The inscription by Ma Shouzhen in regular calligraphy introduces the painting by saying that the scroll represents a series of images of cold and warmth. She describes a scene of pouring wine, women wearing jade pendants and playing the silk strings of a *qin*

¹⁵⁷ *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, vol. 8, n. 66.

instrument by moonlight. Then she concludes by saying, ‘These couplets are written for fun to the intimate friend (*qizhang* 契丈) Baigu [Wang Zhideng], during an elegant gathering at Zhuxi’ (ill. 58b). The inscription is crucial to understanding in which social circumstances the scroll was painted. It is possible to assume that the four courtesans were probably at an evening gathering at the ancient Zhuxi pavilion in the Jiangdu County, close to the city of Yangzhou.¹⁵⁸ On that specific occasion they decided, probably under the supervision of Ma Shouzhen, to paint the scroll as a gift to Wang. The text reveals a joyful atmosphere in which courtesans, perhaps together with literati and other high society members, were enjoying wine and artistic activities, such as music, painting and calligraphy. Ma Shouzhen dedicated the painting by the courtesans to Wang Zhideng, and in turn he inscribed the last part of the scroll with reference to a song poem (*ci* 詞) called *Langtaosha* 浪淘沙.¹⁵⁹ In this instance Ma addressed Wang with the expression *qizhang* 契丈 where the character *qi* or *qie* 契 in this context means ‘intimate’ and ‘close’ and *zhang* stands for *zhangfu* 丈夫, meaning ‘husband’.¹⁶⁰

There is little documentation about the other three women of the scroll and some of the available information is contradictory. The one whose details are most certain is Wang Dingru, who was probably a contemporary of Ma Shouzhen and whose name according to some sources was Bingru 賓儒, and whose style name was Ruimei 蕊

¹⁵⁸ *Zhongguo gujin diming dacidian* 中國古今地名大辭典 *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Historical Places* (Shanghai, 1930), 334.

¹⁵⁹ *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, vol. 8, 23. Unfortunately I could not find any readable image or transcription of the entire final inscription by Wang.

¹⁶⁰ *Qiezhang* means mainly ‘old friend’, in HYDCD, 2-1532B.

梅.¹⁶¹ Wu Juanjuan, style name Meixian 眉仙, originally from the city of Shicheng in Hubei province and not to be confused with Wu Juan, was a courtesan poet living at the end of the Ming dynasty by the Qinhuai River.¹⁶² The figure of Lin Xue is even more puzzling: there is one famous Lin Xue, also named Lin Tiansu 林天素, a distinguished courtesan of the late Ming known for her landscape painting,¹⁶³ who was living and working in the West Lake of Hangzhou.¹⁶⁴ Marsha Weidner has indicated Lin Xue's first dated extant painting, a fan made in 1620;¹⁶⁵ however, a renowned Chinese catalogue of authenticated paintings has mentioned the existence of two painters named Lin Xue, one living in the Ming who painted in 1621 a wintry landscape,¹⁶⁶ while the other is one of the Qing dynasty who depicted Guanyin the Bodhisattva of Compassion in 1669.¹⁶⁷ This information is further supported by bibliographical records which mention one Lin Xue living in the Qing period.¹⁶⁸ It is possible that we are facing the presence of homonymous courtesans, and the name Lin Xue 'Forest Snow' could have been a common name for a woman, also probably within a tradition of transmission of names, which created also an 'invented matrilineal kinship', as Susan Mann has proposed.¹⁶⁹ One more possibility is that there was a homonymous Lin Xue courtesan contemporary of Ma Shouzhen about whom there is no documentation and who does not correspond to any of those mentioned in current biographical dictionaries.

¹⁶¹ Wang Binru in Yuan Shaoying 袁韶莹 and Yang Guizhen 楊瑰珍, *Zhongguo funü mingren cidian* 中國婦女名人詞典 'Dictionary of Names of Chinese Women' (Changchun, 1989), 38. Her style name is said to be Xuemei 雪梅.

¹⁶² Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 294.

¹⁶³ Weider, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 94-6.

¹⁶⁴ Yuan, *Chinese Women's Dictionary*, 358.

¹⁶⁵ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 95.

¹⁶⁶ *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tu mu*, vol.11, 60.

¹⁶⁷ *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tu mu*, vol. 6, 222.

¹⁶⁸ Yuan Shaoying, *Chinese Women's Dictionary*, 358.

¹⁶⁹ Mann, *Precious Records*, 139.

Among Ma's acquaintances there was the famous literatus and aficionado of the pleasure quarter Chen Jiru. In his own collection of writings, there is the record of an inscription titled 'Inscription on Sister Ma's orchid painting' (Ti Mamei hua lan 題馬妹畫蘭). The first noteworthy observation is that Chen used the word 'young sister' *mei* to address the courtesan, so as to indicate a certain level of intimacy between the two, who certainly knew each other. Moreover, in the inscription Chen maintained that 'Lady Ma¹⁷⁰ is a talent of the boudoir and a famous prostitute, she has such a sex appeal!' (馬郎以閨秀名娼，風流乃爾).¹⁷¹ This confirms that boundaries between the *guixiu* 'talent of the boudoir', an expression usually attributed to gentry women, and courtesans could be blurred; thus it demonstrates the need of new definitions for someone like Ma Shouzhen.

Inscriptions often suggest a social tie and at times even artistic collaboration, as in the case of a long handscroll attributed to Ma Shouzhen, of which cursive inscription by Wang Zhideng confirms the authorship (ill. 59). The scroll, now in the National Palace Museum, represents double outlined orchids with elegant and long floating leaves; the flower plants growing amongst rocks on the ground, next to small grasses and other vegetation. The composition, all rendered in black ink, conveys a sense of movement due to the moving line of the ground which appears slightly in the first portion of the scroll, then sinks down the lower edge of the scroll to subsequently reappear in the last third of the scroll, when it raises up to the upper-left corner. The hepta-syllabic quatrain by Wang (ill. 59d) reads:

Deep into the autumn, rouge-and-powder buildings in a rain thin like

¹⁷⁰ *Lang* usually refers to 'young man, husband, male lover', Ōki, *Shan'ge*, 418.

¹⁷¹ Chen Jiru 陳繼儒, *Chen Meigong quanji* 陳眉公全集 'Complete Collection of Chen Meigong's Work', in *Guoxue jiben wenku* (Shanghai, 1936), vol. 2, 185.

dust.

The brush-pot, the scroll and the paperweight guard their mutual affection.

One brush writes the calligraphy, while Xiang praises their shadows.
As if fairies walked over ripples, while dispelling jade ornaments to people.

Composed in the leap month of the *renchen* year [1593] while sitting in the rain by the side of the building. I look at Lady Ma's painted orchids and quickly write this for fun.

秋老妝樓雨似塵。

筆牀書卷鎮相親。

一枝寫出湘皋影。

仿佛凌波解珮人。

癸巳閏月齋頭坐雨。閱馬姬畫蘭走筆戲題。王穉登。

This scroll can be considered a collaborative work in which Ma expressed her recognised talent in painting orchids while Wang displayed his poetic skills and calligraphic style. The painting reified their tie and made their relationship visible on the surface of the scroll, a relationship which was well known to the Jiangnan community of literati and also publicised by a drama which satirised it.¹⁷² Nonetheless, it is hard to establish whether the collaboration of this scroll happened diachronically or synchronically, as much as it is hard to say whether it was made in the same place or in two different venues. The scroll represents a social space which is shared by the two; the painting or the action of painting is shared as emblem of their social and intimate connection. Although the space on the scroll taken by Ma Shouzhen is far bigger and more visible than the one taken by Wang, there is a possible implied hierarchy, which is aesthetic as well as social: calligraphy is more valuable than painting, in the same way in which Wang is socially more important than the courtesan, regardless of how skilful she is. This painting is an interesting case of collaboration in which it is Wang Zhideng's inscription to attribute the authorship of the painting to Ma Shouzhen, who otherwise

¹⁷² See Chapter Five.

did not leave a signature. In doing so, Wang reiterates his powerful position and his ability to claim authenticity.

An exceptional instance of social space shared through painting and inscribing is a Ma Shouzhen painted fan with a single brush orchid plant timidly growing by a rock and a double outlined small bamboo (ill. 60). As mentioned above fans – both round and folding ones – were used as accessories equally by men and women; they were highly requested at court with frames in precious materials such as jade and ivory, as well as they were used by Buddhist monks and were symbolically adopted in ceremonies such as weddings.¹⁷³ Fans were painted and inscribed by both female and male painters, so their uses and functions do not seem to have a specific gendered feature. However, fans were in some circumstances strongly associated to women, their behaviours and practice. For instance female dancers used fans during their performances (as Ma Shouzhen also says in her play, see Chapter Five) and often women were depicted holding a fan (ill. 49); this could have been a visual reference to the story of Concubine Ban, a court lady who was refused by the emperor and expressed her resentment in a poem on a fan.¹⁷⁴ Further research on the gendered meanings and uses of fans in Chinese history would benefit the understanding of these multi-functional objects.

The fan, now at the Palace Museum in Beijing, is attributed to the courtesan as it carries her seals Yuejiao *in rilievo* (*zhuwen* 朱文) and Jiuwan Zhongren ‘the person in the nine fields of orchids’ *in intaglio* (*baiwen* 白文). There are eight inscriptions on the 16.3 x 50 centimetres of paper, none of which is by Ma Shouzhen, but by: the later

¹⁷³ Tsang, *More than keeping cool*, 11-13.

¹⁷⁴ Laing, ‘Erotic themes and Romantic Heroines’, 73-5.

Qing dynasty Zi Yong 子庸 (1793–1846), Chuguang 光初 and Wen Zhifang 文之芳, who could have been contemporaries although this remains undocumented; the other five calligraphies are by identifiable contemporaries, namely Wang Zhideng, the famous playwright Liang Chenyu, the abovementioned painter of orchids and bamboo Du Dashou, the famed calligrapher and painter Mo Shilong,¹⁷⁵ and the gentleman An Shaofang 安紹芳 (1511–1579) who was grandson of An Guo 安國 (1481–1534) a rich merchant, collector and art connoisseur.¹⁷⁶ Besides the already known bond with Wang Zhideng, questions are raised as to whether Ma knew these other men, and in that case what kind of relationship they entertained. Even if the fan is undated, the fact that An Shaofang inscribed the fan helps to date it to before his death in 1579. The relationship between Ma Shouzhen and Liang Chenyu is key to investigating the courtesan's inclusion in the making and performance of theatre which will be discussed in Chapter Six. Liang was very likely a friend of Ma Shouzhen's and a tune composed for the courtesan in 1573, which gives us a date for their acquaintance.¹⁷⁷ As previously seen, she wrote a preface for his *chuanqi*,¹⁷⁸ and, moreover, he wrote a poem on her fan:

In Jinling [Nanjing] there is a young courtesan who is very skilled with the brush;
Orchids and their tender leaves are born in the autumn wind.
Where is the most heartbreaking place to miss someone?
For long it has been in the spitting rain in the Chang'an alley.
金陵小姬筆札工，蘭枝葉葉生秋風。
懷人何處最腸斷，多在長干細雨中。¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Style name Yunqing tinghan 雲卿廷韓, DMB, 1073.

¹⁷⁶ Style name Maoqing 懋卿, DMB, 9-10.

¹⁷⁷ The subtitle says it was made in the autumn of 1573 thinking about Ma Xianglan, see Liang Chenyu 梁辰魚, *Xu Jiangdong bai zhu* 續江東白苧 'Sequel to Jiangnan White Ramie', 2 juan, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 2.4b.

¹⁷⁸ Ma Shouzhen, 'Hongxian chuanqi xiaoyin', 9.11a-b.

¹⁷⁹ Chang'an is the name of an alley in the east part of Nanjing, in Gu Qiyuan, *Kezuo zhuiyu*, 131.

The inscription by Du Dashou is also a hepta-syllabic poem on the theme of orchids and their secluded fragrance; Mo Shilong's inscription, which visually dominates the fan by occupying its far left-hand portion, is dedicated to a certain Mr Yuyan 玉淵, and so are those by Wen Zhifang and An Shaofang. This might indicate that the painting was in Yuyan's collection or was given to him as a present by a group of friends, and also that probably Wang Zhideng, Liang Chenyu and Du Dashou wrote their inscription at a different moment as they did not mention Yuyan.¹⁸⁰

Ma Shouzhen was close to Wang Zhideng and Liang Chenyu and very likely knew the other literati who inscribed the above fan, as they were in the same social network as Wang Zhideng and Zhou Tianqiu; in fact, Mo Shilong and Du Dashou too inscribed Zhou's long orchid scroll discussed above. On another undated handscroll (ill. 61), now in the collection of the Jilin Provincial Museum, Ma Shouzhen's inscription appears next to one written by Wen Zhenheng, author of the 'Treatise on Superfluous Things' and member of the Suzhou family Wen, whose members seemed to have appreciated the courtesan. Wen Zhenheng, who was particularly interested in taste and fashion, described Ma as 'in the world of fashion she is/was the most extraordinary' (風裊苑內英華第一人). In this case it is hard to establish whether Wen Zhenheng, who was almost forty years younger than Ma Shouzhen, personally knew the courtesan or added the inscription in a context which excluded Ma, possibly even after her death.

¹⁸⁰ There is a partial transcription of the inscriptions in He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 69. I was able to obtain a low-res image from the Palace Museum in Beijing, some characters are yet not legible.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed different aspects of Ma's painting practice and production. Starting from a presentation of the formal aspects of her oeuvre, the investigation of her painted subject matter has led through a discussion about the complexity of the visuality and cultural significance of orchids, bamboo and rocks. This has revealed the need for a nuanced understanding of expressions of gendered subjectivity in relation to the representation of male/female and masculine/feminine attributes in Chinese visual culture. There is a degree of negotiation and appropriation of those attributes and representations, and the case of Ma Shouzhen's painting emphasises the importance of the *yin* and the 'feminine' in the expression of the self during the late Ming period. At the same time, in adopting the visual tropes which were traditionally male, Ma Shouzhen embedded her work in the literati tradition of painting, and suggested a need to re-evaluate the legacy of the woman painter Guan Daosheng.

This chapter has demonstrated that painting (both the practice and the painted object) is a space which can be used to craft and display the self. Not only the subject matter carries a self-expressional value, but inscriptions are crucial to understanding the autobiographical statement on the surface of the painting. In the case of Ma Shouzhen, inscriptions have three main functions: first, they have a descriptive function as they reveal information about the time and space of the creation of the piece; second, an autobiographical one as they are used to fashion the self; third, a social function as they display social relationships. Here it is useful to follow Joan Scott in thinking of 'gender as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived

differences between the sexes, and gender as a primary way of signifying relationships of power'.¹⁸¹ With this in mind, it is easier to understand the deployment of Ma Shouzhen's style name and the display of gendered appellatives such as 'female younger brother' (*nüdi*) and 'literata' (*nüshi*) as visible expressions of her gendered self on the surface of the painting.

At the same time, paintings could have a further social function and could be used as gifts. Thus, on the surface of the painting Ma Shouzhen could reify, define and make visible her social relationships. Moreover, her contemporaries could in turn display their appreciation for the courtesan and their social bond by leaving inscriptions on her paintings. This exchange of gifts (the paintings, the inscriptions, the performance of the courtesan and the literatus) enhanced both sides' visibility and functioned as a mutual strategy of self-fashioning. Painting and calligraphy were shared leisure activities and intellectual pursuits of the cultural elite, as well as being part of the courtesan's artistic and social performance. Even if many of the recipients of Ma's works remain still unknown, her paintings are today precious tools at the scholar's disposal because they reveal the names of people who belonged to her social networks and provide information about the modes of expression of those social relationships.

This chapter has established that Ma Shouzhen, through her painting, exerted agency in the surrounding milieu in different ways: contemporary literati interacted with her paintings by discussing them and inscribing them, while some others received them as gifts; at the same time, Ma established a model for the courtesan painter, and

¹⁸¹ Scott, 'Gender', 1067.

contemporary courtesans were compared to her or were said to imitate her painting style. Ma Shouzhen's friends, acquaintances and lovers, as the next chapter will further illustrate, represented her access to a cultural realm which was off-limits for the majority of women. They also contributed to the promotion of her work as a painter, poet and performer. Yet, in the study of Ma Shouzhen and the complexities of her character, painting cannot be considered alone as her only activity, but rather it has to be seen as one of several tools she used to enhance her visibility, her social and cultural capital, and to express her self in social and gendered terms. The other tools at her (and our) disposal will be investigated in the following chapters.

Chapter Four

Rewriting the Courtesan: The Boudoir, Feelings and Sociability

4.1 From painting to poetry

As discussed in Chapter Three, Ma Shouzhen embraced the literati tradition and combined painting with poetry. Yet, she practised poetry independently from painting and there are around eighty individual poems attributed to her, sixty-six of which form her own poetry collection (*bieji*) (see table 5).¹ The majority of her compositions, including those on paintings, are in the form of *shi* ‘lyric poems’, but she also authored *ci* ‘song lyrics’ which were meant to be sung. *Shi* is the traditional name for a poetic composition since the *Shijing*; it traditionally functioned as a non-fictional representation of the world through the eyes of the poet.² However, this chapter will show that poetry was used as a sophisticated strategy for the display of the self and of social relationships. In Ma’s oeuvre most of her compositions are hepta-syllabic ‘regulated verses’ (*lüshi* 律诗) made of four couplets, but she also wrote several ‘quatrain’ poems (*jueju* 絕句) with only two couplets of five or seven characters, and as well composed longer poems classified as ‘long *lüshi*’ (*pailü* 排律).³

¹ The listed titles in table 5 are from the index of the collection, yet it is germane to notice that sometimes they slightly differ from the titles produced within the text. Moreover, in the Taipei copy of Ma’s *bieji* a paging confusion seems to have occurred in the second section, in which the order of poems does not follow the one announced in the index. It has also to be said that a precise total count of Ma’s poems is hard to give since many stanzas were reproduced individually and that the poems appear at times with different titles and variations.

² See on the *Shijing* and *shi* poetry until the Song dynasty in Victor Mair H. ed., *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York, 2001), 97-109; 249-369; Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton, 1987), 31-7.

³ Such as Ma Shouzhen, ‘Tianxiangguan yongyu’ 天香館用韻 ‘Rhyming at the Tianxiang Pavilion’, in Zhong Xing, *Mingyuan shigui*, 28.17a.

Ma Shouzhen wrote about fifteen *ci*. The tradition of *ci* dates back to the late Tang or Southern Song dynasty when the genre flourished; song lyrics are compositions made for musical tunes with prefixed rhyme patterns, usually they are written in a more informal style than *shi*, with recurrent repetitions and dialogues, and composed to be sung and performed.⁴ The term *ci* can encompass different genres of song lyrics, such as ‘individual or dispersed arias’ (*sanqu* 散曲); they usually employed vernacular language in a wide range of subjects and were sung accompanied by a musical instrument.⁵ There is a strong association between *ci*, music and courtesanship since the Tang dynasty; *ci* ‘song lyrics’, which partly developed from folk songs within the pleasure quarters, were an essential part of the performance of the courtesan, who staged or improvised songs also written by themselves.⁶ In the Ming dynasty, courtesans such as Ma Shouzhen were appreciated creators of *ci* and *sanqu*, and functioned as catalysts in the transmission of new songs. The literatus Feng Menglong, for example, wrote about having heard the folk songs of his ‘Mountain Songs’ (*Shan’ge* 山歌) in the pleasure quarters.⁷

The only retrievable copy available of Ma Shouzhen’s individual poetry collection is included in the 1595 printed edition of Zhou Lüjing’s anthology ‘Vanity Case Poetry’ *Xiang lian shi* 香奩詩, edited by Zhou Lüjing. On the first folio it says ‘Pingkang Ma Xianglan’s poetry collection’ (*Pingkang Ma Xianglan shi ji* 平康馬湘蘭詩集). Zhou Lüjing collaborated as respondent (*ciyun* 次韻) to seven of her rhymes in the first section, and

⁴ On *ci* see Stuart Sargent, ‘Tz’u’, in Mair, *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, 314-36.

⁵ Chang, *Women Writers*, 809-11.

⁶ See Kang I-sun Chang, *The Evolution of Tz’u Poetry: from Late T’ang to Northern Sung* (Princeton; Guildford, 1980), 10.

⁷ On Ming courtesans’ performance of *ci* see Zeitlin, ‘Notes of Flesh’, 75-102; Ōki, *Shan’ge*, 18-19; see more in Chapter Five.

acted as editor and publisher (*jiaozi* 校梓) for the second section.⁸ Zhou himself owned a publishing house called 'Idle Clouds Atelier' (*Xianyun guan* 閒雲館),⁹ and thus it is possible that Ma's collection was published by his atelier.¹⁰

The courtesan's *bieji* was quoted in other sources with different titles, for instance it is called *Xianglanzi ji* 湘蘭子集 'Collection of Master Xianglan' in *Liechao shiji* where there is quoted the preface signed by Wang Zhideng and dated 1591 – which is the date thus assigned to the collection. The preface, which does not appear in the Taipei copy,¹¹ describes Ma's poetry as follows:

You cannot say [her poetry] is soft at the stem, as her lyrics are elegant like white snow (*baixue*).¹² How can it be said that [her poetry] is meek and languid?¹³ Her talent dares erudition (*qingxiang*). Already [she caused] a rise in the price of paper in the city, [I] fear and worry for the jujube timbers in the mountain forests. So, people underneath the tassels of the canopy bed, open [her poetry] and peep [at] it until late at night; in front of the jade mirror table, they intone [her verses] up until dawn when the mist entangles in trees. Why Xue Tao from the Brocade River [Chengdu] alone is regarded as a 'scribe' (*piaoshu*)? How is only Du Wei from Jinchang [Suzhou] to move the intestines of the governors?

不謂柔曼，詞兼白雪；豈云窈窕，才擅青箱。既高都市之紙價，遑惜山林之棗材。俾流蘇帳底，披之而夜月窺人；玉鏡臺前，諷之而朝煙縈樹。奚特錦江之薛濤，標書記之目；詎止金閨杜韋，惱刺史之腸而已哉！¹⁴

It is noticeable from the above that Wang Zhideng evaluated Ma Shouzhen's poetry mainly using two criteria: first by highlighting its non-feminine quality and associating her poetry with that of the male scholar since her talent came from the *qingxiang* 青箱,

⁸ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 1.1a; 2.1a.

⁹ Park, *Art by the Book*, 51.

¹⁰ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, mulu 1a.

¹¹ *Liechao shiji* is possibly the first source to reproduce the preface Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.68a-b.

¹² *Baixue* is also the name of a zither tune and of a poem, but it generally indicates sophisticated poetry, HYDCD, 8-192B.

¹³ Adjectives typically associated with women.

¹⁴ See alternative translation in Chang, *Women Writers*, 738.

a case in which literati usually kept their collection of books, texts and paintings.¹⁵ Second, Wang inserted Ma into a female, and more specifically courtesan's, tradition of poetry represented by the acclaimed and prolific Tang courtesan Xue Tao 薛濤 (768–c.832),¹⁶ contemporary of the less known courtesan Du Wei 杜韋.¹⁷ The title of collator or scribe, in Chinese *jiaoshu* 教書 (or *piaoshu*), was an official appointment which, according to Xue Tao's biography, she obtained from the governor of Sichuan.¹⁸ However, it was also attributed to or self-employed by cultured women and courtesans to express their erudition, as for instance the courtesan Xue Susu designated herself 'female collator' (*nü jiaoshu* 女教書).¹⁹ Not only Ma's poetry was recognised as belonging to a female legacy of writing, but Wang Zhideng also envisaged a female readership for Ma's poems, as he implied women readers as those 'in front of the jade mirror table' (*yujing tai* 玉鏡臺), meaning the dressing table used by women in their boudoir.

Wang Zhideng supported the publication of Ma Shouzhen's poetry by writing the preface that likely augmented its authority, and this must have been his marketing strategy also for other courtesans. He wrote prefaces for the individual collections of Xue Susu and Jing Pianpian,²⁰ besides possibly having promoted less known Nanjing

¹⁵ *Qingxiang* see HYDCD, 11-554A.

¹⁶ On Xue Tao see Chang, *Women Writers*, 59-76; and Idema, *The Red Brush*, 182-189; for more on Xue see Jeanne Larsen trans., *Brocade River Poems: Selected Works of the Tang Dynasty Courtesan Xue Tao* (Princeton, 1987).

¹⁷ Du Wei is also the name of a late Ming *mingji* who was probably too minor to be famous by the time the preface was written. See Barr, 'The Wanli Context', 127.

¹⁸ Chang, *Women Writers*, 60. On *jiaoshu* see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, 1985), n. 4615.

¹⁹ Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 85.

²⁰ On Xue Susu see Xu Shumin, *Zhong xiang ci*, shuji, 12a; on Jing Pianpian, Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 24.8a.

courtesans, such as Hao Wenzhu 郝文珠 of the Pearl Market (see Chapter Two)²¹ and Ma Ruyu 馬如玉 of the Southern Market, who despite coming from less respected pleasure quarters both had their individual collections published (Ma Ruyu had in fact three according to Hu Wenkai).²²

In *Xu Jinling suoshi*, the sequel of the previously quoted *ketan* ('random conversation with guests') 'Trivia about Nanjing', the literatus Zhou Hui in a section titled 'collected poetry' (*shiji* 詩集) listed the collections of 133 poets, possibly those he believed to be noteworthy, and included towards the end of the list two courtesans' collections: 'the Old Compound courtesan Ma Shouzhen, style name Xianglan, "Lady Ma's Poetry"' (舊院妓馬守真，號湘蘭，《馬姬詩》) and 'the Old Compound courtesan Zhu Wuxia, "Embroidered Buddha Studio Collection"' (舊院妓朱無瑕，《繡佛齋稿》).²³ This last document further raises uncertainty about the title of Ma's collection, which was possibly published with different titles or became known with different names. Although many of Ma's poems, also from her collection, were reproduced in anthologies from the seventeenth century onwards and circulated widely as late Ming literati mentioned and commented on them, it is possible that *Ma Xianglan shiji* was not very widely printed or re-printed. This consideration is based upon the fact that, besides having been published in the abovementioned 'Vanity Case Poetry', the collection was only included as 'Lady Ma's Poetry' (*Ma ji shi* 馬姬詩) in the collection 'Poetry by the Four Ladies of the Qinhuai' (*Qinhuai si ji shi* 秦淮四姬詩) edited by Mao Yuchang 冒譽昌, previously

²¹ From *Xu Jinling suoshi* in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 152.

²² From *Zhong xiang ci* in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 158.

²³ Zhou Hui, *Xu Jinling suoshi*, 251.

mentioned as Mao Bolin.²⁴ Subsequently Ma's poetry collection as a whole was probably not reproduced integrally again, and today copies of it are extremely rare.

In Ma Shouzheng's poetry it is possible to identify three major kinds of poems according to their main function: occasional poems written to remember a specific moment, such as departures and festivities; lyrical poems composed principally for expressing her feelings and emotions, often inspired by the surroundings; social poems, the main purpose of which was to display and seal a social relationship. Poems were in fact often dedicated to a specific recipient and given as a gift to people, in the same way in which paintings were. Poetry was for courtesans and other cultured women an intellectual pursuit, a creative product, a strategy of self-fashioning and, as Grace Fong has suggested, a 'technology of self-representation'.²⁵ The last two expressions are similar since they both stem from post-structuralist theories,²⁶ yet while 'technology of self-representation' emphasises the need to express the self and the ways in which those expressions take place, self-fashioning puts greater importance on the idea of a constructed self. As this chapter will demonstrate, poetry was for Ma Shouzheng a strategic tool in the practice of self-fashioning, which she used to shape her social persona and build social ties.²⁷

²⁴ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 844 (as part of the latest appendix added in the 2008 edition). I could not retrieve the original source.

²⁵ Poetry as a women's 'technology of self-representation' has been discussed in Fong Grace, 'Writing and Illness: A Feminine Condition in Women's Poetry of the Ming and Qing', in Idem ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond* (Leiden; Boston, 2010), 19.

²⁶ Stephen Greenblatt is heavily informed by the theories of Clifford Geertz see Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, 258-9; while Grace Fong, although not explicitly, might have referred to the expression 'technologies of the self' used by Foucault in his late discussions on the genealogy of the self, see Michel Foucault (Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton eds.), *Technologies of the Self: a Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London, 1988), 16-49.

²⁷ See on women's engagement with the 'public' through writing in Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, esp. 136-142.

Ma Shouzhen's poetry has not received much scholarly attention, possibly due to the fact that the secondary scholarship has considered it of mediocre quality. The present research is not concerned in assessing the literary value of Ma's poetic, but seeks to understand how the courtesan employed poetry as a means of self-expression and a strategy of self-fashioning. Despite the fact that a women-centred scholarship in both English and Chinese continues to grow and contribute to the fields of history and literature, as Grace Fong has recently pointed out, there is a lack of research on individual Chinese women writers of the imperial era.²⁸ Thus this chapter will contribute to sinological studies by reevaluating Ma Shouzhen's poetry, translating and offering a critical reading of fifteen selected poems (twelve *shi* and three *ci*). These have been chosen as representative of the main thematic and compositional patterns of her poetic production.²⁹ At the same time, by employing the concepts of gender and self-fashioning, the present chapter will emphasise the role of poetry in the expression of gendered subjectivity, the construction of the self and of social networks.

The chapter will offer an overview of the anthologies which collected and published Ma's poems; it will provide critical comments about her poetry found in the late Ming and Qing sources and place them against the backdrop of a new rise of women's writing and its critical reception. The following two sections will identify and discuss two of the major themes of Ma's *shi* poetry, namely the space of the boudoir, and the theme of parting, which will also be seen through a letter she addressed to Wang Zhideng. The subsequent section will focus on 'social poems' and will highlight the networking function of poetry used as a display of a social relationship. The penultimate part of the

²⁸ Fong, *The Inner Quarters and Beyond*, 7-9.

²⁹ This chapter will not discuss rhyme patterns, the analysis of which goes beyond the scope of the thesis.

chapter will select three *ci* poems and discuss their content in relation to Ma's *shi* poetry and the construction of the erotic allure of the courtesan. There are other minor themes which could be drawn from Ma's poetry and require further investigation, such as the *topoi* of travelling and illness; however, this chapter aims to provide an overview of Ma's poetry, delineate the major tropes in her poetic work and use them to investigate the ways in which she displayed her gendered self as well as her social networks.

4.2 Anthologising and publishing Ma Shouzhen's poetry

Ma Shouzhen was appreciated as a poet during her lifetime and in the following eras, as demonstrated by her inclusion in anthologies of women's poetry from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Her poetry was incorporated to Ming collections which were all edited by a (male) literatus, such as 'Sources for Poetry by Famous Women' *Mingyuan shigui* 名媛詩歸 attributed to the scholar-official Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574–1624) and possibly published around 1600.³⁰ This included six titles by Ma and was published perhaps at the end of the courtesan's life, while the majority of the available sources date from a later period, such as the collection of poetry by 180 courtesans from the Jin 晉 dynasty (265–420): 'Stylish Verses from the Green Bowers' *Qinglou yunyu*, with preface dated 1616, edited by Zhang Mengzheng 張夢徵 and Zhu Yuanliang 朱元亮, both active in the Wanli period (1572–1620).³¹ Although unusual for a poetry collection, *Qinglou yunyu* included also twelve woodblock printed illustrations, one of which represents Ma Shouzhen, who appears in the anthology with her style

³⁰ Zhong Xing 鍾惺 ed., *Mingyuan shigui* 名媛詩歸 'Return of Poetry by Famous Ladies', 36 *juan* (printed edition, 1621–1644) [accessed via McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project, Harvard Yenching Library ID: T 5237.07/8191]; see Chang, *Women Writers*, 739.

³¹ Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu*; see one of the prefaces translated in Chang, *Women Writers*, 744-6 where the word *yun* is translated as 'stylish'.

name Yuejiao, but the excerpt of her poetic text inserted in the image identifies her as Xianglan (ill. 62).³² This illustration is a very precious document, not only because it highlights the importance of illustrated books in the late Ming printing boom,³³ but also because representations of Ma Shouzhen are rare, and this is the closest one in time to her lifespan.

The woodblock printed image shows a garden scene in which the space is defined by natural (water stream, rocks and trees) and architectural elements, such as balustrades, a table and a bridge which connects the garden to the outside space and on which two servants carry fruit and other things possibly to Ma Shouzhen and her guests. In the right lower corner of the garden there is a stylised image of a woman playing the zither; her hair is in a bun on the top of her head and her elegant clothes consist of a plain upper garment and a patterned skirt. The woman is nobody else but courtesan Ma, since in the poem to which the image refers (and which is translated below) Ma Shouzhen mentions playing the instrument. Her audience is made up of three men sitting at a table, on top of which there are three cups, two little plates, a wine vessel and a little vase with flowers. The men are possibly scholars and officials of different grades: two of them wear square hats usually wore by older officials, and one of them has a headdress with two lateral ribbons (ill. 63). The man on the right has his hands elegantly raised as if to suggest a singing gesture. The evident split of the image into two folios could be read as an implied separation between the three men and the courtesan,

³² The inclusion of images differs according to the edition of *Qinglou yunyu*. Zhang Mengzheng 張夢徵 and Zhu Yuanliang 朱元亮 eds., *Qinglou yunyu* 青樓韻語 'Stylish Verses from the Green Buildings', 4 *juan*, in *Zhongguo gudai banhua congkan* (Shanghai, 1994) is based on the reproduction of original Ming woodblock printed edition in the Bodleian Collection (ref: BOD Chin.d.7382/4) which includes all the twelve images and the index is organised by author in chronological order; whereas the Beijing 1935 edition encompasses only six images and the index is organised by poetic themes.

³³ Park, *Art by the Book*, 101-2, 104-8.

a separation which could be intended in terms of both gender and social place, especially if we consider that the servants are on the same page as Ma Shouzhen. The text in the right middle edge of the right-hand folio is an excerpt of the poem that Ma Shouzhen dedicated to a certain Chen Ruwen 程孺文. The image created in the poem is in turn evoked by the visual elements of the illustration:

‘Rhyming with Chen Ruwen’

A stone bridge on the flowing water, it is to entertain the passer-byes;
At the spring warmth the flowers blossom, pleasing the guests passing by.
Jade cups³⁴ slowly fly, while the moon grows on the Qinhuai,
In turn the brocade-adorned zither executes an elegant tune.
和程孺文
石橋流水是行窩，春暖花開喜客過。
玉斗謾飛淮浦月，錦箏還趁郢人歌。

Around the same time in which Ma Shouzhen appeared in *Qinglou yunyu*, she was also included in the collection of women’s poetry ‘Famous Women’s Collected Poetry’ *Mingyuan huishi* 名媛彙詩, edited by Zheng Wenang 鄭文昂 and published in 1620.³⁵ A few years later her poems appeared in a collection which has been very little studied so far: the 1623 ‘Selection of Collected Works from the Brothels of Past and Present’ *Gujin qinglou ji xuan* 古今青樓集選 edited by Zhou Gongfu 周公輔.³⁶ During the Chongzhen 崇禎 era (1628–1644) Ma was then included in a better known anthology: Zhao Shijie’s *Gujin nüshi*, also published under the name of ‘Collected Works by Women of All Times’

³⁴ Drinking cup with two ‘ears’ (*er*), meaning the handles.

³⁵ Zheng Wenang 鄭文昂, *Mingyuan huishi* 名媛彙詩 ‘Famous Women’s Collected Poetry’, 20 *juan* (Zhang Zhengyue edition, 1620) [accessed via McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women’s Writings Digitization Project, Harvard Yenching Library ID: T 5237.07/8206], 12.15a.

³⁶ Zhou Gongfu 周公輔, *Gujin qinglou ji xuan* 古今青樓集選 ‘Selection of Collected Works from the Brothels of Past and Present’, 4 *juan*, (printed edition, 1623) [microfilm accessed at the Rare Books Dept, National Library of China, Beijing, cat n. 12815], 19a-21a, 30a, 49-51a; the only secondary research to have mentioned, but not discussed in depth this source is Sufeng Xu, ‘The Rhetoric of Legitimation: Prefaces to Women’s Poetry Collections from the Song to the Ming’, *NanNü: Men, Women, and Gender in China*, 2.52 (2006), 273.

Lidai nüzi wenji 歷代女子文集.³⁷ Just after the dynastic turn, three of Ma's poems were reproduced in the comprehensive work 'Collection of Poetry of All Times' *Liechao shiji*, edited by the celebrated historian Qian Qianyi. The fourth and last section titled *Runji* 閨集 is dedicated to women poets and was likely edited by Liu Rushi, the talented wife of Qian Qianyi and previously a *mingji*.³⁸ This is likely one of the reasons why great attention had been paid to courtesan poets, who constitute more than one-third of the women poets listed in the collection.³⁹

The gentry woman Wang Duanshu 王端淑 (1621–1685?), herself a poet and painter, included Ma Shouzhen in her anthology of women's writing 'Complementary Canon of Poetry by Notable Women' published in 1667;⁴⁰ after a short biographical entry on Ma, Wang Duanshu added:

Liudu [Nanjing] was the place for entertainment where people from every place in the east and west travelled to. Famous people gathered [there] extraordinary and refined people. [Ma] Xianglan was the most famous of her time, though she was in the [realm of] mist and flowers (*yanhua*) not for her own will. Today, where there were the courtesan houses with their bamboo balustrades, there are pumpkin fields, but people travelling there still remember the past beauties, alas her name is still famous! [Her] poems express talent (*cai*) and feelings (*qing*); because trained by [Wang] Baigu, she herself reached [in poetry] the same kind of fragrant spirit (*xiangqi*).

留都稱金粉福地，而東西兩院為四方游冶。名人輻輳，豪靡極矣。湘蘭擅名一時，雖處煙花，非其志也。今花樓竹欄夷為瓜田，而行路之人猶艷稱之，噫名之於人甚矣哉。詩有才情，為百谷熏陶，自是此種香氣。⁴¹

³⁷ Zhao Shijie, *Gujin nüshi*; see also Chang, 'Ming and Qing Anthologies', 151-2.

³⁸ On Liu Rushi as editor see Berg, *Female Self-fashioning*, 268-76.

³⁹ Out of 300 women poets listed 119 are courtesans, see index in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 32-9.

⁴⁰ On Wang Duanshu see Ellen Widmer, 'Ming Loyalty and the Woman's Voice in Fiction after Hongloumeng', in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997), 366-96; Fong, *Herself an Author*, 138-42.

⁴¹ Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 38.4b.

In this passage Wang Duanshu expressed her appreciation for Ma's poetry and justified her courtesan status as bondage against her will. Wang Duanshu suggested that Ma was either trained by Wang Zhideng in writing poems or, in a different reading of the verb *hunxun* 熏陶 'to polish', that he edited her poems. Although there is no direct evidence of Wang's intervention in Ma's poems, we know that he promoted her poetry, also by writing the preface to her personal collection.⁴²

Yet, not all comments about Ma's poetry are positive. In the late Ming text *Yujing yangqiu* 玉鏡陽秋 quoted by Hu Wenkai, there is a very negative remark:

What I dislike the most is 'Lady Ma's collection'; the regulated poems are extremely shallow and vulgar, but her quatrains [are better] such as 'Wine is something to dispel grief, but how many hours can it dispel for?', as the official Zhou Liyuan [Lianggong]⁴³ said, it is like [those] little poems you buy today [find] at the market, not enough to be appreciated.

余最不喜馬姬詩，律詩既多膚俗，即其絕句如酒是銷物，能銷愁幾個時，為周櫟園侍郎所稱，亦似近代市小詞，不足賞也。⁴⁴

The same late Ming text, in the section on the contemporary courtesan-poet Jing Pianpian, took the opportunity to deprecate Ma Shouzhen's poetry and stated:

In the pleasure quarter of the Ming dynasty there were notable ladies who became famous for their poetry skills, the most excellent one was Sanmei [Jing Pianpian] and the worst was Ma Xianglan.

明代北里名姬，以能詩著稱者，當以三昧為最優，馬湘蘭為最劣。⁴⁵

In the late seventeenth century other collections included Ma's poems and song lyrics, such as *Zhongxiang ci* 眾香詞 edited by Xu Shumin 徐樹敏 together with Qian Yue 錢嶽

⁴² See the translation of the initial paragraph of the preface in Chapter Two. For an integral translation see also Chang, *Women Writers*, 737-8.

⁴³ Zhou Lianggong 周亮工 (1612–1672) was a famous Nanjing scholar and collector who lived later than Ma, on him see Hongnam Kim, *The Life of a Patron: Zhou Lianggong (1612–1672) and the Painters of Seventeenth-Century China* (New York, 1996); it is interesting to notice that the author has located Ma Shouzhen's residence in the Nanjing city map, yet the precise location is shown in map 2.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 152.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 174.

and published in 1690;⁴⁶ and two extensive collections of Ming poetry: *Ming shi zong* 明詩綜 edited by the early Qing literatus Zhu Yizun and *Ming ci zong* 明詞綜 by Wang Chang 王昶 (1724–1806).⁴⁷ Two of Ma's *shi* poems made it to the imperial encyclopaedia 'Complete Collection of Illustrations and Writings of All Times' *Gujin tushu jicheng* completed in 1725: 'Autumn boudoir song' (*Qiu gui qu* 秋閨曲)⁴⁸ and 'The parrot' (*Yingwu* 鸚鵡)⁴⁹ were respectively included in the section on women's poetry and in the one dedicated specifically to parrots. The encyclopaedia did not designate a section to courtesans' poems as they were included among gentry women's poetry; nonetheless Ma's name, similarly to those of other courtesans, is followed by the phrase 'Nanjing courtesan' (*Jinling ji*) as if to inform or remind the reader that her social provenance was different from that of gentry women. Interestingly, in the parrot section, Ma's poem is recorded among others on the same theme by male poets, where she is placed just before the celebrated poet-painter-official Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427–1509); yet, in this instance Ma Shouzhen is not specified to be either a woman or a courtesan, as if to suggest that when discussing poetry, rather than women's poetry, such a detail could be omitted.

⁴⁶ Xu Shumin 徐樹敏 and Qian Yue 錢嶽 eds., *Zhong xiang ci* 眾香詞 (Jinshutang edition, 1690) [microfilm accessed at the Rare Books Dept, National Library of China, Beijing, cat. n. 01382].

⁴⁷ Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊, *Ming shi zong* 明詩綜 'Ming Poems Anthology', in *Zhonghua shuju* (Beijing, 2007), 98, 4528; Wang Chang 王昶, *Ming ci zong* 明詞綜 'Ming Song Lyrics Anthology', in *Xin shiji wanyou wenku* (Shenyang, 1997), 12.179.

⁴⁸ Ma Shouzhen 馬守貞, 'Qiu gui qu' 秋閨曲 'Autumn boudoir song' in, *Gujin tushu jicheng*, 396 冊, 15 卷, 170.

⁴⁹ Ma Shouzhen 馬守貞, 'Yingwu' 鸚鵡 'The Parrot', in *Gujin tushu jicheng*, 518 冊, 43 卷, 440.

Many anthologies of women's writing since the Ming dynasty included Ma Shouzhen's poetry, often found under her style names of Ma Xianglan or Ma Yuejiao.⁵⁰ Ming-Qing poetry collections varied in temporal and geographical scope, and many collected poems from previous dynasties and tended to systematise the authors in chronological order.⁵¹ Nevertheless, other rationales such as the genre of poetry could have been used for the internal organization of the collection.⁵² A common concern of the editors, male and female, was to specify the women's provenance and separate courtesans from gentry women: in Wang Duanshu's anthology courtesans are in the 'beauties collection' (*yanji* 艷集),⁵³ and in *Liechao shiji* they are in the subsection called 'fragrant vanity case' (*xianglian* 香奩).⁵⁴ Some anthologies did not make any formal distinctions in the women's social status, but courtesans tended to be grouped together, as in *Mingyuan huishi*; usually the inclusion of short biographies within the texts or in a separate appendix illuminated the reader about the poet's background.⁵⁵

Both male and female editors faced an evident moral issue around the inclusion of what was often considered licentious courtesans' poetry. Male editors rhetorically justified their insertion mainly by referring to the presence of folk and licentious poetry in the *Shijing*,⁵⁶ such as Zhao Shijie at the beginning of his preface for *Gujin nüshi*, who stated:

Confucius arranged the 'Airs of the States'⁵⁷ and said: [poetry] can evocate, can be used for befriending, for observing and to express

⁵⁰ Ma Shouzhen did not make it to the record of courtesans published in 1600 Mei Dingzuo 梅鼎祚 (1549–1618) ed., *Qing ni lianhua ji* 青泥蓮花記 'Records of Lotus Flowers in Dark Mud', 13 *juan*, in *Ziqian shuju* (Beijing, 1909).

⁵¹ Such as *Liechao shiji* and *Gujin nüshi*.

⁵² See Chang, 'Ming and Qing Anthologies'.

⁵³ Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, index 12b-16a; the *juan* 24 and 25 are dedicated to courtesans.

⁵⁴ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 724.

⁵⁵ Unique in the case of *Liechao shiji*, which comes accompanied by a large section on biographies *Liechao Shiji Xiaozhuan*.

⁵⁶ This is the main point of Xu's article, Xu, 'The Rhetoric of Legitimation'.

⁵⁷ Section of the *Shijing* usually called *Guofeng*, rather than *Guo zhi feng*, HYDCD, 3-638A.

laments. He collected verses with style,⁵⁸ he did not discard [those by] the ‘wandering girls’ of the Han and Yangtze Rivers.⁵⁹ Who said that the *Shijing*,⁶⁰ ‘the elegances’⁶¹ and others must have been produced by fair-minded men and upright scholars?

孔子於諸國之風，而謂可以興，可以羣，可以觀，可以怨。采擷有韻之言，不廢江漢游女，誰謂三百篇雅什，必盡出於端人正士。⁶²

The motivations behind anthologising women’s writing by Ming and Qing literati have been recently explored by scholars such as Grace Fong⁶³ and Xu Sufeng, who has suggested that collecting and editing women’s writing can be seen ‘more as opportunities or strategies used by male literati to negotiate and sustain their unofficial power than as genuine efforts to construct a canon of women poets’.⁶⁴ On the other hand, Ming and Qing gentry women editors seemed to have been moved by a more sincere concern for the conservation of women’s writing, yet not without the preoccupation of showing their moral attitude, since in their collections courtesans were often partially or completely excluded.⁶⁵ Courtesans were not included in one of the first anthologies of women’s poetry edited by a woman, the small ‘Their Thoughts’ *Yiren si* 伊人思, by the gentry woman poet Shen Yixiu 沈宜修 (1590–1635), published by her husband Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁 (1589–1649) just after her death in 1636. Shen selected contemporary poetry by notable women (*mingyuan* 名媛) she knew or poetry which had been sent to her by acquaintances, and did not explicitly state why she left out

⁵⁸ *You yun* 有韻 could also simply mean ‘rhymed verses’; see also Chang, *Women Writers*, 745.

⁵⁹ *Younü* 游女 ‘wandering girl’ is another name for prostitutes and courtesans, HYDCD, 5-1498B.

⁶⁰ *Sanbai pian* 三百篇 lit. ‘three hundred odes’ indicates the *Shijing*, HYDCD, 1-193B.

⁶¹ *Ya* 雅 could refer to a part of the *Shijing* on dynastic hymns, HYDCD, 11-819B.

⁶² *Zhao Shijie xu* 趙世杰序 in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 888; see also same text in Xu, ‘The Rhetoric of Legitimation’, 282.

⁶³ Grace S. Fong, ‘Gender and the Failure of Canonization: Anthologizing Women’s Poetry in the Late Ming’, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, 26 (2004), 129-49.

⁶⁴ Xu, ‘The Rhetoric of Legitimation’, 258-9.

⁶⁵ See Robertson, ‘Changing the Subject’, 179-80 and Ellen Widmer, ‘Retrieving the Past: Women Editors and Women’s Poetry, 1636–1941’, in Grace S. Fong ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond* (Leiden; Boston, 2010), 81-105.

courtesans, although she possibly was implying a moral discrimination.⁶⁶ During the Qing there was an increasing moralising attitude towards women, with the promotion of chastity for widows and the official abolition of prostitution, which was banned in 1783;⁶⁷ in this climate the gentry woman Yun Zhu 惲珠 (1771–1833) in her very comprehensive ‘Anthology of Correct Beginnings by Boudoir Talents of our Dynasty’ *Guochao Guixiu zheng shi ji* 國朝閨秀正始集, added after twenty *juan* of women’s poetry a small appendix of thirteen famous courtesans who ‘exited the register’ (*chujingji* 出籍名妓), which included Liu Rushi, Xue Susu, Dong Bai and Li Xiangjun and excluded all those who never got married and thus never left the pleasure quarter, such as Ma Shouzhen.⁶⁸

In addition to collected works of women’s writing, from the late sixteenth century courtesans as well as gentry women started to increasingly publish their own individual collections of poems. At a glance in Hu Wenkai’s anthology, there is a noticeable increase of women’s published writing during the Ming dynasty as compared to the previous dynasties, which could be partially due to a loss of earlier texts in the course of history.⁶⁹ Gentry women such as Xiang Lanzhen 項蘭貞 (fl. early seventeenth century),⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Shen Yixiu 沈宜修, *Yiren si* 伊人思 ‘Their Thoughts’, in Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁, *Wumeng tang ji* 午夢堂集 ‘Collection of Wumeng studio’ (Beijing, 1998), 527-90, here 538. On Shen Yixiu’s anthology see Chang, *Women Writers*, 682-6; on Shen and other women editors see Ellen Widmer, ‘Retrieving the Past: Women Editors and Women’s Poetry, 1636-1941’, in Grace S. Fong ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond* (Leiden; Boston, 2010), 81-105, here, 81-97, 103-5; also see Robyn Hamilton, ‘The Unseen Hand: Contextualising Luo Qilan and her Anthologies’, in Grace S. Fong ed., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond*, 107-40.

⁶⁷ There is a vast literature on Qing women, their cult of chastity and suicide, see in brief Mann, *Precious Records*, 19-26; T’ien Ju-K’ang, *Male Anxiety and Female Chastity*, 126-148; on the ban on prostitution see Sommer, *Sex Law, and Society*, 210-59.

⁶⁸ Yun Zhu 惲珠, *Guochao guixiu zheng shi ji* 國朝閨秀正始集 ‘Anthology of Correct Beginnings by Boudoir Talents of Our Dynasty’, 20 *juan*, (Hong xiang guan edition, 1831) [accessed via McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women’s Writings Digitization Project, Harvard Yenching Library ID: 5237.88 / 9519], index, 14a; on this collection see Li Xiaorong, ‘Gender and Textual Politics during the Qing Dynasty: the Case of the *Zhengshi ji*’, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 69.1 (2009), 75-107.

⁶⁹ See index in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 1-4.

