

**Mulan on Page and Stage: Stories of Mulan in Late Imperial China**

by

**Xiaosu Sun**

M.A. in East Asian Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2008

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
M.A. in East Asian Studies

University of Pittsburgh

2008

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

ARTS AND SCIENCES

This thesis was presented

by

Xiaosu Sun

It was defended on

May 16, 2008

and approved by

Katherine Carlitz, Ph.D, Asian Studies Center

Evelyn Rawski, Ph.D, History

Xinmin Liu, Ph.D, East Asian Languages and Literatures

Thesis Director: Katherine Carlitz, Ph.D, Asian Studies Center

Copyright © by Xiaosu Sun

2008

## **Mulan on Page and Stage: Stories of Mulan in Late Imperial China**

Xiaosu Sun, M.A.

University of Pittsburgh, 2008

The famous cross-dressing heroine Mulan is a symbol of filial piety, a role model of female heroism in Chinese culture. However, most people do not know the story as well as they think they do. Besides the ballad of Mulan, there are at least four versions of the Mulan story. My discussion will be a comparison of various versions of the Mulan story and an investigation of the development of the Mulan story. Through the study of the *zaju* drama *Ci Mulan tifu congjun* (A Female Mulan Replaces Her Father and Goes to War) by Xu Wei (1521-1593), I question the commonly-held idea that Ming *zaju* were not written with an eye to performance. I argue that Xu Wei created scenes that were very entertaining for Ming audiences. This *zaju* play was not only widely read and may have been staged by household troupes for male audiences in the Ming literati world, but may also have appealed to common people. Though the story of Mulan was familiar to every household, authors in the Qing dynasty continued to add new twists to this old story and create more complex and intriguing images of Mulan. In the novels *Sui Tang yanyi* (Romance of the Sui and the Tang) and *Mulan qinüzhuan* (Biography of Extraordinary Mulan), Mulan commits suicide either to avoid unwanted marriage or display her loyalty to the ruler. The novel *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* (An Amazing Tale of a Filial Woman in the Beiwei Period Who Has Been Through Extraordinary Ordeals) challenges the audience by an explicit depiction of Mulan having sex with her husband. I examine the significance of the authors in the Qing dynasty depicting Mulan as a chaste or a licentious warrior. I argue that

Mulan could be a symbol of filiality, chastity, loyalty and sexuality, or even a symbol of a mixture of all above. Her complex image may fulfill male authors' fantasies of a woman who has it all.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0 MULAN IN XU WEI'S ZAJU PLAY.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.0 <i>CI MULAN'S</i> ON STAGE PERFORMANCE .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.0 MULAN IN QING DYNASTY NOVELS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>5.0 LICENTIOUS WARRIOR .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>6.0 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>43</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give my sincere gratitude to those who have helped me with my thesis writing. My special gratitude goes to my advisor, Professor Katherine Carlitz. I was extraordinarily lucky to be able to work with Professor Carlitz whose infectious enthusiasm led me to the study of pre-modern Chinese literature. She is the best advisor whom I ever have seen. Her comments have unfailingly expanded the soul of this thesis and its author. When I felt afraid or confused, she was there. She is the magical helper in my tale of life. This thesis would have never become a reality without the help of Professor Evelyn Rawski. Her class on late imperial China has stimulated my interest in the Ming and the Qing period. She not only listened to my ideas but also enriched them. I sincerely thank Professor Xinmin Liu for his advice and suggestions.

I would like to thank the staff of Asian Studies Center, particularly Dianne Dakis who helped me every step of the way. My heartfelt thanks also go to Professor Linda Penkower, Zhang Haihui, Zou Xiuying, Gabe Dakis and Ruthe Karlin for their very helpful assistance.

Finally I acknowledge everything my family gives to me. My husband Wang Xiao and my parents have sustained me during the periods of tension and effort. This thesis is dedicated to them.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Who doesn't know the story of Mulan? She is a fearless Chinese heroine who disguises herself as a male warrior and goes off to battle in her father's stead. She fights valiantly for twelve years without her true sex being discovered by her fellow soldiers. At the end of the war, the ruler wants to reward her for her excellent performance, but she refuses and returns home as soon as possible. She is a symbol of filial piety, a role model of female heroism. This is the most well-known story of Mulan, a folk ballad *Mulan shi* 木蘭詩 (The Mulan Poem). The date of this poem's origin is still a matter of speculation. Many scholars have chosen a Northern Wei or Tuoba Wei date (386-534) because the emperor is designated as Khan. Meanwhile, some scholars prefer to use the date of the Tang (618-906) when the written record of the narrative ballad appeared in court anthologies, *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 (Poems Collected by the Music Bureau) by Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩. Today, the ballad of Mulan is still taught to children in China and sung in Chinese opera in different dialects. But most people do not know the story as well as they think they do. Besides the ballad of Mulan, there are at least four versions of the Mulan story. My discussion will be a comparison of various versions of the Mulan story and an investigation of the development of the Mulan story.