⁷⁰ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 175-6. See also Chang, *Women Writers*, 290-1.

and courtesans such as Ma Shouzhen and the other three of ‘the four Qinhua beauties’ – Zheng Ruying, Zhao Caiji and Zhu Wuxia – as well as their celebrated contemporaries Xue Susu and Jing Pianpian,⁷¹ all had their individual poetry collections published. In exposing themselves to the public through writing and publishing, the position of gentry women and courtesans differed, mainly due to the fact that ‘going public’ could have been perceived as going against the gentry woman’s respectability and could be seen as a sign of loss of propriety, whereas for courtesans visibility was part of their being ‘public women’.⁷² In most cases, publications were the result of the patronage or support of a male peer, their husband, friend or lover.

As seen above, women’s writing received appreciation as well as criticism by editors and readers. The critical engagement with women’s writing by their contemporaries became increasingly evident at the very time in which women had wider access to publication. The preface of an anthology often explained the selection strategies and motivation behind the project, as for instance when Zhong Xing wrote in his preface:

Poetry is the voice of spontaneity. It is not obtained by sticking to rules or by imitation. [...]The poetry of past men and today’s scholars erudite is first from their chest; and then it is done on those models. [Past and] present famous women express their own feelings, which are rooted in their own nature. They do not follow the style of other authors nor know about the schools, or about Nanpi nor the Xikun style.⁷³ However, [they express] their individual flow of sorrow and elegance.⁷⁴ Famous ladies’ collected works, why would they not be of any benefit? Someone says they are licentious, or that they do not conform to the Classics. Do they not know of Lady Jiang, wife of Prince Zhuang of Wei or the imperial concubine Ban?⁷⁵ How about

⁷¹ Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 199-200 (Zheng), 191-2 (Zhao), 78-9 (Zhu), 203 (Xue), 174 (Jing).

⁷² On this see Maureen Robertson, ‘Changing the Subject’, esp. 187-8.

⁷³ Nanpi 南皮 is a county in Hebei where scholars-officials used to meet, HYDCD, 1-888A; *Xikun* is a Song style of poetry, see William H. Nienhauser ed., *Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington IN, 1986-98), 412-3.

⁷⁴ See the integral text translated in Chang, *Women Writers*, 739-41.

⁷⁵ Lady Jiang Zhuang of Wei 衛莊姜 was the beautiful and talented mistress of the instructress of the daughter of Qi (fl. late eighth century BCE) and wife of the Duke of Wei, see Lily Xiao Hong Lee and A.D. Stefanowska eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: Antiquity Through Sui, 1600 B.C.E. – 618 C.E.*

their great [poetry]? Only because they did not appear in the ancient documents, or were not in famous collections, [...]; or transmitted in the records of folk songs or tales. To commend and collect them has been difficult. I discussed their skills and appreciation only together with a few scholars who had the [right] heart/mind. Today the printer [will make] them be forever.

詩也者自然之聲也。非假法律模倣而工者也。【。。】故夫今人今士之詩。胸中先有曹劉溫李。而後擬為之者也。若夫古今名媛。則發乎情。根乎性。未嘗擬作。亦不知派。無南皮西昆。而自流其悲雅者也。則夫名媛之集。不有裨哉？或曰坊於淫。或不盡出於典則。不見衛莊姜班婕妤。豈不丹口而靡曼乎。獨是不微於文獻不戴於名山。

【。。】。謠俗聞見之傳信。其褒輯為難。獨一二有心之士。偶與之論述愛[今]梓人永之。⁷⁶

Zhong Xing's rhetorical stand gave credit to the stereotypical idea of the woman as a particularly sensitive being who cannot help but be flooded with feelings, an idea which fitted well in the contemporary concepts of spontaneity and *qing* from the mid-sixteenth century. He stated that women did not know about traditions in the history of poetry. However it is very likely that those who wrote poetry were informed about major poets of the past and their styles. At the same time, contemporary women also expressed their viewpoint on women's writing, such as the gentry woman and poet included in Zhong Xing's anthology, Lu Qingzi 陸卿子 (fl. 1590–1600), who wrote the preface for her friend's poetry collection, the abovementioned Xiang Lanzhen, and eloquently described her feelings about women's practice of writing and their appreciation:

For us women (*wo bei*), preparing wine and cooking is our business, since ever our duties. If ill, we then stop doing these activities and look towards the legacy of ancient women, a custom handed down from previous generations is to write poetry; poetry originally was not an occupation for gentlemen, [but] truly our duty [...] Women [s writings] gradually disappeared, how many were transcribed? Yet isn't it absurd to see that those who understand are satisfied to collect the doltish ones, so that it can be compared to chaff in famine years?

(Armonk NY, 2003), 30; concubine Ban (Ban jieyu 班婕妤) who lived in the first century B.C., was known for her beauty and literary talent, see Lee, *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women*, 101-2.

⁷⁶ Zhong Xing, *Mingyuan shigui*, preface 1a-2a.

我輩酒漿烹飪是務，固其職也。病且戒無所事，則效往古女流，遺風剩響而爲詩；詩固非大丈夫職業，實我輩分內物也。[...]我輩垂垂衰落，記述幾何，而謬為見諒者，安錄其愚矣。庶幾比之饑年糠粃乎？⁷⁷

The criticism of women's work varied and the above provides only a partial but significant insight into the reception of women's writing and of Ma Shouzhen's work, in particular, which seemed to have encountered, with a few exceptions, her contemporaries' general favour and appreciation. In the next sections, a critical analysis of some selected poems will provide a guide for the major themes in Ma's poetry.

4.3 Feelings of the boudoir: reappropriation and challenges

Filled with emotions

In the bamboo bed clear of dreams,
The flowers' fragrance charms the drinking cup.
I awake in the delightful serenity of seclusion,
The moonlight fills the boudoir.

有懷

竹榻清人夢，花香媚酒杯。

覺來有幽趣，明月滿妝臺。⁷⁸

In China, there is a long tradition of poetry in the female voice authored by male poets and it is usually referred to as *guiyuan* 閨怨 'boudoir laments' due to its languid tone and sadness.⁷⁹ In the pre-Tang period, poems in the female voice, such as in the *Shijing* and the *Chuci*, are mainly unsigned folk songs of unknown authorship and *shi* poems, as in the 'New Songs from a Jade Terrace' *Yutai xinyong* 玉臺新詠 which is regarded to be the canon of established conventions of early love poetry.⁸⁰ In the Tang, many of the

⁷⁷ Lu Qingzi quoted in Hu Wenkai, *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, 176; see also translation by Grace Fong in Chang, *Women Writers*, 686.

⁷⁸ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 2.21b.

⁷⁹ Grace S. Fong, 'Engendering the Lyric: Her Image and Voice in Song', in Pauline Yu ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, 1994), 114-18.

⁸⁰ There is an early tradition of unsigned folk songs in the female voice in the *Shijing*, but Qu Yuan also took the female voice in his poems, see also Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World* (Madison, Wis, 1985), 260; see Birrell, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*, 7-28.

major poets engaged with the motifs of *guiyuan*, such as Li Bo 李白 (701–762) in the following poem:

Autumn song

A slip of moon over Chang'an,
Fulling mallets sound from thousands of homes.
The autumn wind blows and blows –
Always these Jade Pass feelings.
When will the barbarians be pacified,
And my dear man ends his travels afar?⁸¹

Since the Tang, but especially from the Song dynasty when the genre was established, the male-authored female voice took mainly the compositional shape of *ci*.⁸² Literati poetry in the female voice constructed fixed female stereotypes, whose femininity and erotic allure was expressed in the reclusion of her boudoir and mirrored the authors' own feelings, desires and frustrations.⁸³ As Maureen Robertson in her seminal article has discussed, these stereotypes will, later in the Ming dynasty, be challenged by women poets themselves.⁸⁴ The poem 'Filled with emotions' translated above, can be seen as a good instance of negotiation of the normative idea of the deserted woman in her boudoir, usually seen as frustrated and inert while waiting for her man. Although Ma Shouzhen in her poem engaged with some stereotypical feminine and sensuous elements, such as the bed, the drinking cup and the moon, she was not in despair or abandoned in sadness, but rather appeared as a resolute woman who enjoyed the surrounding quiet space at awakening. Ma Shouzhen gave voice to a reappropriation of the boudoir as a space belonging to herself and, in so doing, challenged the notion of it 'as a space of emotional withdrawal and imprisonment'⁸⁵ that is typical of male-

⁸¹ Maija Bell Samei, *Gendered Persona and Poetic Voice. The Abandoned Woman in Early Chinese Song Lyrics* (Oxford, 2004), 99.

⁸² Samei, *Gendered Persona*, 1-2

⁸³ Fong, 'Engendering the Lyric', 110-14.

⁸⁴ Maureen Robertson, 'Voicing the Feminine: Constructions of the Gendered Subject in Lyric Poetry by Women of Medieval and Late Imperial China', *Late Imperial China*, 13.1 (June 1992), 63-110.

⁸⁵ Birrel, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*, 19.

authored poetry in the female voice. The boudoir, which is the female gendered space *par excellence* becomes in Ma's poem a space of serenity in which the woman is at ease and not passively and sadly waiting for her man to return.

Ma Shouzhen concluded the composition of 'Filled with emotions' with the image of the moonlight entering the room and chose the word *zhuangtai* 妝臺, the literal meaning of which is 'dressing table', possibly as a synecdoche for the boudoir. Not only in Ma's poetic production, but in writing by other women of the late imperial time, there is a detectible emphasis on the gendered space of the boudoir, usually called *guige* 閨閣.⁸⁶

Guige commonly refers to inner quarters or chambers of a gentry house, the section of the house dedicated to women placed at the back of the building, and could correspond to more than one bedchamber according to the owner's wealth (ill. 64); yet, *guige* can refer to the courtesan's boudoir as well. The boudoir was the space in which women spent most of their existence and for this reason, it became a metaphor for the woman herself, as the term commonly attributed for literate woman was *guixiu* 'elegance of the boudoir' often translated as 'talent of the boudoir' or 'gentlewoman',⁸⁷ usually indicating a gentry woman. However, especially in the late Ming when class boundaries blurred and talent was not considered a socially grounded factor, the same expression was in fact used for both talented gentry women and courtesans, as demonstrated by the eminent scholar Chen Jiru who, as aforementioned, deployed it for his courtesan friend Ma Shouzhen.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ On the space of the inner quarters see Fong, *The Inner Quarters and Beyond*, 10-15

⁸⁷ Daria Berg and Chloë Starr eds., 'Introduction', *The Quest for Gentility in China* (London; New York, 2007), 16.

⁸⁸ See Chapter Three, 141. Also mentioned in Xu, 'The Rhetoric of Legitimation', 274.

In women's poetry, the word 'boudoir' defines the female gendered dimension of the poem and at the same time sets the spatial frame for the composition. Although its content does not necessarily take place actually in the boudoir; rather the very origins of the thoughts expressed in the poems belong to life in the space of the boudoir. For instance, in the hepta-syllabic quatrain 'Autumnal boudoir song' (*Qiu gui qu*), Ma Shouzhen observed the surrounding nature, and her thoughts travelled into a geographically wider world, but eventually came back to her own self:

Cotton roses and cold dew, the moon is fading away;
 In the small courtyard the wind clears [the sky] and swans fly.
 I have heard that the imperial palace⁸⁹ is thousands of *li*⁹⁰ away,
 In the deep autumn where can I send [you] winter clothing?
 芙蓉露冷月微微，小院風清鴻雁飛。
 聞道玉門千萬里，秋深何處寄寒衣。⁹¹

In Chinese poetry there is a strong tradition of association between the human and the natural world. Feelings and emotions (*qing*) are often set in analogy to or antithesis with the surrounding natural elements, the seasons and the landscape by using the literary device of 'entering the feelings from the scene' (*you jing ru qing* 由景入情) according to which the author's feelings are introduced via the surrounding environment.⁹² In 'Autumnal Boudoir Song' Ma Shouzhen described the outdoor scenery possibly visible from the balcony of her residence, which becomes a point of observance of the outside world. The poem conveys a sense of autumnal landscape, as announced in the title: the presence of the cotton roses (*furong*) and the swans as typical signposts of autumn, but also conventionally the *furong* alludes to the husband (*fu*) and swans are symbols of royalty, possibly linked to the potential recipient of the poem who was then at the

⁸⁹ *Yumen* 玉門 (lit. jade door) can indicate the imperial palace as well as the name of a mountain, HYDCD, 4-485B.

⁹⁰ The *li* 里 is a Chinese length measurement corresponding to 0.5 km.

⁹¹ Ma Shouzhen, 'Qiu gui qu'.

⁹² Samei, *Gendered Persona*, 99-100.

imperial court for an office. In this poem Ma Shouzhen presented herself as a caring woman – or partner – , although she did not use any personal pronouns, there is an unknown and faraway *you* for whom she wished to send a present of clothing for the upcoming winter season. Typically part of women’s work,⁹³ sewing, embroidery and generally to make clothes for lovers, friends or relatives were common practices of the boudoir. Both these latter activities and caring for others were strongly associated to women, therefore Ma clearly displayed her gendered subjectivity while fashioning herself as a potentially perfect companion.

Ma Shouzhen employed different words to indicate her boudoir. In the hepta-syllabic poem ‘Random thoughts on the pillow’ *Zhen shang oucheng* 枕上偶成, she used *lanfang* ‘orchid chamber’:

Too indolent [to go] to the brothel and listen to the jade panpipe,
In the boudoir the incense cools down, the night passes slowly.
I envy to death birds flying in pair, like the Hengyang geese;
Bored and sad, I just poke the snuff of the candlewick.
懶向秦樓聽玉簫，蘭房香冷夜迢迢。
雙飛羨殺衡陽雁，悶對燈花只自挑。⁹⁴

In this poem Ma expressed a full engagement with the surrounding space, the brothel (*Qin lou* 秦樓 ‘Qinhuai building’), and her own boudoir, *lanfang*. The latter word can simply indicate an elegant room, but is often used for the ‘fragrant inner chambers’ of the gentry woman or the courtesan’s boudoir, as the Tang poet Wang Wei 王績 wrote in ‘Chanting the courtesan’ *Yong ji* 詠妓: ‘The belle adorns herself beautifully,/ Gracefulness and gentleness are emanated from the orchids chamber (*lanfang*)’ (妖姬飾

⁹³ Francesca Bray, ‘Fabrics of Power: The Canonical Meaning of Women’s Work’, in Idem, *Technology and Gender*, 183-205.

⁹⁴ Ma Shouzhen, ‘Zhen shang oucheng’, 4.137.

靚妝，窈窕出蘭房).⁹⁵ Similarly, in the late Ming the playwright Mao Xiang 冒襄 (1611–1693), who in 1642 married his beloved courtesan Dong Bai 董白 (1624–1651), in his account on the pleasure quarter ‘Reminiscence of the Plum Shadows Studio’ *Yingmeian yi yu* 影梅庵憶語 called the courtesan’s boudoir ‘the orchid chamber’ (*lanfang*).⁹⁶

In the poem *Zhen shang oucheng* Ma creates a juxtaposition of erotic and anti-erotic elements: the incense – the lighting of which is a sexually arousing trope⁹⁷ – cools down rather than burning, as if to represent the extinguishing of her desire for love; yet, the final scene in which she pokes the candle wick can be seen as erotic and titillating imagery. The focus of the poem is on her own self, there is no mention of a missing man who abandoned her. However, she explicitly expresses her desire for companionship and her feelings of boredom and sadness, conferred by the adjective 悶 *men*. Could this poem be read as a sincere expression of her feelings? Or is it part of the rhetorical construction of the erotic allure of the lonely courtesan waiting for love or a lover? In displaying her tempting availability and showing potential devotion to companionship she fashioned her self as ‘the abandoned woman’ longing for a companion, trope which as mentioned above belongs to the literati tradition of love poetry.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ See *lanfang* entry in the HYDCD, 9-628B.

⁹⁶ See an integral version of the text reported in Ai Suren 艾舒仁, *Yingmei'an yiyu: xingling wenxue mingzhu huibian* 影梅庵憶語：性靈文學名著匯編 ‘Memoirs of the Plum Shadow Hut: Collection of Famous Authors of Aesthetic Literature’ (Hohot, 1997), 17; on Mao see also in Ōki Yasushi, ‘Mao Xiang and Yu Huai. Early Qing Romantic *Yimin*’, in Wilt L. Idema, Wai-yee Li, and Ellen Widmer eds., *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), esp. 235.

⁹⁷ See this motif in Jinpingmei as discussed by Jianjun He, ‘Burning Incense at Night: A Reading of Wu Yueniang in “Jin Ping Mei”’, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, 29 (Dec 2007), 89-91.

⁹⁸ See on this theme Hans H. Frankel, ‘Lonely Women’, in Idem, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry* (New Haven; London, 1976), 56-61.

In another poem titled 'Sitting at night' *Ye zuo* 夜坐, Ma Shouzhen called her boudoir the 'orchid studio' (*lanzhai* 蘭齋), an expression which adds an emphasis to the *zhai* 'study, studio' component of the courtesan's residence rather than as merely her bedroom. Differently from *lanfang*, the attribution of the word *lanzhai* to a typically gendered female space could be read as an intentional appropriation of the masculine and male quality usually attributed to the activity of poetry writing. The poem, in two stanzas, similarly to the previous two poems above, describes the night time of the autumnal season:

Jade dew floats in the sky, remote at nightfall;
In my boudoir facing the wine, I feel in deep joy.
Golden flowers set off one another, the moon above the Qinhuai River.
The regular sound of the stick for washing clothes breaks [the silence],
[it is] Jianye [*Nanjing*] autumn.
The autumn moon high in the sky brightens up the residence of
immortals,
The waterclock suppressed all the sounds, it is quiet and silent.
The flowers' scent enters the room where I sit and its touch is inebriant,
I don't mind the clock's beats or the river sound.
玉露浮空入夜悠，蘭齋對酒興偏稠。
金華掩映秦淮月，砧杵頻摧建業秋。
秋月當空玉宇明，漏殘萬籟寂無聲。
花香入座扶人醉，一任疏鐘隔水鳴。⁹⁹

In this poem there is a clear focus on sounds, their presence and absence, and a sense of serenity seems to pervade the author who is listening to the city as it sleeps, silent except for the sound of the clock and the river, next to which the pleasure quarter was placed. As in the previous poem 'Filled with emotions' there is no mention of a missing lover, the boudoir is her space and she is in control of it as she enjoys the solitude and silence of the night. It is interesting to note from the above poems that Ma Shouzhen often wrote poetry while awake during the night, or at least that is what she wanted her reader to believe. This could have been another stratagem of self-fashioning based on a

⁹⁹ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 2.26b

temporal element, for which her poetic persona was lyrically inspired by the fascinating nocturnal silence and obscurity, or by the stars and the moon which shine at night.

In both 'Filled with emotions' and 'Sitting at night' Ma Shouzhen referred to wine or the drinking cup; as Dorothy Ko has discussed, drinking games and participating in parties were part of the normative practice of the courtesan.¹⁰⁰ From classical poetry such as Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365–427)'s 'Poems after drinking wine', and Li Bo's 'Drinking alone at the moonlight'¹⁰¹ to the Ming dynasty, drinking was a lyrically inspiring social or solitary practice.¹⁰² Especially in the late Ming new interest in spontaneity and passion, drinking and drunkenness were even more recurrent poetic and visual tropes, also found in poems by courtesans.¹⁰³ Yet, the 'wine cup' was rarely discussed in gentry women's poems, as drinking was likely not a desirable activity for a respectable *guixiu*, even if it was not excluded from their habits as Yuan Zhongdao narrated of women partaking in drinking games in which cups were made floating on a water stream.¹⁰⁴ It is worth noting here that it had been indeed a reference to wine and its doubtful effects of obliviousness within the poem 'Poem for *Since you have gone away*' (*Fude zijun zhi chu yi* 賦得自君之出矣)¹⁰⁵ which contributed to Ma's fame and recognition as a poet in the late Ming and Qing periods. The composition, which appears in five stanzas within Ma's

¹⁰⁰ See on courtesans' games Dorothy Ko, 'The Written Word and the Bound Foot: A History of a Courtesan's Aura', in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1997), 82-6.

¹⁰¹ In Victor H. Mair ed., *The Shorter Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (New York, 2000), 77, 94.

¹⁰² See Ming poems by Li Kaixian (1502–1568), Xu Wei and Zong Chen (1525–1560) involving drinking in Chaves Jonathan trans. ed., *The Columbia Book of Later Chinese Poetry: Yüan, Ming, and Ch'ing Dynasties (1279–1911)* (New York, 1986), 303, 311, 323.

¹⁰³ See about the images on drinking found in a Zhou Lüjing's painting manual in Park, *Art by the Book*, 147-52; also in the oeuvre of the late Ming painter Chen Hongshou 陳鴻壽 (1768–1822) drinking is an important visual trope, see Burkus-Chasson, 'Elegant or Common?', 285.

¹⁰⁴ See Park, *Art from the Book*, 160. Although wine is more often part of the poetry of courtesans rather than gentry women, there are exceptions, such as Lu Qingzi who wrote: 'And when I like, pour myself some unstrained wine', in Chang, *Women Writers*, 241.

¹⁰⁵ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 2.20a-21a. The two selected stanzas are the second and the fourth.

personal collection, has been mainly reproduced in a reduced version with only two stanzas as follows:

Since you have gone away, I fear to hear the maiden's song.
The song enters the ears of the one left behind,
On the green robe tears drip copiously.
Since you have gone away,
[We are] no more together to raise the jade cups.
Wine is something to dispel sorrow,
[But] how many hours can it dispel for?
自君之出矣，怕聽侍兒歌。
歌入離人耳，青衫淚點多。
自君之出矣，不共舉瓊卮。
酒是消愁物，能消幾個時。¹⁰⁶

This poem is a *yuefu* 樂府 'ballad', although it literally means 'music bureau' because originally they were folk songs collected for the Han dynasty bureau. Later *yuefu* further developed in more regulated structures and continued to use a simple and non-allusive language. The first line of Ma's poem is identical to the title and first line 'Since you have gone away' (*Zijun zhi chu yi* 自君之出矣) of the *yuefu* written by Yan Shibo 顏師伯 (419–465) and Chen Shubao 陳叔寶 (553–604);¹⁰⁷ the same title and line were then used by the Tang poets Zhang Jiuling 張九齡 (673–730) and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846); the latter was considered to be one of the greatest poets and was commonly known to have described wine as a medicine for sorrow.¹⁰⁸ In this poem Ma Shouzhen engaged with the literati poetic tradition as to appropriate the masculine voice within the male tradition of poetry. Moreover, in order to do this, she employed the typically gendered male trope of wine and sorrow, which she overtly challenged by questioning Bai Juyi's understanding of it.

¹⁰⁶ Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, 'Fu de zi jun zhi chu yi' 賦得自君之出矣 'Poem for *Since you have gone away*', in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.68.b; trans. also in Irving Yucheng Lo, 'Daughters of the Muses of China', in Marsha Weidner ed., *Views from Jade Terrace: Chinese Women Artists 1300–1912* (Indianapolis, 1988), 46; and Chang, *Women Writers*, 230.

¹⁰⁷ Frankel, *The Flowering Plum*, 53-4; on *yuefu*, 216-17.

¹⁰⁸ On Zhang Jiuling's poem see Tang Zi-chang, *Poems of Tang* (San Rafael CA, 1969), 37.

Ma Shouzhen's allusion to the Tang poet must have appealed to the late Ming literati who particularly appreciated this poem, possibly because it perfectly conformed with the male authored poetry tradition. In the *ketan* text *Jinling suoshi* published in 1610, the author Zhou Hui commented on it by saying: 'Isn't Xianglan [Ma Shouzhen]'s death a loss equal to those of the [Tang poetesses] Yu Xuanji¹⁰⁹ and Li Jilan [Li Ye]¹¹⁰?' (何減唐之魚玄機李季蘭乎湘蘭死)¹¹¹ Zhou not only praised Ma's talent, but also recognised her as part of a female legacy in the history of poetry which is represented by Tang courtesan-poets.¹¹² Later, the Nanjing scholar-official and collector Zhou Lianggong in his *biji* titled *Shuying* 書影 reproduced the poem by Ma Shouzhen and commented as follows: 'clearly there is style, therefore her fame as best at the time' (楚楚有致，宜其名冠一時也).¹¹³ The last quatrain of the same poem was quoted also by Zhu Yizun in his 'Jingzhi Dwelling's Notes on Poetry' *Jingzhi ju shihua* 靜志居詩話 in the section titled *Jiaofang* 'Bureau of Instruction' under which courtesans of the Nanjing pleasure quarter were registered. Zhu provided a brief biography of Ma Shouzhen and, after her poetry sample, added a warning response by Ma's friend Yao Lü: 'reciting these verses causes extreme grief' (誦之令人酸楚).¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Yu Xuanji 魚玄機 (c.843–868), style name Youwei 幼微 was a talented Nanjing courtesan, famous for having become a Daoist nun. Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 30.7a.

¹¹⁰ Li Ye 李冶, style name Jilan 季蘭 (?–784), courtesan and Daoist nun, skilled in poetry since a young age see Zhong Xing, *Mingyuan shigui*, 11.1a; also in Robertson, 'Changing the Subject', 180.

¹¹¹ Zhou Hui, *Jinling suoshi*, 276–7.

¹¹² Zhou Hui, *Jinling suoshi*, 88.

¹¹³ Zhou Lianggong 周亮工, *Shu ying* 書影 'Shadows of Books', 10 juan, in *Ming Qing biji congshu* (Shanghai, 1981), 275; this is in contrast with what is recorded in *Yujing yangqiu* as translated above, 158–9.

¹¹⁴ Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊, *Jingzhi ju shihua* 靜志居詩話 'Jingzhi Dwelling's Poetry', in *Mingdai zhuanji congkan* (Taipei, 1991), 23.54b–55b, here 55a.

As noticeable from Ma's poems thus far, the courtesan engaged with themes of sufferance and solitude, and often associated her feelings and desire of companionship with natural elements and animals. For instance, she used the image of the geese flying together, and couples of flat fish and mandarin ducks, which are typical metaphors for the happiness of marriage. Marriage was clearly a concern for courtesans as it was for the majority of other women of the imperial time, it was one of the most important rituals for them and their family, hence not surprisingly it was also a poetic theme. This is demonstrated in the anthology *Qinglou yunyu*, where many poems fall under the label of *congliang* 從良 'following respectability', an expression used to indicate the courtesan's marriage.¹¹⁵ As we know from Ma Shouzhen's biography, she never got married, and as this section will show, her love poetry is pervaded by the desire of companionship and it is plausible to think that she used her poetry as a 'self-promotion for marriage', or as part of a rhetorical self-fashioning for the lonely woman. In 'The Parrot' she voiced her solitude and desire of companionship by employing the image of the caged bird:

All day I watch the parrot,
 Its existence is entrusted to a gilded cage.
 Green plume, it is skilled in brushing its feathers,
 The red beak excels in making sounds.
 Long [mountains] trees, its soul must suffer,
 It can imitate the *wu* accent just successfully.
 Snowdress, I cherish you,
 For long¹¹⁶ my companion of boudoir feelings.
 永日看鸚鵡，金籠寄此生。
 翠翎工刷羽，朱喙善含聲。
 隴樹魂應斷，吳音教乍成。
 雪衣吾惜汝，長此伴閨情。¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1935), *mulu*, 4. On the courtesan's desire for marriage see also Ropp, 'Love, Literacy, and Laments', 115-17.

¹¹⁶ *Chang* could instead be read as *zhang* 'to long for' and the last line would then read: I long for such a companion of boudoir feelings'.

¹¹⁷ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 1.10a.

A reading of this poem suggests that the parrot is the metaphor of the loyal companion she longs for; however, a different reading sees the parrot as an emblem of talent, solitude and bondage, features which are all associated to the courtesan; hence the parrot can be seen as an allegory of the courtesan herself in the 'realm of mist and flowers'. In the poem the focus moves from Ma – the author – through the act of looking to the object of her gaze, the parrot, which is the centre of the poem until the last couplet when Ma refocused the attention on herself – 'I' (wu 吾) – and brings the poem back to her own space and her own feelings, her 'boudoir feelings' (*guiqing* 閨情). This poem, which was collected in *Liechao shiji*, is one of the three of Ma's poems which have been translated into English thus far, and it has been published in both the anthologies *Women Writers*¹¹⁸ and *The Red Brush*. The latter has highlighted a potential contradiction in the poem, which describes the parrot with green plumage and then calls it 'Snowdress', thereby implying that its feathers are white.¹¹⁹ However, in a different interpretation 'Snowdress' could have been the pet's name.

It is impossible to establish whether in reality Ma possessed a parrot or this was just part of the construct of her character, as we know that parrots were often associated with lonely women.¹²⁰ Yet Wang Zhideng, in the eulogies written for the courtesan, refers to her parrot as a sincere friend always present in her boudoir, so able to testify to her abstinence from sex in the last seven years of her life when she became devoted to Buddhism.¹²¹ Moreover, parrots were considered appropriate pets for women, as

¹¹⁸ Chang, *Women Writers*, 231.

¹¹⁹ Idema, *The Red Brush*, 367.

¹²⁰ On the depiction of women and parrots see Park, *Art by the Book*, 170-3.

¹²¹ Wang Zhideng, 'Ma Xianglan wan geci', 4.69b.

confirmed by the literatus Wen Zhenheng in his 'Treatise on Superfluous Things'

Changwu zhi 長物志 published around 1620, in which he wrote:

Parrots can speak and so they should be taught small poems and rhymes; they cannot be next and hear the chats and hubbubs of the marketplace and coarse people; they would flood their ears. The bronze stands and eating jars must be quaint. These birds together with golden pheasants, peacocks, fork-tailed sunbirds¹²² and turkeys, are all among the proper things for the inner quarters, but not among the things that the secluded [scholar] would need.

鸚鵡能言，然須教以小詩及韻語，不可令鬧井市鄙俚之談聒，然盈耳。銅架食缸俱須精巧，然此鳥及錦雞孔雀倒挂吐綬諸種皆斷為閨閣中物非幽人所需也。¹²³

4.4 Poetic tropes: parting and the abandoned woman

The trope of parting has a long established history in Chinese painting and poetry.¹²⁴

The late Ming society was characterised by great mobility: officials and functionaries, at times followed by their wives and families, changed working station every few years; merchants migrated towards better trades; gentry women went on religious pilgrimages; and courtesans moved to the main cities' pleasure quarters to work, while literati and commoners visited friends in faraway places.¹²⁵ The trope of farewell is found in poetry by both gentry women and courtesans, and due to the nature of the pleasure quarter where guests regularly visited and departed, farewells were commonly experienced by courtesans. Parting was an emotionally distressful moment in which the nostalgia of the time spent together and the dream of a loyal companion were expressed in lyrical compositions. Amongst Ma's love poems, several are themed around the trope of

¹²² *Daogua* 倒挂 also called *tonghuafeng* 桐花鳳 (*Aethopyga christinae*) are birds with red and green plumes, which are smaller than parrots, HYDCD, 4-973B.

¹²³ Wen Zhenheng 文震亨, *Changwu zhi* 長物志 'Treatise on Superfluous Things', 12 *juan*, in *Meishu congshu* (Taipei, [1928]–1936), 4.1b-2a; see also translation in Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, 41-2.

¹²⁴ Most of the Tang collected titles are themed around parting, see Tang, *Poems of Tang*.

¹²⁵ Brook, *The Confusion of Pleasures*, 173-90.

parting, and two of them, both titled ‘Presented at parting on a Wintry Day’ *Dongri liubie* 冬日留別 were collected in *Qinglou yunyu*; in this anthology the section on ‘farewell’ (*libie* 離別) with forty-nine poems is the largest one, larger than those labelled ‘sending ideas’ (*jiyi* 寄意), or sending presents, such as fans (*zeng shan* 贈扇) and kerchiefs (*zeng jin* 贈巾), or the section on death (*si* 死) and crying (*ku* 哭), getting married (*congliang*) or serving wine (*zhijiu* 置酒).¹²⁶ This illuminates how in poetry written by courtesans, parting was a major theme, although possible selection strategies by editors could have privileged this subject above others.

We loved each other from dawn until dusk,
 Now to bear the pain is my profound [effort].
 In front of a vessel, a cup of wine,
 By the river my heart has hundred years.
 Imperceptible melancholy at the moment of departure,
 Desolate tears wet my robe.
 On the bridge we tentatively departed,
 I hope to see you here again on a spring day.
 恩愛朝相暮，那堪愁自深，
 樽前一杯酒，江上百年心。
 荏苒悲離況，蕭條淚染襟，
 河橋漫分手，春日望登臨。¹²⁷

The title of the above poem *Dongri liubie*, where *liubie* 留別 means ‘to give a present at parting’, suggests that the piece of poetry was meant to be given to the leaving lover as a tangible memory of an encounter. This highlights the material dimension of poetry, since poems were not ephemeral words recited or sung, but actual objects, usually pieces of paper or silk with ink characters inscribed on them; they were commodities which were used as gifts in the exchange economy also between courtesans and their

¹²⁶ See Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1935), *mulu*, 7-9, 10-12.

¹²⁷ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 10b-11a; also Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, ‘Dongri Liubie’ 冬日留別 ‘Presented at parting on a Wintry Day’, in Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1935), 2.54-5.

guests.¹²⁸ In the above poem the sadness of farewell is soothed by the possibility of reunion, the place of separation and departure – possibly a bridge on the Qinhuai River or the Peach Blossoms Ford *Taoyedu* (map 2) – becomes the place of hope for the future. Ma suggested an association between pairs of opposite elements: parting and gathering, sadness and hope, present and future, winter and spring, where spring is conventionally the season of love and nature's renewal (as it is in Ma's poem). However, hope is not always part of the feelings of departure, as in another farewell composition titled 'On the seventeenth night of the tenth month seeing off Zhang Youyu' *Xiaochu shiqi ye song Zhang Youyu* 小春十七夜送張幼于, in which Ma seemed aware of the sad implications of being a courtesan:

My old sweetheart, we were separated for a long time,
 Like the thousand *li* separate seas and mountains.
 Seeing you again was sudden like a dream,
 And [we had to] ask each other our ages.
 To extinguish the lamps is painful;
 [After] the departure toasts, my thoughts are still pulled [by you].
 In this moment, I can bear sadness and resentment,
 A floating life is to be blamed for a miserable destiny (*boyuan*).¹²⁹
 故人一別久，千里隔山川。
 乍見渾疑夢，相看各問年。
 挑燈腸欲斷，祖酒思還牽。
 此際堪愁恨，浮生愧薄緣。¹³⁰

The reunion with Zhang Youyu, called *guren* 故人 'my old sweetheart' or 'my old friend',¹³¹ after a long time apart brought joy to Ma Shouzhen who in the sorrow of a new separation did not mention the hope for a future appointment, but rather blamed her own (or possibly theirs together) 'floating life' (*fu sheng* 浮生) made of constant movements, quick encounters, comings and goings.

¹²⁸ See a reflection on the material forms of writing in Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu eds., *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan* (Cambridge MA, 2003), 1-26.

¹²⁹ *Boyuan* 薄緣 could also be interpreted as 'sporadic meetings'.

¹³⁰ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 1.12a; also in Zhong Xing, *Mingyuan shigui*, 28.16a.

¹³¹ On *guren* see Chang, *The late-Ming Poet*, 84.

The above poem, together with two others dedicated to the Suzhou literatus Zhang Youyu, reveal an intimate connection with the recipient, who was also known to be close to another talented courtesan of the Qinhuai pleasure quarter, Zhao Jinyan or Caiji.¹³² The poem dedicated to Zhang Youyu had two main functions: on the one hand Ma Shouzhen used it as a ‘technology of self-representation’ to express her strength in the sadness of separation, and on the other hand she adopted it as a display of her social relationship with Zhang. In another poem, the penta-syllabic quatrain ‘Heartbreaking farewell’ (*Chuang bie* 愴別), Ma lamented the pain of solitude after having departed from her lover Wang Zhideng (Wang Sheng 王生):

Sick bones dragged in the long days,
 Mr Wang loved me tenderly.
 Time after time we faced orchids and bamboo,
 Night after night we collected poetic works.¹³³
 In the cold and rain, a letter travelled across the many rivers,
 In the autumn wind I slept all night.
 In the boudoir, not one thing [to do],
 All day I await the boat to return.
 病骨淹長晝，王生曾見憐。
 時時對蘭竹，夜夜集詩篇。
 寒雨三江信，秋風一夜眠。
 深閨無個事，終日望歸船。¹³⁴

‘Heartbreaking farewell’, treated also in Chapter Three for its reference to orchid and bamboo painting, gives voice to the sadness after parting, describes the boredom of the boudoir, called *shengui* 深閨 ‘deep boudoir’, where waiting for her lover seems her main activity. The imagery of the lonely courtesan having to cope with the sadness of

¹³² Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 766; same text in Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.2.13a. More on the relationship with Zhang Youyu will be discussed in Chapter Five.

¹³³ This couplet could be translated also in the first singular person.

¹³⁴ Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 1.7a-b; this is the second stanza of poem which was then individually published as Ma Shouzhen, ‘Chuang bie’, 4.68b.

solitude while hoping for her lover to return clearly conformed to the poetic trope of the abandoned woman, whose happiness is in her lover's hands, and her passiveness can be seen as an eroticising element. In the poem, Ma made reference to the weaknees of her body as a 'sick structure' (*binggu* 病骨); this leads us to reflect upon the role of the body in poetry, and the bodily and emotional dimensions of illness which in this case might have made her sadness even harder to bear.¹³⁵ The display of sufferance, both physical and emotional, contributed to the construction of the courtesan's self in a 'dramatic' fashion. The idea of a fragile female body overcome with feelings belongs to the conventionally constructed image of women in Chinese medical history.¹³⁶ Moreover, in this poem since the author has been 'abandoned', she complies with the stereotype of the deserted woman in need of rescue and protection, an eroticised image which can provoke men's desire.

The emotional distress of separation was expressed also in a letter, which can be considered a love letter (*qingshu* 情書), addressed to Wang Zhideng.¹³⁷ Letters by women deserve further scholarly attention as they are precious documents dense with information and greatly relevant for studying self-expressions and the construction of social ties.¹³⁸ This is the only epistle by Ma Shouzhen recorded in a Ming source; its editor Zhao Shijie briefly commented on it by saying: 'Secluded feelings of many sorts

¹³⁵ In this regard see Grace Fong's illuminating work, Fong, 'Writing and Illness', 19-47, esp. 34.

¹³⁶ Furth, *A Flourishing Yin*, 26-7.

¹³⁷ On women's love letter see Kathryn Lowry, 'Duplicating the Strength of Feeling: The Circulation of *Qingshu* in the Late Ming', in Judith T. Zeitlin et al., eds. *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan* (2003), 247-50.

¹³⁸ For an insight into 'modern letters' by some Jiangnan women see Ellen Widmer, 'The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China', *Late Imperial China*, 10.2 (Dec 1989), 1-43.

rendered not conventionally, it demonstrates her talent' (幽情種種，描來不俗，應是人行白眉).¹³⁹ The complete text of the letter reads:

After parting, immediately I¹⁴⁰ yearn [for you]; awake or asleep I do not stop thinking of my bosom friend. I recollect memories with my old friend, we still cultivate our long relationship, [but] I resent the distance, and in my heart/mind it is gloomy, as I cannot see [you] from morning to evening, close to the pillow I talk my heart/mind. Again for a long time the water fills the windows, crickets in the coldness interrupt my dreams, these feelings and this scene, indeed now I am overwhelmed with sorrow. When will I see you again? To deal with lovesickness is an unjust debt, to be human in this world has no joy.

別後妾頃刻在懷，即寤寐未忘知己。遙憶故人，再續舊好，恨各一天涯，中心鬱結，不能朝夕繼見，聯枕論心。又兼秋水盈窓，寒蛩破夢，此情此景，真妾銷魂時哉。何日既見君子，了却相思宿債，作人間世未有之懽乎。¹⁴¹

In the letter as well as in the poem *Chuang bie*, Ma gave voice to her desire of seeing Wang Zhideng and to her *xiangsi* 相思 'lovesickness', which is described in the epistle as an unfair feeling to have to cope with in the world of human suffering. With these words the courtesan enlarged the scope of her own feelings and made them universal; she went beyond her individual experience to reflect upon human nature. The letter, together with the last two poems, testify to Ma's social ties with Zhang Youyu and Wang Zhideng, and it is this social function of writing which will be explored more in detail in the next section.

¹³⁹ *Baimei* 白眉 (lit. white eyebrow) indicates talent from a legend in the *Sanguo zhi* where Ma Liang was the most talented of five brothers and had white-haired eyebrows, so he was called 'White Eyebrow', HYDCD, 8-186B.

¹⁴⁰ Ma Shouzhen uses the pronoun *qie* 妾 (lit. concubine) which shows humility and respect towards Wang.

¹⁴¹ Ma Shouzhen, 'Ji Wang Baigu shu', 8.50a.

4.5 Poetry and sociability

There is poor documentation about the readership of women's poetry in the late sixteenth century and it is a fair guess to think that those who read Ma Shouzhen's poems were literate people in her vicinity, literati, other courtesans and possibly gentry women.¹⁴² Nonetheless, we know that some of the people she wrote poetry for, as discussed above with Wang Zhideng and Zhang Youyu, were among the real or metaphorical addressees of her poetry. Ma Shouzhen declared an intended recipient for several poems, and this section will focus on a few relevant instances which enable a discussion around the use of poetry in the construction of social networks. An intriguing case of 'social poetry' is the poem composed by four quatrains all under the long title of 'On a spring day with many society gentlemen (*shezhang* 社丈) in a small courtyard admiring peonies. Everybody composed quatrains and the others rhymed with them, I respond to four' *Chunri zhu shezhang guo xiaoyuan shang mudan. Ge fu jueju, jiantuo yongyu, heda si shou* 春日諸社丈過小園賞牡丹，各賦絕句，見投用韻，和答四首. Although we do not know the poetic lines she was responding to, the four quatrains are themed around the peony. The peony is a spring flower with a dense cultural meaning in Chinese tradition and it is strongly associated with romantic love and at times symbolises female sexuality;¹⁴³ hence it conveys an explicit erotic tone to the encounter between Ma and the four gentlemen. The four compositions, each dedicated to a different man, were part of the entertainment during an elegant gathering, which

¹⁴² On women as readers see McLaren, 'Constructing New Reading Publics', 161-3.

¹⁴³ On the auspicious meanings of peonies see Bartholomew, *Hidden Meanings*, 123-4, 155; as symbol of eroticism see Patricia Bjaaland Welch, *Chinese Art: A Guide to Motifs and Visual Imagery* (Singapore, 2008), 36.

probably took place at the garden of Ma's private residence, where she displayed her talent with the following verses:

'Rhyming with Chen Ruwen'

A stone bridge on the flowing water, it is to entertain the passer-byes;
At the spring warmth the flowers blossom, pleasing the guests passing by.
Jade cups¹⁴⁴ slowly fly, while the moon grows on the Qinhuai,
In turn the brocade-adorned zither executes an elegant tune.
和程孺文

石橋流水是行窩，春暖花開喜客過。
玉斗謾飛淮浦月，錦箏還趁郢人歌。¹⁴⁵

Rhyming with Zhang Baimen

Dew spatters the embroidered flowers, they decorate the mild coldness.
I grab a cup of wine with you, I look [at you] with a smile.
I think of the past beauties of the Han palace so far;
Alas! Who will now lean against the jade balustrade [to replace them]?
和張白門

露滋繡萼弄輕寒，把酒同君帶笑看。
憶昔漢宮人去遠，阿誰今倚玉闌干。

Rhyming with Liu Eryu

The spring arrived with its hundred flowers and their charming look;
Every year I enjoy and admire them in this season.
At the moonlight we are drinking abundantly, but the flowers want to sleep;
The 'drunken peony'¹⁴⁶ is slanting on the red balustrade.
和柳二余

春來百卉讓嬌姿，歡賞年年在此期。
月上酒深花欲睡，朱蘭斜倚醉西施。

Rhyming with Wang Xiaohuai

In the spring breeze the curtains compete with the flowers' spirits.
After parting, lovesickness will enter the dreams again and again.
In the pavilion newly built, flowers would like to talk,
In their dreams who is the husband? ¹⁴⁷

和王肖淮
春風簾幕賽花神，別后相思入夢頻。
樓閣新成花欲語，夢中誰是畫眉人。¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ *Yu'er* 玉耳 were drinking cups with two 'ears' (*er*), meaning the handles.

¹⁴⁵ These are the verses quoted in the printed image discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁴⁶ The name 醉西施 *zuixishi* is a red peony which resembles the red cheeks of a woman after drinking, HYDCD, 9-1423A.

¹⁴⁷ Husband is here the translation for *huameiren* 畫眉人 'the person which draws the eyebrows'.

¹⁴⁸ Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, 'Chunri zhu shezhang guo xiaoyuan shang mudan. Ge fu jueju, jiantuo yongyu, heda si shou' 春日諸社丈過小園賞牡丹，各賦絕句，見投用韻，和答四首 'On a spring day with many

Of these four men,¹⁴⁹ the only one who is found in texts of the period is Chen Ruwen; he was possibly a literatus from Nanjing acquainted with Zhou Hui, the author of *Jinling suoshi*, since Zhou recorded in his text:

I was walking with Chen Ruwen and Wang Zining when we saw a beggar led by a dog holding in its mouth a gourd begging for money. Ruwen said joking with Zining: 'How does this dog know about gourds?' And Zining answered: 'This dog only knows its mouth is a gourd'.

余與程孺文、汪子寧同行，見乞兒牽狗銜瓢化錢。孺文云：此狗亦知瓢乎？蓋戲子寧也。子寧曰：此狗只解口瓢耳。¹⁵⁰

The above quatrains reveal that Ma Shouzhen interacted with a small group of men in composing poetry and harmonising rhymes. Gathering in a garden to admire flowers and socialise was a common practice of high society in the late Ming, when a new fashion for gardens bloomed.¹⁵¹ Moreover, as depicted in a woodblock printed image included in a late Ming erotic album, the seclusion of a garden setting was perfect for a romantic encounter (ill. 65). In the above poems there are references to wine-drinking as well as music, as Ma is playing the zither, so the entertainment was in full swing. There is a clear erotic tone in Ma's couplets, expressed by the use of the word *xiu* 'embroidery or to embroider', which could also refer to the sexual act.¹⁵² Furthermore, the image of the 'drunken peony' (*zuixishi*), which has white flowers that shade into a vermilion colour in the middle and a weak stem that sways easily, can be seen as a metaphor for herself possibly tipsy, with blushing and redness also typical tropes of the timid woman longing for love. Finally, the image of the slanting flower/woman is a

society gentlemen in a small courtyard admiring peonies. Everybody composed quatrains and the others rhymed with them, I respond to four', in Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1935), 1.21-2.

¹⁴⁹ The other men are not mentioned in DMB, or Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*; or in Zhang Huizhi 張撫之, Shen Qiwei 沈起煒, Liu Dezhong, 劉德重, *Zhongguo lidai renming da cidian* 中國歷代人名大辭典 'Chinese Dictionary of Historical People' (Shanghai, 1999), 2 vols.

¹⁵⁰ Zhou Hui, *Jinling suoshi*, 152.

¹⁵¹ A new fashion for gardens in the late Ming, see Craig Clunas, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (London, 1996).

¹⁵² This has been suggested also in Van Gulik, *Sexual Life*, 318.

typical feminine bodily posture which exudes sensuality. A critical reading of these four poems leads to two main considerations: first, in this occasion Ma Shouzhen displayed her ability of entertaining and engaging poetically with four men at the same time; second, she explicitly referred to highly female-gendered attributes (such as the ‘drunken peony’ and the slanting body) and expressed her womanly erotic charm.

Ma Shouzhen’s poems disclose some of her social connections which would otherwise remain unknown; at the same time they inform us of the ways in which Ma represented herself to the members of her social network. Another man who might have been quite close to her is a certain Mr Wei to whom she dedicated two poems. As there is no further mention by Ma Shouzhen of Mr Wei, and we are not even provided with his personal name or style name, and thus his identity remains obscure.¹⁵³ The first of the two quatrains of ‘Rhyming with Mr Wei’ (*He Wei Sheng Er Jue* 和衛生-二絕) seemed to have been appreciated as an independent poem, as it is found on its own in *Gujin nüshi*. Here it follows in its full version:

A long rainbow like a girdle reflection, bamboo next to building;
Outside mist and lights, inside I wait to receive [guests].
The river limpid waters, but nobody is around;
Many sounds of extreme grief,¹⁵⁴ the wild geese cross horizontally the
autumn [sky].
I remember your previous house in the city,
Now the river Huai [Qinhuai] and vast land separate us.
The stars Vega and Altair¹⁵⁵ meet every year since a thousand of
generations,
It does not resemble the human world, the constellations of Orion [Shen]
and Antares [Shang][never meet].
長虹帶映竹邊樓，樓外煙光望里收。

¹⁵³ Weisheng could also be a style name, but only two Qing individuals carried it, see Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 929, 1071; *Zhongguo lidai mingren dacidian*, there are a few Ming individuals with surname Wei, 45- 51, none of them seems a fair guess.

¹⁵⁴ *Chang duan* 腸斷 (lit. intestines break down) highlights the impact of grief on the body.

¹⁵⁵ *Nüniu* 女牛 is the abbreviated form for the stars in Chinese called Nüxing 女星 and Qianniuxing 牽牛星; they correspond to Vega and Altair respectively (HYDCD, 4-257B).

一水盈盈人不見，數聲腸斷雁橫秋。
憶昔君家在帝鄉，如今淮水隔蒼茫。
女牛歲合自千載，不似人間參與商。¹⁵⁶

The weaving maid Vega and herdboy Altair were a legendary pair of lovers, who like the corresponding stars were condemned to be separated by the milky way (in Chinese *yinhan* 銀漢 'silver river') and to see each other only once a year over a bridge of magpies built in the sky. When the stars meet on the seventh night (*qixi*) of the seventh month of the traditional lunisolar calendar, it is the festival of 'double seven' or 'night of seven'. *Qixi* was, and still is, a celebration for lovers and for the family, a moment in which girls dream about their perfect love, but also the time in which women invoke the weaver girl to help their needlework skills.¹⁵⁷ Ma Shouzhen employed the theme of *qixi*, which was recurrent in Chinese love poetry, and in so doing she included herself within the poetry tradition of romance.

Another set of poems in her personal collection were dedicated to a certain Zhang Si 張四, whose style name was Buxuan 補軒; Zhang remains an unidentified character, yet since her collection's preface is dated 1591 they must have been acquainted before this year. One of the poems, titled 'Sent to Zhang Buxuan' (*Ji Zhang Buxuan* 寄張補軒), corresponds to one of the four stanzas of 'In a summer day missing Buxuan Zhang Si' (*Xiari huai Buxuan Zhang Si* 夏日懷補軒張四), collected in *Qinglou yunyu*.¹⁵⁸ In the following verses, Ma indulged in the expression of her depressive loneliness:

Sitting alone in the empty room I recall the past years,

¹⁵⁶ Although the name of a certain He appears in at least two of Ma's poems, it is unclear whether this poem – which is reproduced as 'He Wei sheng', in Zhao Shijie, *Gujin nüshi*, 6.30b and Zhong Xing, *Mingyuan shigui*, 28.17b – could instead be titled *He Wang sheng* 和王生; see Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 2.22a-b.

¹⁵⁷ On *qixi* in women's poetry see Robertson, 'Voicing the Feminine', 95; see also Chang, *The Late Ming Poet*, 76-9; and Mann, *Precious Records*, 183-7.

¹⁵⁸ Ma Shouzhen, *Xianglan shiji*, 2.13a-14a.

When we took hot baths together in the breeze of the evening.
 But today we are in two different places, my pillow is lonely.
 When will we meet again and get inebriated in the damasked bed?
 Mountain Chu repeated ten thousand times, you went faraway;
 At the extremely long Xiang River [our] dreams meet each other.
 Anytime I can hear music or read books, but it's so hard to see you.
 Sad and lonely I lean against the carved balustrade and the tears pour
 down.

獨坐空庭記往年，蘭湯浴共晚風前。
 即今兩地欹孤枕，何日重逢醉綺筵。
 萬疊楚山人去遠，千尋湘水夢相連。
 音書雖見人難見，悶倚雕欄淚洒然。¹⁵⁹

In the above poem Ma used once again the trope of the lonely woman which, as mentioned above, is part of the rhetoric of the woman's erotic allure. Ma remembers past times spent in happiness with Zhang and a feeling of nostalgia pervades the whole composition. She concludes the poem with the stereotypical image of the courtesan depicted leaning against the balustrade and weeping, thus the bodily attitude of leaning is a typically female posture which gives a clear gendered dimension to the poem. As mentioned above, in the rhetorics of parting Ma Shouzhen crafted her self in a dramatic fashion in order to conform to the conventional – and titillating – idea of the *guiyuan* desperate in solitude. At the same time, this augmented her connection with extreme expressions of *qing*.

Poetry was a tool to display social ties, as is shown by Ma Shouzhen and also her contemporaries who wrote poems to or for her, such as Wang Zhideng and Liang Chenyu.¹⁶⁰ In *Liechao shiji* there are two poems likely to have been written to Ma when she was still alive: one by the Jiangnan scholar Mei Fanzuo 梅蕃祚 who, as reported in

¹⁵⁹ Ma Shouzhen, *Xianglan shi ji*, 1.4b; Ma Shouzhen, 'Xiari huai Buxuan Zhang Si' 夏日懷補軒張四 'In a summer day missing Puxuan Zhang Si', in Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1994), 311-12.

¹⁶⁰ These will be further explored in Chapter Five.

his biography, was intimate with the courtesan;¹⁶¹ the second one by the scholar-poet Lu Bi 陸弼, style name Wucong 無從, whose precise dates are also unknown, but who was Wang Zhideng's fellow at the *taixue* 'imperial university'.¹⁶² The last couplet of Lu Bi's poem was subsequently used to deride Ma Shouzhen and her – apparently – big feet:

Presented to Lady Ma of Jinling

Apricot blossoms in the corner of the courtyard, sounds of the spring
turtledoves,
Immerse in lingering orchids fragrance, too lazy to go down the building.
A newly cut pomegranate skirt,
[Long enough] not to make others see the jade bound feet.¹⁶³

贈金陵馬姬

杏花屋角響春鳩，沉水香殘懶下樓。
剪得石榴新樣子，不教人見玉雙鉤。¹⁶⁴

4.6 The woman's voice and sensuality in ci poems

As mentioned above, the making and performance of song lyrics had a special feminine dimension: the tradition of *guiyuan*, the connection to the pleasure quarters, and women themselves as authors of *ci*. The famous Song poet Li Qingzhao 李清照 (b.1084), daughter of a high official and a wife, was appreciated as one of the most relevant figures in the history of *ci* writing.¹⁶⁵ In the literati circles *ci* was traditionally considered of lower poetic value than *shi*, and was perceived as a more colloquial and sincere composition; yet, in the late Ming the song lyric genre gained new respectability and

¹⁶¹ Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 465; Mei Fanzuo 梅蕃祚, 'Ji Ma Xiangjun' 寄馬湘君 'Sent to Ma Xiangjun', in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.69a; also quoted in Xu Qiu, *Ben shi shi*, 4.19b.

¹⁶² See his biography in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji xiaozhuan*, 499.

¹⁶³ There are several expressions to indicate bound feet, *shuanggou* 雙鉤 is one of them, HYDCD, 11-855A.

¹⁶⁴ Lu Bi 陸弼, 'Zeng Jinling Ma ji' 贈金陵馬姬 'Presented to Lady Ma from Jinling', in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 3.9.36b.

¹⁶⁵ On Li Qingzhao and her *ci* see John Timothy Wixted, 'The Poetry of Li Ch'ing-chao: A Woman Author and Women's Authorship', in Pauline Yu ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, 1994), 145-68.

vigour, due to the fact that some key intellectual figures and famous courtesans composed *ci* as part of a rediscovery of spontaneity, as well as the expression of passions and feelings.¹⁶⁶

The development of song lyrics in the late sixteenth century was further connected to the flourishing of Southern music and theatre (as discussed in the next chapter). Ma Shouzhen wrote short *ci*, also called *xiaoling* 小凌 and long *ci*, named *manzi* 慢詞. Overall, her song lyrics received less attention than her *shi* poems; five of Ma's *ci* were collected by Wang Duanshu, and nine were anthologised in 'Song Lyrics of a Multitude of Perfumes'.¹⁶⁷

Ma Shouzhen engaged with some of the most ancient love tunes, which were traditionally authored by literati in the female voice, such as *Pusa man* 菩薩蠻 which could be translated as 'The Foreign Bodhisattva',¹⁶⁸ followed by the subtitle *Furong he Rao Jingbi* 芙蓉和饒荆壁, which literally means 'Peonies, rhyming with Rao Jingbi', a figure who remains unknown although he must have been quite close to Ma Shouzhen since she dedicated to him also another poem collected in her *bieji*.¹⁶⁹ The tune composed of one hepta-syllabic couplet and three penta-syllabic ones describes a natural scenery and does not make any direct reference to her own feelings, her boudoir or an absent lover, which were typical themes associated with this tune.¹⁷⁰

Reed flowers, floating snow, in autumn the river is cold,

¹⁶⁶ On *ci* in the Ming see Chang, *The Late Ming Poet*, 41-5; and Robertson, 'Voicing the Feminine', 69.

¹⁶⁷ Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 38.4b-38.6a; Xu Shumin, *Zhong xiang ci*, 6.4a-6.6b.

¹⁶⁸ At a search of this tune in the McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project, there are 342 results [accessed May 2012].

¹⁶⁹ See 'Zeng Jingbi Raojun' 贈荆壁饒君 'Sent to Sir Rao Jingbi', in Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 1.11b.

¹⁷⁰ On this see Fong, 'Persona and Mask', 460-1; in Frankel, 'The lonely woman', *The Flowering Plum*, 56-61; also in Samei, *Gendered Persona*, 122-3.

A jade panpipe's tune spreads, people cannot rest.
 A strong wind brings the geese for the first time in the year,
 Cotton roses bloom in many different directions.
 The dew is heavy so beauties can hardly stand,
 Scented red [flowers] are reflected on the autumn water.
 One plant slanting on mirroring surface,
 A fragrant appearance against the rosy clouds at dusk.
 蘆花飄雪秋江冷，玉笛橫吹人未靜。
 風急雁初來，芙蓉相對開。
 露重嬌難起，紅香映秋水。
 臨鏡一枝斜，芳姿比落霞。¹⁷¹

This song lyric can be seen as a negotiation between the normative performance of courtesans and Ma Shouzhen's individual self: it challenges the traditional clichés used to voice the abandoned woman by focusing on her own self with no mention of a man or lover. Yet, there are allusions to solitude: the coldness recalls the lack of love or companionship while the floating of the flowers reminds readers of the unstable life of the courtesan; the pipe tune adds a note of nostalgia while the circle of nature repeats itself with the return of the geese. Finally, the image of the slanting plant could stand for her own self and conveys the allure of sensual femininity. There are different modes of eroticism in Ma's *ci*, and some express more overt titillating motifs, such as the following:

[To the tune] *Ru meng ling* ¹⁷²
 After the rain, flowers and branches are red and tired.
 The sunshine enters the embroidered curtains halfway through.
 When half asleep half awake, Who whispers by the ear?
 Soul in pain, soul in pain! Even the flowers emit a deep sigh for me.
 如夢令
 雨過花枝紅倦，日照繡幃剛半。
 半睡半醒時，誰向耳邊低喚？
 魂斷，魂斷，花也為人長嘆。¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, 'Pusa man. Furong he Rao Jingbi' 菩薩蠻。芙蓉和饒荊璧, in Xu Shumin, *Zhong xiang ci*, 6.4a-b.

¹⁷² An entry-search for this title in McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project resulted in 173 titles [accessed May 2012].

¹⁷³ Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, 'Ru meng ling' 如夢令 '[To the tune] *Ru meng ling*', in Xu Shumin, *Zhong xiang ci*, 6.4a. This poem highlights the difficulty of interpreting a composition in absence of personal pronouns.

The poem is loaded with erotic imagery: the rain could refer to the 'the games of clouds and rain', an expression used for love-making, the curtains are half open to invite in the voyeuristic gaze, and whispering conveys the idea of intimacy. The last line juxtaposes an image which is apparently in antithesis with the flirtatious attitude built up in the previous lines, and yet it conforms with the eroticising idea of the lonely courtesan in need of support: the focus shifts onto her sorrow emphasised by the repetition of the phrase 'lost soul' or 'heartbreaking' (*hunduan* 魂斷) and the personification of the flowers which sympathise with her distress. Her despair could, even more powerfully, be seen as a cry for consolation and as another potentially erotic factor.

Ma Shouzhen also made use of a straightforward erotic lexicon as in the song lyric '[To the tune] *Qi Luo Xiang*. Embroidering socks' (*Qi Luo Xiang. Xiu wa* 綺羅香。繡襪)¹⁷⁴ in which the title itself by using the word *xiu*, which as already mentioned could allude to the sexual act, sets a highly arousing scene within the space of the boudoir:

Calm water, lights and sounds of spring,
 Lightly cold, lightly warm
 Many blushing beauties and timid green grass
 Deep inside the courtyard
 I open the curtains, I am alone
 Floating red rain,
 The swallows fly in pairs,
 Facing the green jade waves,
 The mandarin ducks bathe together
 I cut three feet of Wu thin silk¹⁷⁵
 On the jade silk I design flowers pattern
 I divide the strips of silk,
 Take a needle,
 Embroider one stem with two lotus flowers.

In this case it seems reasonable to think that in the last line *ren* indicates herself, but it could also mean people and the verse would then read 'Even the flowers emit a sigh for the people'.

¹⁷⁴ A survey search of this title in McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project resulted in 23 entries [accessed May 2012].

¹⁷⁵ The Chinese *chi* 尺 (lit. ruler) corresponds to roughly one-third of a metre (0.33 cm).

Fragrant sweat, I am a bit sticky
I cover with my hand the painting of Mount Wu
My heart is bound up,
I leave out sorrows and pains
My soft breast is moist
In secret I desire a 'happy divination'.
I separate the silk so as to see the lotus seedpod
And again I poke the candle wick.

淡蕩春光，
輕寒輕暖，
多少嬌紅羞綠。
深院沉沉，
鉤起犀簾人獨。
飄紅雨，
燕子交飛，
迎碧浪，
鴛鴦爭浴。
裁就三尺吳綾，
玉織描出花團簇。
絲絲分杼，
把金針，
繡朵并頭湖目。
香汗微粘，
遮端巫山一幅，
芳心綰，
閣住愁來，
酥胸潤，
偷將歡卜。
解春羅露出蓮房，
重挑銀蜡燭。¹⁷⁶

There is a careful building up of the scene with reference to poetic tropes, which have been previously discussed in this chapter, such as Spring as the season for loving and the pair of swallows and mandarin ducks, which meaning is reiterated by the design she embroiders: a stem carrying two lotus flowers, an emblem for a married couple.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, the lotus (蓮 *lian*) carries a strong sexual connotation as it is a homophone with *lian* 連 'to become a couple' either in sex or marriage, and 'silk' (*si* 絲) also evokes

¹⁷⁶ Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, 'Qi Luo Xiang. Xiu wa' 綺羅香. 繡襪 '[To the tune] Qi Luo Xiang. Embroidering socks', in Xu Shumin, *Zhong xiang ci*, 6.6a.

¹⁷⁷ The same imagery is used by Wang Zhideng in the first of the twelve eulogies in her memory, see Chapter Six.

sex.¹⁷⁸ In the poem, Ma Shouzhen's actions succeed quickly one after the other, cutting the silk, designing the pattern, dividing the fabric and threading the needle, thus the emphasis is clearly on bodily engagement in the practice of embroidery. The concluding lines make an unambiguous reference to her sweaty breast, which clearly alludes to the excitement and warming of the body during the sexual act.¹⁷⁹ The explicitly erotic scene is concluded by the image of the courtesan poking the candle wick, which is an invitation for the voyeuristic eye to enter the dim light of her boudoir. Moreover, the reference to embroidery gives a clear gendered dimension to the poem since embroidering and needling are traditionally women's works; the poem is in the female voice and, in this case, an authentic woman's voice.

4.7 Conclusion

The poetic language of feelings which has been extensively studied by scholars such as Paolo Santangelo¹⁸⁰ is relevant in the analysis of Ma Shouzhen's poetry. She employed the emotional lexicon of *qing*, a word which occurs by itself and in binaries: 'great feelings' *duo qing* and 'boudoir feelings' *gui qing*. In the language of *qing*, the words semantically related to sadness (*chou* sorrow, *hen* resentment, *chang duan* extreme grief, *chuang* heartbreaking, *xiangsi* lovesickness) seem to overwhelm those related to happiness (pleasure of seclusion *youqu*, joy *le*). In the lexicon of *qing*, Ma often employed images from the natural world to express her feelings and emotions, from the warmth of spring to the trope of the pairs of animals as metaphors of the merry companionship she longed for and as antithesis to her solitude.

¹⁷⁸ Laing, 'Erotic Themes', 69; Ōki, *Shan'ge*, 433-4.

¹⁷⁹ *Su* 酥 could mean 'sexual extasy', Ōki, *Shan'ge*, 505.

¹⁸⁰ See for instance his discussion around emotive language in Ōki, *Shan'ge*, esp. 42-63

Differently from the stereotypical *guiyuan* woman who is unconditionally powerless and useless in the solitude of her chamber, Ma Shouzhen gives a more nuanced and complex version of a woman: she is in control of her space and feelings as well as she uses her writing ability as a ‘technology of self-representation’ to show the plurality of facets of her own self: she can be strong, tantalising or pathetic. The boudoir – a liminal place between the woman’s private and public self, between the intimate interior and the outside world of the city and nature – was a window, both real and metaphorical, from which to contemplate her feelings and observe the world. The boudoir can also be seen as a place of action, where the courtesan practised needlework and embroidery, reading, writing and painting, alone or in the company of others; the boudoir is for Ma Shouzhen a space for the expression of love and eroticism, as is seen especially clearly in her song lyrics.

For the courtesan, poetry was a multi-functional practice: a personal pursuit for the expression of intimate feelings and emotions, an integral part of the courtesan’s performance, a display of knowledge, culture, and sensuality to the surrounding community of literati. Poetry was a tool employed by the courtesan to display her gendered subjectivity which was expressed by different elements, such as the space of the boudoir, the femininity of *yin* elements, or the act of embroidery. If we consider poetry as a strategy of self-fashioning, then it is clear how Ma Shouzhen used it to exhibit a plurality of ‘selves’, which she shaped according to the circumstance, the recipient or possibly even her readers. Finally, the courtesan’s crafted ‘selves’ could reveal to be even more complex were we to analyse the entire corpus of her available works.

Chapter Five

Staging the Courtesan: Drama, Performance and Gender

5.1 The performance of theatre

In the first line of his eulogies to Ma Shouzhen, Wang Zhideng remembered the courtesan as ‘the best of her time in singing and dancing’ (歌舞當年第一流).¹ The courtesan profession’s main function and expectation was to *entertain*, especially through the performance of dance and music, by improvising and staging poetry and dramas as well as sharing with her guests the practice of painting, witty conversation, drinking games, and most likely sex. Ma Shouzhen was an eclectic performer in the Jiangnan social-cultural milieu: she was a talented painter and poet, a skilled singer, actress and dancer. Moreover, and surprisingly for her time, she was also a playwright and composed a *chuanqi* titled ‘Three Lives – The Story of the Jade Hairpin’ *San sheng zhuan– Yu zan ji* 三生傳-玉簪記.

There is much overdue research to be carried out on women and their involvement in the making of theatre.² A study and translation of the two extant scenes of Ma’s play and her role in the Nanjing theatre scene contributes to a historiographical re-evaluation of theatrical texts written by women in the Ming and to understanding the agency of women in the making and performing of drama. According to Hua Wei, one of the main scholars who has researched women playwrights of the imperial era, Ma Shouzhen is the earliest of

¹ Wang Zhideng, ‘Ma Xianglan wan geci’, 4.69a-b; also quoted in Xu Qin, *Ben shi shi*, 4.18a-b. See a full translation in Chapter Six.

² See Sun Mei 孫玫 and Xiong Zhiguan 熊贊關 ‘Wanming xizuo zhong de qinglou nüzi 晚明戲作中的青樓女子’ (Courtesans and Theatre Making in the Late Ming), in Zhang Hongsheng 張宏生 ed., *Ming Qing wenxue yu xingbie yanjiu* 明清文學與性別研究 ‘Researching Ming-Qing Literature and Gender’ (Nanjing, 2000), 182-97.

the six known women playwrights of the Ming dynasty; the others are: (1) the gentry woman Ruan Lizhen 阮麗珍, daughter of the official Ruan Dacheng 阮大鍼 (c.1587–1646), who was also himself a dramatist;³ (2) Ye Xiaowan 葉小紉 (1613–1657) author of the *zaju* ‘The Mandarin Duck’s dream’ *Yuanyang meng* 鴛鴦夢, and second daughter of the well-known woman poet Shen Yixiu;⁴ (3) the gentry woman Jiang Yujie 姜玉潔; (4) the courtesan Liang Xiaoyu;⁵ and (5) the Daoist nun Liang Mengzhao 梁孟昭 (1560–1640).⁶

The *chuanqi* play is the main genre of theatre of the late Ming, generally composed of not less than thirty scenes; its literary form derived from the ‘Southern theatre’ *nanxi* 南戲, which developed during the Southern Song dynasty (960–1127). The *chuanqi* was performed using a musical style of the South called *kunshan* 昆山, which prevailed from the late Ming dynasty with great prominence given to orchestral ensembles. The literatus, painter and dramatist Xu Wei, who was acquainted with Ma Shouzhen (as discussed in Chapter Three), described *kunshan* music as ‘smooth, sweet, and flowing’ (流麗悠遠), and as himself an aficionado of the Nanjing pleasure quarter also added: ‘it is the most capable of seducing an audience! And courtesans make superb use of this feature!’ (聽之最足蕩

³ There could be an interesting father–daughter relationship to explore there. On Ruan Dacheng – a controversial figure at the turn of the dynasty – as a poet and garden patron, see Alison Hardie, ‘Conflicting discourse and the discourse of conflict: eremitism and the pastoral in the poetry of Ruan Dacheng (c.1587–1646)’, in Daria Berg ed., *Reading China: Fiction, History and the Dynamics of Discourse – Essays in Honour of Professor Glen Dudbridge* (Leiden, 2006), 111–146. The same author is currently researching on Ruan as a playwright.

⁴ The fame and legacy of Xiaowan was overtaken by that of her younger sister Ye Xiaoluan (see Chapter Six), on the latter see Anne Gerritsen, ‘The Many Guises of Xiaoluan: The Legacy of a Girl Poet in Late Imperial China’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 17.2 (Summer, 2005), 38–61; on them and their mother Shen Yixiu see Idema, *The Red Brush*, 383–90, 392–4, 411–14; on Ye Xiaowan’s play, 411–12; on Shen Yixiu see also Berg, ‘Female Self-fashioning’, 241–58.

⁵ See Chapter Two.

⁶ Hua Wei, *Ming Qing funü xiqu chuanzuo yu piping*, 31.

人，妓女尤妙此).⁷ Because *kunshan* music was mainly adopted for the stage execution of *chuanqi*, the theatre was called *kunqu* or *kunju* 昆劇, where *qu* means ‘music’ and *ju* stands for ‘theatre’, and they are often translated as *Kun opera*.⁸ The *chuanqi* is the literary form and *kunqu* the operatic form of Southern theatre, and starting from the Wanli reign these two aspects of the opera were distinct as never before. The tensions between the dramatic text and its performance – their intentions, audience, language and form – were part of an ongoing debate among theatre critics and playwrights.⁹

The private theatre in the late Ming developed around the literati nexus where playwrights, troupe owners and critics were mainly literati.¹⁰ Given that most actors were illiterate, educated courtesans were perfectly suited for comprehending and impersonating literary characters, as their cultural resumé was closer to the literatus writer of the *chuanqi*. Often it was difficult for the director of the troupe, be they a singing master or the company’s owner, to teach their actors and actresses how to impersonate complex characters’ psychologies or intricate plots. This often resulted in bad productions and subsequent negative critiques, especially by the authors of plays who were unsatisfied with their staging and interpretation.¹¹

In Wang Zhideng’s biography of Ma Shouzhen, and subsequently in Qian Qianyi’s, we read that Ma Shouzhen ‘taught theatre to her girl-apprentices as a proper theatrical troupe and

⁷ Guanren Grant Shen, *Elite Theatre in Ming China, 1368-1644* (New York, 2005), 5-6.

⁸ Shen, *Elite Theatre*, 2-10.

⁹ Li-Ling Hsiao, *The Eternal Present of the Past: Illustration, Theatre, and Reading in the Wanli Period, 1573–1619* (Leiden, 2007), 38-86.

¹⁰ See Grant Shen, ‘Acting in the Private Theatre of the Ming Dynasty’, *Asian Theatre Journal*, 15.1 (Spring 1998), 64-86.

¹¹ Shen, *Elite Theatre*, 111-29.

every day they entertained guests at banquets; the drums mingled with the sound of *pipa* and with those of gold strings and sandalwood clappers’ (教諸小鬟學梨園子弟，日為供帳燕客，羯鼓胡琵琶聲，與金縷紅牙相間).¹² It is possible to infer that Ma Shouzhen wrote her drama to be performed by her own acting troupe, likely even including herself as actress and director. In so doing, she could take control of the different stages of theatre making, from its literary form to its stage performance.

In the late Ming, the popularity of *chuanqi* was greatly spread also thanks to the blooming publishing industry, which developed particularly from the 1550s with Nanjing as a major publishing node of the empire.¹³ A Ming *chuanqi* included songs known as ‘dispersed arias’ (*sanqu* 散曲) (discussed also in Chapter Four), the peculiarities of which are the use of vernacular language and the flexibility in themes; this flexibility was despite the fact that *sanqu*, as song lyrics, have patterned compositions related to the aria (*qu*). *Sanqu* were based on arias developed in the Southern Song and became particularly popular in the Ming;¹⁴ the *qu* were either Northern, usually accompanied by the *pipa* (Chinese lute), or Southern, in which case music was usually executed by a vertical bamboo flute.¹⁵

As Ma Shouzhen was based in the Qinhuai pleasure quarter, she likely performed mostly in Nanjing. The Qinhuai was at the heart of the city’s entertainment industry, a prolific cultural centre crowded with theatre critics and intellectuals, which gave great visibility to the

¹² Wang Zhideng, *Ma ji zhuan*, 4.1a; Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.78a-b. See alternative translation in Idema, *The Red Brush*, 366.

¹³ Chia, ‘Of Three Mountains Street’, 110.

¹⁴ For an innovative study on the practice of *sanqu* as self-fashioning strategy in the sixteenth century see Tian Yuan Tan, *Songs of Contentment and Transgression: Discharged Officials and Literati Communities in Sixteenth-Century North China* (Cambridge MA, 2010).

¹⁵ Chang, *Women Writers*, 811.

courtesan and her performances. Nonetheless, sources narrate that Ma Shouzhen went to Suzhou to stage a drama as part of the celebrations for Wang Zhideng's birthday. Shen Defu, a prominent late Ming author and older contemporary of Ma's, reported that for that occasion 'Ma Siniang took many of her girls (*nülang*) to Suzhou and sang the whole *Bei xi xiang* ('Northern arias from the Western Chamber')' (馬四娘挈其家女郎十五六人來吳中，唱北西廂全本).¹⁶ On the same trip, possibly en route to Suzhou, she stopped in Yangzhou where she also performed the Northern arias of the *Western Chamber*, as the literatus Feng Mengzhen (who was likely to be acquainted with the courtesan) recorded on the sixth day of the sixth month 1604:

Yang Sumen, myself and thirteen other fellows invited Ma Xiangjun [Xianglan in Yangzhou], we brought wine to Bao Hansuo's residence, where Ma and three girls from Hansuo's great in-house troupe staged a play. In the evening Ma and the girls performed two scenes from *Bei xixiang*, rather impressively. Soon [after] she was seen off and left the city. My fellows and I remained seated for a good while and only at midnight made our way home.

楊蘇門與余共十三輩請馬湘君，治酒於包涵所宅，馬氏三姊妹從涵所家優作戲。晚，馬氏姊妹演《北西廂》二出，頗可觀。先送湘君母子出城。余與司馬公諸君留坐良久，夜半始罷宿家中。¹⁷

Feng Mengzhen documented the reaction of the audience to the spectacle that Ma Shouzhen put on in collaboration with Mr Bao's private troupe: stating that the spectators did not leave the residence immediately, but rather stayed seated in front of the stage so as to appreciate further and reflect upon what they had just seen.

The above testifies that Ma Shouzhen could sing in the Northern style, as in fact in her own drama some arias are Northern. Nevertheless, all Ma Shouzhen's individual *ci* and *sanqu* are in the Southern style. As mentioned in Chapter Four, five *sanqu* written by the courtesan

¹⁶ Shen Defu quoted in Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.2.4b

¹⁷ Feng Mengzhen, *Kuixue tang ji*, 61.9a-9b. On Feng and Ma, see also Chapter Two, 69.

were collected by the early Qing gentry woman Wang Duanshu, a poet and critic, in her *Mingyuan shiwei*. Moreover, Wang Duanshu edited a less known separate anthology titled ‘Collection of Ming Dynasty Women’s Sanqu’ *Mingdai furen sanqu ji* 明代婦人散曲集, in which she reproduced songs by twelve women and commented on Ma’s *sanqu* as follows: ‘a bright voice from snowy teeth, [in her poetry] you can find Zhang Yiniang and Li Yaoshi’ (明喉雪齒，張一孃、李藥師髣髴一時并見).¹⁸ Zhang and Li were Tang heroines as well as protagonists of the Ming play by Zhang Fengyi, ‘The Red Whisk Girl’ *Hong fo ji* 紅拂記.¹⁹ One of Ma’s *sanqu* was also included in the ‘New List of Southern Song Lyrics’ *Nanci xinpu* 南詞新譜 edited by the late Ming playwright Shen Zipu 沈自晉 (1583–1665). This *sanqu* titled ‘Youth Journey’ *Shaonian you* 少年游 is followed by the subtitle ‘Story of Three Lives’ *San sheng zhuan* 三生傳, which informs that it was part of her homonymous play:

A smiling face opens like blossom;
 Knitted eyebrows are intricate like a willow,
 Why such an unreasonable frown smile?
 I only know how to be [a courtesan] leaning on the door,
 I stop embroidering,
 And it is night again to my boudoir.
 笑臉開花，顰眉鎖柳，顰笑豈無繇。
 且學倚門，休教刺繡，又上晚妝樓。²⁰

The knitted eyebrows or a frowning expression were typically associated with men of letters absorbed in studying but with the courtesan. Ma makes clear that the narrating voice is that of a courtesan, as the expression *yimen* 倚門 ‘leaning on the door’ specifically refers to the practice of entertainers waiting for guests at the door of their building.

¹⁸ Wang Duanshu 王端淑 ed., *Mingdai furen sanqu ji* 明代婦人散曲集 ‘Collection of Ming dynasty women’s *sanqu*’, in Lu Jiye ed., *Furen quhua* (Shanghai, 1937), 15 b, 16 a-b. The other eleven women are: Huang E 黃峨, Xu Yuan 徐媛, Liang Mengzhao 梁孟昭, Shen Huiduan 沈蕙端, Hao Xiang’e 郝湘娥, Shen Jingzhuan 沈靜專, Hu Zu 呼祖, Jiang Qiongqiong 蔣瓊瓊, Meng Ji 楚妓, Jing Pianpian, and Li Cuiwei 李翠微. The same comment was included in Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 38.6a.

¹⁹ Hua Wei, ‘Ma Xianglan’, 67.

²⁰ Shen Zipu 沈自晉, *Nanci xinpu* 南詞新譜 ‘New List of Southern Song Lyrics’ (copy dated 1912–1949, Rare Books Dept, Shanghai Library, cat.n. 線普長 412706-709), 6.1b; Hua Wei, ‘Ma Xianglan’, does not mention this source.

Despite the great achievements in the last twenty years of research into Chinese imperial theatre and drama, in the English-speaking academic world not much scholarly attention has been dedicated to the Ming courtesan's practice of dance, music or theatre. As the music historian Joseph Lam has pointed out for the study of Chinese music,²¹ the scholarship on Ming theatre – which besides music includes its literary form, dance, singing, role-playing and stage performance – has also not yet given proper attention to the agency exerted by women in the development of new song genres and the popularisation of *kunqu* in late imperial Jiangnan.

Courtesans in particular, because they were greatly involved in the execution of music and were often actresses in private theatres, played an important role in transmitting and developing the practice of Southern song and drama, as Judith Zeitlin has discussed.²² In the Confucian tradition, the female voice was seen as corruptive and dangerously seductive;²³ singing was part of the erotic allure of the courtesan, one of her 'most important currencies'²⁴ in the gift-exchange that occurred during encounters with her guests. In a recent article Joseph Lam has explored music and eroticism in late Ming novels, stories and songs, where the protagonists are mostly courtesans, thereby strengthening the association between courtesan, music and eroticism. Although the role of women in the development of songs has already been pointed out by scholars, Lam's focus in his latest article remains

²¹ Joseph S.C. Lam, 'The Presence and Absence of Female Musicians and Music in China', in Dorothy Ko, J.K. Haboush and J.R. Piggott eds., *Women and Confucian Cultures in Pre-Modern China, Korea and Japan* (Berkeley; London, 2003), 97-122.

²² Zeitlin, 'Notes of Flesh', 75-99.

²³ Lam, 'The Presence and Absence of Female Musicians', 97-122.

²⁴ Zeitlin, 'Notes of Flesh', 95.

on the male literati, and his study leaves once again the investigation of women's agency in music and theatre as a potential but mostly unexplored question.²⁵

Recently Chinese-speaking scholarship on late imperial theatre has developed an interest in the role of women in the discourse of drama, led by Hua Wei's excellent research.²⁶ In a groundbreaking article first published in 2007 in the Taiwanese journal *Xiqu xuebao*, Hua Wei discussed the until then neglected place of the courtesan Ma Shouzhen in the extremely prolific drama scene of Ming Nanjing. The article highlights how the courtesan played 'an active and multiple role' in spreading the practice of *sanqu*, collaborated with the famous theatre writer Liang Chenyu in publishing 'Lady Red Thread' (*Hongxian nü*), and herself wrote a drama. Hua Wei has discussed how Ma's persona likely inspired the celebrated playwright Tang Xianzu in developing some of the characters for his early dramas, which will be treated later in the chapter.

This chapter, following on Hua Wei's work, will discuss aspects related to the courtesan Ma Shouzhen as playwright, performer and theatre director. First, the focus will be on her drama by providing a complete translation of the two extant scenes;²⁷ second, the chapter will explore how Ma Shouzhen became herself a character used in theatrical plays; third, in order to better comprehend her activity as dramatist and entertainer, the investigation will move on to her social connections within the 'drama network' in Nanjing. Finally, the

²⁵ Joseph S.C. Lam, 'Reading Music and Eroticism in Late Ming Texts', *NanNü: Men, Women, and Gender in China*, 12.2 (2010), 253.

²⁶ Hua Wei, *Ming Qing funü zhi xiqu*; Hua Wei 華瑋 ed., *Ming Qing funü xiqu ji* 明清婦女戲曲集 'Anthology of Ming-Qing Women's Plays' (Taipei, 2003). This is an anthology of plays by women of the Ming (only Ye Xiaoluan) and nine plays by four Qing women.

²⁷ A more in-depth analysis of the texts will be the subject of future research.

chapter will conclude with some reflections on Ma Shouzhen in relation to issues of performance and gender at the end of the sixteenth century.

5.2 Ma Shouzhen and her drama

Only two scenes from Ma's drama still survive. 'Three Lives' is a *chuanqi* belonging to the Southern drama tradition of *kunqu*; there is not much documentation about the play as a whole and no stage directions appear in the two scenes, so it is unclear how many impersonators were involved in its execution or whether their roles are female or male. The scenes were included in the collection of late Ming plays 'A Multitude of Melodies, Classified and Selected' *Qunyin leixuan* 群音類選, edited by Hu Wenhuan 胡文煥 and published in the years 1593–1596 of the Wanli reign,²⁸ thus Ma's play must have been produced before this date. It is interesting to note that Hu shared with contemporary literati a wide range of interests which, besides the Southern drama, included painting, as demonstrated by his publication of painting manuals.²⁹

The two surviving scenes are titled 'A jade hairpin gifted at departure' *Yuzan zeng bie* 玉簪贈別 and 'Learning to sing and dance' *Xuexi gewu* 學習歌舞; they are briefly introduced by Hu Wenhuan in his collection of plays, as follows: 'This piece was written by Ma Xianglan. The story of Wang Kui differs from that of Pan Bizheng in *The Jade Hairpin*' (此系為馬湘蘭編。王魁故事與潘必正玉簪不同).³⁰ Hu Wenhuan informed his readers that Ma's drama made reference to the Song dynasty tragic love story of Wang Kui, revived and turned into

²⁸ Hu Wenhuan, *Qunyin leixuan*, 929–33. Hu was a bookseller in Hangzhou (according to DMB, 1297).

²⁹ Park, *Art by the Book*, 80.

³⁰ Hu Wenhuan, *Qunyin leixuan*, 929.

opera during the Yuan and Ming dynasty. Wang Kui was a scholar who did not pass the imperial examination and during his wanderings around the country fell in love with the beautiful courtesan Jiao Guiying 敫桂英, who helped him financially. After having promised her eternal love, Wang went back to the capital to resit the exams. He passed as one of the top scholars and subsequently married an official's daughter. At the news of their marriage Guiying killed herself, and her ghost persecuted Wang until his death.³¹

Hu Wenhuan made clear that although Ma's *chuanqi* title echoed the play 'The Jade Hairpin' *Yuzan ji* 玉簪記 written in 1570 by the contemporary Gao Lian 高濂 (1527–1609), it was distinct from it – but he did not specify how. Gao's happy-ending romance narrates the story of Pan Bizheng, a scholar who fell in love with Chen, a young Daoist nun who turned to religion after her family lost their wealth. When the abbot of the nunnery discovered their relationship, Pan was obliged to retake the imperial examination to prove his love; in the end he succeeded in the exams and could marry Chen.³²

The late Ming novelist and critic Lü Tiancheng 呂天成 (1580–1618) included Ma's *chuanqi* in his 'Classification of Drama' *Qu pin* 曲品, but suspected her ability to compose a drama and attributed the work to a substituted brush (*daibi*). He wrote:

Three Lives begins with [the story of] Wang Kui abandoning Guiying, then follows up with [that] of Su Qing abandoning Feng Kui, and thirdly [it deals with] Chen Guan and the courtesan Peng. Each [character] behaves faithfully and eventually is reunited; only then the emotional debts are repaid. However, using three worlds [generations] as a technique is not as

³¹ On the story of Wang Kui and the theme of the ungrateful scholar in sixteenth-century theatre see Regina Llamas, 'Retribution, revenge and the ungrateful scholar in early Chinese southern drama', *Asia Major*, vol. XX, n. 2 (2007), 75-101.

³² Shen, *Elite Theatre*, 78.

effective as the vigorous narrative of [Wang Yufeng's 王玉峰] *Burning Incense*. Lady Ma may not have been able to compose such a drama, so probably it was written in secret by a substitute brush.

《三生傳》，始則王魁負桂英，次則蘇卿負馮魁，三而陳冠、彭妓，各以節自守，卒相配合，情債始償。但以三世轉折，不及《焚香》之暢發者。馬姬未必能填詞，乃所私代筆者。³³

Lü provides the most exhaustive information about Ma's drama, the title of which refers to three generations of reincarnation, possibly of the courtesan-protagonists, rather than the scholars, of the revisited classic stories included in the drama. 'Three lives' is a Buddhist expression to indicate the previous, the present and the future, in reference to people who are meant to meet in a future life, as in the Tang dynasty tale of monk Yuanguan and the playboy Li who remeet years later when Yuanguan is in the guise of a shepherd boy.³⁴ The paradigmatic tale of Wang Kui and Guiying briefly explained above is also at the centre of the forty-scenes romance 'The Story of Burning Incense' *Fen xiang ji* 焚香記 by Wang Yufeng, which was regarded by its contemporaries as a strikingly truthful play in portraying human feelings.³⁵ As Judith Zeitlin has pointed out, Wang Yufeng opted for a variation of the original tale and added an unusual happy ending for the scholar-courtesan odyssey, in which Wang Kui is in the end able to prove that his marriage is not valid and that he can in fact marry the courtesan.³⁶ Yet, it is unknown how Ma Shouzhen interpreted it. The second story of the plot was that of the courtesan Su Qing, who was obliged to become a concubine of the tea-seller Feng Kui. In the traditional tale, the authorities intervened to annul the

³³ Lü Tiancheng 吕天成, *Qupin* 曲品 'Songs Classification', in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* (Beijing, 1959), 390-1. I thank Dr Alison Hardie who commented on a previous translation of this passage and other extracts in this chapter.

³⁴ Chang, *Writing Women*, 272-3.

³⁵ Faye Chunfang Fei ed., *Chinese Theories of Theater and Performance. From Confucius to the Present* (Ann Arbor, 1999), 66-7.

³⁶ Wang Yufeng 王玉峰, *Fen xiang ji* 焚香記 'The Story of Burning Incense', in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002); Judith T. Zeitlin, 'Operatic Ghosts on Screen: The Case of *A Test of Love* (1958)', *Opera Quarterly* 26 (2-3) (2010), 223.

wedding, so that she could marry her true love, the scholar Shuangjian 雙漸. The third is a folk story, again about a love affair between the scholar Chen Guan and the courtesan Peng.³⁷ The three tales are centred around the beauty-scholar romance with emphasis on the idea of passion and love (*qing*) as well as karmic retribution.

As cited above, Lü Tiancheng raised the issue of authenticity of Ma's *chuanqi*, although he did not specify why he doubted the authorship, besides the fact that he did not recognise her literary skills.³⁸ It is interesting to note that in his erotic novel 'The Wild Stories of the Embroidered Bed' *Xiuta yeshi* 繡榻野史, Lü Tiancheng again depicted Ma Shouzhen quite negatively through the words of a male protagonist talking to one of his female lovers:

Last year when I went to Nanjing to take the Provincial Examination, I visited Ma Xianglan's house in the pleasure quarters for some fun. I saw her décor, which is almost like yours. Even though she is an extremely famous courtesan, she is not even comparable to a hair under your foot.
我舊年到南京科舉。去院子裡馬湘蘭家耍子。見他的鋪設。與你家差不多的。只是馬湘蘭極出名的小娘。趕你的腳底毛不來哩。³⁹

We do not know whether Ma and Lü knew each other, but there is a detectible level of scepticism towards the courtesan which could have related to personal reasons. Although we know the main content of Ma's play, it is difficult to establish from which part of her drama the extant scenes were selected. Moreover, as there are no stage directions but only the tune-names indicated in brackets,⁴⁰ it is impossible to know who or how many characters are involved in each scene. Nonetheless, further information on the practice of

³⁷ See also Hua Wei, 'Ma Xianglan', 18.

³⁸ On Lü and Ma see Wilt L. Idema, "'Blasé literati': Lü T'ien-Ch'eng and the Lifestyle of the Chiang-nan Elite in the Final Decades of the Wan-li Period', in R.H. Van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Late Ming Period* (Leiden, 2004), xxxi-lxii.

³⁹ Lü Tiancheng 呂天成, *Xiuta yeshi* 繡榻野史 'The Wild Stories of the Embroidered Bed', in *Siwuxie huibao* (Taipei, 1995), 2.146; see alternative translation in Lenny Hu trans., *The Embroidered Couch. An Erotica Novel from China* (Vancouver, 2001), 55.

⁴⁰ As accepted practice in drama studies, the tune titles are left in *pinyin*.

theatre can be extrapolated from reading the scenes, and their translation is provided below.

5.3 A jade hairpin gifted at departure

As seen in Chapter Four parting is a recurrent *topos* in poetry by literati and courtesans. It was common practice to give a token of departure, which could have been a broken willow branch (see Chapter Two), a painting (see Chapter Three), a piece of poetry (see Chapter Four) or any other object which symbolised their union. In the following scene, the token is a jade hairpin:

(To the tune: *Xiang liu niang*) Pour the wine! Pour the wine! Let's drink a farewell cup, soon the knot of love will be broken.

The travelling bag is ready, the travelling bag is ready! In the journey dusty lands will be left behind your carriage. At dusk you will rest in a desolate guesthouse.

(All) What a style in parting! What a style in parting! The spirit is already distant on the way, while in the deep boudoir the dreams accumulate.

(To the previous tune) Remember the past time of our love! Remember the past time of our love! In a hundred years we will still be together. Unfortunately halfway through our love has been ceased, let's renew our promise, let's renew our promise! There is no need to live in an expensive residence and forget my simple room.

(All as previous)

(To the tune: *Yi duo jiao*) With a broken voice knotted in my stomach, how can I look at you leaving?

(All) When we die we will be buried together, When we die we will be buried together, but now just take this jade hairpin as gift at your departure.

(To the previous tune) My words are earnest and my tears about to exhaust! The journey will be hard, the horses will gallop fast. It is hard to listen to the cuckoo singing.

(All as previous)

(To the tune: *Heima xun*) From now onward I will throw away all my rouge and powder, I will be plain and pure like water, I won't have any appointments with others, will take out my towel and comb, redo the bed and open the mandarin-ducks embroidered curtains, and nicely pile up the green quilts. My heart is entrusted [to you] just as bright as the moon.

(All) [Our] feelings are genuine, we have grown old together but from now on we will be separated. We hope in an extraordinary encounter! We hope in an extraordinary encounter, and to talk to each other [again soon].

(To the previous tune) A lighthearted departure, only to achieve scholarly honour, how can we disappoint our promise and forget our righteous love? We should tie the knot again. Only I am afraid that your success will bring you too far and you won't write letters again, [I am afraid it will bring you] to a remote place and for a long time.

(All as previous).

(香柳娘)把斟來竹葉，把斟來竹葉，一盅餞別，相將斷卻同心結。看行囊已設，看行囊已設，塵泥逐征車。日暮投荒舍。

(合)這別離行色，這別離行色，古道魂賒，深閨夢疊。

(前腔)念當時題葉，念當時題葉，百年為節。可憐中道恩情歇。把誓盟重設，把誓盟重設，莫戀富豪宅，忘卻茅檐舍。(合前)

(憶多嬌)聲已咽，腸自結，怎將青眼送人別。離禁這盈盈淚成血。

(合)死相同穴，死相同穴，卻把玉簪贈別。

(前腔)言正切，淚欲竭，問關千里馬蹄捷，難聽那聲聲鵲啼血。(合前)(黑麻序)今后把脂粉全拋，水清玉洁，忍違誓干盟，又操持巾櫛，收拾鴛幃遶，翠衾疊，一點丹心，直教明月。

(合)情真意切，白首從今訣。冀作奇逢，冀作奇逢，與人共說。

(前腔)只為功名，輕離易別，肯負義忘恩，把赤繩再結。只恐鵬程杳，魚書絕。萬里關山，淹留歲月。(合前)⁴¹

In this scene, we are fairly likely hearing the voice of a courtesan who describes the sorrowful moment of departure from her lover. In the rhetoric of departure, courtesans are left in solitude as it is always the man busy in his duties who will eventually leave. Of course, he cannot be seen as a reliable partner, but the courtesan naïvely will await his return, just as Ma Shouzhen in one of her poems 'Heartbreaking departure' lamented: 'In the boudoir with nothing to do, I await the boat to return'.⁴²

The scene describes the emotionally unbalanced moment of departure in which the courtesan does not have any other choice but to be left alone in the world of prostitution while waiting to be rescued. In this scene, after the initial moment of farewell toasting for the parting lover, there is a suffered moment of remembrance of the time spent together

⁴¹ Hu Wenhuan, *Qunyin leixuan*, 929-31.

⁴² Ma Shouzhen, 'Chuang bie', 4.68b.

and the gifting of the hairpin as a symbol and reification of love. Soon the courtesan turns to think about the future and expresses devotion to her lover by renouncing the company of other men; she entrusts her pure loving heart to him. Although it is impossible to know how this scene worked within the whole play, it can be read as a rhetorical self-fashioning in which Ma Shouzheng reiterated some of the stereotypes connected to courtesans: as a woman she (by default) depended on a man; as a courtesan, she was devoted and faithful were she only given the opportunity to love and be loved. But, will her lover be back? Or as in Wang Kui's original story, will the courtesan be deluded and the promise of love betrayed?

5.4 The symbol of the hairpin

The hairpin (usually *zan* 簪 or *chai* 釵) is an object dense with significance in Chinese literature and culture. In Chapter Two it has been said that the hairpin *chai* is a synonym for 'a beautiful girl'. However, scholars and officials kept their hair long, they also made use of pins as suggested by the typical expression used to indicate them 'cap and pin' (*guan* 冠 and *zan* 簪).⁴³ Nonetheless, the hairpin was mainly a woman's object and bore a special meaning in the life of women in imperial China due to the rite of passage called the 'hairpin ceremony' (*jili* 笄禮), where *ji* (hairpin) is a synonym of *zan*. The rite marked the beginning of womanhood for girls of fifteen *sui* (or fourteen years old) stepping into their marriageable status. The hairpin was an emblem of the woman's age of maturity in body and mind, the beginning of adulthood and the time of reproduction. Girls brought up in brothels were likely to undergo 'the hairpin ceremony' earlier than in gentry houses; as Feng Menglong in his novella 'The oil vendor' says: 'the general rule in brothels is that twelve is too early for a

⁴³ HYDCD, 2-446A. Interestingly in the late Ming *Bian er chai* 弁而釵 'caps and hairpins' was used as the title for a collection of homoerotic stories, see Huang, 'Sentiments of Desire', 177-8.

first night [...] Thirteen is known as Opening the Flower, and by this time the girl has reached puberty and is able to receive the man, so this is held to be the right age.’⁴⁴

Hair is also an erotic ornament for the female body and the hairpin can be seen as a sexual and tantalising object for men.⁴⁵ The actions related to the hairpin strictly belong to the space of the boudoir and women’s habits and fashion. Women would fix their hair before or after encountering a man, as portrayed in a scroll (ill. 66) in which a palace beauty is probably getting ready to meet the emperor or to return to her bedchamber after a romantic encounter. Ma Shouzhen herself in a song dedicated to her friend Zhang Youyu described a scene of erotic and relaxed routine: ‘Going up into the building I loosely fix my mandarin duck-shaped hairpin’ (登樓漫把鴛釵整).⁴⁶ Hair and its decorations are seen as markers of social status and civil status as married women would arrange their hair differently from single women, and widows in mourning would have specific rules on how to arrange their hair, and would not be allowed to wear decorative hairpins.⁴⁷

Numerous Ming dynasty dramas encompassed in their title the word ‘hairpin’, be it the ‘separate hairpin’ (分釵記) of the *chuanqi* attributed to Zhang Jingyan 張景巖,⁴⁸ a pair of hairpins (雙釵記),⁴⁹ or a jade hairpin as in the case of a certain Xinyi shanren (心一山人), Lu Jianglou 陸江樓, Gao Lian and Ma Shouzhen, or the purple hairpins of Tang Xianzu’s play (*Zi*

⁴⁴ Hanan, *Falling in Love*, 29.

⁴⁵ Hair is a very important part of beauty, followed by eyebrows; see Wang Shunu, *Zhongguo changji shi*, 241-2.

⁴⁶ Ma Shouzhen 馬守真, ‘Gui zhao huan xiaochun ji Zhang Youyu’ 歸朝歡小春寄張幼于, in Liu Shumei 徐樹敏, *Zhong xiang ci* 眾香詞 (1690) [microfilm accessed at National Library of China, Beijing, Rare Books Collection, cat.n. 01382], 4.6a-b.

⁴⁷ On the hairpin ceremony see Sing-chen Lydia Francis, ‘Body and identity in *Liaozhai Zhiyi*’, *NanNü: Men, Women, and Gender in China*, 4.2 (2002), 212.

⁴⁸ Fu Xihua, *Mingdai chuanqi quanmu*, 220.

⁴⁹ Anonymous play mentioned in Fu Xihua, *Mingdai chuanqi quanmu*, 505.

chai ji 紫釵記).⁵⁰ In Ma Shouzhen's play the hairpin is given to the parting lover as a symbol of love and devotion, as a miniature representation or personification of the woman herself, which can then be taken away. In Tang Xianzu's play 'The Purple Hairpins' the sixteen-year-old Huo Xiaoyu 霍小玉, daughter of Lady Zheng 鄭 and Prince Huo 霍王, loves wearing purple jade swallow-shaped hairpins. In scene three, the jade carver brings a pair of new swallow hairpins inlaid with gold to be viewed by Lady Zheng as a present commissioned for Xiaoyu; at the end of the scene she wears the hairpin while wondering how to find the perfect match, thus the hairpins are symbols of the springtime of life in which the young woman is ready to find a lover. The whole story from this scene onward is centred around the hairpins, which appear and disappear, are sold and rebought, to eventually return to be possessed by Xiaoyu when she is able to be joined to her true love, the scholar and successful examination candidate Li Yi 李益.⁵¹ As happened in Tang's play, in many historical circumstances hairpins were gifted by women to other women. As Craig Clunas discusses in his latest research, women from regional kingly houses and the imperial palace may have contributed to a gift-exchange network by reciprocally presenting objects, which were often precious hairpins made of silver or gold, inlaid with stones and decorated with jade carvings,⁵² such as those housed in the Nanjing Museum (see ill. 67a and 67b).