A *zaju* play, *Ci Mulan tifu congjun* 雌木蘭替父從軍 (A Female Mulan Replaces Her Father and Goes to War), was written by the Ming playwright Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593). As I

will note below, modern critics highly praise this talented and virtuous Mulan. Was Xu Wei a proto-feminist who composed *Ci Mulan* to oppose patriarchal society? We know that *Ci Mulan* was very popular in print in the Ming and the Qing. There are at least seven Ming editions of *Ci Mulan* still in existence.<sup>1</sup> Did *Ci Mulan*, which was widely read, lead only a “desktop” life? Would it be possible for *Ci Mulan* to be staged in the late Ming? Could it be performed at community gatherings for a large audience or in a private setting by household troupes?

Though the story of Mulan was familiar to every household, the authors in the Qing period (1644-1911) continued to add new twists to this old story and create a more complex and intriguing image of Mulan. In *Sui Tang yanyi* 隋唐演義 (Romance of the Sui and the Tang, c.1675; first edition 1695) by Chu Renhuo 褚人獲 (c.1630-c.1705) and *Zhongxiao yonglie qinüzhuan* 忠孝勇烈奇女傳 or *Mulan qinüzhuan* 木蘭奇女傳 (Biography of Extraordinary Mulan)<sup>2</sup>, Mulan commits suicide either to avoid unwanted marriage or display her loyalty to the ruler. *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* 北魏奇史閩孝烈傳 (first edition 1850) by Zhang Shaoxian 張紹賢 challenges the audience by an explicit depiction of Mulan having sex with her husband. When the happily-ever-after stories (*The Song of Mulan* and the *zaju Ci Mulan*) were still around and well accepted by the audience, what is the significance of having Mulan commit suicide as a way out of her difficulties? Why did authors in the Qing depict Mulan as a *lienü* 烈女 or a licentious warrior? What kind of message did these authors send to their audience?

---

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of different editions of *Si Sheng Yuan*, see Liang YiCheng. *Xu Wei de wenxue yu yishu*. 1976. p74-76.

<sup>2</sup> The author of *Zhongxiao yonglie qinüzhuan* 忠孝勇烈奇女傳 or *Mulan qinüzhuan* 木蘭奇女傳 (Biography of Extraordinary Mulan) is unknown. It is suggested that this novel was produced after 1732 or around 1827. See more discussion in the preface of *Zhongxiao yonglie qinüzhuan*. 1990.

## 2.0 MULAN IN XU WEI'S ZAJU PLAY

Wang Jide王驥德 (1542?-1623), a famous drama critic who once studied with Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593), wrote this assessment: “*Si sheng yuan* 四聲猿 (The Four Cries of the Gibbon) by master Xu Wei definitely belongs to the most marvelous writing in the world. The Northern tunes of his *Mulan* and the Southern tunes of his *Huang Chonggu* <sup>3</sup> are even the most marvelous.”<sup>4</sup> What makes this *zaju* play *Ci Mulan tifu congjun* 雌木蘭替父從軍 (A Female *Mulan* Replaces Her Father and Goes to War) so marvelous?

*Mulan* in this *zaju* play was good at martial arts. *Mulan*'s skill in martial arts was an uncommon experience for women in premodern times. In Confucian culture, men were supposed to be strong and aggressive while women's femininity was highly praised. The idea of “*nanyi qiang weigui nüyi ruo weimei*” 男以強為貴 女以弱為美 (a strong man is noble while a delicate woman is beautiful) was prevalent. *Mulan*'s physical strength and martial arts deviated from the gender norms for women stipulated by Confucianism. However, we should keep in mind that *Mulan* is a woman raised in a military family in Northern China. The date of *Mulan*'s origin is still a matter of speculation. However, all accounts agree that she is a northerner. In *Ci Mulan*, *Mulan* is trained in the arts of war from an early age by her father. She is already an

---

<sup>3</sup> Also known as *Nü zhuangyuan cihuang defeng* 女狀元辭凰得鳳 (A Female Top-graduate Refuses a Phoenix-hen and Obtains a Phoenix-rooster). *Ci Mulan and Nü zhuangyuan* are two short plays by Xu Wei collected in his *Si Sheng Yuan*.