5.5 Learning to sing and dance

There is no indication of whether or how the second scene 'Learning to sing and dance' relates to the first one. As Hua Wei has suggested, since there are a few Northern tunes in

⁵⁰ Fu Xihua, *Mingdai chuanqi quanmu*, 406, 214, 117-18, 89, 66 respectively.

⁵¹ Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖, *Zi chai ji* 紫釵記 'The Purple Hairpins', in *Da Zhonghua wenku* (Guangzhou, 2009), vol. 1, 19-29.

⁵² (forthcoming) Craig Clunas, *Screen of Kings. Royal Art and Power in Ming China* (London, 2013).

this scene, which are typically sung by one person only, and since we know that Ma Shouzheng could perform Northern arias, this scene could have been sung by Ma herself.⁵³ Rather than explaining the processes of teaching and learning the narrating voice, possibly the teacher's voice, tells us what results of good training are expected to be achieved by a courtesan. The scene can be divided into five parts which describe how a beautiful woman should play wind and string instruments, sing and dance. In the last part, the master emphasises that the highest achievement is to excel in all these four skills, only then can she be successful and admired. This scene, written by a courtesan about courtesans' performance, shows that the level of expectation from the audience was very high, as was the pressure on young courtesans and performers to learn and perform perfectly. The scene reads:

(To the tune: *Bei xin shui leng*) A beautiful woman blowing a horizontal jade flute plays a new song, [the music] reaches the whole city while falling plum blossoms fill the alleys. The song is the sound of 'leaning against the building', three melodies beautifully played by the flute; [its potency] splits rocks and reaches the clouds, don't say it is a *jushan* mirror.⁵⁴

(To the tune: *Pupu jiao*) [It is important to] change from one note (*yu*) to the other one (*gong*) again in a beautiful flute melody, where the six sounds are played together, they all reach the highest level in the mist and clouds. At that moment the music attracts the celestial birds and everybody in the sky will want to listen to it. In the immortals' residence suddenly they can hear such an elegant tune and all enjoy the precious melody.

(To the tune: *Bei zhegui ling*) The red sandalwood pipa plays sounds powerful like thunders; fingering the strings to play a Kunlun tune, wearing a splendid attire while tuning the six strings to the correct note so that its sounds, both low and high, are well distinct, like a bottle suddenly breaking and its water splashing or like warriors unsheathing their swords all together. The oriole's song is graceful and the spring sounds are crystalline, play again the 'Mingfei tune',⁵⁵ without more ado, lonely and sad.

⁵³ Hua Wei, 'Ma Xianglan', 19.

⁵⁴ Translation conjectural.

⁵⁵ Mingfei was the beautiful imperial concubine Wang Qiang 王嬙 or Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–8 AD) who was sent to the Xiongnu by the emperor; the song 'Mingfei qu' was performed and reinterpreted throughout the time, as for a Southern Song instance see Yang Xiaoshan, 'Wang Anshi's "Mingfei qu" and the Poetics of Disagreement', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, vol. 29 (Dec, 2007), 55-84.

(To the tune: *Nan jiangshui er*) Just stopped playing the reed pipe immediately start to finger the *se* [zither], when plucking the *konghou* [ancient instrument] is like meeting Husheng, like the butterfly of Zhuangzi forgets whether it is a dream or reality, like Si Maxiang who attracted Wen Jun and became husband and wife in joyous love. The high tone of her voice is unique like water flowing from high mountains, like horses galloping and fish swimming.

(To the tune: *Bei ya'erluo*) When she starts singing with her teeth exposed, she knows perfectly how to produce the sound; when she starts singing, her soft red lips know perfectly when to go slow or fast. When she starts singing she imitates the voice of Ziye, when she starts singing she is not afraid that Zhou Lang could hear, when she sings she responds to 'White snow',⁵⁶ when she sings her voice clears the dust away. She seems like Chang'e entering the moon palace,⁵⁷ she surpasses the girl of Mouchou in Nanjing in purity and freshness. Her voice is so beautiful that it is almost impossible to retain, when you listen to such a beautiful sound immediately the body feels refreshed.

(To the tune: *Nan raorao ling*) While singing she moves a round fan in search of moon shadows, her singing is unsurpassed even by Yun Ying,⁵⁸ from a clear note she enters into the tune of *Raorao ling*. If in the theatre the spectators will be amazed.

(To the tune: *Bei zhuang Jiangnan*) Ah, she needs to change into her white skirt, surely will reach the dwelling of [immortal] Xu Feiqiong,⁵⁹ like patterned mandarin ducks facing the mirror about to fly in pair; a purple swallow flies through the curtains without stopping, looking very beautiful she turns around and around like she is pirouetting on a hand palm; she dances trippingly, surpassing the beauties of Chu.

(To the tune: *Nan yuanlan hao*) A tiny bag floats and the jade ornaments move light and heavy; she whirls in her crimson skirt which looks like a lotus flower; on top of her head embroidered red silk attract the guests' gaze, moving their feelings.

(To the tune: *Bei jiemeijiu*) Her character is bright, her demeanour is charming, her voice pure and elegant, her body slim and graceful, even the female immortals don't surpass her, like E'lu or Yunying and Nongyu, Wen Jun, even Fan Su and Xiao Luan,⁶⁰ they all had many skills including the four most difficult ones, but you, you have until now successfully learnt how to play the

⁵⁶ Ziye 子夜 was a girl of Taiyuan during the Jin 晉 dynasty (265–420), see HYDCD, 4-169B.; Zhou Lang 周郎 was Zhou Yu 周瑜 (175–210), a handsome and smart official during the Three Kingdoms, HYDCD, 3-299A; *baixue* 'white snow' was a kind of music, see Chang, *Women Writers*, 36.

⁵⁷ Chang'e is a legendary goddess who stole the grass of immortality and inhabited the moon, see Chang, *Women Writers*, 114.

⁵⁸ Yun Ying 雲英 was a famous female singer of the Tang dynasty, HYDCD, 11-639B.

⁵⁹ Xu Feiqiong 許飛瓊 is a female immortal who accompanies Xi Wang Mu, HYDCD, 11-70B.

⁶⁰ As previously seen for Yunying, these are the names of famous historical or legendary figures: E'lu 萼綠 or E'lühua 萼綠華 is a female immortal, HYDCD, 9-471B; Nongyu 弄玉 was the musically talented daughter of the Duke Mu of Qin during the spring and autumn period (771–476 BC), Chang, *Women Writers*, 146; Wen Jun 文君 possibly corresponds to Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君, the beautiful and talented daughter of Han dynasty, the prince of Zhuo, HYDCD, 6-1520A; Fan Su 樊素 was a courtesan of the Tang dynasty and concubine of the poet Bai Juyi; see Chang, *Women Writers*, 382; I am not sure who Xiao Luan 小鸞 was.

flute, pluck the *qin*, sing and dance. Ah, look in front of the door how many carriages are waiting.

(To the tune: *Qing Jiang yin*) Looking for beauties, the carriages crowd the streets, it is full of rich young talented men, the house is very busy and noisy, outside the door they are queuing because only here there are the beauties who they are attracted by.⁶¹

(北新水令) 麗姝橫玉奏新聲，遍江城落梅盈逕。一聲倚樓韻，三弄拈床音。裂石穿雲，謾道是居山境。

(南步步嬌) 換羽移宮再把簫韶整，六律齊相應，煙霞最上層。時引靈禽，共上秦台聽，仙洞忽陽春，這琅玕妙節無余品。

(北折桂令) 紫檀槽鐵撥雷鳴，曲奏昆侖，盛裝成六么才定，嘈切分明，似銀瓶乍破了水漿共迸，儼鐵騎忽突出刀劍齊鳴。鶯語婷婷，泉韻粼粼，又彈出明妃曲，馬上淒清。

(南江水兒) 才罷笙篴理，且將琴瑟經，奏箜篌時遇廬生聘，似周庄蝴蝶迷魂夢，引文君鸞鳳成歡慶。可是調高聲俊，流水高山，抹馬游魚韻。

(北雁兒落) 動歌喉綻榴房識重輕，動歌喉破櫻顙知遲迅，動歌喉重開得子夜聲，動歌喉不怕他周郎聽，動歌喉謾道是和白雪，動歌喉煞強似拂輕塵。好一似儷娟入清虛境，還勝那莫愁在石頭城，清新。一曲繞梁聲難并，聽著這佳也麼音，頓教人肌骨清。

(南僥僥令) 歌扇團圓尋月影，宛轉遏雲英，清商慢入僥僥令。若是在華筵，四座驚。

(北妝江南) 呀，須索再把霓裳整，儼是個洞府許飛瓊，似文鴛對鏡展雙翎，紫燕穿簾羽不停，看絕倫轉身，轉身在掌上，翩躚尤勝楚腰輕。

(南園林好) 柳帶飄動佩環重輕，蓮花旋露絳裙，頭上應纏紅錦迷客目，動人情。

(北沽美酒) 性玲瓏，貌娉婷，聲清雅，體輕盈，便是那神女仙姬難廝并，追萼綠，企雲英，肩弄玉，勝文君，駕樊素小鸞丰韻，兼眾藝四難相稱，你呵，到如今吹成彈成，歌成舞成。呀，看門前車闐馬兢。

(清江引) 尋芳車馬應盈徑，盡是豪家俊。堂前嚷嚷喧，門外紛紛盛，端只為這佳人相牽引。⁶²

From this piece we can gather some useful information about the time and space of the performance. Most stage performances took place at night, as concluded by the contemporary scholar Grant Shen on the basis of sources, such as the diary of the late Ming connoisseur and theatregoer Qi Biaoja who was an eminent figure in the intellectual milieu of the Jiangnan, a famous theatre consumer and critic, and also well known for his garden.⁶³

This is confirmed by the performer who in the scene attempts to create moon shadows with

⁶¹ Hu Wenhuan, *Qunyin leixuan*, 931-33.

⁶² Hu Wenhuan, *Qunyin leixuan*, 931-33.

⁶³ Shen, *Elite Theatre*, 137-40.

her fan, thereby suggesting it was night time. The space of the performance seems to be within the courtesan's house, probably in a hall or the courtyard, and the text indicates that probably the audience surrounded the stage area, as it says that guests were sitting in all four directions (*sizuo* 四座), although the traditional stage had spectators on three sides only. The piece also tells us about the dress and accessories of the performer: she is wearing a white or red skirt complemented by a little purse and jade jewels, while on her head she has red ornaments.

This scene echoes the twenty-fifth scene 'perform dancing' *yanwu* 演舞 of Liang Chenyu's 'Washing Silk' *Huansha ji* 浣紗記 (1579), the first play of the *kunqu* genre,⁶⁴ and a bestseller published six times in the Ming dynasty.⁶⁵ In both Ma's and Liang's scenes, the knowledge of singing and dancing is passed from woman to woman, although the environments in which these plays set their women are very different. In Ma's it is the courtesan scene, while in Liang's it is the Suzhou palace of King Fuchai of Wu (fifth century BCE), where the beautiful maiden Xi Shi is chosen to be taught by the queen to dance and sing in order to seduce the king.⁶⁶

Both scenes introduce the authors' ideas about theatre aesthetics and the concept of 'the beauty'. Liang, through the queen's voice, asserts that a 'consummate beauty' needs to have 'first beauty of feature; second, skill in song and dance; and third, elegant deportment'.⁶⁷ Similarly Ma is concerned with the skills needed to be a beauty (*jiaren* 佳人):

⁶⁴ Birch, *Scenes for Mandarins*, 63.

⁶⁵ Katherine Carlitz, 'Printing as Performance. Literati Playwright – Publishers in the Late Ming', in Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, 2005), 271.

⁶⁶ Xi Shi is a legendary beauty on whom the work of Liang is based upon; see on introduction and translation in Birch, *Scenes for Mandarins*, 63-105.

⁶⁷ Birch, *Scenes for Mandarins*, 83.

a bright character, a charming demeanour, a pure elegant voice, and a slim and graceful body, but she also needs to play the flute, pluck the *qin*, sing and dance. In the scene by Ma, playing instruments is added as a necessary quality which is not mentioned by Liang, who is, at least in this scene, more concerned with the aesthetics of dancing.

The themes narrated in the two scenes of Ma Shouzhen's play are both very relevant to the life of the courtesan. Ma possibly chose to represent circumstances familiar to her, such as the painful departure from a lover and the performance of song. The treatment of these motifs implied a strong engagement with her own personal experience as a woman living in the pleasure quarter. Yet, the display of the courtesan's life and talents in Ma's play can be seen having two additional aims: emphasising the centrality of the courtesan, also in the stage performance; and confirming the authority of her female voice in writing scholar-beauty related stories.

5.6 Ma Shouzhen in the drama

The previous sections of the chapter have discussed the extant scenes of Ma Shouzhen's drama, while this part will explore how she became a character in dramas written by others. Through careful and sophisticated strategies of self-fashioning which included the display of her talents and skills, Ma created her own fame; her celebrity was then simultaneously constructed and maintained by contemporary literati who used her as a character in their dramas or stories, wrote anecdotes about her or dedicated poems to her. Furthermore, as Chapter Six will discuss, the legacy of her historical character can be observed in visual and written sources dating from after her lifetime to the nineteenth century. Even as late as the

1950s, as Hua Wei has discussed,⁶⁸ one of the eight scenes of the play *Jiuzhai's zaju* 疾齋雜劇 written by Mao Guangsheng 冒廣生 (1873–1959) is titled ‘Ma Xianglan celebrates [Wang] Baigu’s birthday’ 馬湘蘭生壽百穀.⁶⁹ The woodblock printed edition also included an image in which Ma bravely drives her boat alone on the way to Suzhou. Of course this representation has to be understood as an idealised vision of the courtesan by a twentieth-century author (see ill. 68).

As mentioned above, in the erotic novel by Lü Tiancheng, Ma Shouzhen is evoked as an example of women’s taste (the décor of the boudoir), and her character likely inspired the late Ming dramatist Tang Xianzu, greatly famous then and now for his ‘Peony Pavilion’ *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭. Although no proof of their acquaintance has yet been found, it is very probable that Ma and Tang knew of each other through common friends. As Hua Wei has pointed out, in the fourth scene of Tang’s first play ‘The Purple Flute’ 紫簫記, the mature courtesan named Bao Siniang 鮑四娘 could have been referring to Ma Shouzhen, whose childhood name was Siniang 四娘. The same character then appears in his recasting of the same story in the later ‘The Purple Hairpins’ mentioned above, the preface of which is dated 1595, where again in scene four Bao Siniang is hired to teach singing and dancing to Lady Zheng’s daughter. Bao Siniang introduces herself in a *Shao nian you* tune, and her verse ‘Wine perplexes me and spring depresses me’ (殢酒愁春)⁷⁰ resonates with the famous last

⁶⁸ Hua Wei, ‘Ma Xianglan’, 23.

⁶⁹ Mao Guangsheng 冒廣生, *Jiuzhai zaju* 疾齋雜劇 ‘Jiuzhai’s play’ (1912–1949) [printed edition in the Ancient Books Department, National Library of China, Beijing, cat. n. 106533], 12a-16a.

⁷⁰ Tang Xianzu, *Zi chai ji*, vol. 1, 30-1.

lines of a poem by Ma which says: 'Wine is something to dispel grief, but how long can it dispel for?'⁷¹

The most renowned play in which Ma appears as one of the characters is the 'mixed play' *zaju* written by Zheng Zhiwen and Wu Zhao. Shen Defu in his *Unofficial Records* wrote:

In 1597 Feng Kaizhi [Mengzhen] was in office at the Southern Bureau of Libations. All the famous scholars from the South-East gathered in Nanjing. Tu Zhangqing, a fellow examinee [of Shen Defu's father], for a while did not have any office and just received news from the emperor of a new office abroad. He liked going to the courtesans' houses and fancied the courtesan Kou Si'er, also called Wenhua, to whom at the beginning he gave a big sum of money. Every day he arrived wearing the official robes and his guards cleared his way in the streets. He took his seat in the hall/reception room [disregarding] facing South, the madam came out to receive him and ordered [the courtesan] Kou Si'er to wait on him and serve him with wine. He intentionally spoke with pompous words to show off his talent [and ridicule the courtesan]. The following day all the six brothels were gossiping about what happened and laughing at him. In the North of the Yangtze River there was an exam candidate named Zheng Bao, personal name Zhiwen, who also thought of himself as talented and wrote a *chuanqi* titled *White silk skirt*; its content is about Tu, that foolish man, and also about Wang Zhideng who, at that time, was often in Liudu [Nanjing], and who from his youth liked the famous courtesan Ma Xianglan, named Shouzhen. Then Ma was almost sixty and Wang was about seventy, but the two still had an affair. Zheng turned their relationship into a story, used it as a disgraceful example. The book increased the price of the paper [became famous]. The following year Li Jiuwo, who was the Southern deputy governor at the Ministry of Rites, prohibited further printing of this book by confiscating the original woodblocks. However, the copies in circulation were already numerous. Eventually I met Zheng in the capital and after having examined [the book], I thought it was very well written. Zheng was after all embarrassed [about it] and asked me not to inform other people [of its authorship].

頃歲丁酉〔1597〕，馮開之〔夢禎〕年伯為南祭酒，東南名士雲集金陵。時屠長卿年伯久廢，新奉恩詔復冠帶，亦作寓公。慕狹邪寇四兒名文華者，先以纏頭往。至日，具袍服、頭踏，呵殿而至。踞廳事南面，呼嫗出拜，令寇姬旁侍行酒，更作才語相向。次日六院喧傳，以為談柄。有江右孝廉鄭豹先名子文者，素以才自命，遂作一傳奇名曰《白練裙》。摹寫屠憨狀曲盡。時吳下王百穀亦在留都，其少時曾眷名妓馬湘蘭名守貞者。馬年已將耳順，王則望七矣。兩人尚講衾裯之好。鄭亦串入其中，備列醜態。一時為之紙貴。次年李九我為南少宰，署禮部，追

⁷¹ Ma Shouzhen, 'Since you have gone away', in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.68b.

書肆刻本，毀其板，然傳播遠近無算矣。予後於都下遇鄭君。譽其填詞之妙。鄭面發赤。囑予勿再告人。⁷²

Unfortunately the text of 'White Silk Skirt' has not survived and Shen's account is the most exhaustive source of information about it. The play was written, or at least known of, in 1597 when Ma Shouzhen was well established as a famous courtesan in the Nanjing pleasure quarter. Zheng Zhiwen used Wang and Ma's celebrity and their well-known love story as an iconic representation of the Nanjing pleasure quarter. The above passage suggests that there was a political intervention from the local authorities to destroy the woodblock matrixes, so as to impede future publications. This could have been due to the fact that Ma Shouzhen herself and some of her influential connections did not want the drama to be reprinted and it could thus testify to Ma's own powerful position in Nanjing.

In thinking about the reasons why Zheng Zhiwen wrote a satire about Ma Shouzhen, besides the fact that she was a Qinhuai celebrity worth gossiping about, there seemed to have been also a personal motive. In Zheng's biography edited by the later author and famous intellectual Qian Qianyi, it says:

Zheng Zhiwen, named Yingni, from Nancheng failed the imperial examination, and went on a pleasure journey to Chang'an [in Nanjing]. In the entertainment district Ma Xianglan enjoyed a great reputation and she participated in literary drinking parties with Wang Zhideng and his associates, [once Ma] did not treat Yingni respectfully, so Yingni with his fellow Wu Feixiong [Zhao] wrote the *zaju* play *White silk skirt* to make a provoking satire; they gathered actors for a stage performance and invited also Xianglan to watch it; she smiled at it.

鄭之文，字應尼，南城人。公車下第，薄遊長干。曲中馬湘蘭負盛名，與王百穀諸公為文字飲，頗不禮應尼。應尼與吳非熊輩，作《白

⁷² Shen Defu, *Ye huo bian*, 26.34a-35a.

練裙》雜劇，極為譏調，聚子弟演唱，召湘蘭觀之，湘蘭為之微笑。⁷³

This account is significant to understand the reasons behind the satire, being that Ma refused Zheng possibly because he did not pass the examinations. Such symbolic and intellectual capital was an important requirement for the elite courtesan, who could choose who to entertain or be entertained by. At the same time, Qian Qianyi confirms Ma's sense of humour and chivalrous attitude in elegantly accepting the satire. Besides Ma Shouzheng, Wang Zhideng also was part of the *zaju* and, as Hua Wei pointed out, in a poem entitled 'Visiting Lady Ma who gave as a gift a white silky dress' (試看馬姬所贈白練衫) made reference to a white silk robe.⁷⁴ Whether this has to be considered as ironically connected to the *zaju* written about their love story, it is difficult to establish:

A light white silky dress, soft and warm,
the beauty sewed it together and then sent it to the scholar.
Did you notice that the sleeves were dripping wet?
Both, because of tears and because of wine drops.
白練輕衫軟更溫，美人縫就寄文園。
淋漓雙袖君知否？半是啼痕半酒痕。⁷⁵

Later the official and theatre critic Qi Biaojia included 'White Silk Skirt' *Bai lian qun* in the 'outstanding' (*yipin* 逸品) section of his plays commentary. After a brief synopsis he added: 'very soon [after its release] it was censored by the officials and barely half of the book is still extant' (俄為大司成所訶，僅半本而止);⁷⁶ but he did not explain why.

⁷³ Qian very likely knew Zheng as he dedicates a poem to him in which he refers again to 'White Silk Skirt', in Qian Qianyi 錢謙益, *Muzhai chu xue ji* 牧齋初學集 'Collection of Muzhai's early studies', in *Zhongguo gudian wenxue congshu* (Shanghai, 1985), vol. 1, 20, 672.

⁷⁴ Hua Wei, 'Ma Xianglan', 76-7.

⁷⁵ Wang Zhideng, *Nanyou tang shiji*, 10.18b.

⁷⁶ Qi Biaojia 祁彪佳 (edited by Huang Shang 黃裳), *Yuanshan tang Ming qupin jupin jiaolu* 遠山堂曲品劇品校錄 'Classified Ming Melodies and Dramas from Yuanshan Hall' (Shanghai, 1955), 13.

References to ‘White Silk Skirt’ similar to that of Qian Qianyi’s appear in literati writing such as *Jianhu ji* 堅瓠集 written by the late Ming–early Qing scholar Chu Renhu 褚人穫 (1625–1682),⁷⁷ and later in the Qing ‘History from the Vanity Case’ *Lianshi* 奩史 by Wang Chutong 王初桐 (1729–1821).⁷⁸ From its production onwards *Bai lian qun* enjoyed great exposure and Ma Shouzhen was thus forever associated with the phrase ‘white silk skirt’, so that later authors continued to make reference to her and the opera title. The comprehensive dictionary of Chinese, *Hanyu da cidian*, reports under *bai lian qun* an extract from a poem written by the Qing poet Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634–1711) in the collection dedicated to the Qinhuai titled ‘Random poems on the Qinhuai’ *Qinhuai Zashi* 秦淮雜詩, which reads: ‘At the Stone Bridge Alley all the young men in those years would know how to sing “White silk skirt”’ (石橋巷口諸年少，解唱當年《白練裙》).⁷⁹ This confirms the popularity of the *zaju* from the late Ming onwards, and the continuity in the construction of the character of the famous courtesan Ma Shouzhen in the following centuries.

5.7 The courtesan and the Nanjing ‘drama network’

Ma Shouzhen lived and worked in the Nanjing pleasure quarter, a cultural space in which famous literati and intellectual-officials mingled with courtesans, and shared tastes for refined items, poetry, calligraphy, painting and theatre. The social space of the Qinhuai was defined by networks of relationships established among the members of its extended community. Focusing on Ma and the construction of her social relations is a useful tool to

⁷⁷ Chu Renhuo 褚人穫, *Jianhu ji* 堅瓠集 ‘Jianhu’s Collected Works’, in *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* (Yangzhou, 1984), 7.2.12b.

⁷⁸ Wang Chutong 王初桐, *Lian shi* 奩史 ‘History from the Vanity Case’, 100 *juan*, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]-2002), 34.11a.

⁷⁹ See HYDCD, 8-209A.

understanding some of the social practices occurring in Nanjing at the end of the sixteenth century. Ma used her skills and cultural capital to connect with male peers around her, who were friends, sometimes lovers, patrons or foes. Her self-fashioning strategies included *kunqu* theatre, both in its literary form and stage performance, which was in the late Ming dynasty a new shared cultural product of the elite. The 'drama network' around Ma Shouzhen was much larger than it is possible for us to know today, and included all those people she was connected with, particularly by means of 'drama', such as other playwrights or theatre critics, but also those whose names are lost to history, such as actresses and other people involved in the stage performances.

As Hua Wei has highlighted in her article, social connections are crucial in understanding Ma's role in the theatrical scene, both in terms of the agency she exerted upon other dramatists around her as well as the agency that literati in turn exercised on her.⁸⁰ We can start with one of the closest people around Ma, Wang Zhideng, who was a theatregoer and critic and, moreover, even if rather unknown, a writer of theatre plays himself.⁸¹ Wang was closely connected with playwrights, such as Zhang Fengyi, as documented by their epistolary exchange,⁸² and the drama critic and connoisseur of the pleasure quarters Pan Zhiheng. The latter recorded attending an important theatrical event in Suzhou in 1579 with his good friends Zhang Fengyi and Wang Zhideng: this was a stage performance of a *zaju* using only

⁸⁰ Hua Wei, 'Ma Xianglan'.

⁸¹ There are at least two plays by Wang, see Fu Xihua, *Mingdai chuanqi quanmu*, 87-8.

⁸² Zhang Fengyi, 張鳳翼, 'Da Wang Baigu lunshu' 答王百穀論書 'Reply to Wang Baigu debate letter', in Idem, *Chushi tang ji* 處實堂集 'Chushi Hall Collected Works', 8 *juan*, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 4.4b.

Southern tunes, 'The Great Elegance Hall' *Daya tang zaju* 大雅堂雜劇, by Wang Daokun 王道昆 (1525–1593) a high official from a rich merchant family.⁸³

Wang Zhideng was also close to the playwright Liang Chenyu, as testified by a poem written by the latter on the occasion of Wang's journey to the North.⁸⁴ Liang Chenyu was an eminent figure in the *kunqu* milieu and an important node in Ma's 'drama network' who, besides having inscribed one of Ma's fans (as discussed in a previous chapter), wrote lyric songs with the subtitle in the autumn season 'missing Ma Xianglan' (懷馬湘蘭), which gives reason to think that they had an intimate relationship.⁸⁵ In turn, Ma Shouzhen wrote in a sort of a *biji* style a preface to his *chuanqi* drama which narrates the story of Red Thread *Hong xian*, a Tang dynasty super-heroine whose fascination was revived in the Ming.⁸⁶ It is possible that the story was popular in the courtesan environment, since Jing Pianpian also made reference to the *chuanqi* in a poem, saying 'once in the boudoir I discussed about Hongxian' (閨中自昔論紅線).⁸⁷ If we exclude Ma Shouzhen's letters, this is the only extant prose written by her:

In between the immortal and the ordinary, the space is filled with people and their natural talents, as the boudoir, with its profound passions, is filled with human feelings.

As for the love expressed in poems, there is nobody who does not appreciate it, but a romantic encounter can be seen as lowly.

I was born in the muddy world where unfortunately even the white sand has no way to remain pure. The body grows like a wild willow and now regrettably my black hair is getting older.

⁸³ On Wang Daokun see Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen eds., *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* (New York, 2010), vol. 2, 73.

⁸⁴ Liang Chenyu, *Liang Chenyu ji*, 136.

⁸⁵ Liang Chenyu, *Xu Jiangdong bai zhu*, 2.4b.

⁸⁶ Karl S. Y. Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic: Selections from the Third to the Tenth Century* (Hong Kong, 1985), 363-70.

⁸⁷ Jing Pianpian 景偏偏, *Jie chao* 解嘲, in Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1935), 2.39-40.

I extremely appreciate [Liang Hong's wife] Meng Guang for presenting the food to her husband with devotion, and [the immortal] Xiao Shi⁸⁸ who flew to the sky with a carriage driven by phoenixes and her spouse.

Many [in my situation] would desire to die, but I still have to look after my elderly mother who depends upon me; I would like to become a nun, but I have not yet found the right master. In spite of all this, I use all my energy for painting and I place my pure heart in between secluded orchids and bamboo. I am passionate about reading; I recollect my pure heart in the stories of valorous women and men. I read the collection of poems on Hongxian by Mr Liang from Kunshan. At night in the twinkling of an eye Hongxian flies a long distance and as planned she takes the golden box and in a flurry stopped the army.

Then she goes away leaving no trace like Yang Guifei did as if she was a Buddha; both became immortals as it is well known. Like Diaochan in the early Han, they made extraordinary achievements and had an impressive courage!

I hired some talented singers to interpret this story content and to perform it in dance; in a joyous atmosphere, it was on for five nights of delicate singing while people enjoyed eating and drinking. How could the spectators not have been moved by watching it and felt the same I felt for the past times?

竊惟仙凡界徑，固殊稟乎天資，而閨壺情深，實均原於人性。河洲之詠，莫可尚矣；濮上之期，何其鄙哉。嬌也藉染汙泥，悼白沙無由終潔；軀鄰岐柳，恨青絲徒爾增攀。涎垂舉案之孟光，目斷驂鸞之蕭史。欲墜樓者屢矣，而高年之母孰依，思傳鉢者久焉。而悟空之師難遇。用是托諸丹素，見冰心於幽蘭叢竹之間。嗜彼簡編，徵雅志於烈女夫君之際。偶值崑山梁氏所輯《紅線詩詞》，漏滴玉壺，瞬息神飛萬里；計收金盒，倉皇膽落三軍。況茲脫跡塵寰，奚翅楊家之侍佛，永爾流芳瑤島；更早漢室之貂蟬，功云奇也，勇非大歟！迺屬良工，爰俾繡梓，郎當舞袖，儘可供五夜之歡，婉轉歌，尚可佐十日之飲。玄覽君子，能無觸目激衷，感往事以諒余衷者哉？⁸⁹

This piece contributes to the understanding of the courtesan as reader and stage director.

She talks of expressing her pure heart ('frosted heart' *bingxin* 冰心) in her paintings between secluded orchids and bamboo, but also of being fond of reading as a way of identification with the brave stories of other pure-hearted people. Her literary knowledge is further proved by the numerous references to past literature, from the 'Book of the Later

⁸⁸ These figures traditionally represent devotion and love for their partner. The wife Meng Guang 孟光's story is in the Book of the Later Han 後漢書, see Chang, *Women Writers*, 394, 762; and Xiao Shi 蕭史 was the chief flute player of the Duke of Mu and husband of Nongyu, their music called the phoenix which brought them away, see Chapter 5, fn. 60.

⁸⁹ Ma Shouzhen, 'Hongxian chuanqi xiaoyin', in Zhao Shijie, *Gujin nüshi*, 9.11a-b.

Han' to dynastic stories narrating tales of female immortals, as well as of classic heroic historical palace beauties, such as Yang Guifei, the consort of the Tang emperor Xuanzong who sacrificed her life for her husband and empire.⁹⁰ Moreover, Ma at the end of the prose piece confirms the traditional practice of the theatre audience which enjoyed the stage performance as part of other leisurely activities, which included eating and drinking. In the end, Ma tells us that she herself staged the *chuanqi*, thus again reiterates her role as director, and highlights that she found the play extremely moving. Ma emphasises the importance of feelings, here expressed by the word *zhong* 衷 'inner feelings', close to the European conception of 'heart'.

As discussed in a previous chapter, Ma Shouzhen very likely knew Xu Wei, the famed literatus, playwright and painter. In his own collection of writing he reported having inscribed her painted fan and even to have followed her orchid painting style.⁹¹ Thus, even if there is not direct reference to drama making, it is very likely that by being in the same circle of people who appreciated the Southern drama and orchid painting, Xu Wei and Ma exerted a mutual agency upon each other. The 'drama network' has now taken shape: Ma was connected to some of the biggest names in the production of theatre and its criticism in the late Ming. She was very close to Wang Zhideng, very likely acquainted with Xu Wei, intimate with Zhang Xianyi and Liang Chenyu and possibly knew Zhang Fengyi; furthermore, she was at least known of by Tang Xianzu. The social ties amongst these people played a role in shaping their literary productions, in which agency from one node of the network to the others deserves more investigation. This preliminary and necessary research shows that

⁹⁰ For Yang Guifei and her seductive image see Ellen J. Laing, 'Chinese Palace-Style Poetry and the Depiction of a Palace Beauty', *The Art Bulletin*, 72.2 (Jun 1990), 291-95.

⁹¹ See Chapter Three.

the social interplays among this community contributed to the making of the drama discourse in which women were not simply marginal actors, but were actively writing, directing and performing theatre.

5.8 Conclusion: drama, performance and gender

In the late Ming the theatre was, among other cultural productions, a means of expressing of the self, a stage for novel ideas about culture, taste and total devotion to passions (*qing*). The *kunqu* theatre, in its literary and operatic forms, with its musical softness and openness to creativity, was perfect also for manifesting the new needs of gender redefinition. Ma Shouzhen was not only a performer of music and dance, but as this chapter has discussed, she was a creator and a director of theatre as she wrote and performed *sanqu* and *kunqu*. In imperial China, positions of control and creative power were usually associated with masculinity and traditionally occupied by men. Ma Shouzhen in synthesising all these activities represents a clear instance of a new womanhood, as she crossed the boundaries of traditional gender roles of cultural production and creativity as well as intellectual expectations. She epitomises the creation of new spaces for women in the cultural discourse of the time, when women's intervention in writing, publishing and readership is more visible and relevant than ever before.

Ma Shouzhen used *kunqu* because she shared with the Jiangnan cultural elite the same taste for Southern theatre and tunes, where taste was a visible marker of social distinction. In her drama she used three stories of courtesans and scholars, which perfectly fitted into the beauty-scholar genre created by the literati. The appeal of this subject could, on the one

hand, have stemmed from the desire to be included in the same literati genres, but on the other could have fulfilled her need for authenticity, implied by the autobiographical experiences which shrank the distance between stage and worldly life.

As Sophie Volpp has insightfully discussed, the metaphor of the 'world as stage' – or what she called the 'worldly stage' – is particularly valid for the theatre and theatricality discourses in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the emphasis is placed on the illusions created on the real stage and the 'self as spectacle' in the real world.⁹² In addition, this thesis conceives the pleasure quarter as an 'extended stage', where the social performance of the courtesan was constantly taking place in a continuous search for visibility, display of culture and sensuality in order to gain patronage and respect from the surrounding literati. The actors in this social performance were not only courtesans, but all those involved in the Qinhuai pleasure quarter, including (but not restricted to) the people related to the theatre performance. After the theatrical performance, other performances took place: those of drinking games, and instant poetry, rhyming and painting, flirting and gazing around; those performances of social interactions and bonding between courtesans and elite men, in which couples looked for the intimacy of the boudoir to possibly continue a more private sensual engagement. As demonstrated by the extant scenes of 'Three Lives', and her prose writing about Liang's 'Lady Red Thread', Ma Shouzhen clearly emphasised the relevance to *qing*: she created *qing* in her writing, experienced *qing* in her reading and performed *qing* on stage.

⁹² Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge MA, 2011), 8.

Chapter Six

Constructing the Courtesan: Ma Shouzhen's 'Afterlife'

6.1 Remembering the courtesan

Ma Shouzhen was acclaimed as a talented *mingji*, painter, poet and entertainer; during her life she achieved celebrity and her fame long survived her death in 1604. Shortly after she passed away her intimate friend Wang Zhideng provided a biography (see Chapter Two), and twelve eulogistic quatrains in seven characters (translated below) to celebrate the courtesan's character and talent. The eulogies were published in Wang's personal poetry collection *Nanyou tang shiji* with the simple title 'Mourning Lady Ma' *Diao Ma ji* 弔馬姬.¹ They were subsequently reprinted with the more formal title 'Songs to mourn Ma Xianglan' *Ma Xianglan wan geci* 馬湘蘭挽歌詞 and a few stylistic modifications in *Jinling suoshi* (1610)² and *Liechao shiji* (1667).³ The version in the latter texts became the most common one, and reads as follows:

She was the best in singing and dancing of her time,
Her fame spread and filled the *qinglou*.
[Her] great passion could not be fully expressed as her body died too early;
She transformed into a double headed lotus.⁴
歌舞當年第一流，姓名贏得滿青樓。
多情未了身先死，化作芙蓉也並頭。

A pomegranate skirt⁵ newly cut,

¹ Wang Zhideng, 'Diao Ma ji' 弔馬姬 'Mourning Lady Ma', in Idem, *Nanyou tang shiji*, 10.31b-32b.

² Zhou Hui, *Jinling suoshi*, 88-9.

³ Wang Zhideng, 'Ma Xianglan wan geci', 4.69a-b; quoted also in the Qing anthology Xu Qiu, *Ben shi shi*, 4.25-6. The version recorded in his own collection shows some variations which do not change the overall meaning, but mainly are different stylistic choices of words.

⁴ The composite word *furong* 芙蓉 usually indicates 'cotton roses', but can be an alternative name for the lotus flower, which is commonly associated to the image of the married couple when two flowers grow from the same stem, HYDCD, 2-106B.

Folded in the empty case, [she was] afraid to ruin it.
[She] carried a *pipa* with strings not tuned;
At Changgan Temple, the monks arrived.
石榴裙子是新裁，疊在空箱恐作灰。
帶上琵琶絃不繫，長干寺裏施僧來。

She did not need to make the hearts pound or use her gaze to attract;
For a whole life [she was] disappointed in the pitiful nights.
It is enough to be punished, like the magpies on the Milky Way,
Year after year, [we could] only meet once.
不待心挑與目招，一生辜負可憐宵。
祇堪罰作銀河鵲，歲歲年年只駕橋。

She did not care about gold and taught her novices;
Singing and dancing until now, they were the pleasure for the youth.
The moon pavilion and the wind terrace have grown weeds;
The gold inlaid *zheng* and the brocaded *se*⁶ have transformed into cold mist.
黃金不惜教嬋娟，歌舞於今樂少年。
月榭風臺生蔓草，鈿箏錦瑟化寒煙。

Bright pearls stitched together on phoenix feather patterned shoes;
The white carved jade disk turned into a swallow-shaped hairpin.
She obtained instead ten *mou* of mountainside in Moling [Nanjing],
Her fragrant name does not pass, but her bones are all buried.
明珠綴在鳳西鞋，白璧雕成燕子釵。
換得秣陵山十畝，香名不與骨俱埋。

Dancing skirts and singing fans at the beginning were her karma;
Embroidered Buddhas and persistent vegetarianism were for her afterlife.
[She] did not pursue the West Pool where Xiwangmu goes,
Surely [she] followed Lady Wei of the Southern Peak.⁷
舞裙歌扇本前因，繡佛長齋是後身。
不逐西池王母去，定隨南嶽魏夫人。

The water flows and the flowers fall and this makes people suffer,
Once buried the golden hairpin,⁸ the soil will exude her scent.
In the end [we were] a predestined relationship, at last it did not end,
We were born betrothed, [but she wanted to] marry a handsome lover.⁹

⁵ A pomegranate skirt *shiliuqun* 石榴裙 is a bright red skirt for women, HYDCD 7-997A.

⁶ The musical instruments *zheng* 箏 (16 strings) and *se* 瑟 (at least 25 strings) are two different kinds of zithers; on *se* see Van Gulik, *The Lore of the Chinese Lute*, 7-11.

⁷ Xiwangmu 西王母 – the Queen Mother of the West – is an extremely popular deity, while Lady Wei (Wei Huacun 魏華存 252–334), a woman living in the Jin dynasty, was a Celestial Master practitioner. Both belong to the Daoist pantheon, see Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism* (Cambridge MA, 2003), esp. 13-14, 25-45.

⁸ Hairpin also means ‘beauty’, as in ‘the twelve hairpins’ (see Chapter Two), and it could indicate Ma herself.

⁹ To indicate a handsome lover Wang Zhideng used in the text Wang Chang 王昌, who was a Tang official famous for being handsome; see also used by the courtesan-poet Yu Xuanji in David Young and Jiann I. Lin,

水流花謝斷人腸，一葬金釵土盡香。
到底因緣終未絕，他生還許嫁王昌。

In a life she had not yet seen Suzhou,¹⁰
For my celebrations [she] went for the first time.
How to think that suddenly [she could] disappear like mist,
In front of what used to be her door, long moss has grown.
平生猶未識蘇臺，為我稱觴始一來。
何意倏然乘霧去，舊時門戶長青苔。

Lamps [in front of the] Buddhas, meditation mat, and a pot of water,
For seven years in the empty room, she knew only herself.
You can try to ask the parrot in the gilded cage,
She never entertained those young frivolous men.
佛鐙禪榻與軍持，七載空房只自知。
試向金籠鸚鵡問，不曾私蓄賣珠兒。

After a scented bath [she] lighted incense,
And slowly [her] fragrant spirit transformed into a coloured cloud.¹¹
[She] lost her molt in the soil under the pine trees,
But it should be a pagoda rather than a grave.
蘭湯浴罷淨香熏，冉冉芳魂化彩雲。
遺蛻一坯松下土，只須成塔不須墳。

Red letter papers newly cut look like rosy clouds,
Small 'fly head' characters, elegant and slanting.
[I] open the box and cannot refrain from crying sad tears,
It is nothing to do with my aged eyes, [I] desire to be reborn as a flower.
紅牋新擘似輕霞，小字蠅頭密又斜。
開篋不禁沾臆淚，非關老眼欲生花。

[She] sketched orchids and painted bamboo for her close friends,
The writings [she] left seem to have been written with teardrops.
[She] never met Gao Jiedu¹² from Sichuan,
[But] in Pingkang¹³ [she] undoubtedly achieved the fame of a *jiaoshu*.¹⁴
描蘭寫竹寄卿卿，遺墨都疑淚染成。
不遇西川高節度，平康浪得校書名。¹⁵

trans., *The Clouds Float North. The Complete Poems by Yu Xuanji* (Hanover; London, 1998), 2, 61; here it clearly recalls Wang Zhideng and the line could be translated: '[but she wanted to] marry me'.

¹⁰ Suzhou is here called SUTAI 蘇臺.

¹¹ The transformation in coloured clouds is reckoned to belong to divine beings.

¹² Gao Jiedu 高節度 refers to Gao Shi 高適 an acclaimed poet of the Tang dynasty, see Tang Zi-chang, *Poems of Tang*, 412-3; here the reference to him indicates that although Ma did not meet him or was not from the Tang dynasty her poetry skills were very high.

¹³ Tang dynasty expression for the pleasure quarter, see Chapter Two.

¹⁴ *Jiaoshu* means scribe or collator, see Chapter Four.

¹⁵ Wang Zhideng, 'Ma Xianglan wan geci', 4.69a.

In commemorating Ma Shouzhen, Wang Zhideng began by praising her talent as an entertainer in the pleasure quarter; yet, the version of the eulogies contained in his own poetry collection starts differently by emphasising, in a more sentimental fashion, the void that Ma's death left in the city of Nanjing:

[When] the song ceased, it travelled up to the clouds and the twelve buildings.
Since then Moling cannot bear the autumn.
歌罷行雲十二樓，
秣陵從此不宜秋。¹⁶

In both versions, Wang Zhideng expressed Ma Shouzhen's desire for companionship epitomised by the reference to the two lotus flowers. A longing for love was part of the stereotypical idea of the courtesan living in solitude in the bondage of the prostitution industry. Nonetheless, in the following verses Wang Zhideng emphasised Ma's detachment from things, her devotion in teaching her novices, and her Buddhist belief. The latter is conveyed by reference to the courtesan's practice of vegetarianism and abstinence from sex. Despite Wang considering Ma a Buddhist, in thinking about her existence in the underworld he referred also to Daoism, suggesting that her soul followed Lady Wei in her Southern Peak, rather than the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu), both belonging to the Daoist pantheon. With this statement Wang possibly referred to the fact that Lady Wei besides being a divine Daoist practitioner and founder of the school of Shangqing was also a wife, a status which Ma never achieved in her life. This reference to Daoism, rather than a contradiction should be interpreted as a sign of accepted syncretism of beliefs amongst elite circles. Then in the ninth quatrain of the eulogy, Wang Zhideng raised Ma to a saint-like level by saying that her corpse will scent the ground and that a pagoda rather than a common grave should host her remains. In the last two quatrains he praised her writing and painting skills, concluding by focusing on her erudition and attributing to her the honorary title of

¹⁶ Wang Zhideng, 'Diao Ma ji', 10.31b.

jiaoshu ‘collator’, as he similarly did in the final sentence of the 1591 preface to her poetry collection (see Chapter Four).

By writing about Ma Shouzhen after she died, Wang Zhideng achieved two main objectives: he publicly consolidated his relationship with the celebrity courtesan, and he initiated the ‘afterlife’ of Ma Shouzhen with the construction of her historical figure, a construction which, as this chapter demonstrates, will then continue into subsequent centuries. Other literati contemporaries of Ma Shouzhen mourned the death of the famous courtesan, such as the Wenzhou poet and painter He Bo 何白 (?–1628?),¹⁷ who in the poem ‘Sent to Mei Zi Ma [Mei Fanzuo]’ *Ji Mei Zima* 寄梅子馬 – who was Ma’s friend – wrote: ‘Willow blossoms flew to exhaustion, orchids stopped fringing,/ The Qinhuai water is in grief and deep is the resentment’ (楊花飛盡蘭歇蕤，淮水愁愁與恨深).¹⁸ A note in the text explains that the sorrow was caused by the death of the two *mingji* Yang Wuhua 楊舞華¹⁹ and Ma Xianglan, whose names are signalled in the text by the words willow (*yang*) and orchids (*lan*). These verses testify that in He Bo’s viewpoint both courtesans were equally important, yet in the following decades the fame of Ma Shouzhen must have overshadowed that of Yang Wuhua, who remains a rather unknown character. Moreover, this makes us reflect upon the role of personal engagement with events and people in the making of memory and history.

After Ma Shouzhen’s death and up until the twentieth century, dozens of literati, but also a small number of cultured women, engaged with the figure of the famous Nanjing courtesan

¹⁷ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 249.

¹⁸ He Bo 何白, *Jigu tang ji* 汲古堂集 ‘Collected Works from the Jigu Hall’, 28 *juan*, in *Siku jinghuishu congkan* (Beijing, 2000), 17.11a

¹⁹ I could not find any further information on Yang Wuhua, unless Wuhua was a rarely used alternative name for Yang Yuxiang 楊玉香, a contemporary of Ma’s; see the long list of courtesans in Zhao Qingzhen 趙庆楨, *Qinglou xiaoming lu* 青樓小名錄 ‘Record of Names from the Green Buildings’, 8 *juan*, in *Quanguo tushuguan wenxian suowei zhongxin* (Beijing, 2007), 6.2.

and her cultural production. The ways in which this engagement was expressed varied as it has been similarly demonstrated by Anne Gerritsen for the case of the young poet Ye Xiaoluan 葉小鸞 (1616–1632) and the ‘many guises’ that her character took in history after her premature death.²⁰ The present chapter will discuss a representative selection of the nearly two hundred texts discussing or mentioning Ma Shouzhen which have been retrieved during the archival research carried out for this thesis. These include writings about Ma ranged from poems written while passing by her former residence, to anecdotes about her life (also in relation to other people’s biographies),²¹ comments and inscriptions on her paintings, reproductions of her poetry, as well as poems and prose metaphorically addressed to the courtesan or which included her character often as a means of comparison for talent. Moreover, as this chapter will show, Ma Shouzhen’s paintings were collected as well as copied and forged during the Qing dynasty. Not only, there are a few posthumous portraits of Ma Shouzhen, which are extremely useful documents to understand how the courtesan was visualised in the Qing dynasty. These representations of Ma Shouzhen were made according to the traditional conventions of Chinese portraiture and are stylised female images rather than naturalistic portraits with detailed of individual physical features.²²

Each section of this chapter will discuss the selected sources grouped thematically and chronologically, in order to investigate the making of Ma Shouzhen into a *lieu de mémoire*,²³ the practice of appreciating, collecting, copying and counterfeiting her painting; the

²⁰ Gerritsen, ‘The Many Guises of Xiaoluan’.

²¹ As in the case of Wang Zhideng, DMB, 1364; on the playwrights Wu Zhao and Zheng Zhiwen see Chapter Five, or on other courtesans associated to Ma such as the other three of the four Qinhuai beauties, namely Jiang Ruzhen, Zhu Wuxia and Zhao Caiji; but also Tang Xiaocong 湯小聰 as reported in Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.8.6a.

²² For a discussion on the conventions of female portraiture see Mary H. Fong, ‘Images of Women in Traditional Chinese Painting’, *Woman’s Art Journal*, 17.1 (Spring - Summer, 1996), 22-27.

²³ Pierre Nora, ‘From Lieux de Mémoire to Realms of Memory’, in Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Krizman eds., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past. Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York; Chichester, 1996), 15-24.

visualisation of Ma Shouzhen in posthumous portraits. A final section will suggest how to place Ma Shouzhen in the Qing vogue for the late Ming and its courtesans. However, before proceeding, it is important to clarify the distinction between the two words ‘copy’ and ‘forgery’ (or ‘counterfeit’ used as its synonym). Copies are paintings which are made with the genuine intention of resembling the original, while forgeries are done with the deceitful intention of being the original.

6.2 Ma Shouzhen as a ‘lieu de mémoire’

In the late Ming the city of Nanjing became ‘a discursive subject’ in literati writing.²⁴ The practice of urban touring contributed to the construction of the literati identity in reclaiming their knowledge of the city with its streets and alleys, streams and bridges, temples and culinary specialties, literary circles and brothels. The physical or imaginary roaming often took the form of ‘dialogues with guests’ (*ketan*), such as the two famous texts *Jinling suoshi* ‘Trivia about Nanjing’ (1610) and *Kezuo zhuiyu* ‘Superfluous Chats’ (1617), in which the authors presented and discussed different socio-cultural aspects of urban life.²⁵ In talking and gossiping about the city, the pleasure quarter and its dwellers played an important role, and Ma Shouzhen, as one of its celebrities, was also a subject of discussion in the literati’s urban roaming.

In Zhou Hui’s *Jinling suoshi* Ma Shouzhen, referred to as ‘a courtesan of the Old Compound’ (舊院妓), is included in a section on poetry which contains also the above eulogies Wang

²⁴ Fei, *Negotiating Urban Space*, 188.

²⁵ For an in-depth discussion on *ketan* and the making of Nanjing social space see Fei, *Negotiating Urban Space*, ch.4.