<sup>4</sup> Wang Jide, translated and quoted in Idema. *Female Talent*. 1998.p7

accomplished martial expert even before joining the army. In *Weishi* 魏書 (Northern Wei History), a folk ballad *Libo xiaomei ge* 李波小妹歌 (The Song of Libo's Little Sister)<sup>5</sup> in the biography of Li Anshi depicts a general's sister who was good at martial arts. This suggests that in non-Han Wei culture, it may have been common practice that military families in the North train their daughters in the arts of war.

*Ci Mulan* presents a talented woman displaying unconventional qualities. The first act of the play is given over to a demonstration of Mulan's ability. She has been practicing martial arts with her father since childhood. When Mulan puts on military armor, she changes herself to a warrior eager to fight. As a general, Mulan takes the field and quickly and easily captures the bandit chieftain. Mulan sings:

[Sings while pantomiming getting on a horse]

My horse will gallop

To win glory in the battle.

To catch a monkey in the mountain

As its companion in the stable,

And to smash the fox's lair

When I put its bridle.

I am a girl of beauty

Inside the household portal. (Ma, 137)

The image of Mulan is bold and unconventional, therefore, many modern critics have read Mulan as a paean to the talents of women, promoting women's rights to oppose the

---

<sup>5</sup> “李波小妹字雍容，褰裙逐馬如卷蓬。左射右射必疊雙，婦女尚如此，男兒安可逢？” Libo's little sister is called Yongrong. She lifts up her skirt and rides a horse running fast. If she shoots two arrows, both of the arrows must hit the target cleanly. Even if a woman is physically strong, how is it possible to confront their men? Translated by Xiaosu Sun. See in *Wei History, Biography of Li Anshi, Juan 53* 魏書·李安世傳. 卷 53, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1974, p1176-1177.

patriarchal system. For example, in *Zhongguo wenxueshi* (History of Chinese Literature), Luo Yuming notes: “Both *Ci Mulan* and *Nü Zhuangyuan* highlight women’s talents. They challenge the traditional thoughts which regard men highly while despising women.” (264) Chen Fang contends that “women in *Si Sheng Yuan* are not standard images in terms of their looks and behaviors. The composition of such marvelous heroines [Mulan and Huang Chonggu] is sufficient to prove Xu Wei’s thoughts broke with the hegemonic orthodoxy in his days. Strongly praising women’s talent and independent quality, Xu Wei is the biggest rebel, spokesman of women” (Chen, 191).

The play appears to celebrate women’s wisdom and quality. However, viewing Xu Wei as a rebel challenging male-centered culture, or spokesman for women goes too far. “Chinese dramatic representations encode ideological meanings and usually serve to perpetuate a patriarchal ideology, especially in male-authored texts in the premodern era” (Hsiung 74). The idea that Xu Wei rebels against orthodox constructions of gender is absurd, because in fact *Ci Mulan* echoes the Confucian ideal of gender system and female virtue.

What makes Mulan perfectly fit into the Chinese gender system is her female virtue. Mulan’s father is too old to fight, and her young sister and brother are too young to go. Because of love and piety to the family, Mulan takes on this taxing task. In *Ci Mulan*, she buys herself a military outfit even before she informs her parents of her decision, which indicates that she is very determined to go. “When I was a child, I was physically strong and pretty clever too. I used to study both classic literature and martial arts with my father. Now is the time for me to repay him” (Ma, 134). The notion of repaying the kindness of parents is a central Chinese value of filial piety. For example, the legend of Mulian saving his mother from hell demonstrates the great efforts that parents, particularly the mother, have made to feed their children. In return, the

children by all means need to repay their debts in order to be filial even though they might sacrifice themselves by doing so. In *Mother and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*, Alan Cole argues the legend of Mulian stresses the sinfulness of female sexuality, which is embodied as their menstrual blood.<sup>6</sup> “Because of her menstrual bleeding and the pains of parturition, a woman is living in Hell not only after her death but already in this present life” (Idema, 2001: 32). The sin of Mulian’s mother is her lust and desire, so “Mulian is a living evidence of his mother’s sexuality” (Cole, 177). Therefore, the close relation between mother and son is created. Mulian is supposed to save his mother who committed the sin of sexuality while alive and falls into the underworld after she dies.

For parents still alive in this world, the children save them when they are in danger. When we go back to *Mulan*, we find that *Ci Mulan* establishes a relation between father and filial daughter. There is no single line spoken by Mulan’s father alone throughout the play. But there are many lines spoken by Mulan’s mother alone. The father role is either silent or speaks together with the mother role. However, this neither implies that Mulan’s father is out of the picture nor establishes the idea of paternal absence. In fact, I argue that Mulan’s father plays a central part in the unfolding of Mulan’s destiny. We get all the information about the father indirectly from Mulan in her opening narration. Mulan was raised in a respectable family. Her father Hu is well versed in both classic literature and martial arts. He was once an army officer in charge of a huge company. But he is now “worn with age and weakened by illness” (Ma, 135). Mulan’s father continues the patriline by producing one male heir and two girls. He also takes credit for educating his children, as Mulan says he taught her both literature and martial arts

---

<sup>6</sup> See Cole. 1998. p184

when she was little. Being responsible, he cares a great deal about his daughter's future and helps Mulan into an advantageous marriage. Mulan sings:

He [father] finds pleasure in rearing his daughters

And watching us comb our hair.

Seeing us dress up at the mirror,

He is all smiles.

Hearing the sound of a sword fight,

He knits his eyebrows.

He often sighs and says:

I am already near my grave,

And my daughters are not yet betrothed. (Ma, 135)

Mulan becomes a filial daughter who wants to repay her father's kindness even before she leaves her natal family. She fights in war like a man and returns with glory. She brings presents for the sister and the brother who take care of the parents when she is away. In the end, being a filial daughter, she accepts the marriage arranged by the parents. Because the father is filial and virtuous himself, it is quite possible that we are meant to see the father's influence at work in every stage of Mulan's life. Therefore, the story prizes the paternal power over all the rest by depicting a filial daughter, because Mulan is the living evidence of her father's strength and virtue.

The notion that "*nüzi wucai bianshi de*" 女子無才便是德 (women without talents are virtuous) was prevalent in the Ming. Chinese society has long placed virtue above talent for women. Think about those chaste women. They are praised not for their talents, but for their chastity (killing themselves to avoid remarriage). In Mulan's case, virtue and talent are not

mutually exclusive. Her talents, “though not necessarily essential for her, serve as decorative accessories that increase her value in the marriage market” (Hsiung, 80). However, her marriage has less to do with her talent and more to do with her female virtue. Mulan’s virtue rather than her talent has won the admiration of her future husband.

Virginity and filial piety are the ultimate bargaining chips. Before Mulan goes off, her mother warns her of the risk of rape and pregnancy. Mulan promises she will come back as a virgin. She is proud of her purity when she comes back after twelve years:

Though I should not brag,  
I am like true gold that fears no fire,  
Or a lotus that emerges from mud  
Without staining its bud. (Ma, 146)

Xu Wei killed his fourth wife because he thought she was deceiving him. This may help us understand why virginity is highlighted in this play. Hence, this play, instead of exerting pressure against patriarchal rules as the critics above suggest, reinforces the prevailing social values of filial piety and female virginity.

In *Ci Mulan*, Mulan presents her female virtue in terms of her body in many ways. What makes this Mulan so distinctive is she has a pair of bound feet. As soon as Mulan has unbound her feet, she sings:

With great difficulty,  
I took off the heavy stocking.  
It took me many years  
To bind my feet into a pointed shape,  
Like the heads of phoenixes

...

[Speaks]

I have to get married when I come back. What I shall do then? Well, there's no need to worry. My family has a special herbal recipe for foot-binding. I only have to boil the herbs and soak my feet. They will become even smaller than now. (Ma, 135)

Given the fact that *Ci Mulan* was produced in the Ming when footbinding was prevalent, it is not unusual to see how much Mulan cherishes her lotus feet. Footbinding, which remained primarily an elite, upper class practice until the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, was regarded as an honored civilized practice. For girls, a pair of beautiful lotus feet might bring an opportunity for “marrying up” to a big family. The lotus shoes, as material signs, signaled women’s talent, discipline and modesty. “The ideal of Confucian woman was the one who worked diligently with her hands and body, and those who did so were amply rewarded in terms of power in the family, communal respect, and even imperial recognition. The binding of feet created a woman who fit these ideals” (Ko, 15). Therefore, we can understand why Mulan worries when she unbinds her feet. The binding of the feet and the making of shoes “display a woman’s effort and pride; they are testimonies to a woman’s status in a society that valued domesticity and women’s handwork” (Ko, 2001:17). Regarding the “secret recipe,” we of course doubt that it can shrink natural feet back to golden lotuses. But we see how badly Mulan wants her bound feet back in preparation for marriage. And in any case, we see how Xu Wei exerted effort to fit his heroine into a society where the footbinding emblemized feminine virtue.