Zhideng wrote for her.²⁶ The same author in the *ketan* sequel *Xu Jinling suoshi* recognised Ma as a poet worthy of mention by listing her poetry collection (see Chapter Four).²⁷ In Gu Qiyuan's 'Superfluous Chats' Ma Shouzhen is discussed in a section titled 'ranking of painters addendum' (*hua pin buyi* 畫品補遺) in which the author recalled the courtesan's painting talent and fame: 'the Old Compound courtesan Ma Shouzhen, style name Xianglan, skilled in painting orchids, fresh and graceful [she] had style and was famous also beyond [our] seas, the ambassador of Siam knew it and collected her painted fans' (舊院妓馬守真，號湘蘭，工畫蘭，清逸有致，名聞海外，暹羅國使者亦知其畫扇藏之).²⁸

It is difficult to establish whether these *ketan* authors, who were Ma Shouzhen's older contemporary Nanjing fellows, personally knew her or ever visited her in the pleasure district. Nonetheless, it can be argued that she symbolised a metaphysical place in an intellectual journey through the city, which aimed at exploring places of the literati collective memory. By being remembered for her poetry and painting skills, they confirmed the existence of a female literary and painting legacy in their imaginary travels. This memorial process exemplifies how the legendary image of a courtesan could become a *topos* of elite discussion and a symbolic place to visit in the urban touring of Nanjing, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

Since several contemporaries and later authors celebrated the courtesan while passing by her abode, Ma Shouzhen's residence can be seen as a place of memory and inspiration in the space of the Qinhuai pleasure quarter. The Ming poet Yao Lü, who was a contemporary of Ma

²⁶ Zhou Hui, *Jinling suoshi*, 88.

²⁷ Zhou Hui, *Xu Jinling suoshi*, 251.

²⁸ Gu Qiyuan, *Kezuo zhuiyu*, 182. The same information is then reported in another Ming text Jiang Shaoshu, *Wusheng shishi*, 5.83.

Shouzhen and likely her acquaintance (as discussed in Chapter Two), wrote a poem in her memory titled 'Passing by [Ma] Xianglan's old residence' :

The winding kiosk left in the mist;
The beauty (*jiaren*) formerly in this residence.
Flowers like dragons on the brocade se zither,
Moss itself embroiders the carriage curtains;
The name of the woman knight-errant still survives;
But the girdle of river spirit is already empty.
To dispel grief do not mention wine,
Preserve [your] resentment or learn to eliminate it.

曲榭殘煙里，佳人昔此居。
花猶籠錦瑟，苔自繡帷車。
女俠名徒在，江神佩已虛。
銷愁不道酒，留恨若教除。²⁹

The poem creates a nostalgic atmosphere rendered by the decay of the abandoned residence set in contrast with the survival of her name and fame. The agency of Ma's poetry in the circle of the surrounding literati is evident in the last couplet, where Yao Lü engaged with Ma's poem 'Since you have gone away', which challenged the Tang poet Li Bo (see Chapter Four) by saying 'Wine is something to dispel grief./ But how long does it last for?' In turn, Yao confronted the courtesan by suggesting that the solution is to deal with sufferance rather than using wine to attempt to dissolve it. In this poem Yao, in order to highlight Ma Shouzhen's generosity and strength of character, referred to her as a 'woman knight' (*nüxia*), an appellative which will continue to be attributed to her in the following centuries, and which will associate her to later courtesans also called *nüxia*, such as the celebrated Liu Rushi (see Chapter Two). The twofold association with the appellative *nüxia* and with other *mingji* found in Qing sources has strengthened the position of Ma Shouzhen as one of the earliest emblematic figures of the golden age of Nanjing courtesanship.

²⁹ Yao Lü 姚旅, 'Guo Xianglan guju' 過湘蘭故居 'Passing by [Ma] Xianglan old residence', in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.69b; also in Xu Qiu, *Ben shi shi*, 20a-b.

As Yao's poem shows, there is a profound relationship between memory and place, which, in this case, is her abode called *guju* 'previous residence'. Yao is only one of the many who, in remembering Ma Shouzhen and writing about her, created an evident and strong connection between her and the urban space of Nanjing, its pleasure quarter and her residence. Inspired by the surroundings of Banqiao and the Eastern Garden another contemporary of Ma Shouzhen, the Nanjing poet Chen Xuanyin 陳玄胤, about whom little is known, composed the hepta-syllabic regulated verses with the title 'Passing by the abandoned residence of Lady Ma Xianglan' (Guo Ma ji Xianglan fei ju 過馬姬湘蘭廢居). The same poem is reported in *Liechao shiji* and in 'Storyed Poems' *Ben shi shi*, edited by Xu Qiu 徐鉉 (1636–1708) with a slightly different title 'Mourning at Ma Xianglan's abandoned residence' (Diao Ma Xianglan fei ju 弔馬湘蘭廢居).³⁰ The poem reads:

Tree entangles with the cold, while birds cry,
 The *qinglou* leisure and trivia, on the west of Banqiao.
 The screen windows colour changed, glued by snails,
 The fragrance of the embroidered doors has faded, navel of cold musk scent.
 No rain and scattered clouds, the spring dream is interrupted.
 Falling blossoms and desolate moss, the setting sun is low.
 Her fragrant name still exists, but her romantic allure is depleted,
 Misty water year after year, surrounding the old embankment.
 樹結寒陰鳥自啼，青樓閒瑣板橋西。
 紗窗色改粘蝸殼，繡戶香銷冷麝臍。
 零雨殘雲春夢斷，落花荒蘚夕陽低。
 芳名猶在風流盡，煙水年年繞舊堤。³¹

Similarly to Yao Lü's poem, Chen describes a desolated environment in which the birds cry to express mourning, moss grows and covers up the past splendour, blossom falls as emblems of beauties who do not exist anymore, while the spring dream of love-making (rain and clouds) is interrupted by the courtesan's death. Chen gave some precise geographic

³⁰ Chen Xuanyin 陳玄胤, 'Di Ma Xianglan fei ju' 弔馬湘蘭廢居 'Mourning at Ma Xianglan's abandoned residence' in Xu Qiu, *Ben shi shi*, 4.12b

³¹ Chen Xuanyin 陳玄胤, 'Guo Ma ji Xianglan fei ju' 過馬姬湘蘭廢居 'Passing by the abandoned residence of Lady Ma Xianglan', in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4.69b.

coordinates and placed Ma's residence west of Banqiao (map 2); in so doing he reinforced the association between the courtesan, the place of her residence and the pleasure quarter. As visible in the above poems, there was a respectful attitude towards Ma Shouzhen: while Wang Zhideng in his eulogies celebrated her as a sort of Buddhist saint for whom it is necessary to build a pagoda, Yao recognised her chivalrous spirit. All of them, possibly because they were personally attached to Ma, remembered her as a 'lady' (*ji* 姬), rather than a 'courtesan/prostitute' (*ji* 妓).

The *Liechao shiji* biography of Ma Shouzhen ends with the sentence: 'Until today those who have passed by the Old Compound, all wrote poems in her memory' (至今詞客過舊院者，皆為詩吊之).³² In fact not only Ma's contemporaries, but also later Qing literati wrote poetry while passing by Ma Shouzhen's previous residence, so they encountered her in both a physical and metaphysical way. In texts written after Ma's death, her abode is often called *Kongque an* 孔雀庵 'Peacock nunnery'. One of the first sources which reported this name is 'Gu Yuzhi's poetry' *Gu Yuzhi shi* 顧與治詩 by the Nanjing poet and painter Gu Mengyou 顧夢游 (1599–1660).³³ Gu wrote a poem titled 'Du Yuhuang's birthday banquet looking over Kongque an' 杜于皇生日餘眺孔雀庵,³⁴ where Du Yuhuang 杜于皇 (1611–1687) was a poet contemporary of Gu's and very likely his friend. A note to the poem specifies: '*Kongque an* on its left is Ma Xianglan's previous residence, and on its right is Xufu's Eastern Garden' (孔雀庵左為馬湘蘭故居右為徐府東園).³⁵

³² Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiji*, 4. 68b.

³³ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 1545.

³⁴ Gu Mengyou 顧夢游, *Gu Yuzhi shi* 顧與治詩 'Poetry by Gu Yuzhi', 8 *juan*, in *Siku jinhushu congkan* (Beijing, 2000), 3.10b-11a.

³⁵ Gu Mengyou, *Gu Yuzhi shi*, 3.11a. The meaning of Xufu in this sentence is not clear.

In the years of the dynastic turn, the eminent Suzhou poet and playwright You Tong 尤侗 (1618–1704),³⁶ who was known to be Yu Huai's patron and fellow aficionado of the pleasure quarter, also engaged with the figure of Ma Shouzhen. Both You Tong and Yu Huai were keen promoters of women's education and literature³⁷ as the two edited together the collection of women's biographies *Gonggui xiaominglu* 宮閨小名錄.³⁸ You Tong lived through the dynastic transition; as a loyalist interested in women's literacy, he looked back at Nanjing history and composed the quatrain 'Residing in Ma Xianglan's Old Compound' 寓馬湘蘭舊院:

By the side of a Qingxi bridge, a small fragrant building,
It looks like the old Wu palace designated for women.³⁹
Yet it had an odd host and was deep enough to hide guests,
At night the terrace was still and quiet, closed by a golden hairpin.
青溪橋畔小香齋，彷彿吳宮舊館娃。
却怪主人深避客，夜臺寂寂閉金釵。⁴⁰

Major expressions of loyalism towards the Ming are found in the work of the *yimin* 遺民 'leftovers', as loyalists were called, in the years of the Manchu conquest and the first decades of the Qing ruling. Some famous courtesans who lived during the dynastic transition, such as Liu Rushi and Gu Mei, were involved in loyalist movements and were connected to officials and literati who played important roles in supporting or opposing the new dynasty.⁴¹ Works inspired by Ming loyalism, as Ellen Widmer has discussed, are detectable in later decades, such as in the writing of the gentry woman Wang Duan 汪端 (1793–1839), who was

³⁶ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 28.

³⁷ See briefly on You Tong in Dorothy Ko, 'Lady-Scholars at the Door: The Practice of Gender Relation in Eighteenth-Century Suzhou', in John Hay ed., *Boundaries in China* (London, 1994), 200.

³⁸ It was included in the *Siku quanshu* collection You Tong 尤侗 and Yu Huai 余懷, *Gonggui xiao ming lu* 宮閨小名錄 'Palace Women's Childhood Names', 5 *juan*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* (Jinan, 1995-7)

³⁹ *Guanwa* 館娃 is the ancient Wu palace or the women's palace, as *wa* means 'beautiful woman', HYDCD, 12-566B.

⁴⁰ You Tong 尤侗, *Xitang shi ji* 西堂詩集 'Poetry Collection from the West Hall', 32 *juan*, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 2.12b-13a.

⁴¹ On Liu Rushi see Chang, *The Late Ming Poet*, 16-17; on Gu Mei see Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 96-7; and Zhang Ying, *Politics and Morality*, 341-92.

influenced by her relative the notable literatus and official Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771–1843). During the late Qing, evident anti-Manchu sentiments arose albeit they did not necessarily imply a longing for the Ming dynasty.⁴² Even if an analysis of Ming loyalism and anti-Manchu resistance with their complex nuances are beyond the scope of this study, they are important concepts to understanding Qing literati feelings towards their ruling establishment and towards the past.

Although it is in the early nineteenth century that an increasingly patriotic consciousness grew with reference to the Ming dynasty, and eventually exploded in the Taiping rebellion (1850–1871),⁴³ a climate of discontent and frustration within the literati class, which was unlikely to have been motivated by ethnic factors, can be identified during the Qianlong 乾隆 reign (1736–1795). During his reign the chances for the cultural elite to enter the bureaucracy were very remote, while at court officials were often punished and killed; in the massive effort of gathering the encyclopaedia *Siku quanshu* (The Complete Library of the Four Treasuries), between 1772 and 1793 the emperor carried out numerous literary inquisitions which condemned and eliminated texts and authors.⁴⁴ During these years, the thinker and historian from Yangzhou, Wang Zhong 汪中 (1745–1794), style name Rongpu 容甫, wrote a piece of prose about Ma Shouzhen titled ‘Passing by the old quarter to mourn Ma Shouzhen’ (Jing jiuyuan diao Ma Shouzhen 經舊苑弔馬守真).⁴⁵ It is included in his

⁴² Kauko Laitinen, *Chinese Nationalism in the Late Qing Dynasty. Zhang Binglin as an Anti-Manchu Propagandist* (London, 1990), esp. 19–20.

⁴³ Immanuel C.Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York; London, 1976), 168–95.

⁴⁴ Alexander Woodside, ‘The Ch’ien-Lung Reign’, in Willard J. Peterson ed., *The Cambridge History of China. The Ch’ing Empire to 1800* (Cambridge, 2002), vol. 9, 238–9, 245–6, 282–93.

⁴⁵ In this case *jiuyuan* 舊苑 differs from *jiuyuan* 舊院 the name commonly used for the pleasure quarter (see Chapter Two), and it possibly indicates Ma’s individual residence rather than the whole area.

‘Discourses on Learning’ *Shu xue* 述學 and reveals an important connection established by the Qing literatus with the historical figure of the late Ming courtesan.⁴⁶

In the year *chanye*⁴⁷ I visited the south of the city of Jiangning [Nanjing] and once I passed the Huiguang Temple on its left there was an abandoned garden; by the cold limpid stream, a field filled with autumn cabbage, a cottage abandoned by all means, only an old cypress half alive, while wind and dust cover and restrain, many stones scattered in the courtyard. In the Ming southern quarter, the courtesan Ma Shouzhen used to live here. The Qinhuai waters keep flowing, what was left behind is gone [yet her] name remains, her beauty and talent,⁴⁸ and character, you can hear of her past life and many still remember her. I admire her painting legacy (*ji*), thickets of orchids, thin and long bamboo, gentle and fragile, of incomparable elegance, her spirit is great and rich, besides paper and ink she was extremely appreciated for her talent (*cai*), I regret to be born too late to meet her. She entrusted herself to the bureau register (*leji*), indeed a hard life, how can it be that duty leads to death? Elegant and beautiful smiles at the door, entertaining with passions, drums and zither, but against her will. In the past concubine Ban was full of grief⁴⁹ and Cai Yan (Wen ji)⁵⁰ of sorrow and indignation, [like Ma] were all ill-fated, but [Ma] was even more unlucky. Alas! Such talent born in a woman, in a hundred years and thousands of *li*, it is very hard to find [a woman like her]. How come that so talented still she had to be so unfortunate?

I am the only son of a family with a small house and land with not enough for living, as the destiny of the eldest ten people counted on me. At the beginning I was a scribe and changed many employers, I had to bend or raise my head according to their moods, while sorrow and happiness depended upon others [...] My own life experience is not much different from hers! Only because of the second reason of happiness,⁵¹ [for which] fortunately I am a man, and I can choose not to have the disgrace of sleeping on a mat [being a prostitute]. I am composing next to the river and sympathise for the common misfortune, while birds cry in the autumn breeze, and those who hear are filled with sorrow. Those who are ill-fated even in different times we share the same distress (*langji*). If you meet grief in the autumn breeze, find comfort in writing and lamenting, I understand destiny cannot be changed, so I can only express my sorrow until deep at night.

歲在單闕，客居江寧城南，出入經迴光寺，其左有廢圃焉，寒流清泚，秋菰滿田，室廬皆盡，惟古柏半生，風煙掩抑，怪石數峯支離草際。明

⁴⁶ On this see also Li, ‘The Late Ming Courtesan’, 66-7; on Wang Zhong see John Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects* (Cambridge MA, 2003), 288-9.

⁴⁷ *Chanye* is another way to say ‘mao year’ (*maonian* 卯年), HYDCD, 3-425B.

⁴⁸ *Se* has also a sexual connotation. *Matthews’s Chinese-English Dictionary*, n. 5445.

⁴⁹ Concubine Ban 婕妤 (c.48–c.6 BCE) was a talented poet from a scholarly family, and became one of the consorts of emperor Cheng (r.37–33 BCE) of the Western Han. Ban failed to give the emperor a son and was accused of witchcraft by other concubines, see Chang, *Women Writers*, 17-18.

⁵⁰ For Wen ji see Chapter Two fn. 118.

⁵¹ Confucius said to have three reasons to be joyful (*san le*): to be a human being, to be a man and his elderly age, HYDCD, 1-248A.

南苑妓馬守真故居也。秦淮水逝，迹往名留，其色藝風情，故老遺聞，多能道者。余嘗覽其畫蹟，叢蘭修竹，文弱不勝秀氣，靈襟紛披，楮墨之外，未嘗不愛賞其才，恨吾生之不及見也。夫託身樂籍，少長風塵，人生實難，豈可責之以死？婉孌倚門之笑，綢繆鼓瑟之娛，諒非得已。在昔婕妤悼傷，文姬悲憤，矧茲薄命，抑又下焉。嗟乎！天生此才在於女子，百年千里猶不可期，奈何鐘美如斯而摧辱之至於斯極哉！余單家孤子，寸田尺宅，無以治生，老弱之命，懸於十指。一從操翰，數更府主，俯仰異趣，哀樂由人。[.] 靜言身世，與斯人其何異！祇以榮期二樂，幸而為男，差無牀簀之辱耳。江上之歌，憐以同病，秋風鳴島，聞者生哀。[.] 人固有不偶兮，將異世同其狼籍。遇秋風之惻愴兮，撫靈蹤而太息。諒時命其不可為兮，獨申哀而竟夕。⁵²

In this long passage Wang Zhong, as Wai-yee Li has suggested,⁵³ expressed a deep empathy for Ma Shouzhen; his feelings towards the courtesans seem a genuine retroactive sharing of suffering (*pathos*) in a self-identification with the talented and ill-fated Ma. Here it is suggested that Wang's focus is on the fact that her unfortunate destiny, despite her talent, assigned her to the courtesan world, while in Li's analysis her bad luck was to be an 'unloved beauty', since she was refused marriage by Wang Zhideng.⁵⁴ From Wang's viewpoint, part of the misfortune he shared with Ma Shouzhen was due to the inability of controlling their destiny or emotions, which were in the hands of others: his employers, her guests or Heaven. Despite this feeling of self-identification, Wang recognised the different gender expectations within society and felt lucky to have been born male.

A better known younger contemporary of Wang Zhong, the aforementioned Hangzhou intellectual Chen Wenshu, reiterated the connection between the city, its history and Ma Shouzhen's residence in his collection of texts on Nanjing, where under the voice *Kong que an* he wrote: 'green sleeves are everywhere, in the air chanting of "White Silk Skirt"' (翠袖人

⁵² Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.2.6a-b.

⁵³ Li, 'The Late Ming Courtesan', 66.

⁵⁴ Li, 'The Late Ming Courtesan', 67.

何处，空吟白練裙).⁵⁵ Yet, in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century not only was Ma Shouzhen's abode a place to visit or travel to in the city of Nanjing or in a memorial journey through the past, but also her grave is found in literati's poems. The famous scholar and controversial teacher of women Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797) spent many years in Nanjing and, by being a promoter of women's erudition and history, was aware of Ma Shouzhen's fame. In his 'Suiyuan's Notes on Poetry' *Sui yuan shihua* 隨園詩話, Yuan Mei wrote about Ma Shouzhen's sepulchre as follows:⁵⁶

According to the legend, outside the southern wall of Jiangning [Nanjing] in a bamboo thicket, there is Ma Xianglan's grave. A poem by Lu Yanmen of Wangjiang⁵⁷ goes:

Floating leaves can hardly stop being blown back and forth by the wind,
 With no consensus carried in the breast towards a beautiful young person.
 She painted her heart in orchids, remains extremely pure,
 After she died in the Buddhist temple, nothing was left.
 Bosom friend, outstanding woman, feelings although reciprocated
 Unfortunately Mr Wang did not entirely.
 A little I feel for her talent, with a genuine meaning.
 Dense bamboo joined in the setting sun.
 Uniqueness and heroism sent to a woman's trousseau,
 like the story of Shisan Niang, granddaughter of the Jin Family.⁵⁸
 Over the years scholars came and went,
 Then [those] who had known her could not forget [her].
 Fragile like the intense fragrance of round cardamom,
 The hundred flowers want to see her embroidered cloths.
 In my whole life I only paid respect to Yao Li's⁵⁹ grave,
 [but] arrived here I had to burn a stick of incense.

相傳江西南城外瑞相院后叢竹中，為馬湘蘭墓。望江魯雁門題詩云：
 葉飄難禁往來風，未肯輸懷向狡童。
 畫到蘭心留素素，死依僧院示空空。
 知音卓女情雖切，薄倖王郎信未終。
 一點憐才真意在，青青竹節夕陽中。

⁵⁵ Chen Wenshu 陳文述, *Moling ji* 秣陵集 'Collection on Moling', in *Nanjing xijian wenxian congkan* (Nanjing, 2009), 255; see his biography in Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Dynasty (1644–1912)* (Washington, 1943–1944), 103-4; more on him in Widmer, 'Ming Loyalism', 367, 370-82.

⁵⁶ There is a vast literature on the controversial figure of Yuan Mei, see J.D. Schmidt, *Harmony Garden: the Life, Literary Criticism, and Poetry of Yuan Mei, 1716–1799* (London; New York, 2003).

⁵⁷ County in Anhui province, *Zhongguo lishi diming cidian* 中國歷史地名辭典 (Jiangxi, 1986), 810.

⁵⁸ The short story of Shisan Niang belongs to the martial genre *wuxia* 武俠 and was originated during the Five Dynasties (907–960); it narrates the vicissitudes of Jing Shisan Niang 荆十三娘 (Thirteen Girl) of the Jing family of merchants and her heroic gestures, see Altenburger, *The Sword or the Needle*, 103.

⁵⁹ Yao Li 要離 was a notorious murderer of the Spring and Autumn Period. HYDCD, 8-763A.

絕世英雄寄女糰，荊家曾說十三娘。
年來文士動相擠，始識伊人不可忘。
零露似熏香豆蔻，百花想見繡衣裳。
平生除拜要離冢，到此才焚一瓣香。⁶⁰

Yuan Mei continued by saying that the grave was mistakenly believed to be that of Ma Shouzhen, as a tablet clarified that it belonged instead to the concubine of a merchant surnamed Mou.⁶¹ Nonetheless, later in the nineteenth century the author known by the style name of Xueqiao jushi 雪樵居士 in his 1838 'Records of what heard and seen about the Qinhuai', quoted the same poem on Ma Shouzhen's grave as was reported in Yuan Mei's poetry collection translated above.⁶²

In the nineteenth century several volumes collecting notes and poems about the Qinhuai and the pleasure quarter, such as *Qinhuai wenjian lu* or Wang Shizhen's miscellanea of poetry *Qinhuai zashi*,⁶³ revealed the ongoing fascination that the late Ming and courtesan culture exerted on the literati circles during the mid to late Qing dynasty. The name of Ma Shouzhen often appears within those texts, as in 'Records of Qinhuai Painted Boats' *Qinhuai huafang lu* 秦淮畫舫錄 published in 1817 by Peng Huasheng 捧花生, where there is a poem 'Inscription on a little portrait of Ma Xianglan presented to Madam Youlan 題馬湘蘭小像贈又蘭女士 written by a certain Bai Ye 白也 to the Nanjing woman Ma Youlan 馬又蘭.⁶⁴ Ma Youlan's dates are unknown, but she lived in the Qing dynasty; her style name was Yunqing 芸卿 and she painted 'elegant and moist orchids and bamboo, with the intention of

⁶⁰ Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Sui yuan shihua* 隨園詩話 'Notes on Poetry from Sui Garden', 16 *juan*, in *Zhongguo gudian wenxue lilun piping zhuanzhu xuanji* (Beijing, 1960), vol. 2, 155-6.

⁶¹ Yuan Mei, *Sui yuan shihua*, 156.

⁶² Xueqiao jushi 雪樵居士, *Qinhuai wenjian lu* 秦淮聞見錄, in Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 4b-5a.

⁶³ Wang Shizhen 王士禛, *Qinhuai zashi* 秦淮雜詩, in Xu Qiu, *Ben shi shi*, 10.1-3.

⁶⁴ Peng Huasheng 捧花生, *Qinhuai huafang lu* 秦淮畫舫錄 'Records of Qinhuai Painted Boats', 1 *juan*, in *Xiangyan congshu* (Beijing, 1992), 46b.

following Xianglan', meaning Ma Shouzhen's style (蘭竹秀潤, 欲步湘蘭).⁶⁵ Again, in another Peng Huasheng's account, there is a passage on the four beauties of Nanjing, which reads:

In the Shenzong [Wanli] reign, the four beauties of the Qinhuai were Zhu Wuxia, Zheng Wumei, Ma Xianglan and Zhao Jinyan; the topic of famous literati in the alleys by the river [where they] entangled with beauties, up to now has been seen in Southern tales, just as they recounted them. I remember yesterday when I teased Ou Yu on the collection of the painted boats, so we exchanged views; Ou Yu said: 'In between the Long Bridge and the Old Compound, in the last two hundred years, how can it be that so rare are the beauties who can match them?

明神宗時，秦淮四美人，為朱無瑕、鄭無美、馬湘蘭、趙今燕，渡江名士，紛致佳題，迄今熟南中故事者，猶能道之。憶昨招鷗雨集畫舫，偶與議及，鷗雨輒曰：‘長橋舊院之間，二百年來，豈鮮佳麗，可媲前徽？’⁶⁶

Although the dazzling glamour of the Qinhuai pleasure quarter ended with the Ming dynasty, and most of the brothels were destroyed during the dynastic transition, some courtesans' houses were maintained during the Qing dynasty and the Qinhuai remained a synonym for the pleasure quarter until the twentieth century.⁶⁷ Throughout the centuries literati engaged with the historical figure of Ma Shouzhen and created a powerful association with the place of her residence, the Qinhuai pleasure quarter and the city of Nanjing. There is a detectible continuity in writing about Ma Shouzhen which contributed to the construction of her as a *lieu de mémoire*, a 'site of memory' – an idea coined by the French theorist of the *nouvelle histoire* Pierre Nora. Although Nora has conceived the *lieu de mémoire* in thinking about the making of the French national consciousness, his very idea and definition are applicable to the case of Ma Shouzhen: 'a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a

⁶⁵ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 765.

⁶⁶ Peng Huasheng 捧花生, *Huafang yu tan* 畫舫余譚 'Leftover Talk of the Painted Boats', 1 juan, in *Qinhuai xiangyan congshu* (Yangzhou, 1987), 18.b-19a.

⁶⁷ Oki, *Fengyue Qinhuai*, 66-8.

symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.’⁶⁸

6.3 Appreciating, collecting and counterfeiting Ma Shouzhen’s painting in the Qing dynasty

The practice of inscribing Ma Shouzhen’s paintings, which started during her lifetime (as discussed in Chapter Three), was maintained in subsequent centuries in order to express appreciation for the courtesan and her painterly talent. Although many of her paintings did not survive, as we have seen in the case of Xu Wei,⁶⁹ the inscribed poems were often recorded in authors’ individual collections or alternatively were anthologised. For example, the late Ming dynasty Yangzhou poet Wang Chun 王醇 (style name Xianmin 先民) wrote an inscription on a handscroll by Ma, then recorded it in *Ben shi shi*. Even though it is not possible to establish whether it was written before or after Ma’s death, the inscription reveals the engagement of the Jiangnan literatus with her painting: ‘the frost shines in the autumn scent, like many jade branches; snow-white frost winds like the Xiang River’ (寒映秋芳數枝玉，冰綃宛是湘江曲).⁷⁰

In the early Qing the celebrated author Zhu Yizun, who we have already encountered in Chapter Four, recorded in his collection *Pushu ting ji* 曝書亭集 the song lyric ‘On the tune of *Haoshijin*. Inscribed on Ma Xianglan’s orchids painting’ 好事近，題馬湘蘭畫蘭. The inscription, which is still visible on the handscroll housed today in the Shanghai Museum (ill. 28c), reads:

⁶⁸ Nora, ‘From Lieux de Mémoire to Realms of Memory’, 17; see also on place and memory in Nanjing Owen Stephen, ‘Place: Meditation on the Past at Chin-ling’, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 50.2 (Dec 1990), 417-57.

⁶⁹ See Chapter Three.

⁷⁰ Wang Chun 王醇, ‘Ti Ma Xianglan suo hua lanzhujian 題馬湘蘭所畫蘭竹卷’, in Xu Qiu, *Ben shi shi*, 4.19b-20a.

Twelve thickets of orchids,
I could look [at them] a thousand times.
Clean and washed to display the secret rouge,
Dew and nature [show] their genuine colours,
The beauty and her rich clothing have been long famous,
[Her] painting moves to compassion.
If you try to change it with a Lady Guan's,
Alas! Who would know?
一十二叢蘭，意態看成千百。
淨洗陳丹暗粉，露天然真色。
紅粧季布舊聞名，畫也動憐惜。
試易管夫人款，有阿誰知得。⁷¹

Zhu Yizun expressed appreciation for Ma Shouzhen's painting by associating it with that of Guan Daosheng, the most iconic figure in the history of women's painting. In so doing, Zhu recognised Ma as part of a wider female legacy within the history of painting, a legacy which was later kept alive also by means of Ma Shouzhen when later painters (both male and female) started to paint after her.

For instance, the celebrated late-eighteenth century painter Pan Gongshou 潘恭壽 (1741–1794) claimed on a hanging scroll titled 'Garden rock and flowers' and signed with his style name Lian jushi 蓮居士, now in the collection of the Harvard Art Museums, to paint by copying (*mu* 摹) Ma Shouzhen (ill. 69). In fact the painting clearly resembles a hanging scroll attributed to Ma that was sold by Christie's in 1994 (ill. 70); it even copies the inscription on its top part signed by Zhang Chong 張翀. Pan Gongshou was evidently interested in women painters, since he made a portrait of his contemporary gentry woman Wang Yuyan 王玉燕 captured in the act of painting orchids (ill. 71), a subject for which she was particularly famous.⁷² Interestingly the orchids in Pang's painting closely resemble those painted by Ma

⁷¹ Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊, *Pushu ting ji cizhu* 曝書亭集詞注 'Collected Works from Pushu Pavilion. Song Lyrics', (accessed via the database *Zhongguo jiben guji ku* 中國基本古籍庫 at the Baptist University, HK), 5.210.

⁷² Li Shi, *Mingqing guige huihua yanjiu*, 87-8.

Shouzhen rather than those painted by Wang Yuyan, shown via a distinct feature in their undulated leaf strokes (ill. 72).

Another instance in which Ma Shouzhen's style was copied is a coloured painted round fan, possibly dating from the end of the nineteenth century. It is signed by a certain Mengshi jushi 夢石居士 'Dreaming stone Buddhist adept' (ill. 73), perhaps the style name of a late Qing woman whose identity remains obscure;⁷³ the fan bears the inscription: 'Painted following [Ma] Xianglan's brush style at the 'Listening to the incense' reading and painting studio' (捶湘蘭筆□作聽香讀畫室). The fan shows an evident visual reference to Ma's painting style, especially if we compare its orchids and leaves with those depicted in the handscroll with Wen Zhenheng's inscription (ill. 61) and the fan in the Yale University Art Gallery (ill. 56); or perhaps Mengshi jushi practised painting while studying the widely used 'Garden seed' painting manual, which illustrated orchids 'à la Ma Shouzhen' (as discussed in Chapter Three) (ill. 36).

As Qing literati inscribed Ma Shouzhen's paintings so did Qing gentry women, such as Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀 (c.1762–c.1832), who was a poet-disciple of the abovementioned master Yuan Mei,⁷⁴ a painter of Buddhist subjects, and possibly of orchids too.⁷⁵ In her personal collection *Xiu yu xu cao* 繡餘續草, Gui recorded 'Inscription on an orchid painting by Ma

⁷³ Tsang points out that the style name Mengshi jushi was adopted by three Qing male painters who lived in the nineteenth to twentieth century, but this does not fit with any of their painting style, see Tsang, *More than Keeping Cool*, 41.

⁷⁴ Chang, *Women Writers*, 492-5.

⁷⁵ Although there are not extant orchid paintings by Gui, two poems are titled 'Painting orchids' ('Hualan' 畫蘭) and 'Orchids' ('Lan' 蘭), see Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀, *Xiu yu xu cao* 繡餘續草 'Sequel of Poetry Drafts After Embroidering', 5 juan, (Shanghai Li shi edition, 1832) [accessed via McGill-Harvard-Yenching Library Ming-Qing Women's Writings Digitization Project, Harvard Yenching Library ID: 5500/2142], 1.16b-17a; 4.4b-5a.

Shouzhen' (題馬守真畫蘭) in which she identified Ma as a literate woman whose presence was still felt through her painting:

Orchid fragrance⁷⁶ withered and fallen, entrusted to wind and dust;
The rouge dried up in the time of leisure, the ink stone box was your friend.
Nobody wonders how painting came about, [her] spirit comes alive
Ah, you were in origins, this body of flowers.
國香零落委風塵，脂盞閒時硯匣親。
莫訝繪來神活現，阿儂原是此花身。⁷⁷

In Gui Maoyi's collection, the above poem is followed by a similarly titled one 'Inscribing Xue Susu's Orchids painting' 題薛素素畫蘭, another famous courtesan contemporary of Ma's.⁷⁸ This could indicate both the fascination of an eighteenth-century/nineteenth-century literate woman for talented women of the past, and also that emblematic figures of famous courtesans, such as Ma and Xue, still exerted their agency in the Qing knowledge of history and painting. The legacy of Ma Shouzhen is also demonstrated by the fact that Qing women painters of orchids were associated with her, as in the case of the Suzhou actress (but also painter and poet) Wu Lanxian 吳蘭仙 who lived in the late nineteenth century. In the source *Fen mo cong tan* 粉墨叢談 by Meng Wansheng 夢畹生 (1852–1925), Wu is said to be 'skilled in painted ink orchids, graceful and slanting plants in the wind and leaves in the rain, evidently there is Ma Xianglan's legacy (*jiyi*)' (吳蘭仙蘭仙為南皮太守后人，自字號紉秋館主。工畫墨蘭，風枝雨葉，婀娜橫斜，大有馬湘蘭遺意).⁷⁹

⁷⁶ In the text *guo xiang* 國香, which literally means the 'nation fragrance', is likely to indicate the scent of orchids, HYDCD, 3-637B.

⁷⁷ Gui Maoyi, *Xiu yu xu cao*, 3.32a.

⁷⁸ Gui Maoyi, *Xiu yu xu cao*, 3.32a.

⁷⁹ Integral Chinese text of *Fen mo cong tan* 粉墨叢談 reproduced in the anthology *Hai shang mo lin*, *Guang fang yan guan quan an*, *Fen mo cong tan* 海上墨林, 廣方言館全案, 粉墨叢談, in *Shanghai tanyu Shanghai ren congshu* (Shanghai, 1989), 177.

The practice of inscribing Ma Shouzhen's painting continued during the high and late Qing dynasty (1851–1911) when many famous literati, as well as less celebrated authors, recorded the poems they inscribed on Ma Shouzhen's painting. Among them the abovementioned Chen Wenshu was, moreover, a Ming nostalgic⁸⁰ and one of the greatest Qing promoters of women's literacy and history, as demonstrated by the project of the 'Orchid Fate Collection' *Lanyinji* 蘭因集, which involved the restoration of three women's graves situated next to the West Lake.⁸¹ As discussed by Anne Gerritsen in her investigation into nineteenth-century fashion for the late Ming, Chen Wenshu's collection includes the writing of male and female poets from the past and within Chen's network – including his relatives, concubines and daughters – about the three women (nüshi 女士) of the past.⁸² In his individual poetry collection *Shendao tang ji* 頤道堂集, Chen Wenshu, besides many other writings about late Ming women such as Xue Susu, Dong Xiaowan and Liu Rushi, included his hepta-syllabic quatrain on a bamboo painting by Ma Shouzhen; in the poem he celebrated her chivalrous character by associating it to that of Zhu Jia, a celebrated Confucian scholar of the past:

Snatch a moment of leisure she sketched the creeping plants.
 Flying gossamers in the empty garden, while the sun changes into a slanting
 [figure].
 A painting of the Xiao and Xiang [rivers], reflections of autumn dreams,
 Leaning and coming green sleeves, [she] was a [Zhu Jia] knight-errant.⁸³
 偷閒自寫牽蘿意，
 飛絮空園日易斜。
 一副瀟湘秋夢影，
 倚來翠袖是朱家。⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Widmer, 'Ming Loyalty', 367.

⁸¹ The three women are: Lady Juxiang 菊香 of the Song dynasty, the late Ming dynasty Feng Xiaoqing 馮小青 (1595–1612) and the Yangzhou late Ming painter Yang Huilin 楊慧林, style name Yunyou 雲友, skilled in depicting landscapes, see *Tuhui baojian xuzuan* 圖繪寶鑑續纂 'Addition to the Precious Mirror for Examining Painting', 3 *juan*, in *Huashi congshu* (Shanghai, 1963), 3.72.

⁸² See on this Gerritsen, 'Searching for Gentility', 188-91, 195, 200.

⁸³ Zhu Jia 朱家 was an eminent Confucian of the Lu 魯 period during the Zhou dynasty, and became a synecdoche for knight-errant. HYDCD, 4-734B.

Ma Shouzhen's paintings were appreciated and collected during the Qing dynasty, as demonstrated by the entries in *Yutai shushi* edited by the Hangzhou scholar Li E (1692–1752) and mid-nineteenth-century *Yutai huashi* by the gentry woman Tang Souyu (previously discussed in Chapter Three).⁸⁵ The two texts not only are invaluable sources of information on calligraphy and painting by women of the Chinese imperial era, but also reveal a profound interest in women's painting production and history during the Qing dynasty. A modern source on the collecting of Ma Shouzhen's pieces is in the seminal survey on collection catalogues and texts on painting conducted by Sir John Calvin Ferguson (1866–1945), a Canadian missionary who spent most of his life in Nanjing and became a scholar of Chinese art history (he is known also with the Chinese name Fu Kai Sen 福开森). Ferguson listed twenty pieces by Ma Shouzhen found in sixteen collection texts dating from the seventeenth to the twentieth century (see table 7).⁸⁶ Recently the Chinese scholar He Junhong has listed twenty-six entries for Ma Shouzhen's paintings found in texts.⁸⁷ This chapter will complement the above by adding a few more names to the list of Ma's collectors.

He Junhong's research on collecting late imperial women's painting during the Qing dynasty has shown that some important cultural figures of the late Ming welcomed and collected paintings by women, such as the painter and theorist Dong Qichang, and the scholars Li

⁸⁴ Chen Wenshu 陳文述, *Shendao tang ji* 頤道堂集 'Collected Works from the Shendao Hall' (accessed via the database *Zhongguo jiben guji ku* 中國基本古籍庫 at the Baptist University, HK), 800.

⁸⁵ Li E, *Yutai shushi*, 72b; Tang Souyu, *Yutai huashi*, 5.3b-4a.

⁸⁶ Ferguson and Lovell's research is the most important contribution to the systematisation of texts on painting. See John C. Ferguson, *Lidai zhulu huamu* 歷代著錄畫目 'List of Painting Catalogues of all Times' (Nanjing, 1934); Lovell, *An Annotated Bibliography*. See the entry 'Ma Shouzhen 馬守貞' in Ferguson, *Lidai zhulu huamu*, 244.

⁸⁷ He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 96-7; table 5, 98-101.

Rihua 李日华 (1565–1635)⁸⁸ and Wang Luoyu 汪砢玉 (1587–1645).⁸⁹ Ma Shouzhen's pieces received a very good response in the collecting world and she finished up as one of the most appreciated pre-twentieth-century women painters. Among the Qing dynasty collectors of Ma Shouzhen's there are relevant names, such as Kong Shangren, author of the celebrated drama 'Peach Blossom Fan', who possessed an ink orchid painting of Ma's dated 1603;⁹⁰ also the calligrapher Zhu Zhichi 朱之赤 who, alongside his collected artworks by Ni Zan and Wen Zhengming, collected two orchid and bamboo pieces by Ma Shouzhen.⁹¹

There is textual evidence for late Qing collections which included the courtesan's painting, besides those already discussed in Chapter Three: in the 1861 inventory catalogue *Yuexuelou shuhua lu* 嶽雪樓書畫錄, the famous collector Kong Guangtao 孔廣陶 (1832–1890) among the 139 items of his collection possessed a piece by Ma Shouzhen. The 'Long handscroll with Ma Xianglan's narcissus and rocks added by Wang Bogu' 馬湘蘭水仙王伯穀補石長卷 was a 1599 handscroll roughly 4.5 metres long, dedicated to Wang Zhideng, who in turn left an inscription and, according to the title of the piece, painted the rocks.⁹² This collaborative piece was subsequently acquired by the scholar and collector Pei Jingfu 裴景福 (1854–1926) and listed in his 1924 catalogue. Pei commented on it with praise and associated Ma Shouzhen with relevant names in the history of painting: the Song master Zhao Mengjian recalled with his style names Zigu and Yizhai, and the Ming celebrity Wen Zhengming, both

⁸⁸ See Li Rihua's biography in DMB, 826.

⁸⁹ He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 96-7; table 5, 98-101.

⁹⁰ Kong Shangren 孔尚任, *Xiangjin bu* 享金簿 'Xiangjin Notebook', 1 *juan*, in *Meishu congshu* (Shanghai, 1936), 19.

⁹¹ Zhu Zhichi 朱之赤, *Zhu Woan cang shuhua mu* 朱臥庵藏書畫目 'Zhu Woan's Painting and Calligraphy Collection Catalogue', 1 *juan*, in *Meishu congshu* (Shanghai, 1936), 13b; Lovell, *Annotated Bibliography*, 83-4.

⁹² Kong Guangtao 孔廣陶, *Yuexue lou shuhua lu* 嶽雪樓書畫錄 'Record of Painting and Calligraphy from the Yuexue Building', 5 *juan*, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 5.17a-b; Lovell, *Annotated Bibliography*, 76-7.

of whom shared with Ma Shouzhen recognition as painters of orchids (see also Chapter Three):

The ink narcissus follows [the style of Zhao Mengjian] Zigu, the flowers and leaves are too dense and do not equal [those by Zhao Mengjian] Yizhai, but the elegant and free spirit (*qi*) [of the painting] recalls Hengshan [Wen Zhengming's style]; [moreover] the grass lines are as thin as the silky hair of a woman. This is a unique style. It concentrates the pure energies of heaven and earth.

墨筆水仙仿子固，花葉繁密不及彝齋，而秀潤瀟散之氣尚在衡山上，叢草細密如絲髮女子。有此絕技亦。乾坤清氣所鍾也。⁹³

The erudite official Lu Xinyuan 陸心源 (1834–1894),⁹⁴ collector of books, rubbings, painting and calligraphy, recorded in his 1892 catalogue *Rangli guan guoyan lu* 穰梨館過眼錄 having inscribed a hanging scroll by Ma dated 1603, which depicted orchids with bamboo and rock (馬湘蘭蘭竹石軸), and is simply recorded in his collection with no further comments.⁹⁵ In the early twentieth-century collection catalogue titled *Xuzhai ming hua lu* 虛齋名畫錄 (1909) of the connoisseur, dealer and patron Pang Yuanji 龐元濟 (1864–1949),⁹⁶ there is a painting by Ma Shouzhen (Orchid, bamboo and rock painting by Ming dynasty Ma Xianglan 明馬湘蘭蘭竹石圖) with double outlined orchids and a simple inscription which dates the piece 1600 (*gengzi* 庚子 year) and is followed by inscriptions by Wang Zhideng and four others.⁹⁷

⁹³ Pei Jingfu, *Zhuantaoge shuhua lu*, 11.36a. See a reference to this also in Tseng, 'Women Painters', 253.

⁹⁴ Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 545-7.

⁹⁵ Lu Xinyuan 陸心源, *Rangli guan guoyan lu* 穰梨館過眼錄 'Record of what seen in Rangli Studio', 40 *juan*, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 27.5a.

⁹⁶ Katharine P. Burnett's research on Pang should soon be published as a book titled *Pang Yuanji (1864–1949): Artist, Patron, Collector, Dealer*.

⁹⁷ Pang Yuanji 龐元濟, *Xuzhai ming hua lu* 虛齋名畫錄 'Records of Xuzhai's Famous Paintings', 16 *juan*, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 8.71a-72b; He Junhong believes this to be a forgery but does not explain why, see He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, table 8, 132-3.

By reading inscriptions and seals on Ma's paintings it is possible to recognise some important names in art collecting.⁹⁸ The handscroll in the Tokyo National Museum begins with a nineteenth-century portrait of Ma Shouzhen, which depicts her wearing simple cloths and revealing a chaste attitude (ill. 15a); the inscription following the portrait dated 'on an autumn day of *jiachen* [1844]' (甲辰秋日) and signed by a certain Fei Qiuyu 費秋漁 says that the portrait was made by Wang Qiuyan 王秋言 (1813–1879).⁹⁹ After Ma's album leaf there are ten colophons; besides the first one which was left by Wang Zhideng (as translated in Chapter Three), all the others were added in the Qing dynasty; amongst them it is worth drawing attention to the fourth one, signed by the collector and official Gu Wenbin 顧文彬 (1811–1889) who collected a painting by the famous concubine Li Yin,¹⁰⁰ followed by a short inscription by Wei Qiansheng 魏謙升 (?–1861), a literatus who wrote the preface for the contemporary woman poet Wu Zao 吳藻 (1799–1863)'s collection of song lyrics;¹⁰¹ while the last colophon is signed by a certain Peng Chunshi 彭醇士. Although it is hard to establish whether any of the above people actually owned the scroll, this piece reveals the interest and appreciation that Ma Shouzhen's painting provoked amongst the literati for almost three centuries. Moreover, it makes us reflect upon the original shape of the piece, which was subsequently complemented with the portrait and the colophons. All this can be read as a document of the object's life as well as of Ma's agency in history.

The handscroll in the Shanghai Museum (ill. 28), where the painting by Ma Shouzhen had been mounted together with a Xue Susu depiction of orchids (see Chapter Three for more

⁹⁸ Due to the impossibility of accessing Ma Shouzhen's painting in most museums and not being able to obtain integral high-res pictures of the scrolls where collectors and admirers used to leave their colophons and seals, this part of the research requires further investigation.

⁹⁹ See also He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 128.

¹⁰⁰ He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, table 5, 100-1.

¹⁰¹ Chang, *Women Writers*, 601.

details), is a good instance of the kind of information about appreciating and collecting which can be found on the surface of a scroll. At the incipit of the scroll the inscription in seal calligraphy ‘Suck and chew orchids’ (*jujue lanhui* 咀嚼蘭惠) was written by Yang Fa 杨法 (1696–1750), a painter and calligrapher native of Nanjing.¹⁰² The expression indicates someone so pure that they can be fed only with orchids and, in this case, it refers to the two courtesans who besides being both celebrated for their orchid painting were considered morally firm women. On the painting the inscription next to Ma Shouzhen’s is signed by Zhu Zhai 竹宅, style name of the abovementioned poet and scholar Zhu Yizun, who was a contemporary of Yang Fa and collected his inscription in his own poetry collection (as seen above).¹⁰³ Seals and colophons placed at the beginning and end of this scroll locate this piece in the early twentieth-century collection of the famous Shanghai art connoisseur and painter Wu Hufan¹⁰⁴ who, as seen in Chapter Two, also collected and mounted Ma’s letters.¹⁰⁵

The undated hanging scroll at the Rijksmuseum (ill. 16) is framed on three sides by five colophons written on the mounting paper and added by later people who came into contact with the painting or possibly owned it. The inscription at the bottom was written by a certain Gu Mian 顧免; on the right side the top inscription is signed by the Manchu minister Duan Fang 端方 (1861–1911), style name Taozhai 陶齋 or Gengyang 溁陽;¹⁰⁶ below, it is the smaller calligraphy of Wang Bocha 王伯茶, who inscribed the painting for a certain Fang

¹⁰² Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 1183.

¹⁰³ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 229; Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 182-5.

¹⁰⁴ For his paintings see his catalogue Wu Hufan, *Wu Hufan hua ji* 吳湖帆畫集 ‘Collection of Wu Hufan’s painting’ (Shanghai, 1987); on him as a collector and connoisseur see Clarissa Von Spee, *Wu Hufan: a Twentieth Century Art Connoisseur in Shanghai* (Berlin, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ This is based on an examination of this work at the Shanghai Museum on 22 August 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 780-2.

Bo 方伯, whose name is followed by the respectful appellation of ‘grand person’ (*daren* 大人); on the left-hand side both the inscriptions on top and bottom refer again to Fang Bo (*daren*), who could have been the recipient of the painting used as a gift, or was possibly the owner of the scroll; one of the inscriptions carries the date *xuan tong yuan nian* 宣統元年 which corresponds to 1909.

A further source of information on collections, which has recently received more scholarly attention but still requires further investigation within the study of material and visual cultures, are the imperial inventories of goods confiscated as a punishment for tax evasion and corruption. In a confiscation registry of the Qianlong, there is a hanging scroll by Ma Shouzhen depicting orchid and small grass (馬湘蘭蘭小草軸), which was confiscated together with many artworks, including a Dong Qichang orchid handscroll and a Tang Yin landscape painting. According to the inventory, Ma’s painting belonged first to the governor of Jiangsu and collector Wang Danwang 王亶望 (d.1781), and later to the man who arrested him for having illegally appropriated funds designated for famine relief, the official Chen Huizu 陳輝祖 (1732–1783), second son of the famous official of the Hanlin Academy Chen Dashou 陳大受 (1702–1751).¹⁰⁷

As already mentioned in Chapter Three, the counterfeiting industry, which thrived along with the late Ming art market, also fabricated Ma Shouzhen’s pieces. This can be read as a testimony of the importance that Ma Shouzhen had in the eyes of potential buyers, who created a demand for her painting within the market. As it will be further discussed in the

¹⁰⁷ Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 100; *Qianlong chao chenghan tanwu danan xuanbian* 乾隆朝懲辦貪污檔案選編 ‘Selected Records of Punishments for Corruption during the Qianlong Reign’ (Beijing, 1994), vol. 3, 2758. I thank Dr Yan Yun for this suggestion.

last section of this chapter, a vogue for the late Ming and its courtesans was very much alive during the Qing dynasty and Ma Shouzhen, who as one of the emblems of the golden age of Nanjing courtesanship, was appreciated throughout the subsequent centuries. The forgeries of her paintings can be seen as a statement of appreciation of her painting style and are part of her legacy in the history of painting.

Several of Ma Shouzhen's extant pieces today housed in museum collections and circulating in the Chinese ancient art market are forgeries. This is the case with the long 1566 handscroll (see Chapter Three), which was recorded in the eighteenth-century imperial collection catalogue *Sanqu baoji* and the hanging scroll dated 1554, when Ma Shouzhen was only six (ill. 74), both held at the Palace Museum in Beijing (ill. 17).¹⁰⁸ Other pieces carry a date in discordance with the established time span of Ma's life, such as the Liaoning Museum album which is dated 1624 (ill. 75).¹⁰⁹ Despite the evidence for a market of Ma Shouzhen's paintings – both authentic and counterfeit –, it is hard to establish exactly when the forgeries were made or by whom; they were likely to have been produced during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but some of them could have circulated in the market even since the late Ming. Counterfeited Ma Shouzhen paintings reached the European art market possibly in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, as shown by the undated hanging scroll in the Östasiatiska Museet in Stockholm (ill. 18).¹¹⁰ Further research on this topic would shed some light on the authors, the time and motivations behind forging Ma Shouzhen.

Besides the above, some of Ma Shouzhen's paintings reported in texts and catalogues very probably were forgeries. A clear instance of counterfeit is the orchid and bamboo painting

¹⁰⁸ That is the main argument in the article by Li Shi, 'Shiqu baojian'.

¹⁰⁹ He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, table 9, 154-5.

¹¹⁰ It was mistaken as authentic by Sirén, *Chinese Painting*, vol. 5, 72.

recorded in the early Qing scholar Gao Shiqi's 高士奇 (1645–1704) collection, and with an inscription that reads: 'Jiaqing [reign] *yiyong* [year 1549] painted in a spring day by Xianglan Ma Shouzhen' (嘉靖己酉春日湘蘭馬守真寫).¹¹¹ The date clashes with Ma's biographical information, as she was born in 1548 and could not paint at the age of one, thus the piece is an obvious forgery.

In addition to the above-documented collections that included Ma Shouzhen's paintings, there is textual evidence for nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century interest in ink stones and seals allegedly belonging to the courtesan. The prolific *ci* poet and playwright Huang Xieqing 黃燮清 (1805–1864) who contributed to the diffusion of the poetry and appreciation of the peasant woman He Shuangqing 賀雙卿 (1712–?),¹¹² in his *Yiqinglou shiyu* 倚晴樓詩餘 made reference to Ma Shouzhen's seal.¹¹³ His less known contemporary Peng Bangding 彭邦鼎 in the *biji* 'Idle time' (*Xian chu guang yin* 閒處光陰), possibly published in 1849,¹¹⁴ revealed an extended interest in Ma's belongings:

In the past there was a famous courtesan known in the whole country as Ma Xianglan; her seal made with the stone from the Longevity Mountain was squared, four cun and five fen tall, and about three fen wide, carried a central knob engraved with 'in the floating life half a day is of leisure', five characters in *baiwen* (intaglio) and big seal style; on the four sides had written: 'In the year of *renzi* [1552 or 1612] every day Gu [was] together with his society fellows Lan Tianshu 藍田叔 [Lan Ying 藍瑛]¹¹⁵, Cui Yuchang 崔羽長,¹¹⁶ Dong Xuanxing 董玄

¹¹¹ Gao Shiqi 高士奇, *Renying suo xia lu* 壬寅銷夏錄 'Summer record of *renying* trivia' (accessed via the database Zhongguo jiben guji ku 中國基本古籍庫 at the Baptist University, HK), 404.

¹¹² Paul S. Ropp, *Banished Immortal: Searching for Shuangqing, China's Peasant Woman Poet* (Ann Arbor, 2001), 225–6.

¹¹³ Huang Xieqing 黃燮清, *Yiqinglou shiyu* 倚晴樓詩餘 'Poetry from the Yiqing Mansion', 4 *juan*, in *Xuxiu siku quanshu* (Shanghai, [1995]–2002), 4.10b.

¹¹⁴ The earliest dated publication of this volume held in the Ancient Books collection of the National Library of China in Beijing is dated the 29th year of Qing Daguang, meaning 1845 (ref. n. 40836).

¹¹⁵ Lan Ying 藍瑛 (c.1585–1664) from Hangzhou was a painter of landscape, bamboo, orchid, bird and flowers, see Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishu jia ren*, 1492.

¹¹⁶ Unknown character.

宰 [Dong Qichang 董其昌]¹¹⁷ and Liang Qianqiu 梁千秋,¹¹⁸ literata Ma Xianglan received them as guests on a boat.' The seal says: 'Xue Yu engraved the jade-like stone perfectly, the characters are also stunning.' Cousin Chun Nong wanted [it] for a long time. I left Hunan and gave it as a token of parting; while waiting for Chun Nong I heard that in Mr Gui Yunxi's (Gui Qing) collection there was a Ma Xianglan's ink stone; thus we met to appreciate one another's object, [though] each of us desired to collect the pair, but we eventually only talked [to appreciate them].

舊有勝國名妓馬湘蘭印章一枚，壽山石，方徑四寸五分，厚約三分，餘瓦紐中鑄“浮生半日閒”五字，白文，大篆，四圍鑄“壬子，穀日偕藍田叔崔羽長董玄宰梁千秋，社集西湖，舟中女史馬湘蘭索刊”，款曰：雪漁其石瑩潤完好，文字亦復整全”。從兄春農屬意久。余之楚，即用以誌別。迨春農聞貴簣西先生貴慶藏有馬湘蘭硯，彼此傳玩，各欲取以成耦，乃強為立說。

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Peng Bangding's seal did not genuinely belong to the courtesan, given that it carried the date of *renzi* 壬子 corresponding to the year 1552 or 1612, both of which are unrealistic dates according to Ma's lifespan and biography. Given the Chinese dating system Pang Bangding possibly was not aware of this information and believed the objects to be authentic. His writing testifies to the existence of forgeries of objects supposed to have belonged to Ma Shouzhen alongside her paintings. In a similar but later text, the scholar-official (*jinsi* 1876) and bibliophile Miao Quansun 繆荃孫 (1844–1919)¹²⁰ wrote about Ma Shouzhen's inkstone and seal, the authenticity of which is difficult to establish, although there is no seal in extant Ma's paintings which corresponds to the one discussed by Miao:

[Ma] Xianglan left an inkstone, at its back there are two little holes and [Wang] Baigu [engraved] in a small seal calligraphy the two characters 'little stars' (*xingxing*). Ma herself engraved: 'Baigu's inkstone was born with excellent qualities, he kindly gave [it] to me as a gift and it has been sitting in the orchid room¹²¹ for a long time'.

湘蘭遺研研，背有雙眼，百穀小篆‘星星’二字。馬自銘云：‘百穀之品，天生妙質，伊以惠我，長居蘭室’。

¹¹⁷ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishu jia ren*, 1225. Interestingly Dong did not make it for an individual biography in the DMB.

¹¹⁸ Known also as Liang Zhi 梁袞, he was a less renowned contemporary of Zhou Lianggong, see Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishu jia ren*, 910.

¹¹⁹ Peng Bangding 彭邦鼎, *Xian chu guang yin* 閒處光陰 'Idle time', in Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.2.5b.

¹²⁰ Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, 27.

¹²¹ Her boudoir.

[Ma] Xianglan's small seal carved in a beautiful stone, about two *cun* high, had four characters in a square saying: 'Listening to the oriole in the inner chamber (*ting li shenchu*);¹²² the four characters were engraved in intaglio (*baiwen*) and on the body of the seal it says: 'Brother [Wang] Baigu requested the engraving as a present to Xianglan "celestial scholar" (*xianshi*).'

湘蘭小印，花乳石，約高二寸許，四方文曰：聽鸝深處。四字白文，邊款
'百穀兄索篆贈湘蘭仙史。¹²³

As noticeable in the passages above, in discussing Ma Shouzhen's collectibles the name of Wang Zhideng often appears alongside that of the courtesan. This could be seen as part of the construction of his historical character being iconically linked to that of Ma Shouzhen. Miao Quansun wrote about objects previously belonging to Ma Shouzhen as relics (*jiuwu* 舊物) of the Qinhuai, as memorabilia of the vanished era of the Nanjing pleasure quarter, and with a note of nostalgia concluded the above passage by saying:

Who can hear those graceful voices singing new songs? The fragrant smell of the vanity case, the white silk skirts dancing to melodies, the mind/heart is aware of the past; the passions and arts of seduction (*fengyue*)¹²⁴, the beauty and happiness of handsome lovers are still alive.

睨睨新聲誰聽？眉硯生香，練裙顧曲，舊事心頭省。綢繆風月，王昌豔福同領。¹²⁵

Besides being a collector, Miao Quansun was a promoter of literature by women,¹²⁶ and furthermore the editor of an encyclopaedia on the Qinhuai and its courtesans (*Qinhuai guangji* 秦淮廣紀),¹²⁷ which was published in the early twentieth century. This impressive collection of texts from previous centuries demonstrates the interest of a modern man in the history of courtesanship and in the late Ming, which was recognised as its apogee. Miao Quansun's *Qinhuai guangji* remains one of the most useful and complete sources of information about courtesans.

¹²² *Shenchu* indicates the deepest part of the house.

¹²³ Miao Quansun, 'Bixiang ci' 碧香詞, in Idem, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.2.6a.

¹²⁴ *Fengyue* 風月 (lit. 'breeze and moon') indicates the seductive power of women and it is usually associated with the gaiety and dissipation of the pleasure quarter. *Matthews' Chinese-English Dictionary*, n. 1890.

¹²⁵ Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.2.6a.

¹²⁶ Miao also contributed to the appreciation of the woman poet He Shuangqing, see Ropp, *Banished Immortal*, 227-8.

¹²⁷ Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.2.6a.

6.4 Visualising Ma Shouzhen

Images of Ma Shouzhen possibly circulated during her lifetime, nonetheless the earliest extant image representing the courtesan is the woodblock printed scene in which Ma plays the zither (ill. 62), which was included in the early seventeenth-century poetry anthology *Qinglou yunyu* (discussed in Chapter Two). The same source reveals that among the many gifts sent by courtesans to others, such as paintings, clothing, and their own hair, there were also self-portraits. The Nanjing courtesan of the Old Compound Ma Shou 馬綬¹²⁸ titled one of her hepta-syllabic quatrains ‘Sending a small portrait’ 寄小像, which refers to a self-portrait and reads:

My own solitary image carrying a sorrowful expression,
I have no choice but the jade-inlaid-zither, in the darkness I carry it in a wrap.
One genuine heart, together with the moon,
desires to follow the phoenixes, entertained by blowing flutes.
自將孤影帶愁描，無奈瑤琴暗挑裹。
一片真心同夜月，願隨鳳鸞待吹簫。¹²⁹

It is possible that the practice of producing and sending self-portraits as gifts was more widespread than is known, but further research on the topic would illuminate its relevance.

A few extant representations of Ma Shouzhen done during the Qing dynasty, such as the one on the Tokyo scroll (ill. 15a) discussed above, reveal that both painters and engravers visually engaged with the past figure of the courtesan. These posthumous representations of Ma Shouzhen are relevant in the way in which they visualise an idea of what she (could have or

¹²⁸ Wang Duanshu, *Mingyuan shiwei*, 25.20a; 37.17b.

¹²⁹ Ma Shou 馬綬, ‘Ji xiaoxiang’ 寄小像 ‘Sending a small portrait’ in Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1935), 3.114. This poem has been mistakenly attributed to Ma Shouzhen in Judith T. Zeitlin, ‘The Life and Death of the Image. Ghosts and Female Portraits in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Literature’, in Wu Hung and Katherine R. Tsang eds., *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture* (Cambridge MA; London, 2005), 239; possibly it is in reference to an unpublished paper by Yuhang Li, mentioned in fn. 40, 470; Cahill reported the same inaccuracy in James Cahill, *Pictures for Use and Pleasure: Vernacular Painting in High Qing China* (Berkeley, 2010), 32.

should have) looked like. An interesting case is a life-size late-eighteenth-century hanging scroll with colours on silk depicting a seated woman who, in the above inscriptions, is identified as Ma Shouzhen (ill. 76). Yet, the piece is a ‘painting of a beauty’ (*meiren hua* 美人畫) representing the image of an idealised and standardised beautiful woman, rather than the actual portrait of an individual.¹³⁰ The scroll, which has been recently included in James Cahill’s publication on the vernacular paintings of the high Qing period, very closely resembles another *meiren hua* possibly made in the same period. The latter is spuriously dated 1643 and is meant to represent Liu Rushi, another celebrated courtesan of the late Ming and wife of Qian Qianyi (ill. 77).¹³¹ When the ‘Liu Rushi’ painting – which seems to have been cut out from a larger one and thus is missing its setting – was acquired by the Fogg Museum of Art, it attracted the attention of art historian Robert Maeda who discussed it in his 1974 article ‘The Portrait of a Woman of the Late Ming–Early Ch’ing Period: Madame Ho-tung’.¹³² Due to its similarities with the ‘Ma Shouzhen’, a study of the latter could prove useful also for the ‘Liu Rushi’.

The inscription at the top of the ‘Ma Shouzhen’ portrait quotes the entire passage by the late-eighteenth-century-intellectual Wang Zhong, mostly translated above, in which he sympathised with the courtesan and her sad destiny. Moreover, in his text Wang Zhong wrote as if he has seen the painting or had attempted to visualise Ma:

a seductive look, with fine eyebrows and a beautiful smile.¹³³ In a pensive pose her sleeves revealed her white wrist, but clearly expressed extraordinary endowments which made her superior.

此冶容兮，又工顰與善謔。攘皓腕以抒思兮，乍含豪以縣邈。¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Wu, ‘Beyond Stereotypes’, 328-30, 349-50.

¹³¹ Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 168, figures at 169. Cahill does not refer to the current location of Ma Shouzhen’s ‘portrait imaginaire’.

¹³² Robert Maeda, ‘The Portrait of a Woman of the Late Ming–Early Ch’ing Period: Madame Ho-tung’, *Archives of Asian Art*, vol. XXVII (1973–1974), 46-52.

¹³³ Smile is translated from *xue* 謔 which could also mean voice or laugh.

The second inscription on top of the scroll carries the signature of Wu Shiqi 吳世祺 (style name Jiexuan 介軒), possibly a student of the Imperial College (*jiansheng* 監生) under the reign of Xianfeng 顯豐 emperor (1850–1861),¹³⁵ thus the year (*jiayin* 甲寅) in the text could correspond to 1854. The colophon declares the painting to be Ma Shouzhen's self-portrait (此湘蘭自繪小像);¹³⁶ whether the mistake was genuine – or voluntary so as to raise the status or price of the painting – is hard to establish. However, it is clearly a later production and the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nice, where it is currently kept, meaningfully titled it a '*portrait imaginaire*' of the courtesan. At some point in the nineteenth century the painting belonged to the French baron, collector and connoisseur Joseph Raphaël Vitta (1820–1892), and later in 1935 it was donated to the French museum where it is now kept.¹³⁷

While in the Ming dynasty women tended to be portrayed outdoors, in line with eighteenth-century trends,¹³⁸ the woman said to be Ma Shouzhen is depicted in a luxury interior, elegantly but seductively sitting with her left leg raised on the bed; her left arm is resting on the bed frame, while her sleeve erotically falls down revealing the delicate skin of her wrist and forearm; her hand lightly supports her face in a pensive position, which Maeda associated with the typical pose of Northern Wei (386–534) Buddhas (ill. 78). The sitting position resembles in fact the relaxed posture which, in Buddhist iconography, is called *rajalalitasana* 'the regal ease posture' and is usually associated with Guanyin, the deity of

¹³⁴ Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*, 2.2.6a-b.

¹³⁵ *Da Qing Wenzong Xian huangdi shilu* 大清文宗顯皇帝實錄 'Veritable Records from the Qing Wenzong Emperor Xian' (Taipei, 1964), vol. 1, Xiuzhuan guan/tenglü guan 修纂官/謄錄官, 42b.

¹³⁶ Inscription read from a high-res image of the piece provided by the museum and the kind collaboration of the Principal Assistant to Conservation Ms Emmanuelle Terrel at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice.

¹³⁷ See the image reproduced and the inscription partially translated in French in Béatrice Debrabandere, *Conserver Restaurer Les Oeuvres de la Collection du Baron Vitta* (2002), page unknown.

¹³⁸ Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 169-70.

Compassion (ill. 79), but also to Tang representations of female musicians.¹³⁹ Interestingly, Guanyin has a strong association with prostitution and sensuality, and in the Qing dynasty was mainly represented in a female form (see Chapter Two).¹⁴⁰ In the scroll Ma Shouzhen holds in her right hand a folding fan, a typical *meiren's* attribute; the fan carries a landscape painting similar to the decoration of the ceramic side of the headrest and the lateral panels of the bed frame. There is an open book on the bed on Ma's right-hand side as if she was caught, or interrupted, during the act of reading in order to pose for the portraitist. This same element is seen in other *meiren hua* of the eighteenth century, such as 'Woman resting from reading' in the collection of the British Museum (ill. 80).¹⁴¹

In the painting of Ma Shouzhen, besides the book, on the table behind her there are scholar's implements: a pile of papers, scrolls, an inkstone and brushes in a pot, so as to indicate her erudition. On the other desk surface, possibly her dressing table, there are a vase of roses and some toiletries, while in the background a depiction of bamboo and rocks in a landscape setting remind the viewer of the woman's connection with painting. Her hairstyle with a decoration on the forehead mirrors a Ming dynasty style (ill. 81), rather than a Qing one, yet her clothing appears to be in a Qing fashion (Han not Manchu), especially when considering the collar with a pointed design and the silk pattern (ill. 82). In comparison, the style of the 'Liu Rushi' is very typical of the Qing and is especially similar to the fashion of the 'twelve beauties' of the emperor Yongzheng (ill. 82a).¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Maeda, 'The Portrait', 47-8; also on the same Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 175.

¹⁴⁰ For the female forms of Guanyin see Yu, *Kuan-yin*, ch. 10.

¹⁴¹ The painting is discussed and reproduced in Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 172, 175.

¹⁴² See Shen Congwen 沈從文, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu* 中國古代服飾研究 'Research in Chinese Ancient Clothing' (Hong Kong, 1981), 414-16, 441, 465-7; Wu, 'Beyond Stereotypes', esp. 340-5.

There are eroticising elements in the painting: the raised sleeve and the wrist uncovered, the tantalising bound feet, the woman proudly but timidly gazing sideways to avoid, yet provoke, the viewer's voyeuristic gaze.¹⁴³ As Laing has established in her 1990 article on the imagery of Chinese palace-style poetry, depictions of beauties need to be understood in the context of love poetry and in particular of the arousing *guiyuan* poetry, in which the woman is depicted as meek and alluring while waiting for her man in the space of her bedchamber.¹⁴⁴ The indoor setting, as Cahill has pointed out, is an invitation to the intimacy of her boudoir;¹⁴⁵ nonetheless, here, although the woman depicted can become a scopophilic object thanks to her attire and posture, she also appears as a woman of culture at ease in the space of her boudoir – as Ma Shouzhen also described herself in poetry – and possibly this feature made her even more tempting for the viewer. There are no pictorial elements which tell us that she is a courtesan, yet her pose suggests that only a woman of low morals would have allowed herself to be portrayed in such a posture.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, her availability and erudition are the sexually rousing combination typical of the cultured courtesan. Although this is not meant to be a genuine portrait of Ma Shouzhen, but rather an idealised image of a woman simply named 'Ma Shouzhen', it is relevant in the way in which it reveals that in the eighteenth century the memory of the late sixteenth-century courtesan was still alive, and that she embodied the idealised image of the erotic and erudite woman in the space of her boudoir.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ On shoe fetish see Van Gulik, *Sexual Life*, 219-53.

¹⁴⁴ Laing, 'Chinese Palace-Style Poetry', 278-9.

¹⁴⁵ On this see also Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 157.

¹⁴⁶ This was first noted by Maeda, 'The portrait', 48, 50; and then reported in Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 175.

¹⁴⁷ See on the possible uses of this type of *meiren hua* in Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 159-67.

A completely different representation of Ma Shouzhen is the album leaf called 'Picture of Ma Xianglan' *Ma Xianglan yuzhao* 馬湘蘭玉照 (ill. 83),¹⁴⁸ now housed in the Palace Museum in Beijing.¹⁴⁹ It was made in ink and light colours on paper by the itinerant painter Wuxing Fei Danxu 費丹旭 (1801–1850),¹⁵⁰ and was possibly part of an album of portraits of past famous courtesans, as Fei Danxu was particularly well known for his depictions of women.¹⁵¹ Fei depicted Ma Shouzhen in a stylised manner as a young timid woman wearing simple clothes and standing on a floating cloud of flowers. The painted image is accompanied by her biography inscribed on the left, in which she is remembered as a Qinhuai 'famous performer' (*mingji* 名伎), rather than a 'famous courtesan' (*mingji* 名妓), thereby the focus is placed on her skills rather than on her position in the prostitution industry.

Alongside the medium of painting, Ma Shouzhen was portrayed in the woodblock printed image of the 1892 publication 'Portraits of the Eight Beauties of the Qinhuai' *Qinhuai ba yan tuyong* 秦淮八艷圖詠 edited by the scholar-officials Ye Yanlan 葉衍蘭 (*jinshi* 1856) and Zhang Jingqi 張景祈, who wrote the preface.¹⁵² The volume couples woodblock printed images with the biographies of the following eight courtesans, in order of appearance: Ma Shouzhen (ill. 84), Bian Sai (ill. 85),¹⁵³ Li Xiangjun (ill. 86),¹⁵⁴ Liu Rushi (ill. 87),¹⁵⁵ Dong

¹⁴⁸ *Yuzhao* 玉照 is a modern term used also for photograph.

¹⁴⁹ Li Shi, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu*, 194 (unfortunately I have not able to obtain the original image from the Palace Museum).

¹⁵⁰ Barnhart, *Three Thousand Years*, 292.

¹⁵¹ Yu Jianhua, *Zhongguo meishujia*, 1113.

¹⁵² Ye Yanlan 葉衍蘭 and Zhang Jingqi 張景祈, *Qinhuai bayan tuyong* 秦淮八艷圖詠 'Portraits of the Eight Beauties of the Qinhuai' (Yangcheng yuehua jiangyuan edition, Guangdong, 1892) [Rare Books Dept, Shanghai Library, cat. n. 319757].

¹⁵³ Bian Sai was intimate with the poet Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1609–1671), see Chang, *Women Writers*, 331.

¹⁵⁴ Li Xiang commonly known as Li Xiangjun (as previously mentioned in Chapter Two, 128) lived in Nanjing by the Qinhuai River (see map 2); she had a love relationship with the official Hou Fangyu which inspired the story of the drama 'The Peach Blossom Fan', see Li, 'The Late Ming Courtesan', 57-8.

¹⁵⁵ Liu Rushi was extremely famous also for her relationship with the literati Chen Zilong and Qian Qianyi, see Chang, *The Late Ming Poet*, 19-37; Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, 274-8.

Xiaowan also known as Dong Bai (ill. 88),¹⁵⁶ Gu Mei (ill. 89),¹⁵⁷ Kou Mei 寇湄 (ill. 90)¹⁵⁸ and Chen Yuanyuan 陳圓圓 (ill. 91).¹⁵⁹ Ma Shouzhen is represented sitting on a chair of speckled bamboo, which is typically associated with the Xiang River; she is wearing a simple garment, pendant earrings and bangles, while holding in her right hand a plant of orchids to recall her connection and identification with the flower. Her facial features are simple and standardised with the other portraits in the volume, which all have the same round nose with small lips and elegant eyebrows.

In *Qinhuai ba yan tuyong* Ma Shouzhen stands out amongst the eight late Ming courtesans because she is the only one who died at the very beginning of the 1600s, while all the others lived during the dynastic transition. There are evident common features among these women: their status as famous courtesans – at least for a part of their life; their talent as performers, painters and writers; and their connection with the city of Nanjing. Another feature in which Ma Shouzhen differs from the others is that she was a courtesan for her whole life, whereas the others left the pleasure quarter mainly due to marriage: Dong Xiaowan was married to Mao Xiang, Liu Rushi to Qian Qianyi, Gu Mei to Gong Dingzi, Li Xiangjun to Hou Fangyu (and their story was narrated in ‘The Peach Blossom Fan’), while Kou Mei married general Bao, and Chen Yuanyuan was married to Li Zicheng and then to the

¹⁵⁶ Dong Xiaowan (1624–1651) or Dong Bai was the beloved young concubine of Mao Xiang, see Ōki, ‘Mao Xiang and Yu Huai’, 234–8.

¹⁵⁷ For Gu Mei’s married life and painting practice, see Zhang Ying, *Politics and Morality*, 341–92.

¹⁵⁸ Kou Mei (lived around 1640) or Baimen 白門 was admired by Yu Huai and Qian Qianyi who wrote poems about and to her; she became General Bao’s concubine. See Li, ‘The Late Ming Courtesan’, 61.

¹⁵⁹ Chen Yuanyuan (1624–1681) became the concubine of Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606–1645) and Wu Sangui 吳三桂, see Wai-yee Li, ‘Women as Emblems of Dynastic Fall from Late-Ming to Late-Qing’, in Shang Wei and David Wang eds., *Dynastic Crisis and Cultural Innovation: From the Late-Ming to the Late-Qing and Beyond* (Cambridge MA, 2005), 94–8.

official Wu Sangui; the remaining courtesan Bian Sai abandoned the entertainment industry to devote herself to religion and became a Daoist nun after the fall of the dynasty.¹⁶⁰

Interestingly, the expression ‘the eight beauties of the Qinhuai’ *Qinhuai ba yan* is not found in any previous literature, yet a similar phrase using the number eight (*ba* 八) – an auspicious cosmological number – in association with beauties is found in the 1736 figure painting ‘Eight beauties on the Balcony of a Brothel’ (ill. 92).¹⁶¹ Subsequently the expression *Qinhuai ba yan* has become a common way to refer to the late Ming Nanjing courtesans and it is still today used to merchandise the idea of the courtesan in the Nanjing souvenir market and even a local delicatessen (ill. 93). At this point it is germane to remind ourselves that today’s popular understanding of the Nanjing or Qinhuai beauties is not historically accurate, and that the famous eighteenth-century *Honglou meng*’s fictional ‘twelve beauties’ have replaced the twelve beauties of Nanjing (see also Chapter Two). *Qinhuai ba yan tuyong* testifies to the late-nineteenth-century literati interest in rediscovering the late Ming and its courtesans, and at the same time it reveals the agency that those Ming women exerted over subsequent centuries, when they were subjected to the constant creation and re-creation of their characters.

6.5 Conclusion: a vogue for Ma Shouzhen in the nostalgia for the late Ming

The material discussed in this and previous chapters demonstrates that in the centuries following Ma Shouzhen’s death dozens of literati, but also several literate women, recalled the figure of the courtesan, her talented character and cultural production; in so doing they

¹⁶⁰ See Bian Sai’s short biography in Yuan Shaoying, *Zhongguo funü mingren cidian*, 59.

¹⁶¹ Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 33, 153, figs., 2.1 and 5.2.

contributed to the construction of her 'afterlife'. Since the seventeenth century, Ma's poems were collected in anthologies; her paintings (both authentic and forgeries) appeared in the art market, and in private and imperial collections, while objects which allegedly belonged to her became valuable collectibles. Furthermore, her residence and grave were recognised to be inspirational places to visit in a real or imaginary journey through Nanjing and literati cultural memory. The significance of this visible interaction with the historical character of Ma Shouzhen during the Qing dynasty has to be understood in view of two major cultural trends: a profound interest in the past and a renewed fascination with courtesans.

In Chinese cultural production there is an evident and profound intellectual engagement with the past which takes the form of visual and written references to historical tropes and masters of previous dynasties, as seen especially in painting (in Chapter Three) and poetry (in Chapter Four). During the Manchu reign this cultural attitude, which often functioned as historical escapism for literati frustrated by current affairs, contributed to revive the history of the Ming dynasty, the last Han Chinese ruling power. As mentioned above, during the conquest years and the early decades of the dynasty loyalist sentiments towards the Ming were expressed in nostalgia for the past and the remembrance of the decadent glamour of the pleasure quarter and its courtesans, as in the work of Yu Huai and Mao Xiang, mentioned in Chapter Four. The literature has identified a nostalgic fascination with the late Ming, often called 'Ming nostalgia' in early Qing loyalist attitudes and in the late Qing also in association with anti-Manchu sentiments.¹⁶² However, this chapter shows that although collectors of Ma Shouzhen were mainly in the early and late Qing period, there is a constant engagement

¹⁶² Ropp, 'Ambiguous Images', 25-31; Li, 'The Late Ming Courtesan', 47-52. For Ming nostalgia in the nineteenth century see Widmer, 'Ming Loyalism'; and Gerritsen, 'Searching for Gentility', 191.

with the courtesan throughout the dynasty, thus an interest in the Ming, and possibly a feeling of nostalgia for the past, permeated the whole duration of the Qing dynasty.

Scholars such as Paul Ropp and Wai-yee Li¹⁶³ have identified late Ming courtesans as symbols of culture and emblems of nostalgia during the Qing. As mentioned above, courtesans of the late Ming were also associated with loyalist movements, thus in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the figure of the courtesan not only was used to revive the glamour of the past, but could also symbolise a political statement against the ruling dynasty. Later in the eighteenth century, due to a diffuse moralising attitude towards women promoted by the Qing government, women working in the entertainment industry were commonly perceived as immoral. Female entertainers were removed from the central court but less successfully from urban centres. The Bureau of Instruction, under which courtesans used to work, was eliminated by the emperor Yongzheng in 1729 and prostitution was officially banned in 1783.¹⁶⁴ Yet, courtesans continued to exist in the less regulated private market and, by the high Qing, as Susan Mann has suggested, the 'courtesan was a living tragedy: a woman of talent who had lost her virtue'.¹⁶⁵ Meanwhile, real talent was recognised in gentry women, who cultivated it through moral virtue and propriety. Courtesans lost the privileged position they held in the Ming, and although after the fall of the dynasty in Jiangnan cities the entertainment districts were still working, especially in Suzhou, their clientele radically changed due to the tumultuous socio-political events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Consequently, courtesans could not count anymore on the literati appreciation and support which had made them so famous in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alternatively, Wang Shunu has suggested that the lack of

¹⁶³ See previous note above.

¹⁶⁴ Mann, *Precious Records*, 126-7.

¹⁶⁵ Mann, *Precious Records*, 121.

governmental support from the mid-eighteenth century brought about the decline of courtesanship.¹⁶⁶

After the Opium Wars against the British Empire (1839 to 1842, and 1856 to 1860), the pleasure district in modern Shanghai began to flourish and a renewed fashion for courtesans, prostitutes and the pleasure quarter was exemplified by the numerous *xiaxie xiaoshuo* 狹邪小說, often translated as ‘courtesan novel’s, but more accurately described as ‘red-light novels’.¹⁶⁷ There is an evident connection between these writings and the *caizi jiaren* romance of vernacular stories and dramas of the late Ming period (discussed in Chapter Five): the main common point is their cathartic function of ‘frustration relief’ for unrealised literati.¹⁶⁸ Nonetheless, while during the late Ming courtesans dominated the entertainment industry, proposing an alluring mix of talent, culture and sexuality, in the Qing dynasty courtesans with a businesslike attitude governed the sex and pleasure market.¹⁶⁹

In a recent study Anne Gerritsen has discussed how in the nineteenth century ‘Ming nostalgia’ took the shape of a fashion for the tragic lives of talented gentry women writers of the past and the restoration of their graves. Gerritsen has explored the writing and activities of the above-mentioned intellectual Chen Wenshu in his ‘Orchid Fate Collection’ project, the less known Qing literatus Ye Naiqin 葉乃濤 and the magistrate Wang Shoumai 王壽邁; the latter two were both interested in maintaining the legacy of the prodigious young poetess Ye

¹⁶⁶ Mann, *Precious Records*, 142; Wang Shunu, *Zhongguo changji shi*, 261-2.

¹⁶⁷ See Chloë Starr, *Red-light Novels in the Late Qing* (Leiden; Boston, 2007), 18-20; although Starr makes the point about the translation of *xiaxie xiaoshuo*, she still repeatedly uses ‘courtesan novel’.

¹⁶⁸ Starr, *Red-Light Novels*, 22, 27-40.

¹⁶⁹ Yeh, *Shanghai Love*, 183.

Xiaoluan.¹⁷⁰ Gerritsen has concluded that a key element in the late Qing literati association and identification with women of the past was in the concept of gentility, defined as ‘social distinction and cultural sophistication’ typically belonging to the late Ming and gentry women writers.¹⁷¹ Gerritsen has further proposed to connect the late Qing idea of ‘Ming nostalgia’ with what Polachek has identified in his study as ‘the cult of aesthetic elegance (*fengliu*, *fengya*) [...which] had by the nineteenth century become *the* dominant mode through which men confirmed common value within the interstices of public life’.¹⁷² These observations contribute to an understanding of why the image of the courtesan, imbued with *fengliu*, but also paradoxically an emblem of gentility, grew to epitomise the past during the late Qing dynasty.

Against this backdrop, a study of the Qing sources about Ma Shouzhen illuminates the modalities as well as the purposes of the engagement with her historical character through a variety of media. The interest in Ma Shouzhen can be seen as part of the Qing literate men and women’s interaction with the past and a revived interest in the figure of the courtesan, as she epitomised what Wai-ye Li has defined as a ‘cultural nostalgia’ for ‘a lost world that the famous courtesans of the period are remembered or imagined’.¹⁷³ In exploring the Qing sources about Ma Shouzhen, it is possible to attribute to her the following five legacies: (1) in the nostalgic eyes of loyalists who lived the dynastic transition, such as Yu Huai and You Tong, Ma Shouzhen was part of their relatively recent cultural memory and represented an emblem of past glamour as well as belonging to the last Han Chinese ruling dynasty. (2) Since

¹⁷⁰ Gerritsen, ‘Searching for Gentility’, 188-207; see also Ellen Widmer, ‘Xiaoqing’s Literary Legacy and the Place of the Woman Writer in Late Imperial China’, *Late Imperial China*, 13.1 (1992), 140.

¹⁷¹ Gerritsen, ‘Searching for Gentility’, 194.

¹⁷² James M. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge MA, 1992), 28; I converted the Wade-Giles in pinyin, emphasis in the original text. See on this Gerritsen, ‘Searching for Gentility’, 192-3.

¹⁷³ Li, ‘The Late Ming Courtesan’, 48.

the seventeenth century she served as a *lieu de mémoire* for the city of Nanjing, as seen in Gu Qiyuan's and Hui's *ketan*; later her residence represented a place to which to travel in the memory of the urban space and its pleasure quarter. (3) In the eighteenth century the intriguing complexity and moral ambiguity of the courtesan's character – a mix of talent, culture, bondage and frustration – appealed to those Qing literate men and women interested in women's literacy, painting, history and legacy, such as Yuan Mei, Gu Maoyi, Li E and Pang Gongshou. At the same time, (4) Ma Shouzhen's character fascinated those who sought to construct their identity through the engagement with the past, such as Wang Zhong. He identified himself in Ma Shouzhen's 'misfortune-despite-talent' and possibly sought to reclaim the agency of a historical character considered minor – according to the master historical narrative – in fear of being himself relegated to such a category. From the nineteenth century (5) a true revival of Ming history brought a renewed interest in its women and courtesanship, as evident in the work of Tang Souyu, Chen Wenshu, Miao Quansun, Fei Danxu and all the authors of texts on the Qinhuai.

Ma Shouzhen was famous during her life and iconic after her death. She herself contributed to the construction of her fame through grooming her talent and supportive social networks. After her death, the celebration of her character was maintained first through the eulogies of her contemporaries, and then through an on-going interaction with her historical character and cultural production. Written and visual sources by and about Ma never ceased to circulate since the late Ming. They continued to exert agency in their surroundings, they kept on being read, viewed and commented upon, thus the process of construction of her 'afterlife' character continued over time. Finally, with the late-nineteenth-century volume *Qinhuai ba yan tuyong*, a simple canon for the history of late Ming courtesanship was

provided, and Ma Shouzhen was recognised as the earliest iconic figure of Ming courtesan culture.

Chapter Seven

Epilogue:

Ma Shouzhen, Present & Future

The vogue for the late Ming courtesan did not cease with the Qing dynasty, as demonstrated by the early twentieth century the *Qinhuai guangji* (1924) and Wang Shunu's history of courtesanship (1935).¹ The character of Ma Shouzhen continues to be part of the history of Nanjing – where her alleged residence today stands in the Bailuzhou Park – and the ongoing interest in her painting is testified by the recent sales of her paintings in auctions. Her name is found in products of pop culture, such as pop-fiction and blogs.² In 2002 thirty episodes of the costume TV drama 'Heartbreaking Qinhuai' *Hunduan Qinhuai* 魂斷秦淮 directed by Zhu Jianxin 朱建新 and Zhou Xiaobing 周小兵 were broadcasted by the Shenzhou TV channel.³ The episodes narrate the vicissitudes of unscrupulous officials, refined scholars and talented courtesans living in late Ming Nanjing by the Qinhuai River against a background of personal and political intricacies, magical powers and spectacular *kongfu* moves. The eight courtesans protagonist of the TV drama⁴ (ill. 94) are based on the eight beauties of the late-nineteenth-century text *Qinhuai ba yan tuyong* (excluding Bian Sai who is replaced by a certain Qian'er).⁵ In *Hunduan Qinhuai* Ma Shouzhen, interpreted by He Caifei 何賽飛, is a charming and sophisticated older entertainer, who appears as the famous and respected Ma Xianglan (ill. 95).

¹ Miao Quansun, *Qinhuai guangji*; Wang Shunu, *Zhongguo changji shi*.

² There are fictional stories including dialogues, based on late Ming courtesans and some historical facts, including Ma Shouzhen, such as in Wu Dehui 吳德慧, *Zhongguo gudai yeshi mizang* 中國古代野史秘藏 'Secret Treasures of Chinese Ancient Unofficial History' (Jilin, 2002), vol. 7, 245-57; entering 'Ma Shouzhen' in simplified Chinese characters in the Google search on 3 Nov 2012 gives 70,000 results, among which there are innumerable personal blogs discussing courtesan culture and poetry. For Christie's auction sales see table 2.

³ The drama was produced in 2001 and consequently broadcasted in 2002; it can be viewed also on Youku http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMjE0Mjg4Mjg=.html?f=1489114.

⁴ Ma Xianglan, Liu Rushi, Gu Mei, Li Xiangjun, Kou Baimen, Dong Xiaowan Chen Yuanyuan and Qian'er.

⁵ See Chapter Six, 273-4.

In the first episode Ma Shouzhen welcomes into her house the younger Liu Rushi and offers to protect her, as she is the daughter of a concubine who escaped from the imperial palace twenty years earlier, and is now being sought by the imperial guards. Ma organises the meeting between the young girl and the scholar-official Qian Qianyi, during which Liu fascinates him with her poetic skills. Meanwhile, Ma is entertaining a vulgar official by playing the *pipa* and singing, but she is ridiculed for her age and asked to wash her face; embarrassed by this lack of respect she slaps the official and ends up in prison; she will be freed thanks to Qian Qianyi's intervention. This is just one instance of the many intricacies of the plot, which does not respect historical accuracy; all the main characters are shown as contemporaries, when in fact we know that Ma Shouzhen died years before the other courtesans, such as Liu Rushi, were even born.

The promotional video of *Hunduan Qinhuai* seemed to target a female audience as it showed today's girls in everyday activities such as reading, playing guitar and chatting on the phone, while the subtitles read: 'if time went back 375 years, what sort of life did women have?' (如果时光倒流三百七十五年, 她们会有什么样的命运呢?) The drama has an educational and possibly moral purpose in showing a part of women's history and conveying the idea of misfortune-despite-talent as seen in the bondage of the courtesan's life. *Hunduan Qinhuai* reinforces the idea of the cultured courtesan of the Qinhuai, as a part of Nanjing and popular history. At the same time, it symbolises how history can be read, adapted and re-narrated according to a later author's purpose.

This thesis through a discussion of Ma Shouzhen's biography, activities and social connections has pursued the double aim of providing a more nuanced and complex image of the courtesan, and reclaiming Ma's agency in the surrounding milieu as well as the legacy of her historical character, her painting and writing. By employing primary visual and written sources, the chapters have unravelled different aspects of the cultural and social practices of a multi-talented entertainer who lived in a very particular moment of Chinese early modern history. This research has provided the most complete biography of the courtesan thus far, and highlighted the interplays between her character and the surrounding environment. Those interplays have been explored in a cross-disciplinary approach through the investigation of strategic fashioning and display of the self as well as social network building in the practice of painting (Chapter Three), poetry (Chapter Four) and theatre (Chapter Five).

By employing gender as a category of investigation, this thesis has revealed that the negotiation of gender in Ma Shouzhen's life and practice is complex and multi-layered. As a Qinhuai courtesan connected to the highest literati of her time she could challenge traditional notions of womanhood and creative power by stepping into conventionally male-dominated spaces of painting, poetry and theatre production. Ma Shouzhen engaged, conformed and appropriated the literati tradition; yet, at the same time she subtly negotiated her position with different strategies: she claimed to be a woman on the surface of her paintings by adopting the appellatives 'sister' or 'literata', played with gendered notions of the orchid and bamboo, and connected her practice to that of Guan Daosheng, thus implying a female legacy in painting; in her poetry she reappropriated the space of the boudoir, delivered a more nuanced image of woman against the stereotype of the *guiyuan*,

and expressed her sensuality with explicit erotic language; finally, she established her role as a performer and maker of Southern theatre, when the genre was flourishing. By exploring Ma's life and practice using the concept of self-fashioning, the present dissertation has demonstrated that the courtesan used her talents in order to create and display her gendered self and exert power in her surroundings. Ma Shouzhen needs to be distinguished from later famous courtesans as the first significant figure of late Ming courtesan culture; she embodies the late sixteenth century's changing notions of gender as well as of cultural and social boundaries.

By recovering and analysing visual and textual sources afresh, this thesis has illuminated aspects of Ma Shouzhen's life and practice which had been ignored by previous scholarship. Yet, as mentioned in various parts of the thesis many questions remain unanswered and require further investigation, such as issues related to the training and education of courtesans, social ties within the brothel, and the intriguing connection between courtesans and Buddhism. Other queries, which have been explored in relation to this study, but due to their wider implications for research on Chinese visual culture and late imperial history deserve further study, include: patterns in modes of self-fashioning, naming practices, expressions of gendered subjectivity and strategies of social network building by courtesans. Some questions related to courtesanship could also be explored in a comparative perspective with other early modern geographies; especially fruitful avenues of enquiry can be envisaged with the counterpart of early modern Japan and Italy. The present thesis has demonstrated that through an in-depth and cross-disciplinary study of one woman it is possible not only to reclaim her agency and legacy, but also to illuminate modes of self-fashioning as well as complex interplays of gender and socio-cultural processes of the late

Ming. In doing so it confirms the importance of studying women who have been thus far neglected in mainstream historical studies.

Appendix of Tables

Table 1. Ma Shouzhen's biography and contemporary relevant events

Year	Event in Ma Shouzhen 's life	Other events
1548	Birth	
1557		Tian Yiheng's <i>Shi nüshi</i> is published
1563	First dated painting	
1570s	Ma meets Wang Zhideng	Other famous courtesans active in Nanjing: Zheng Ruyin, Zhao Caiji, Zhu Taiyu, Xue Susu, Jing Pianpian
1572	First dated painting inscribed by Wang Zhideng	Wanli reign (1572-1620)
1573	Liang Chenyu writes a song for Ma	
1580	Ma inscribes Zhou Tianqiu's long orchid handscroll	Gao Lian's 'Jade Hairpins' is published
1581		The Single Whip taxation is introduced
1586		The Wende Bridge is built
1587	Wang writes a poem for her fortieth birthday	
1591	Wang writes the preface of her poetry collection	
1593-6	Two scenes of Ma's theatre play are published in <i>Qunyin xuanlei</i>	
1597	Around this time Ma possibly moves to her new residence; she becomes a Buddhist devotee	The drama <i>Bai lian qun</i> is released
1598		Manuscript of the drama 'The Peony Pavilion' in circulation
1602	Ma is listed as a top celebrity in Nanjing by Yao Lü	
1604	She participates in Zhu Chencai's party and goes travelling to Yangzhou and Suzhou; she dies of illness in Nanjing as a Buddhist devotee	Wang Zhideng's 70 th birthday celebration

Table 2. List of paintings attributed to Ma Shouzhen

	Title/Subject	Format	Medium	Date	Dim. in cm	Collection
1.	Orchids (forgery)	Hanging scroll	Ink	1554		Palace Museum, Beijing
2.	Orchid, bamboo and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper	1563	102.2x31.1	Private collection, USA
3.	(forgery) Flowers	Album leaf	Ink on paper	1564	21.8x29.3	Liaoning Provincial Museum
4.	Orchids (forgery)	Handscroll	Ink on paper	1566	30.5x572.5	Palace Museum, Beijing
5.	Orchid, bamboo, rock and fungi	Handscroll	Colours and ink on paper	1566	27.5x200.6	Mactaggart Collection, University of Alberta Museum (2004.19.56)
6.	Orchid and rock	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1570	16x52	Manpukuji Temple, Japan (Suzuki, JT 178-011-13)
7.	After Guan Daosheng	Handscroll	Ink on gold speckled paper	1571		Xubaizhai Collection, Hong Kong Museum of Art (XB1992.0062, Suzuki, S37-157)
8.	Orchid and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper	1572	52.5x29.1	Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1982.1.7, Suzuki, A1-253)
9.	Orchid, bamboo and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper	1572	71.5x40.5	Anxi Museum
10.	Orchid, bamboo and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper	1572	91x50	Guangdong Provincial Museum, Guangzhou
11.	Orchid and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink and light colour on paper	1573	114.2x28	Private collection ? Christie's lot 59 sold 22 March 1995 NY

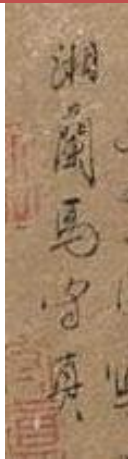
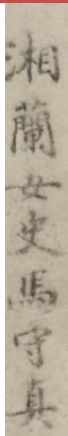
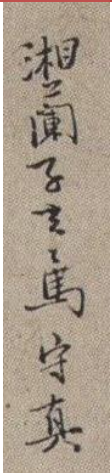
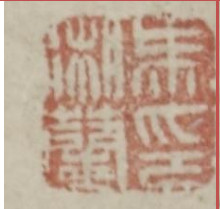
12.	Orchid with bamboo, rock and fungi	Handscroll	Ink on paper	1576	29.5x 127.4	Mactaggart Collection, University of Alberta Museum (mounted with the 1566 scroll)
13.	Boating by a cliff	Album leaf mounted as handscroll	Ink on paper	1576	16x60	Munetake Hayashi Collection, Tokyo National Museum (Suzuki, JP16-047)
14.	Narcissus	Album leaf	Ink on paper	1576		Shanghai Museum
15.	Flowers and plants (possible forgery)	Handscroll	Ink and colour on paper	1576	21.7x 103	Wuxi Museum
16.	Orchid and bamboo	Fan		1578		Palace Museum, Beijing
17.	Orchid and bamboo	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1589		Shanghai Museum
18.	Orchid, bamboo and lake rocks	Fan	Ink on paper	1590		Shanghai Museum
19.	Album varied subjects	8 album leaves	ink or ink and light colours on paper	1591		Private collection? Christie's Lot 340 sold 25 apr 2004 HK
20.	Orchids	Hanging scroll	Ink on speckled paper	1592	111.4x 28.9	Kurokawa Institute of Ancient Cultures, Japan (Suzuki, JM-19-015)
21.	Orchid, fungus and rock	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1593		Wuxi Museum
22.	Double outline orchids (with Wang Zhideng)	Handscroll		1593	24.7x 220.8	National Palace Museum, Taipei (001654N000000000)
23.	Orchid and bamboo	Fan	Ink and colour on paper	1593	17.5x 53 cm	National Palace Museum, Taipei

24.	Orchid, bamboo and rock	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1594	17.8x 49.8	Palace Museum, Beijing
25.	Orchid, bamboo and rock	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1595		Liaoning Provincial Museum
26.	Orchid, bamboo and rock	Fan	Ink on paper	1596		Yuji Eda Collection, Tokyo (Suzuki, JP14-187-12)
27.	Bamboo and orchid	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1597	15.8x 48.2	Palace Museum, Beijing
28.	Orchid and bamboo	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper	1598	66x 28.8	National Museum of China, Beijing
29.	Orchid and bamboo	Album leaf	Ink and colour on paper	1598		Shanghai Museum
30.	Orchid, bamboo and rock	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1599		Sichuan Provincial Museum, Chengdu
31.	Orchid, bamboo and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper	1599	101x 29.3	Private collection in US/Princeton University (Suzuki, A18-046)
32.	Emerald bamboo and secluded orchids	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper	1599		Xubaizhai Collection, Hong Kong Museum of Art
33.	Secluded orchids with bamboo and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper	1601	50x 32.4	Jilin Provincial Museum
34.	Flowers	Handscroll	Ink and colour on paper	1601		Shanghai Museum
35.	Rock and bamboo	Handscroll	Ink on silk	1602	163.5x 14.8	Jilin University
36.	Orchid and rock	Fan	Ink on gold	1602		Palace Museum, Beijing

			speckled paper			
37.	Orchid and bamboo	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1603	15.5x 45.9	Palace Museum, Beijing
38.	Orchid, bamboo, and rock	Handscroll	Ink on gold speckled paper	1604	28.8x 243.3	Palace Museum, Beijing
39.	Colored fungus, orchid and bamboo	Handscroll	Ink on gold speckled paper	1604	26.5x 229.5	Indianapolis Museum of Art (Suzuki, A25-016)
40.	Orchids (Imitating Zhao Mengjian)	Handscroll (mounted with Xue Susu's scroll)	Ink on paper	1604	20.3x 136.6	Shanghai Museum
41.	Secluded orchid with bamboo, and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper	1604	111.8x 31.3	Tianjin Museum
42.	Orchid, bamboo, and rock	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1604		Sichuan Provincial Museum, Chengdu
43.	Orchids	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper	1604	16.5x 51	Yale University Art Gallery (Suzuki, A12-098)
44.	Three friends	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper		85.3 x 47.2	Palace Museum, Beijing
45.	Chrysanthemum (forgery)	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper		127.3x 34.8	Ostasiatiska Museet, Stockholm (Suzuki, E20-013)
46.	Bamboo and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper		121.8x 31.8	Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Suzuki, 14-025)
47.	Bamboo, orchid and rock	Hanging scroll	Ink on paper		92 x 29.7	Private collection? Christie's lot 171 HK 27 aprl
48.	Epidendrums	Hanging scroll		?	?	Mr. Soyeshima, Tokyo

49.	Orchids	Handscroll	Ink on paper		23.5 x 56	Jilin Provincial Museum
50.	Narcissus and orchid	Handscroll	Ink and colour on paper		21.7x1 37	Wuxi Museum
51.	Orchid and bamboo	Handscroll	Ink on paper		23.4x 105.6	Suzhou Museum
52.	Orchid, bamboo and rock	Fan	Ink on paper			Tianjin Museum
53.	Rock and orchid	Fan	Ink on paper		16.3 x 50.3	Palace Museum, Beijing
54.	Zahua shierkai	Fan	Ink on paper			Hangzhou Museum
55.	konggu qingfen tu	Fan	Ink on gold speckled paper			Ningbo Museum
56.	Orchid and Rock	Fan mounted on album	Ink on paper			Private collection? Christie's lot 44 NY 4 june 1993
57.	Orchids	Fan	Ink on paper			Winscosin Library
58.	Varied subjects	8 album leaves	Ink and colour on paper		28.2 x 20.5	National Palace Museum, Taipei
59.	Orchid bamboo and rock	3 album leaves	Ink on paper		26.4 x 32.4 each	Chōkaidō Museum, Japan
60.	Rock, orchid and small bamboo	Album leaf	Ink on gold speckled paper		67.8 x 88.6	Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution (Bridgman Education FSG325086)

Table 3. Ma Shouzhen's painting signatures and seals

				
Xianglan Ma Shouzhen (Wuxi fan, 1593)	Xianglan Ma Shouzhen (Yale fan, 1604)	Xianglan nüdi Ma Shouzhen (Kurokawa scroll 1592)	Xianglan nüshi Ma Shouzhen (Tokyo scroll, 1576)	Xianglan nüshi Ma Shouzhen (Indianapolis scroll, 1604)
				
Xianglan nüshi Ma Shouzhen (Rijksmuseum)	Xianglan zi Xuanxuan Ma Shouzhen (MET, 1572)	Xuanxuanzi Xianglan Ma Shouzhen (Private Collection, 1563)	Shouzhen Xuanxuan zi (Wuxi fan, 1593)	Shouzhen Xuanxuan zi (Yale fan, 1604)
				
Ma Xianglan yin (Tokyo scroll, 1576)	Yuejiao (Christie's album)	Shouzhen (Tokyo album-scroll)	Shouzhen (Indianapolis, 1604)	Xianglan (Wuxi fan, 1593)

				
Xianglan (MET, 1572)	Xianglan (Yale fan, 1604)	Xianglan (Jilin Prov. Museum, handscroll)	Yuejiao (MET, 1572)	Ma Yuejiao Shouzhen (Kurokawa scroll 1592)
				
Xianglan nüshi (Indianapolis, 1604)	Ma Shi nüshi (Rijksmuseum)	Jiuwan zhongren (MacTaggart, 1566)	Jiuwan zhongren (Indianapolis, 1604)	

Table 4. Details of Ma Shouzhen's painted orchids

	Works in chronological order	Details of orchids	
1.	Ill.10 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids, bamboo and rock</i>, hanging-scroll, 1563, ink on paper, 102.23x31.12 cm, private collection. From Weidner, <i>Views from Jade Terrace</i>, 73.		
2.	Ill. 26 Ma Shouzhen, <i>After Guan Daosheng</i>, handscroll, 1571, ink on gold speckled paper, Xubaizhai Collection, 22.8x97.5 cm, Hong Kong Museum of Art (XB1992.0062).		
3.	Ill. 12 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids and rock</i>, 1572, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 52.5x29.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. From Weidner, <i>Views from Jade Terrace</i>, 75.		For ge ry?

4.	III. 39 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids, bamboo and rock</i>, hanging scroll, 1572, ink on paper, 91x50 cm, Guangdong Provincial Museum. From <i>Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu</i>, vol. 13, 90.			
5.	III. 50 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids with bamboo rock and fungi</i>, handscroll, 1576, ink on paper, 29.5 x 127.4 cm, Mactaggart Collection, University of Alberta Museum (mounted with the 1566 scroll). Image from Artstor.			
6.	III. 21 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Emerald bamboo and secluded orchids</i>, hanging scroll, 1599, ink on paper, Xubaizhai Collection, Hong Kong Museum of Art.			

7.	Ill. 59 Wang Zhideng and Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids</i>, 1593, handscroll, ink on paper, 24.7 × 220.8 cm, National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China			
8.	Ill. 22 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids, Bamboo and Rock</i>, handscroll, 1604, ink on gold speckled paper, 28.8 x 243.3 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.			
9.	Ill. 28 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids (following Zhao Mengjian)</i>, handscroll, 1604, ink on paper, 20.3 x 136.6 cm, Shanghai Museum (mounted with Xue Susu's handscroll). In <i>Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu</i>, vol. 3, 222-3.			

10.	Ill. 46 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids, bamboo, rock and fungi</i>, handscroll, 1566, ink and colour on paper, 27.5 x 200.6 cm, Mactaggart Collection, University of Alberta Museum 2004.19.56. From Weidner, <i>Views from Jade Terrace</i>, 80-1.		
11.	Ill.56 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids</i>, folding fan, 1604, ink on paper, Yale University Art Gallery, (1989.9.1).		
12.	Ill. 25 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Three friends (after Guan Daosheng)</i>, hanging scroll, undated, ink on paper, 85.3 x 47.2 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.		

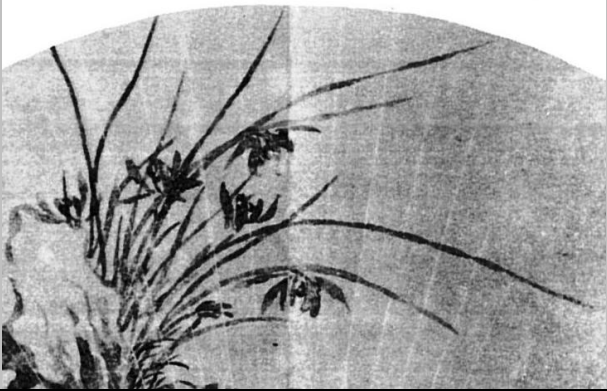
13.	Ill. 52 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids and rock</i>, folding fan, undated, Manpukuji Temple, Kyoto (Japan), Suzuki JP-178-011-13.		
14.	Ill. 61 Ma Shouzhen, <i>Orchids</i>, handscroll, undated, ink on paper, 23.5 x 56 cm, Jilin Provincial Museum. From <i>Zhongguo meishu quanji</i>, vol. 8, n.68.		

Table 5. The sixty-six poems contained in Ma Shouzhen's *bieji*

H= heptasyllabic

P= pentasyllabic

L= *lǔshi*

J= *jujue* (quatrain)

	Titles in the first <i>juan</i>			Titles in the second <i>juan</i>	
1	對花 -二首	PL	1	懷補軒張君- 三首	HL
2	夜坐彈琴-二首	PL	2	和顧太湖-二首	HL
3	對酒賦花- 二首	PL	3	席上偶成- 二首	HL
4	味蘭- 二首	PJ	4	游桃花塢	HL
5	有懷 - 二首	PL	5	贈青城周君	HL
6	囑使者還楚- 二首	HL	6	贈寧宇尤君	HL
7	寄張補軒 -二首	HL	7	賦荅顧太湖	HL
8	壞人	L	8	訪息園	HL
9	題姚太守延秀閣用姚韻	HL	9	吳孝甫六十	HL
10	天香館用陳湖山韻	HL	10	中秋壞姚君	HL
11	對蘭有懷	PL	11	月下有懷	HL
12	愴別二首	PL	12	曉起	HL
13	臥看銀河有感	PL	13	九日席上	HL
14	和蕭條夜雨鳴	PL	14	月下泛秦淮	HL
15	和閉門日已暮	PL	15	冬日留別	HL
16	七夕聞雷雨	PL	16	自君之出矣-五首	P YUEFU
17	詠松竹梅	PL	17	悔別王生-二首	PQ
18	對葉莉有懷	PL	18	有懷	PQ
19	有感	PL	19	賞牡丹 - 四首	HQ
20	郊遊	PL	20	月下有懷-二首	HQ
21	鸚鵡	PL	21	言別-二首	HQ
22	贈萬六墀	PL	22	送別寅之-二首	HQ
23	冬日留別	PL	23	夜坐-二首	HQ
24	題蘭石圖	PL	24	和王生二絕	HP
25	贈衡麓張名	PL	25	七夕和衛生-二絕	HL
26	贈荊壁饒君	PL	26	枕上偶成	HQ

27	小春別張幼于	PL	27	獨坐有懷	HQ
			28	夜夢有感	HQ
			29	三徑	HQ
			30	玩盆魚寄懷	HQ
			31	聞蟬	HQ
			32	夜坐	HQ
			33	感盆魚依人	HQ
			34	追憶寅之	HQ
			35	秋海棠	HQ
			36	賞雪	HQ
			37	喜客泉	HQ
			38	流觴曲水	HQ
			39	壽吳山顧翁	HQ

Table 6. Titles of poems attributed to Ma Shouzhen published in Ming-Qing anthologies

*included in Ma's personal collection

Zhang Mengzheng , *Qinglou yunyu* (1616) = QLYY

Zheng Wen'an, *Mingyuan huishi* (1620) = MYHS

Zhong Xing, *Mingyuan shigui* (1621-1644) = MYSG

Zhou Gongfu, *Gujin qinglou ji xuan* (1623) = GJQLJX

Zhao Shijie, *Gujin nüshi* (1628-1644) = GJNS

Qian Qianyi , *Liechao shiji* (1664) = LCSJ

Wang Duanshu, *Ming yuan shi wei chubian* (1667) = MYSW

Xu Shumin, *Zhong xiang ci* (1690) = ZXC

Gujin tushu jicheng (1725) = GJTSJC

Zhou Shouchang, *Gong gui wen xuan* (1846) = GGWX

	SHI POEMS	
1	*You huai 有懷	QLYY; GJQLJC
2	*Xiaochun shiqi ye song Zhang Youyu 小春十七夜送張幼于	QLYY; MYSG; GJQLJX
3	*He Wei Sheng (er shou) 和衛生(二首)	QLYY; MYSW(only the first stanza); MYHS; GJNS; GJQLJX
4	*Zeng Zhou Qingcheng 贈周青城	MYSG; MYSW
5	*Yue xia you huai 月下有懷	MYSG;
6	*Yanxiuge he Gu Taihu yun 延秀閣和顧太湖韻	MYSG; GGWX; LCSJ
7	Tianxiang gua n yong yun 天香館用韻	MYSG
8	*You Taohua wu 遊桃花塢	MYSW
9	Qiu gui qu 秋閨曲	GJTSJC
10	*Yingwu 鸚鵡	MXLSJ; LCSJ; GJTSJC
11	*Fude Zi jun zhi chu yi 賦得自君之出矣	MXLSJ; LCSJ
12	*Chuang bie 愴別	LCSJ
13	Zhongchun dao zhong songbie 仲春道中送別	GGWX
14	Qiu ri guo Wumen ganjiu 秋日過吳門感舊	GGWX
15	*Dongri liubie 冬日留別	QLYY
16	He zhu shezhang xiaoyuan kan mudan wang zeng dazhi (er shou) 奉和諸社長小園看牡丹枉贈答之 (二首)	QLYY

17	*Chunei zhu shezhang guo xiaoyuan shang mudan , yong yun heda si shou (yi, he Zhang Ba; er, he Liu Eryu; san, he Cheng Ruiwen; si, he Wang Xiaohuai 春日諸社丈過小園賞牡丹， 用韻和答四首（一，和張白；二，和柳二餘；三 和程孺文；四 和王肖淮）	QLYY; GJQLJX
18	*You gan 有感	QLYY; GJQLJX
19	*Dongri liubie 冬日留別	QLYY
20	Ji you 寄友	QLYY
21	Huai ren 懷人	QLYY
22	Dongri liubie 冬日留別	QLYY
23	Shizhe huan Chu 嘱使者还楚	QLYY
24	*Zhen shang oucheng 枕上偶成	QLYY
25	*Xia ri huai Puxuan Zhang Si 夏日懷補軒張四 （四首）	QLYY; GJQLJX
26	*Ye zuo 夜坐	QLYY; GJQLJX
27	*Qixi he Weisheng shi 七夕和衛生詩	QLYY
28	Gu Taihu jian yu xie lan yi Wushan, tou shi yi suo fu; yi dazhi 顧太湖見予寫蘭貽吳山，凡投詩以索賦，以答之	QLYY
29	Yi you 遺友	QLYY
	SONG LYRICS	
30	Jin chang dao: Gui si 錦纏道：閨思	MYSW
31	Pu tian le 普天樂	MYSW
32	Gu lun tai 古輪臺	MYSW
33	Wei sheng 尾聲	MYSW
34	Shao nian you: san sheng zhuan 少年游：三生傳	MYSW
35	Ru meng ling 如夢令	ZXC
36	Pusa man, furonghe Raojing Bi 菩薩蠻， 芙蓉和饒荊璧	ZXC
37	Wu tian rao 壺天曉	ZXC
38	Que ga shan: qixi 鵲稿山；七夕	ZXC
39	Ta sha hang; you si 踏莎行；遊絲	ZXC
40	Die lian hua 碟戀花	ZXC
41	Qin yu an 青玉案	ZXC
42	Qi luo xiang 綺羅香	ZXC
43	Gui chao huan (xiaochun bie Zhang Youyu 歸朝歡（小春別張幼于）	ZXC ; MXLSJ

Table 7. Textual evidence for collecting Ma Shouzhen's painting (including possible counterfeits)

	Collector	Source	Painting	Note
1.	Wang Luoyu	<i>Shanhuwang minghualu</i> (1643)	Orchids, with bamboo and rock (1578)	
2.	Zhu Zhichi	<i>Zhuwoan cang shuhua mu</i> (undated)	Orchids and bamboo handscroll	
3.	As above	As above	Ink orchid, bamboo and rock	
4.	Kong Shangren	<i>Xiang jin bo</i>	Ink orchid (1603)	
5.	Bian Yongyu (1645-1712)	<i>Shigutang shuhua huikao</i>	Orchids (1570)	
6.	An Qi	<i>Mo yuan hui guan</i> (1742)	Secluded orchids (1570)	
7.	Li E	<i>Yutai shushi</i>	Double outline orchids angling scroll (1572)	
8.	As above	As above	Small hanging scroll (1596)	
9.	(Imperial Collection)	<i>Shiqu baoji</i> (1745)	Orchid handscroll (1566)	Forgery
10.	Lu Shihua	<i>Wuyue suoja shuhua lu</i> (1776)	Ink plum blossom and orchid	Forgery
11.	As above	As above	Ink hanging scroll	Forgery
12.	Jin Yuan	<i>Shibaizhai shuhua lu</i> (undated)	Orchid and bamboo (1549)	Forgery
13.	As above	As above	Orchid and bamboo	
14.	As above	As above	Orchid, bamboo and rock (1546)	Forgery
15.	Hu Jing	<i>Xiqing zha ji</i> (1781)	1	
16.	Hu Jing	<i>Shiqu baojian sanbian</i> (1816)	Eight album leaves	Forgery
17.	Wu Xiu	<i>Qingxiaguan lun hua jueju</i> (1824)	Ink orchid small handscroll	Poems on painting he saw or in his collection
18.	Zhang Dayong	<i>Ziyiyue zhai shuhua lu</i> (1832)	Orchid and bamboo (1556)	Forgery

19.	Kong Guangtao	<i>Yuxuelou shuhua lu</i> (1861)	Long handscroll (1599)	Same later collected by Pei Jingfu
20.	Wang Danwang	<i>Qianlong chao chenghan tanwu danan xuanbian</i>	Orchid and small grass hanging scroll	
21.	Chen Huizu	As above	Orchid and small grass hanging scroll	
22.	Ge Jinlang	<i>Airiyinlu lou shuhualu</i> (1881)	Bamboo hanging scroll	
23.	Du Ruilian	<i>Gufenge shuhua ji</i> (1881)	Orchid and bamboo	Forgery
24.	As above	As above	Orchid handscroll	Forgery
25.	Lu Xinyuan	<i>Rang liguan guoyan lu</i> (1892)	Orchid, bamboo and rock (1603)	
26.	Yang Enshou	<i>Yanfubian sanji</i> (1885)	1 piece	Poems on paintings in Du Ruilian's collection
27.	Pang Yuanji	<i>Xuzhai Ming hua lu</i> (1909)	Orchid, bamboo and rock hanging scroll (1600)	
28.	Wang Shiyuan	<i>Luyunlou shuhua ji</i> (1922)	8 album leaves	
29.	Pei Jingfu	<i>Zhuangtaoge shuhua lu</i> (1924)	Long hand-scroll (1599)	
30.	Guan Mianjun	<i>Sanqiuge shuhua lu</i> (1928)	8 album leaves	

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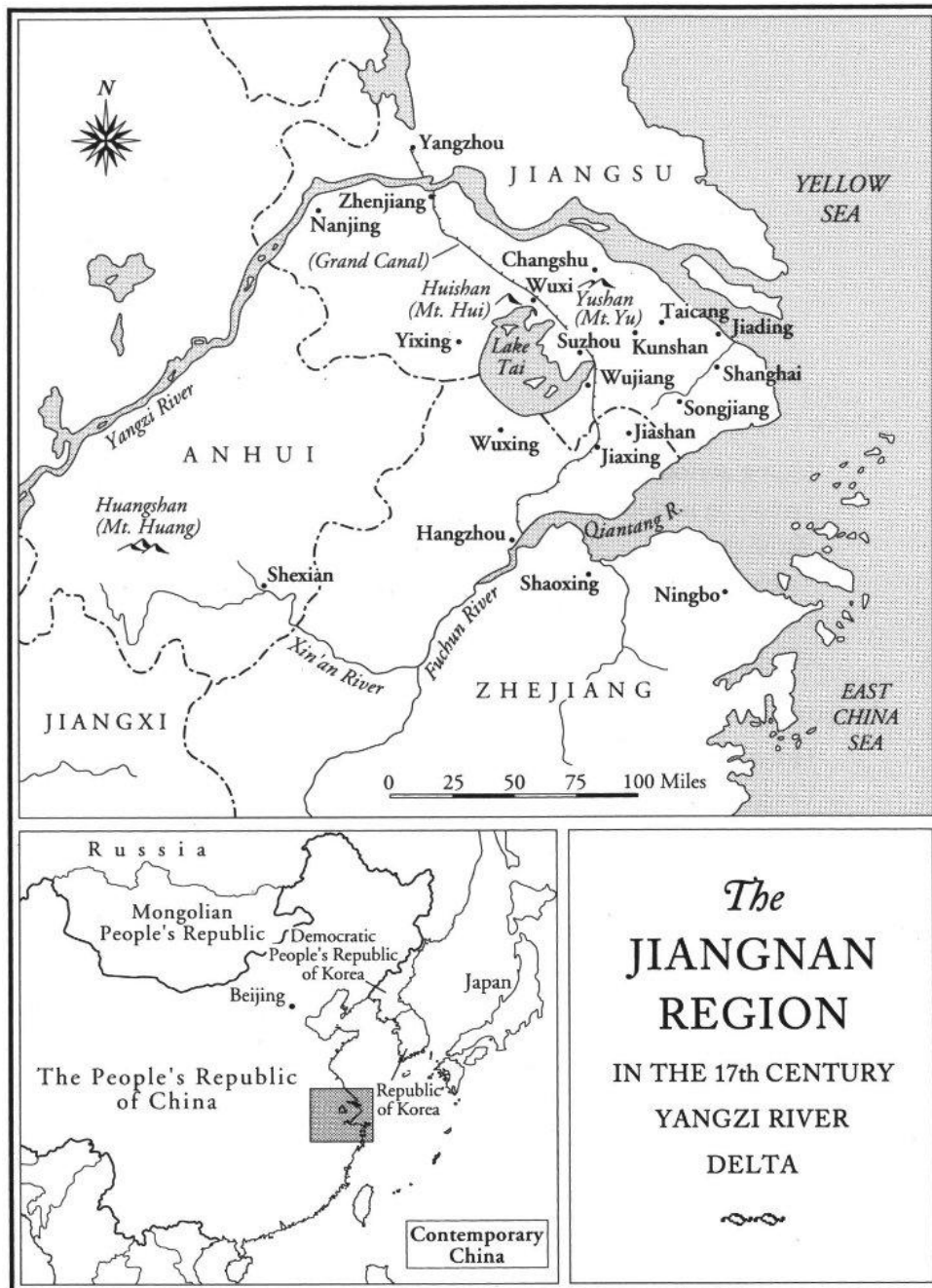
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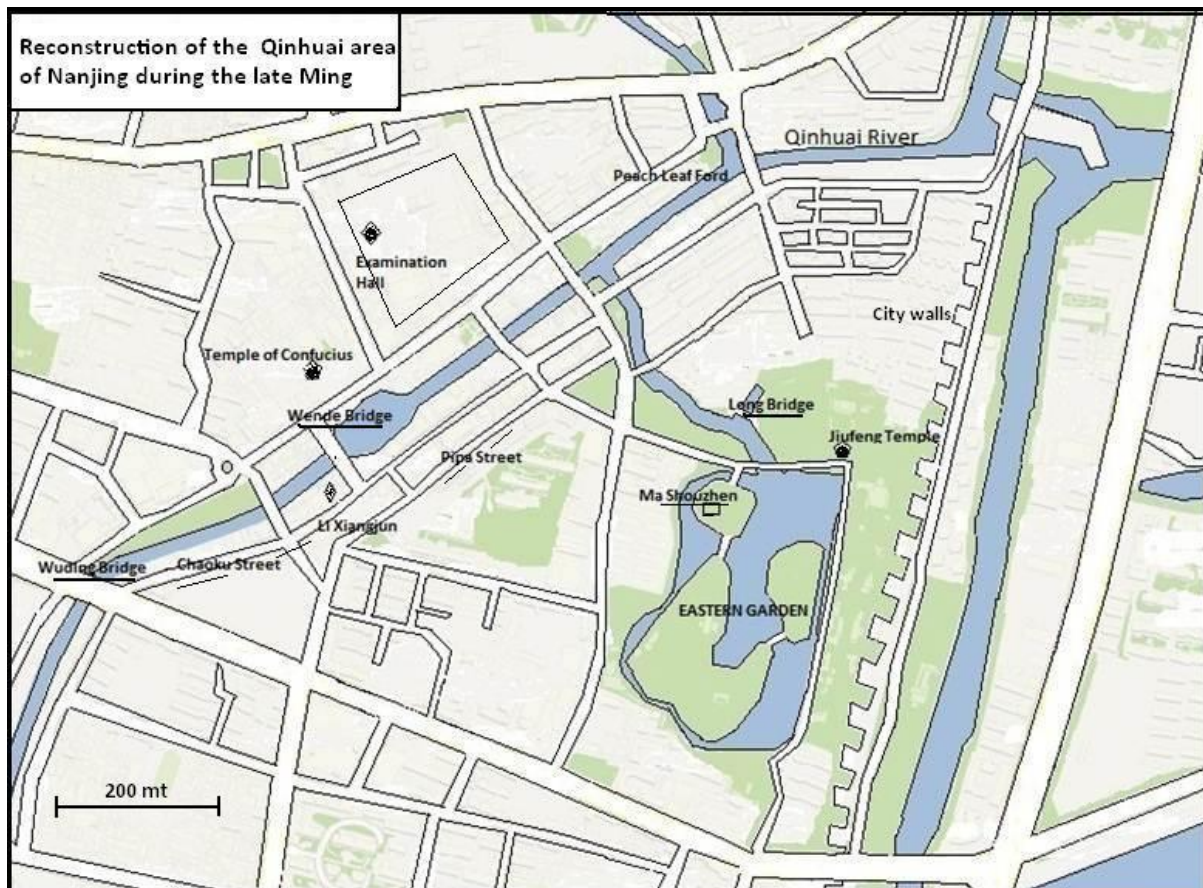
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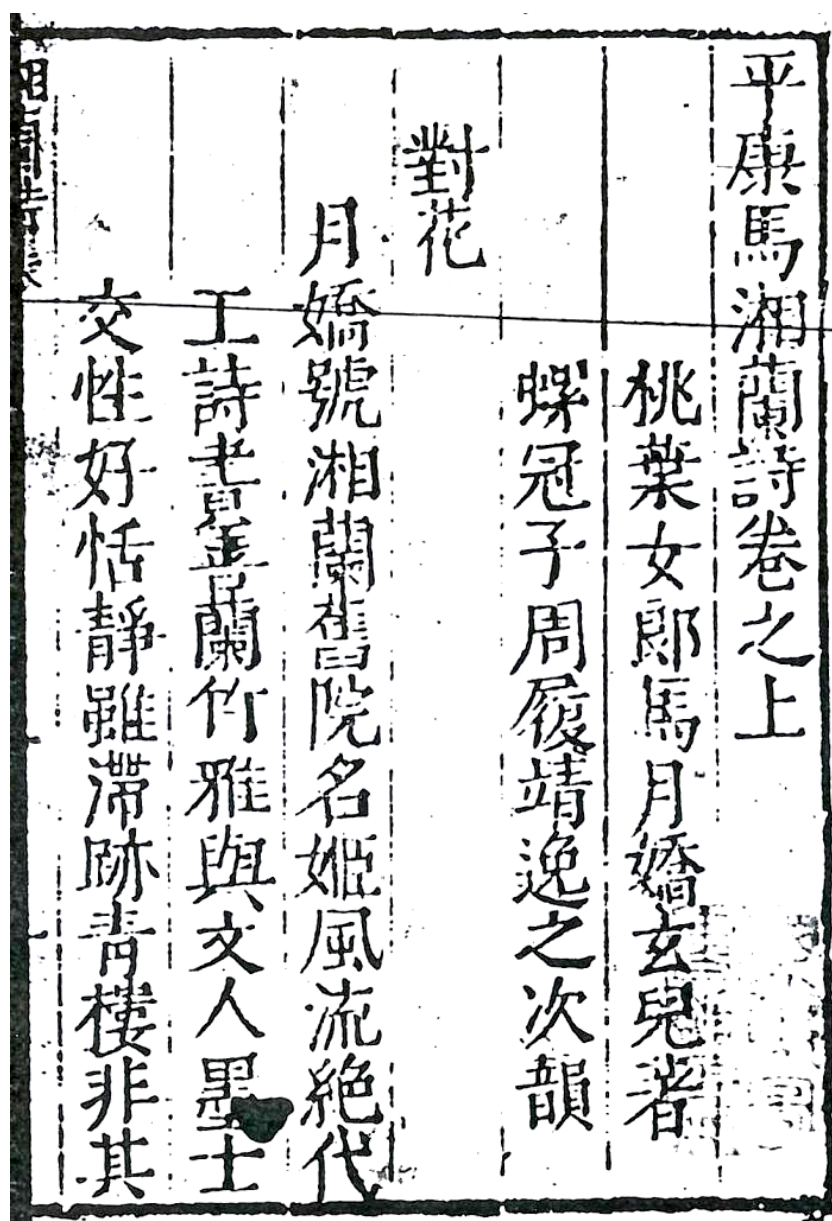


Map 1. The Jiangnan area, from Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*.



Map 2 . The Qinhuai area and its landmarks.

Illustrations



III. 1 First page of *juan 1* of Ma Shouzhen's personal poetry collection. Ma Shouzhen, *Ma Xianglan shiji*, 1.1a



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

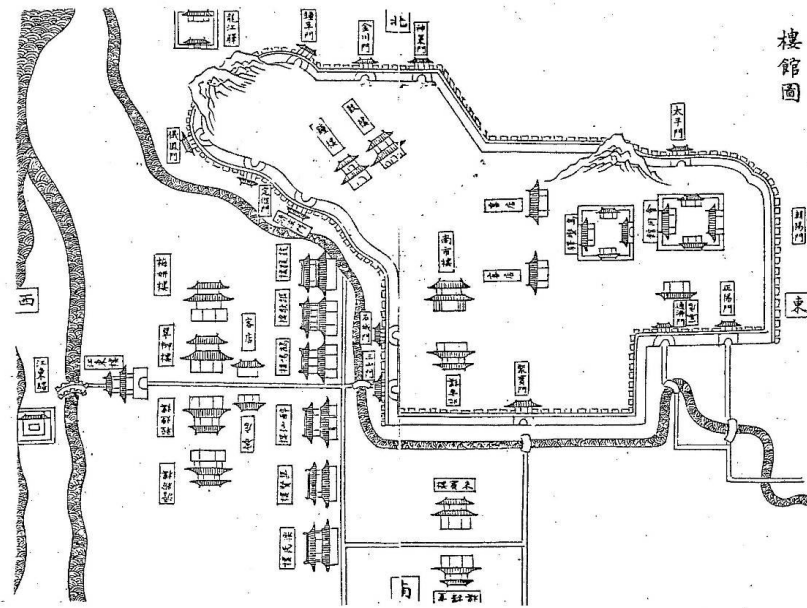
III. 2 Anonymous, *Nandu fanhui tu* 'Thriving Southern Capital', c.1600, handscroll, ink and colour on silk, 44x350 cm, National Museum, Beijing. From Yu, *A Journey into China's Antiquity*, vol. 4, 89-91.



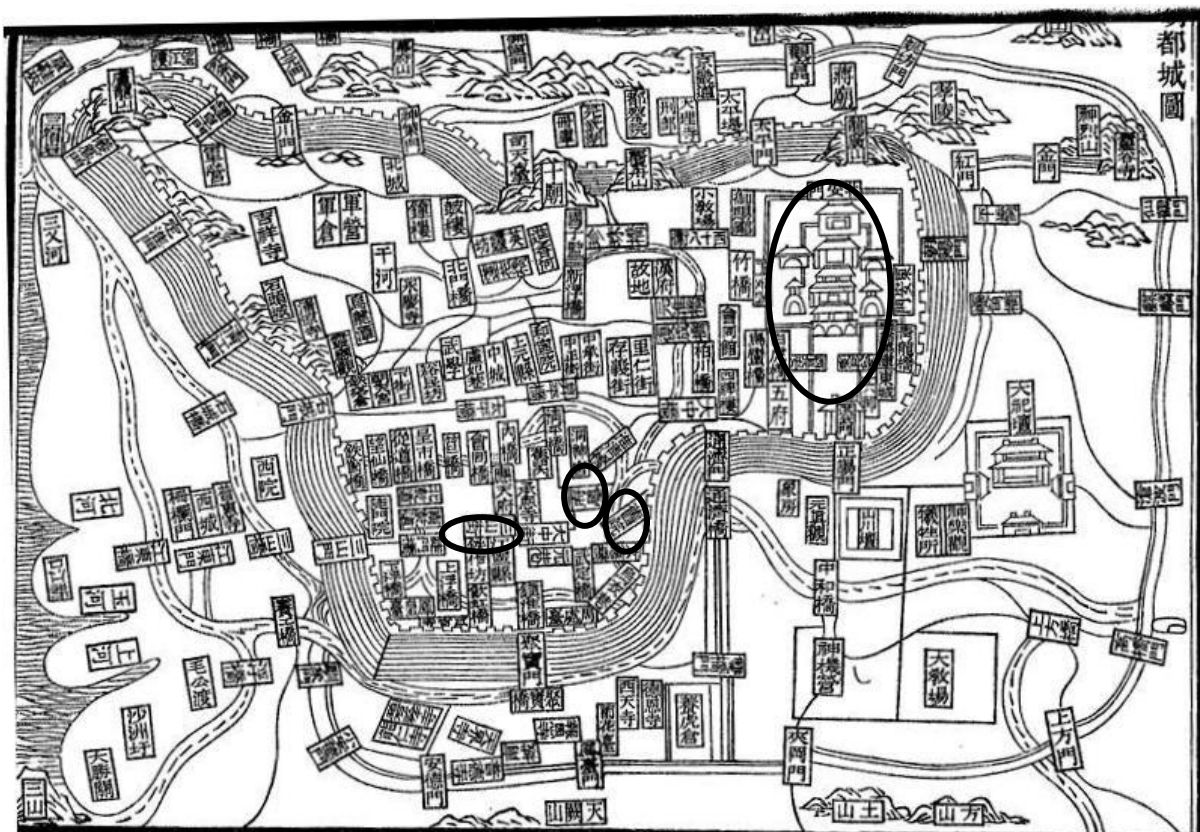
III. 2.1 Detail of *Nandu fanhui tu* (b).



III. 2.2 Detail of *Nandu fanhui tu*(b).



III. 3 Map of Nanjing sixteen entertainment buildings. From Wang Junhua, *Hongwu jingcheng tuzhi*, 8.



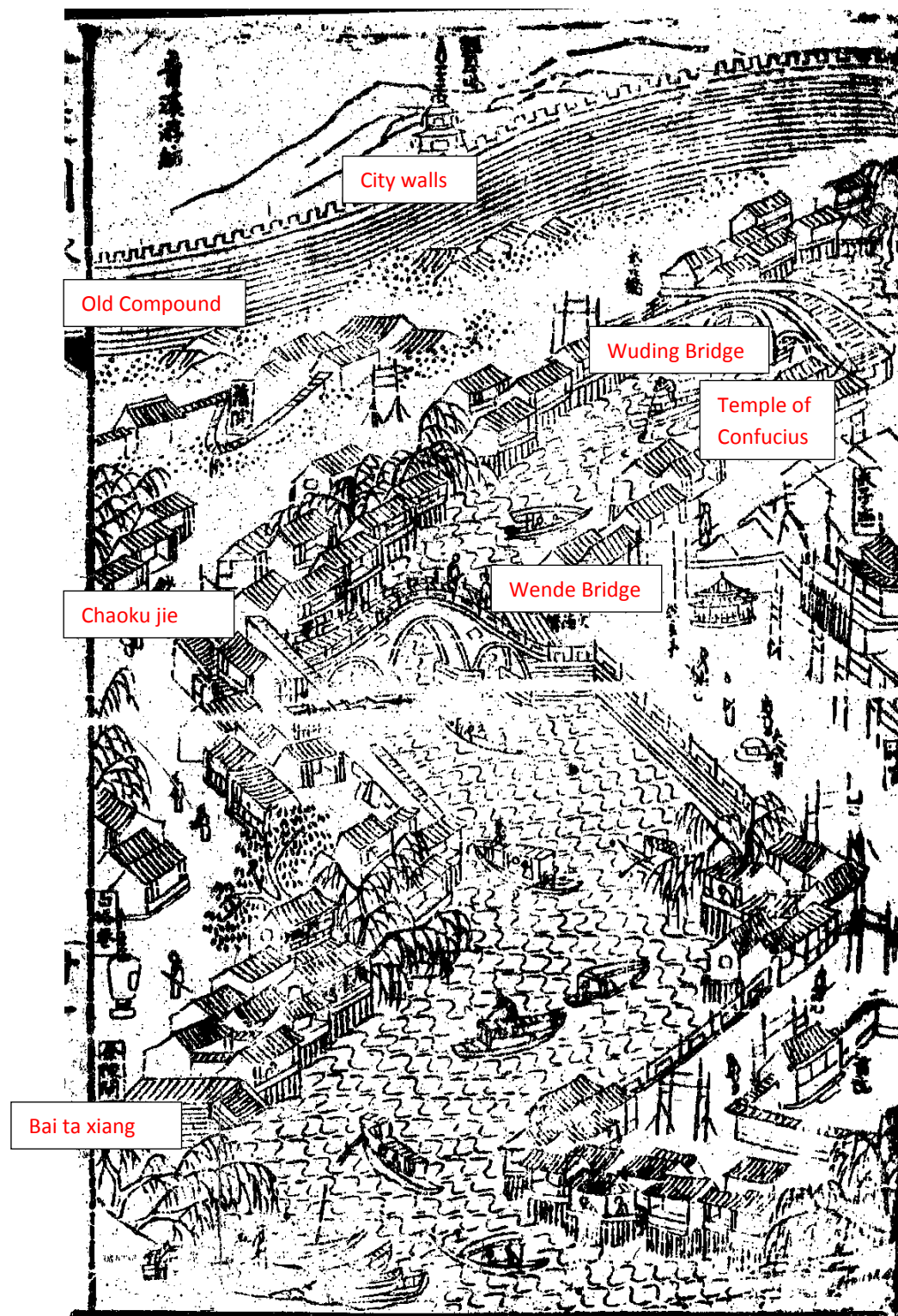
III. 4 Map of Nanjing from Chen Yi, *Jinling gujin tu kao*, 86. Clockwise from top are highlighted: the Imperial Palace, the Old Compound, San shan jie and the Examination Hall.



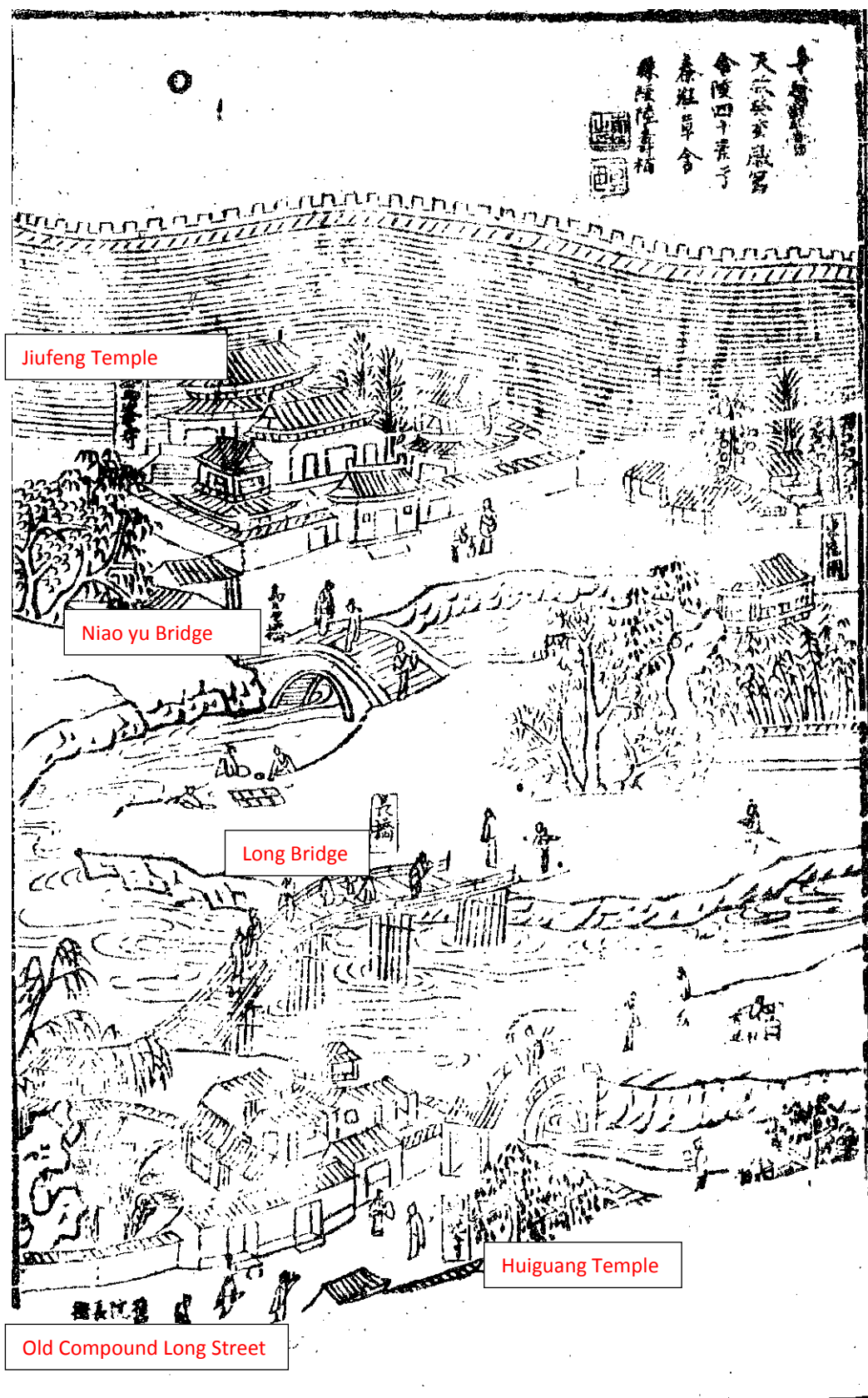
III.5 Wu Wei, *Gewu tu* 'Singing and Dancing', hanging scroll, ink on paper, 118.9x64.9 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing. From Li Shi, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu*, 159.



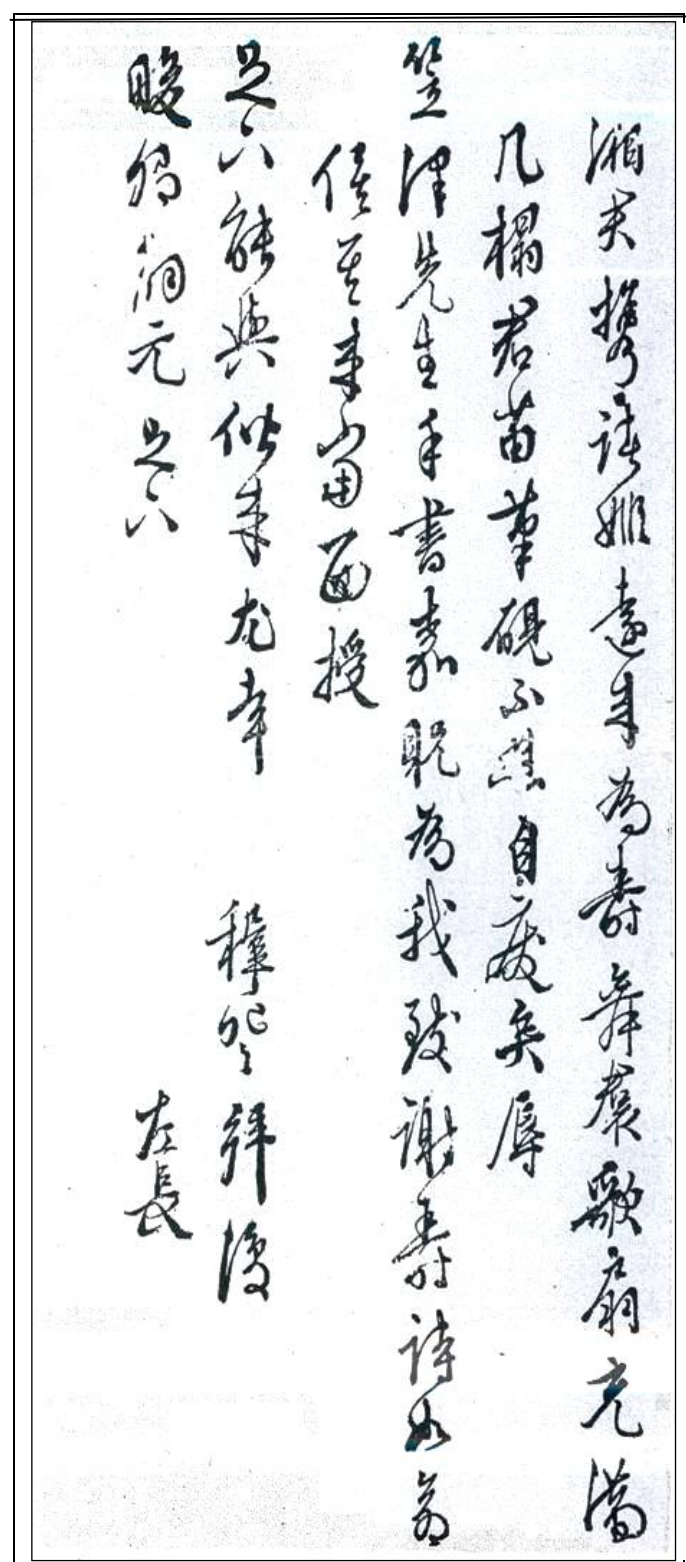
III.6 Tang Yin, *Taogu Presents a Poem*, hanging scroll, ca. 1515, ink and colour on silk, National Palace Museum, Taipei. From Barnhart, *Three Thousand Years*, 225.



III. 7 *Qingxi youfang* 'Pleasure boats on the river'. From Zhu Zhifang, *Jingling tuyong*, 67.



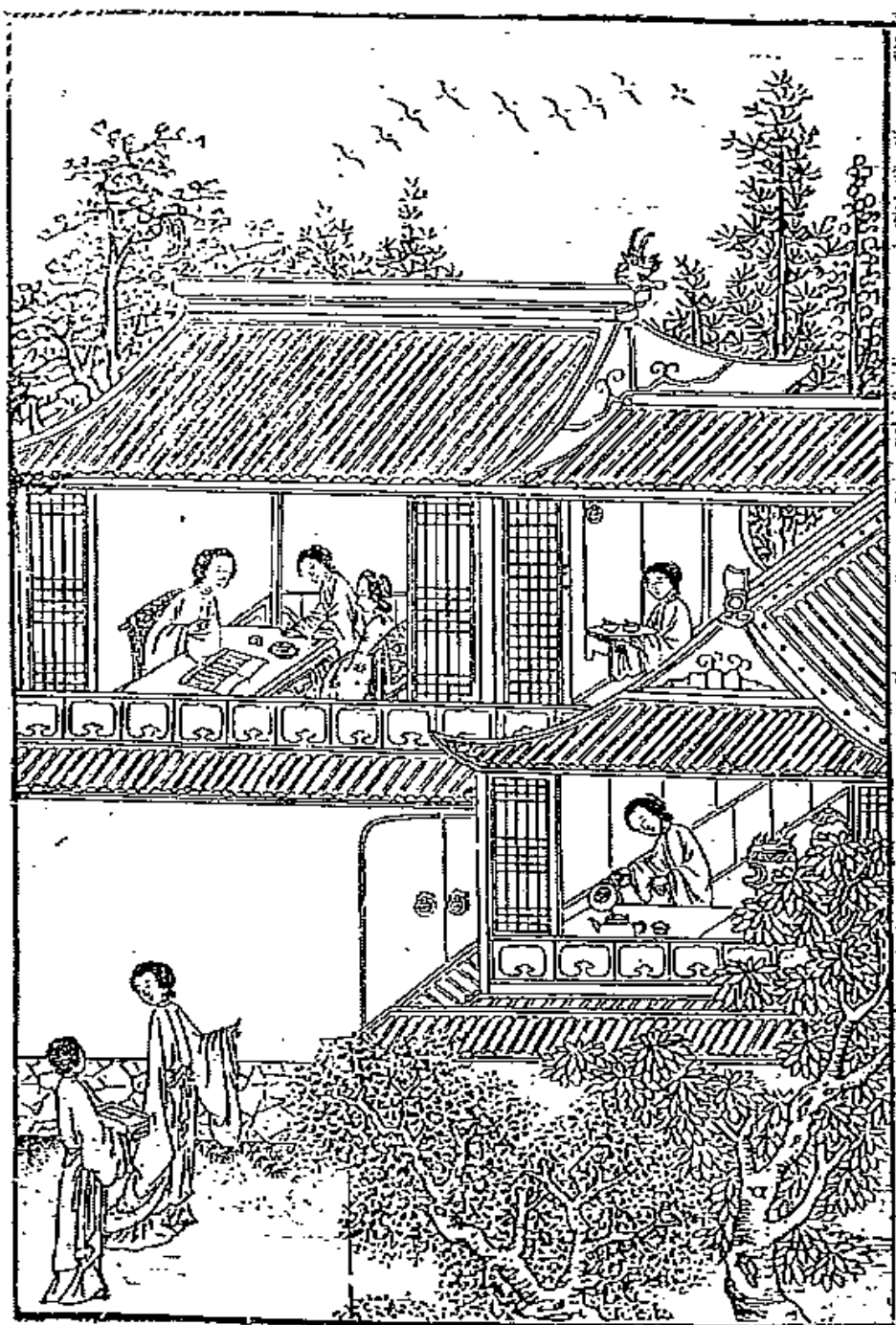
III. 8 *Chang Qiao Shang Yan* 'Admiring Beauties from the Long Bridge'. From Zhu Zhifang, *Jingling Tuyong*, 85.



III. 9 Wang Zhideng's calligraphy of a letter addressed to Ma Shouzhen. From *Mingdai shuzha xuancui*, vol.7, 7.



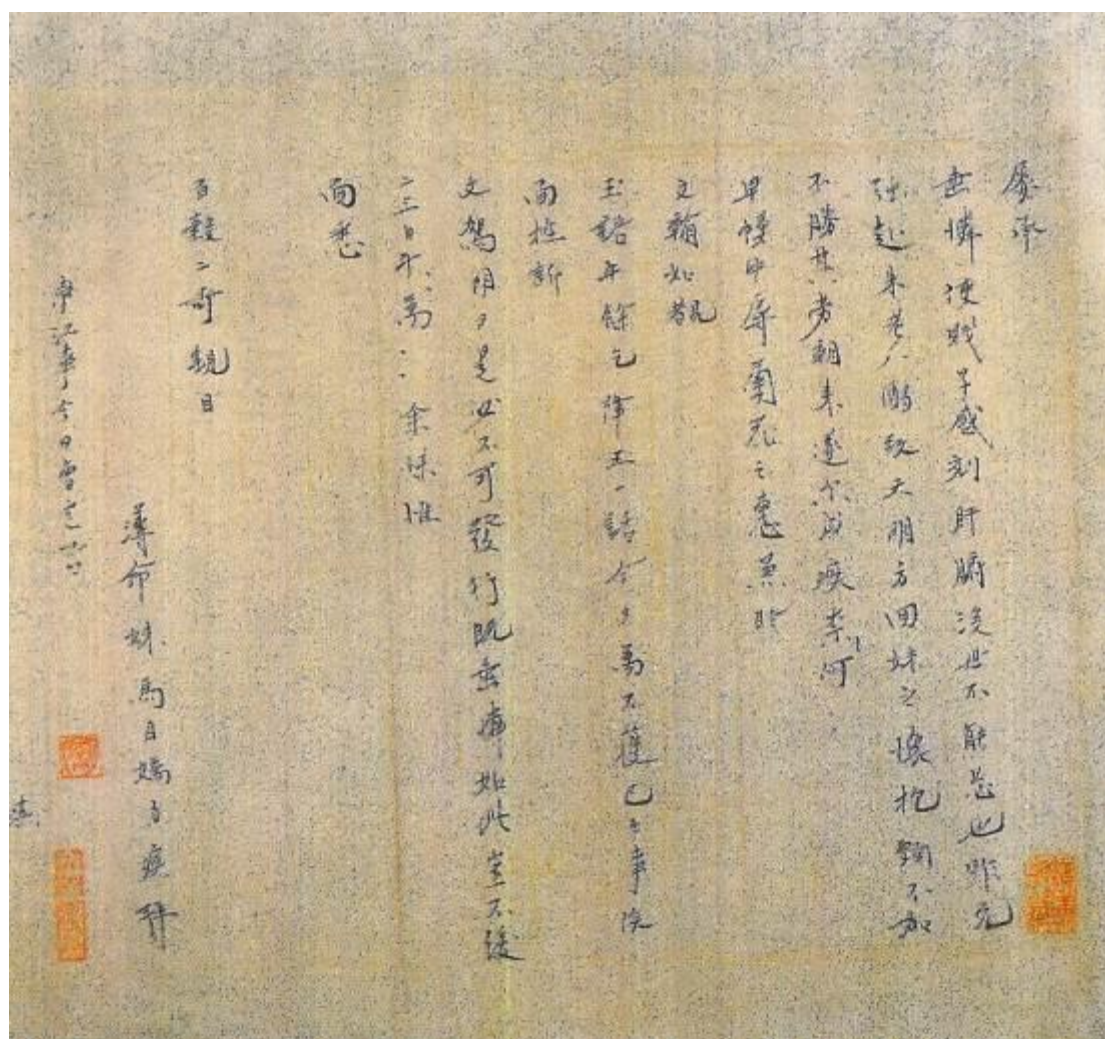
III.10 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids, bamboo and rock*, hanging-scroll, 1563, ink on paper, 102.23x31.12 cm, private collection. From Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 73.



III.11 Woodblock printed image from *Lüchuang nüshi* reproduced in Jin Peilin, *Guben xiaoshuo banhua tulu*, vol.2, n. 649.



III. 12 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids and rock*, 1572, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 52.5x29.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. From Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 75.



III.13 One of the letters by Ma Shouzhen assembled on the hand scroll at the Shanghai Museum. Image from *Lishi wenxian*. vol. 12.



III.13 Ma Shouzhen's residence (*Xianglan yuan* 湘蘭苑) in the Bailuzhou Park, Nanjing.



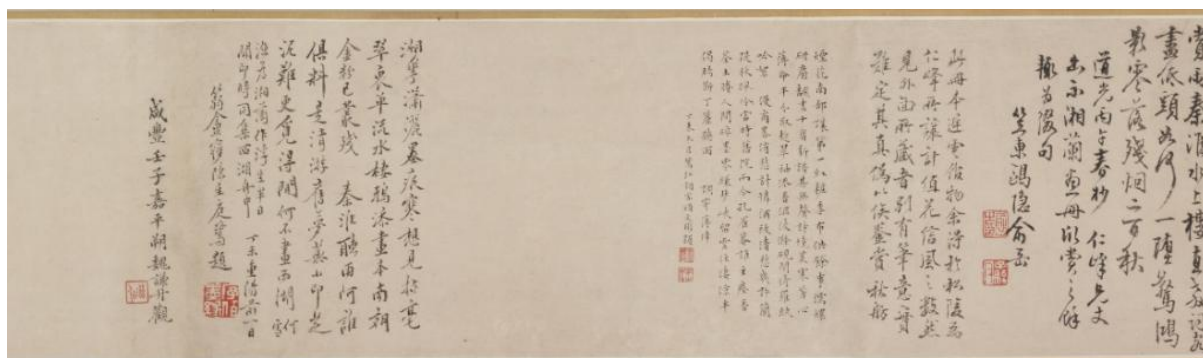
(a)



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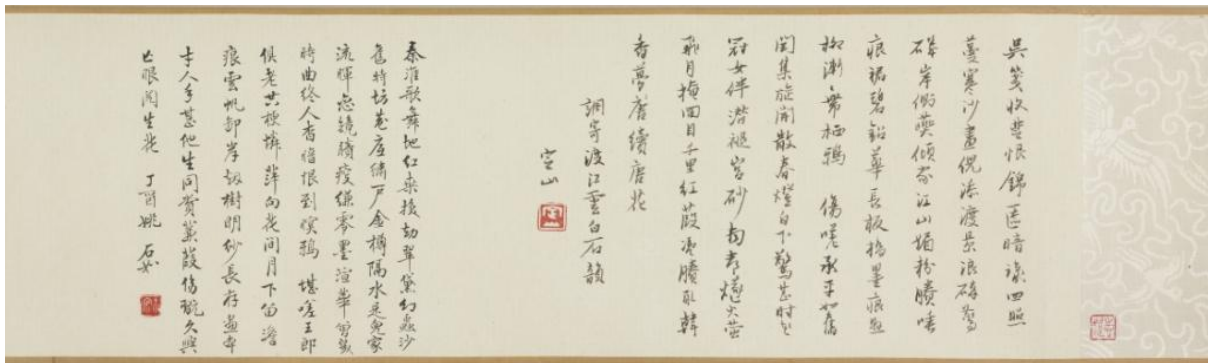
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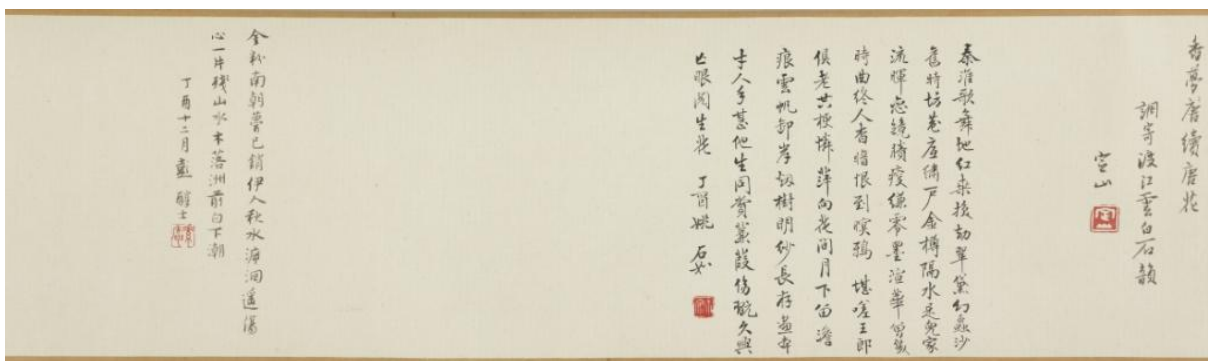
(d)



(e)



(f)



(g)

III.15 Ma Shouzhen, *Boating by a cliff*, album leaf, 16x60 cm, mounted on handscroll, National Museum of Tokyo, Japan (TA-464).



Ill. 16 (integral scroll and detail of painting) Ma Shouzhen, *Orchid and bamboo*, hanging scroll, undated, ink on paper, 121.8x 31.8 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (AK-RAK-1990-8).



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)



(g)

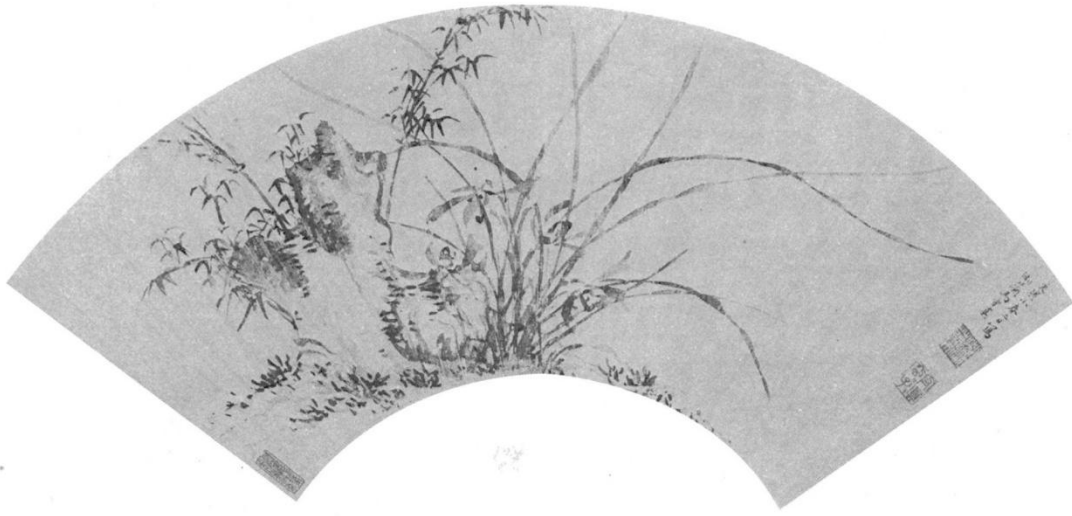
III. 17 (forgery) Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids*, 1566, handscroll, ink on paper, 30.5x572.5 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.



III. 18 (forgery) Ma Shouzhen, *Chrysanthemums*, hanging scroll, undated, ink on paper, 127.3x34.8 cm, Ostasiatiska Museet, Stockholm (NMOK-054).



III. 19 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids, bamboo and rock*, hanging scroll, 1572, ink on paper, 71.5 x 40.5 cm, Anxi Museum. From He Junhong, *Danqin qiba*, 143.



III. 20 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids, bamboo and rock*, folding fan, 1590, Shanghai Museum. From He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 144.



III. 21 Ma Shouzhen, *Emerald bamboo and secluded orchids*, hanging scroll, 1599, ink on paper, Xubaizhai Collection, Hong Kong Museum of Art.



(a)



(b)

III. 22 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids, Bamboo and Rock*, handscroll, 1604, ink on gold speckled paper, 28.8 x 243.3 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.



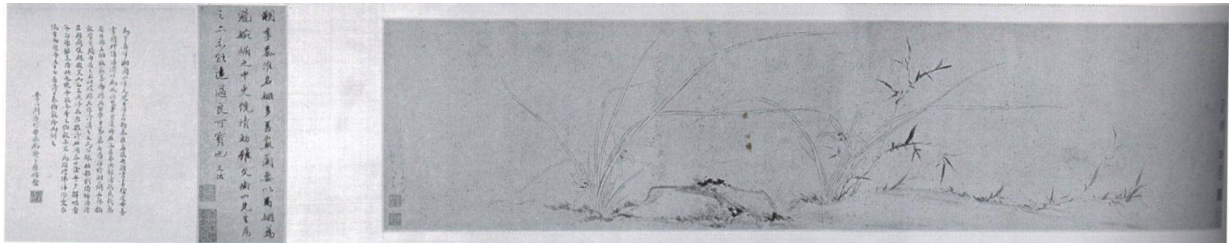
III. 23 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchid, bamboo and rock*, 1604, hanging scroll, ink on paper, 111.8x31.3 cm, Tianjin Museum. From *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*, vol. 9, 123.



Ill. 24 Guan Daosheng, *Bamboo and stone*, hanging scroll, undated, ink on paper, 87.1x28.7 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei, Republic of China. *Gugong shuhua tulu*, vol. 4, 93.



III. 25 Ma Shouzhen, *Three friends (after Guan Daosheng)*, hanging scroll, undated, ink on paper, 85.3 x 47.2 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.



III. 26 Ma Shouzhen, *After Guan Daosheng*, handscroll, 1571, ink on gold speckled paper, Xubaizhai Collection, 22.8x97.5 cm, Hong Kong Museum of Art (XB1992.0062). Suzuki, *Comprehensive Illustrated Catalogue*, series II, vol. 2, 209 (Suzuki S37-157).



III. 26a (detail) of the above.



III. 27 Zhao Mengjian, *Orchids*, handscroll, undated, ink on paper, 33.2 x 372.2 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1973.120.4).
From <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1973.120.4> [accessed 22nd July 2012].



(a)



(b)



(c)

III. 28 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids (following Zhao Mengjian)*, handscroll, 1604, ink on paper, 20.3 x 136.6 cm, Shanghai Museum (mounted with Xue Susu's handscroll). In *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*, vol. 3, 222-3.



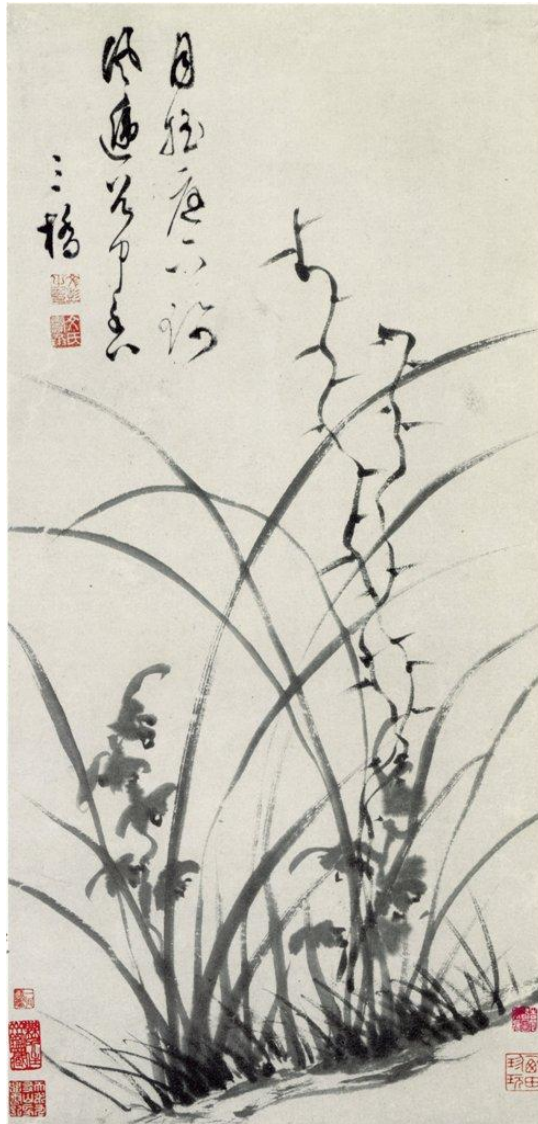
III. 29 Book illustrations from the orchid painting manual by Zhou Lüjing, *Jiuwan yirong*, 28-30.



III. 30 Zhao Mengfu, *Self-portrait*, album leaf, 1299, ink and colour on silk, National Palace Museum, Taipei. From McCausland, *Zhao Mengfu*, 285.



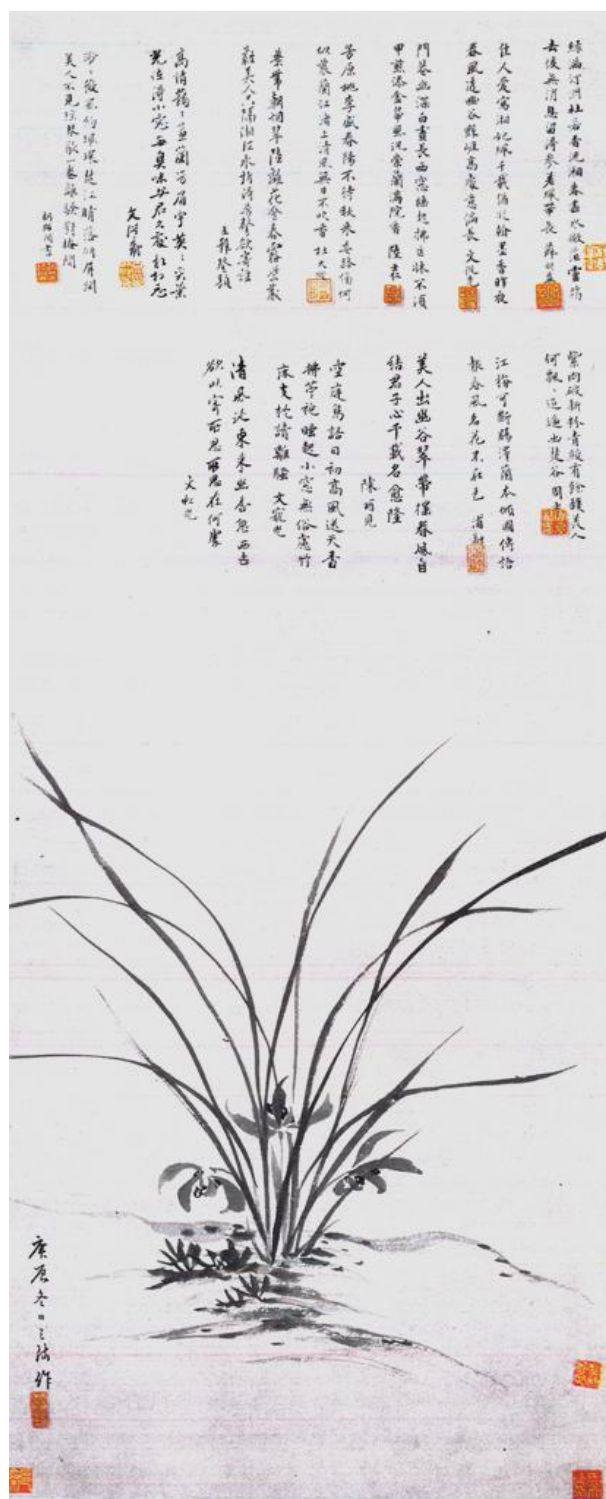
III. 31 Wen Zhengming, *Orchids, bamboo and rock*, hand scroll, c 1530, ink on paper, Worcester Art Museum, MA, Charlotte E. W. Buffington Fund, 160.10. From the museum website, <http://www.worcesterart.org/Collection/Chinese/1960.10.html> [accessed 22nd July 2012]



III. 32 Wen Peng, *Orchids*, hanging scroll, undated, ink on paper, 65x31.2 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing. From *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, vol. 7, 126, n. 114.



III.33 Wen Jia, *Orchid, rocks and bamboo*, hand scroll, 1591, ink on paper, 31.5x119.3cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA. Image from Bridgeman Education (BST263754).



III. 34 Zhou Tianqiu, *Ink orchids*, hanging scroll, 1581, ink on paper, Palace Museum, Beijing.
From *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, vol. 7, 158, n. 142.



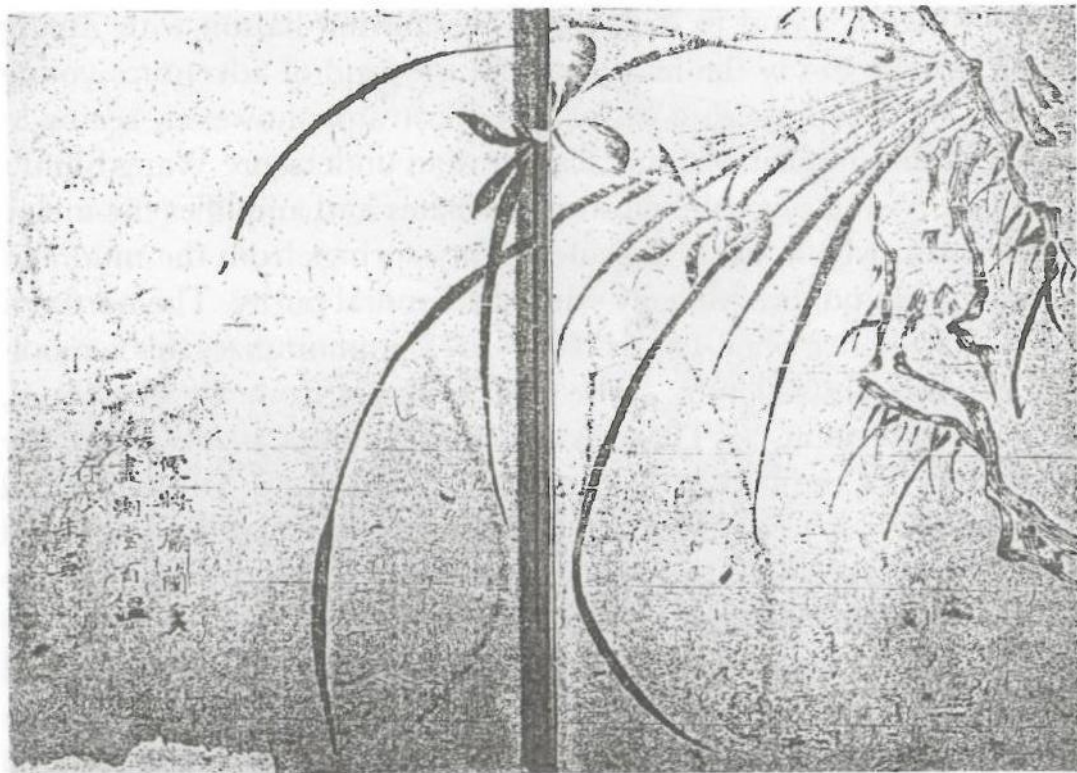
III. 35 Xue Susu, *Outlined ink (wild) orchids*, handscroll, 1601, ink on paper 31.8 x 598.17 cm, Honolulu Academy of Arts, 1667.1. Image from Artsor.



III. 36 Book Illustration of orchids 'à la Ma Shouzhen, in Wang Gai, *Jiezi yuan*, 1.21.



III. 37 (detail) Gu Mei, *Orchids and rocks*, handscroll, 1644, ink on satin, 27x 170.8 cm, Arthur M Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. From Weidner, *View from Jade Terrace*, 97.



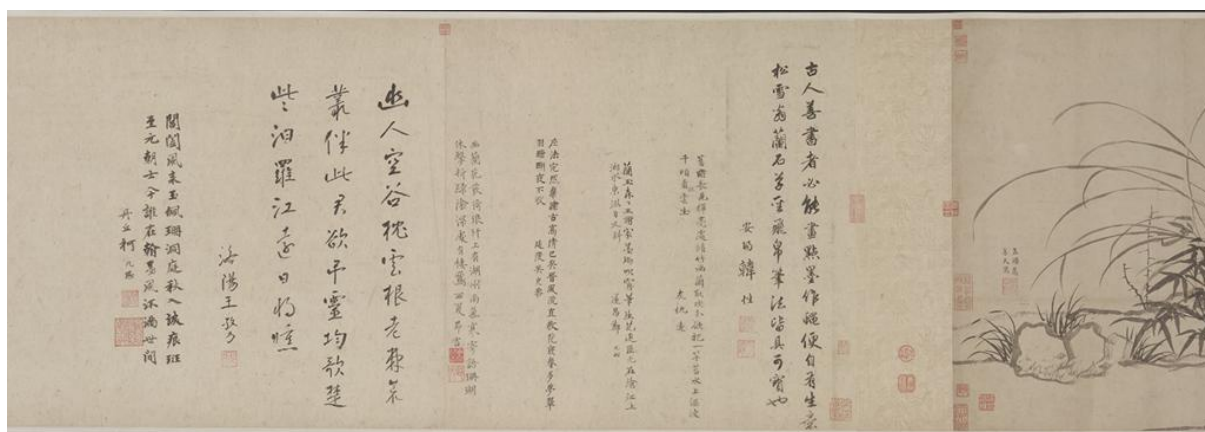
III. 38 Illustration from Li Zhuowo *xiansheng piping Xixiang ji*, reproduced in Hsiao, 'The Allusive Mode of Production', fig.2.11.



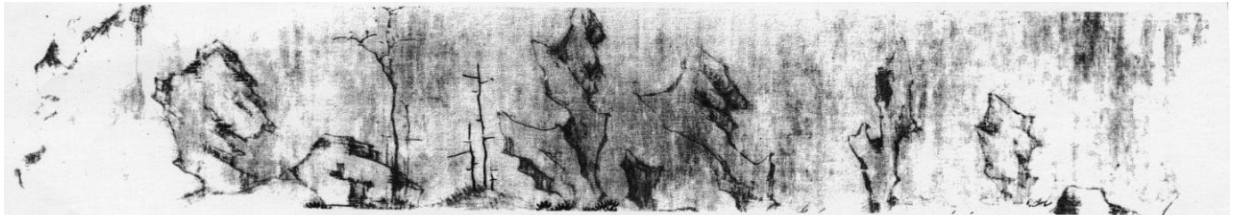
III. 39 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids, bamboo and rock*, hanging scroll, 1572, ink on paper, 91x50 cm, Guangdong Provincial Museum. From *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*, vol. 13, 90.



III. 40 Wen Tong, *Bamboo*, hanging scroll, c.1070 , ink and color on silk, 132.6 x 105.4 cm
University of California, San Diego. Image from Artstor.



III. 41 Zhao Mengfu, *Bamboo, rocks and lonely orchids*, handscroll, undated, ink on paper
50.5cm x 144.1cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art (1963.515). Image from Artstor.



(a)



(b)

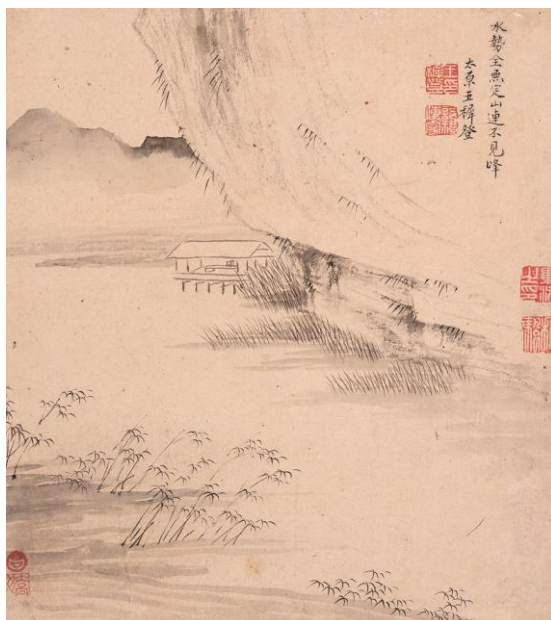
III. 42 Ma Shouzhen, *Rock and bamboo*, handscroll, 1602, ink on paper, 163.5 x 14.8, Jilin University. From *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*, vol. 16, 160.



III. 43 Wen Zhengming, *Boating under the Red Cliff*, handscroll, 1552, ink and colour on paper, 30.5x141.5cm, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution (FSG325375). From Bridgeman Education.



III. 44 Liu Rushi, *Landscape*, album leaf (1 of 8), ink and color on paper, 17.6 x 20.8 cm, Mr. and Mrs. J.P. Dubosc Collection. Image from Artstor.



III. 45a and 45b Ma Shouzhen, *Various subjects*, album leaves (2 of 8), 1591, private collection (?), Christie's, Lot 340 sold on 25 April 2004, Hong Kong.



(a)



(b)

III. 46 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids , bamboo, rock and fungi*, handscroll, 1566, ink and colour on paper, 27.5 x 200.6 cm, Mactaggart Collection, University of Alberta Museum 2004.19.56.
From Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 80-1.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)

III. 47 Ma Shouzhen, *Colored fungus, orchids and rock*, handscroll, 1604, ink and colour on paper, 26.5 x 229.5 cm, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 60.25.



III. 48 Rolled up image of the handscroll in ill. 26.



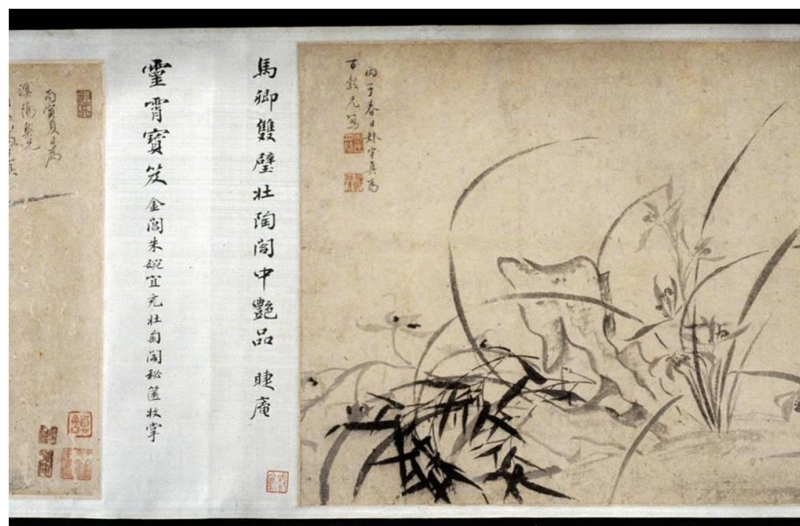
III. 49 Tang Yin, *Silk fan in the autumn breeze*, undated, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 77.1x39.3 cm, Shanghai Museum. From Barnhart, *Three Thousand Years*, 224.



(a)



(b)



(c)

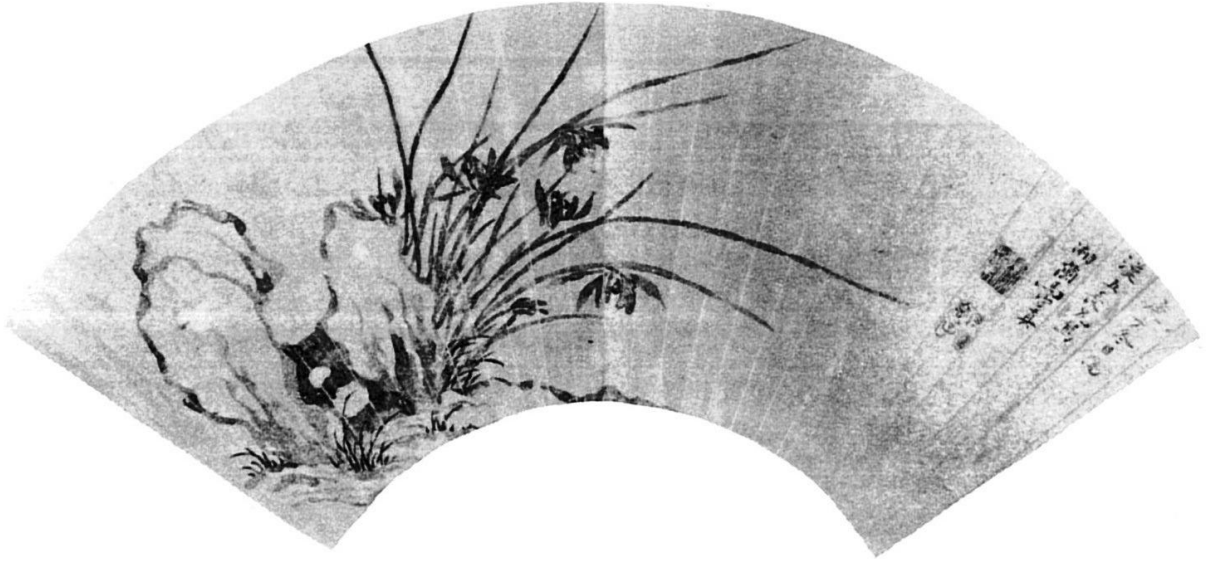
III. 50 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids with bamboo rock and fungi*, handscroll, 1576, ink on paper, 29.5 x 127.4 cm , Mactaggart Collection, University of Alberta Museum (mounted with the 1566 scroll). Image from Artstor.



Ill. 51 Ma Shouzhen , *Coloured orchids*, hanging scroll, 1592, ink and colour on paper, 114.4x29.8 cm, Kurokawa Institute of Ancient Cultures. From Weidner, *Views from Jade Terrace*, 77.



III. 51a (Detail of the above scroll) Image from Artstor.



III. 52 Ma Shouzheng, *Orchids and rock*, folding fan, Manpukuji Temple, Kyoto (Japan), Suzuki JP-178-011-13.



III. 53 Ma Shouzheng, *Orchids, bamboo and rock*, folding fan, undated, ink on paper, Tianjin Museum. From *Zhongguo lidai shuhua tumu*, vol. 9, 123.



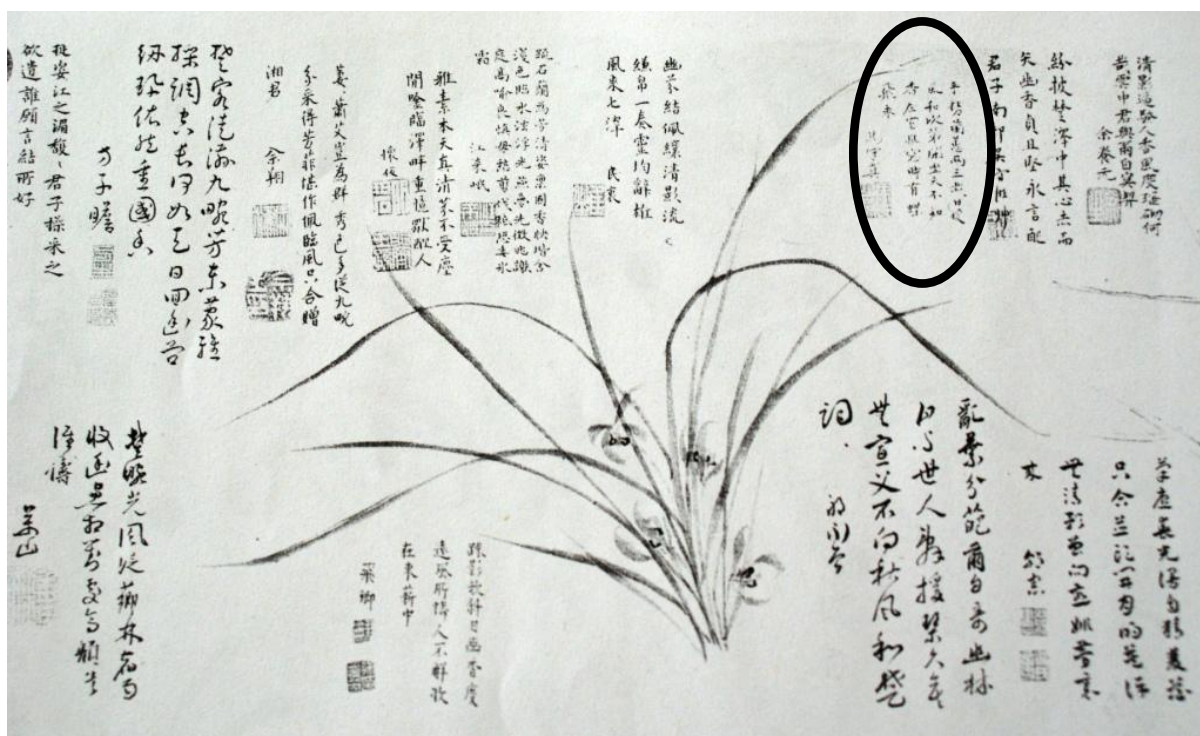
III. 54 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids, bamboo and rock*, folding fan, 1599, ink on paper, Sichuan Museum, Chengdu. From *Zhongguo lidai shuhua tumu*, vol. 17, 36.



III. 55 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids with rock, bamboo and fungi*, folding fan, 1593, ink on paper, Wuxi Museum.



III. 56 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids*, folding fan, 1604, ink on paper, Yale University Art Gallery, (1989.9.1).



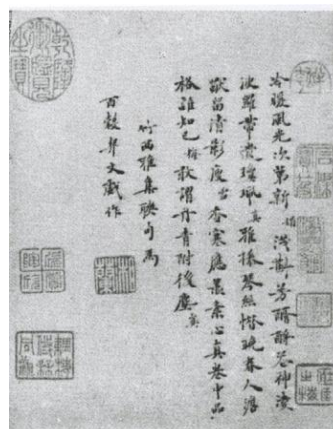
III. 57 Detail of Ma Shouzhen's inscription on Zhou Tianqiu, *Orchids*, 1591, handscroll (detail), ink on paper, 33.1x431.9 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei, Republic of China. Image from *Gugong shuhua tulu*, vol. 19, 284.



III. 58 Ma Shouzhen, Wu Juanjuan, Lin Xue and Wang Dingru, *Flowers and Plants*, handscroll, 1576, ink and colour on paper, 21.7 x 103 cm, Wuxi Museum. From *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, vol. 8, n. 66, 23.



III. 58a Detail of Ma Shouzhen painted orchids. From *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, vol. 8, n. 66, 70.



III. 58b Detail of Ma Shouzhen's calligraphy from the scroll. In *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*, vol. 6, 178.



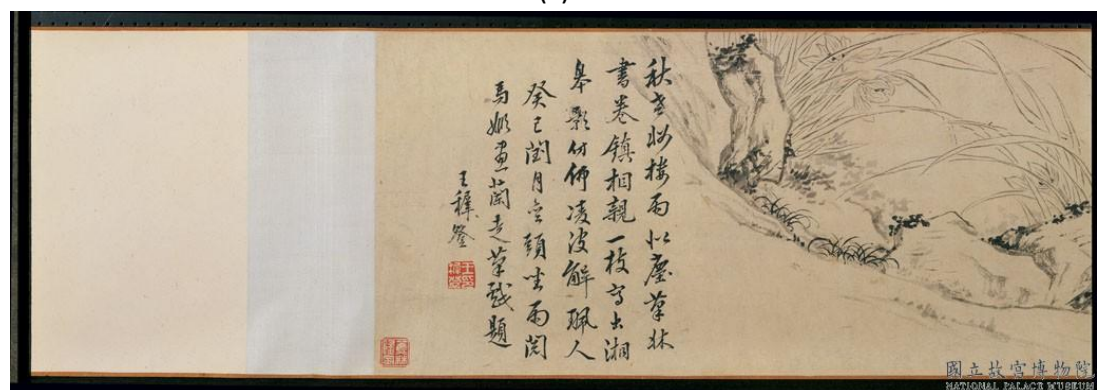
(a)



(b)

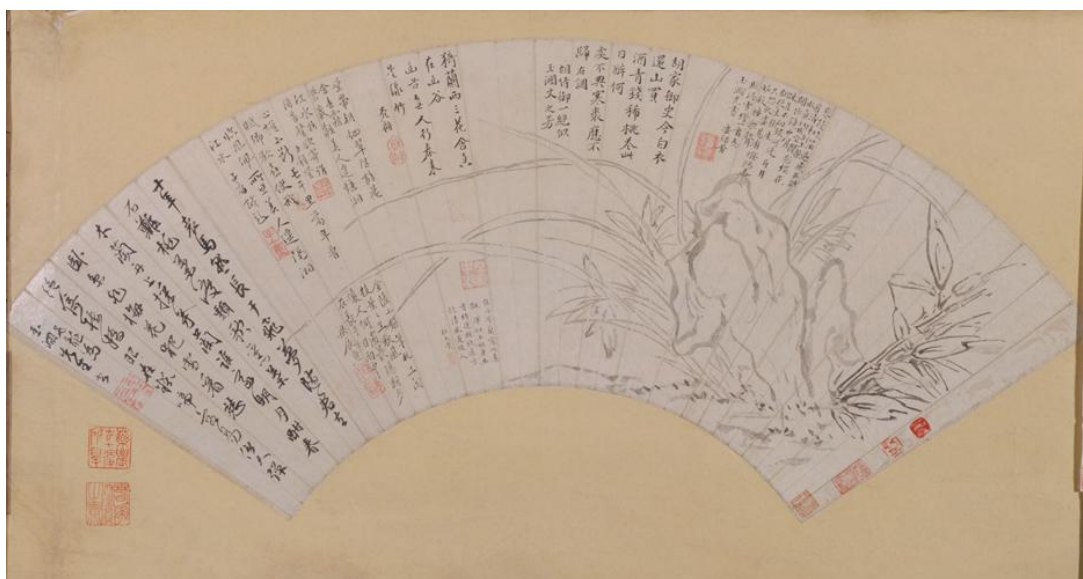


(c)



(d)

III. 59 Wang Zhideng and Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids*, 1593, handscroll, ink on paper, 24.7 × 220.8 cm, National Palace Museum, Taiwan, Republic of China.



III. 60 Ma Shouzhen, *Rock and orchid*, folding fan, undated, ink on paper, 16.3 x 50.3 cm, Palace Museum Beijing.



III. 61 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids*, handscroll, undated, ink on paper, 23.5 x 56 cm, Jilin Provincial Museum. From *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, vol. 8, n.68.



III. 62 Woodblock printed image from Zhang Mengzheng, *Qinglou yunyu* (1994), 82-3.



III. 63 Typical styles of the scholar's hat in the Ming dynasty. Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*, 409.

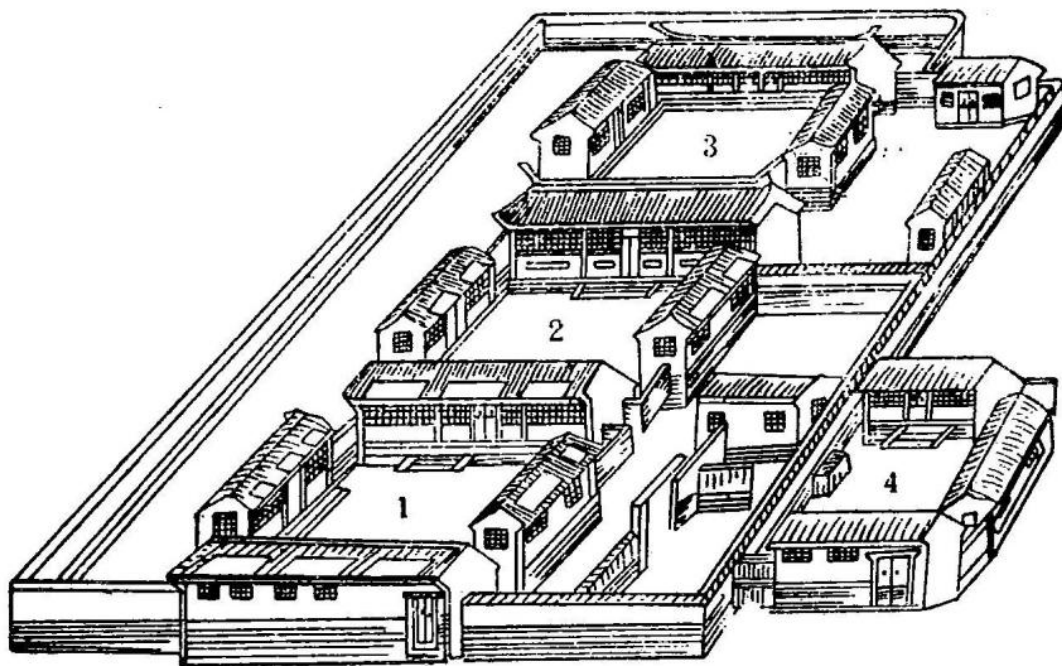


Fig. 3. Home of a *guixiu* family, showing (1) the outer courtyard, for receiving visitors; (2) the inner courtyard, where the daily activities of the household took place (study, record keeping, consultation, recreation); (3) the deeply recessed "inner apartments" reserved for women; and (4) the servants' quarters. From C. A. S. Williams 1976: 23.

III. 64 Image reproduced in Mann, *Precious Records*, 50.



III. 65 Ming block-printed illustration of a brothel scene, in *Fengyue zhengji*. From Van Gulik, *Sexual Life*, 301.



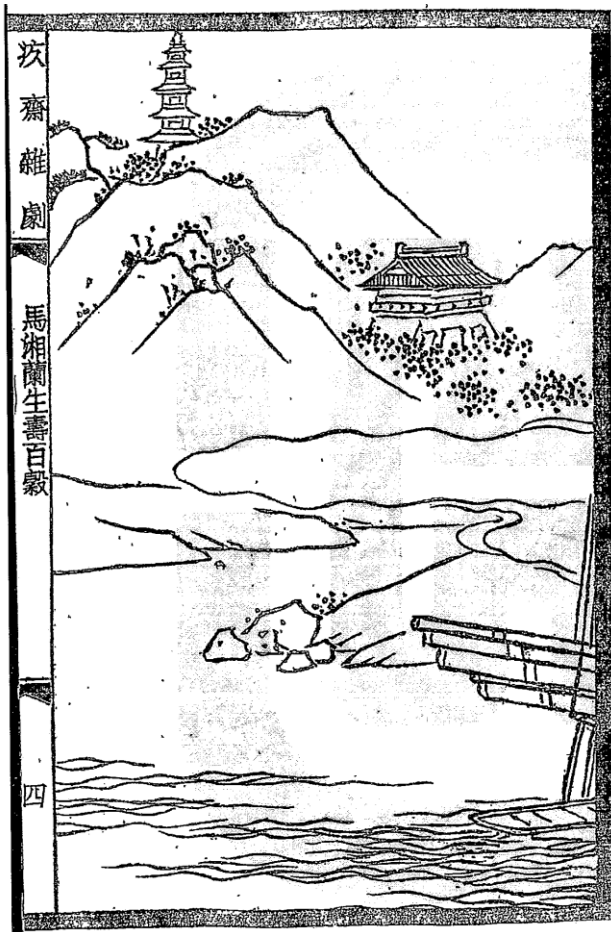
III. 66 Anon., *Palace Beauty*, Ming dynasty, Liaoning Provincial Museum.
From Laing, 'Chinese Palace-Style Poetry', 285.



III. 67a Jade and gold hairpins in a flower shape. Ming Dynasty. Suzhou Museum.



III. 67b Golden hairpins in the shape of leaves and dragonflies. Ming Dynasty. Nanjing Museum.



III. 68 Wood-block printed book illustration 'Ma Xianglan celebrates Baigu', 1950s, in Mao Guangsheng, *Jiuzhai's zaju*, 3b-4a.



III. 69 Pan Gongshou, *Garden rock and flowers* (after a painting by Ma Shouzhen), late 18th century, hanging scroll, ink and light colour on paper, 126 x 28.2 cm, Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum.



III.70 Ma Shouzhen, *Orchids and rocks*, hanging scroll, 1573, ink and light colour on paper, 114.2 x 28 cm, Private Collection?, Christie's Auction, 22 March 1995 NY lot 59.



Ill. 71 (detail) Pan Gongshou and Ren Zhao, *Wang Yuyan paints orchids*, hanging scroll, ink and colour on paper, 111.5 x 41.6 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing. From Li shi, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu*, 87.



Ill.72 Wang Yuyan, *Ink orchids*, folding fan, ink on paper, 15.8x48.6 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing. Li shi, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu*, 89



Ill.73 Mengshi jushi, *Orchids*, round fan, late 19th century, 40.5 x 27.8 cm. From Tsang, *More than Keeping Cool*, 41.



III. 74 (forgery) Ma Shouzheng, *Orchids*, hanging scroll, 1554, ink on paper, Palace Museum, Beijing.



III. 75 (forgery) Ma Shouzhen, *Flowers*, album leaf, 1624, ink on paper, Liaoning Museum.
From He Junhong, *Danqing qiba*, 136.



III. 76 Anon., *Potrait imaginaire of Ma Shouzheng*, hanging scroll, possibly mid-late 18th century, ink and colour on silk, 204 x 105 cm, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nice.



Ill. 77 Anon., *Beautiful woman in her boudoir*, hanging scroll, mid-late 18th century, ink and colours on silk, 119.5 x 62.3 cm, Harvard Art Museum, Arthur Sackler Museum, Oriental Objects Fund, 1968.40. From Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 169.



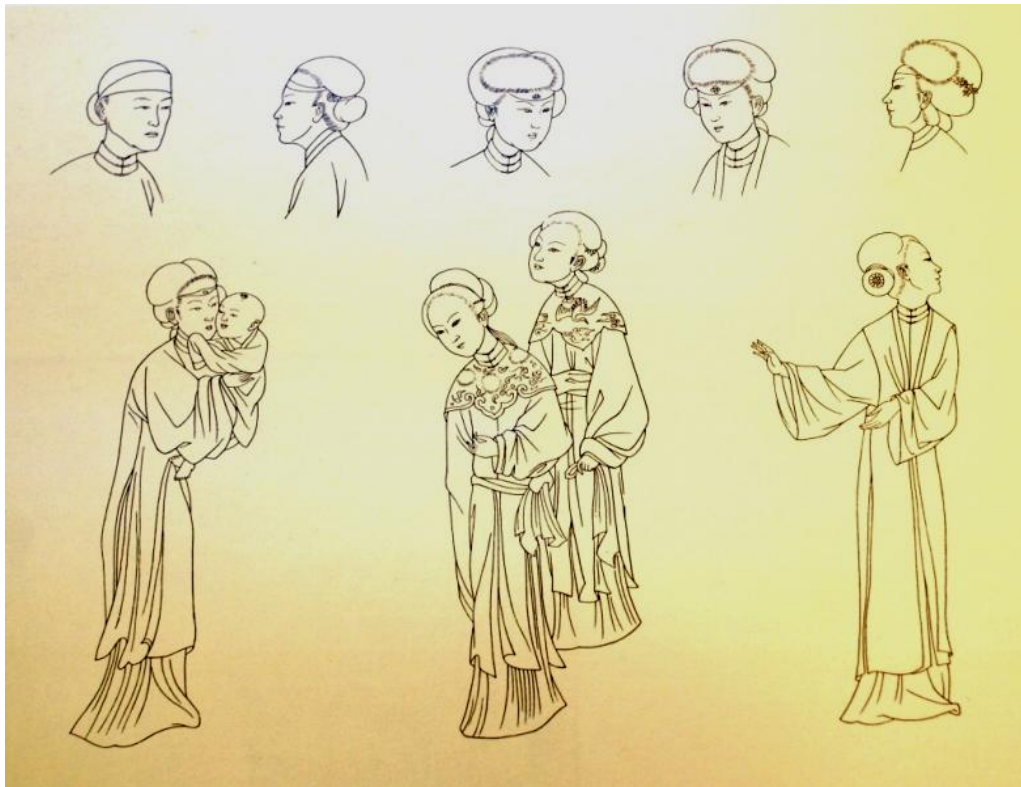
III. 78 *Pensive Buddha*, Northern Wei (5th century), limestone, 61 x 44.5 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (BST 263753). Image from Bridgeman Education.



Ill. 79 *Guanyin of the Southern Sea*, Liao (907-1125) or Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) , wood with multiple layers of paint, 241.3 x 165.1 cm, The Nelson-Atkins Museum, image from the museum website, <http://www.nelson-atkins.org/collections/iscroll-objectview.cfm?id=597> [accessed 15th Dec 2012].



Ill. 80 Anon., *Woman resting from reading*, hanging scroll, 18th century, ink and colour on silk, 163 x 97 cm, The British Museum, London (Suzuki, E15-041). Image reproduced in Cahill, *Picture for Use*, 174.



III. 81 Typical Ming style of gentry women's clothing and coiffeur. From Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*, 416.



III. 82a Typical Qing dynasty elite women's clothing. From Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*, 441.



III. 82b Qing fashion of the imperial concubines of emperor Yongzheng. From Shen Congwen, *Zhongguo gudai fushi yanjiu*, 465.



III. 83 Fei Danxu, *Ma Xianglan yuxiang* (detail), colours on paper, album leaf, 31.6 x 56.5cm, Palace Museum Beijing. Image from Li Shi, *Ming Qing guige huihua yanjiu*, 194.



III. 84 Ma Shouzhen portrait in *Qinhuai bayan tuyong*.



III. 85 Bian Sai portrait in *Qinhuai bayan tuyong*.



III. 86 Li Xiangjun portrait in *Qinhuai bayan tuyong*.



III. 87 Liu Rushi portrait in *Qinhuai bayan tuyong*.



III. 88 Dong Bai portrait in *Qinhuai bayan tuyong*.



III. 89 Gu Mei portrait in *Qinhuai bayan tuyong*.



III. 90 Kou Mei portrait in *Qinhuai bayan tuyong*.



III. 91 Chen Yuanyuan portrait in *Qinhuai bayan tuyong*.



III. 92 Hua Xuan, *Eight beauties on the Balcony of a Brothel* (ca.1736). Image reproduced in Cahill, *Pictures for Use*, 33.



III. 93 Nanjing delicatessen, the Eight Beauties of the Qinhuai.



III. 94 Image of the seven courtesans of *Hunduan Qinhuai*, Youku
http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMiE0Mjg4Mjg=.html?f=1489114.



III. 95 Still of actress He Caifei interpreting Ma Shouzhen in *Hunduan Qinhuai*.