The opening lines of *The Song of Mulan*, recorded in a court anthology as early as the Tang (618-906), associate Mulan with weaving: “Click, click, click, click. Mulan is at her loom. We no longer hear her weave. Now we only hear her sigh” (Lee, 1). *Ci Mulan* does not begin

with a weaving theme, however, it mentions that Mulan has been weaving at home. When Mulan practices swordplay, she sings:

Not having touched the sword for long,  
I thought I'd lost the skill.  
But holding it in my hands,  
I found it an old friend still.  
My hands are not even shaking,  
Though they are used to weaving. (Ma, 136)

Why does weaving matter in *Ci Mulan*? The embroidered luxury clothes had represented high civilization and symbols of political power since the Shang and the Zhou period; the women who knew how to produce fancy textiles were controlled as slaves.<sup>7</sup> Weaving as traditional *nüigong* 女紅 “womanly work” has always been associated with both family and civic virtue. Spinning and weaving skills taught women to learn “diligence, orderliness and respect for labor, the dignity of a wife and the responsibility of a wife and the responsibility of a subject of the state” (Bray, 242). Domestic textile tasks such as weaving and embroidery were also seen as an exercise in filial piety: “the end product of the women’s labors was shown as warm and delicate cloths that would be used to make new clothes for the patriarch and matriarch each year” (Bray, 243).

With the expansion and commercialization of the textile industry in the Ming and Qing, most elite families abandoned cloth production and supplied their needs through the market. Bray’s study of the illustrations of textile production reveals that women’s role in the textile industry was marginalized as more and more men participated in this industry. There are no men

---

<sup>7</sup> See Bray. 1997. p241

in earlier paintings or woodcuts of textile production while the illustrations in the Ming books show men doing textile work.<sup>8</sup>

When the traditional ideal of “men till and women weave” gradually declined in late imperial China, elite men felt threatened. Rawski notes that elite concern about declining morals stimulated production of morality books, fiction and other works during the late Ming and early Qing, which can be viewed as “an expression of economic changes that created opportunities to quickly raise or depress individual fortunes” (Rawski, 1985:15). Members of the elite were anxious because they felt that women had been distanced from womanly work and thus from female virtue, and they saw this as a serious moral threat. Therefore the elite literati of the late Ming and early Qing made great efforts reviving women’s weaving skills. In the late imperial period, a growing number of morality books criticized women who abandoned needlework. The eighteenth-century conservative Chen Hongmou criticized the spoiled young women in rich families whose maids and concubines did their needlework.<sup>9</sup> In *Ci Mulan*, it is mentioned that before Mulan leaves, her mother says: “I have also put some needle and thread in your bag in case you need them for your armor or uniform” (Ma, 139). Knowing Mulan will disguise herself as a man who will not be able to practice needlework, Mulan’s mother insists on putting needles and thread in her bag. Even though this line seemingly refers to the love and care of Mulan’s mother, we in fact see Xu Wei’s attempt to restore women’s role as weaver, ultimately to promote female virtue. Mulan’s life outside the inner chamber and her temporary role as a man are then symbols of her separation from the ideal of “men till and women weave,” a danger of turning the world up-side-down. However, her final restoration to a woman’s role represents the return of female virtue.

---

<sup>8</sup> See Bray. 1997. p241

<sup>9</sup> See Bray. 1997. p243.

Mulan's future husband Wang Sixun is an official in charge of book editing at court. He has been recognized by the Khan for his superior moral conduct and mastery of classical literature. Could Mulan be a compatible "inner helpmate" for this gifted scholar? It is interesting to note that in the narrative ballad, Mulan is only known for her military talent. Nothing about her literary talent is ever depicted. However, in *Ci Mulan*, Xu Wei portrays Mulan as a talented woman in the arts of *wen* 文 (culture) and *wu* 武 (martial arts). She studies classical literature as well as martial arts with her father. Finally she marries a gifted scholar. Xu Wei's portrait of Mulan as a woman of *wenwu shuangquan* 文武雙全 (good at both culture and martial arts) often has been read as an advertisement of his own unrecognized talent. Xu Shuofang suggests that Xu Wei wrote *Ci Mulan*, and other two plays (*Nüzhuangyuan* 女狀元 and *Kuanggushi* 狂鼓史) around 1558, after he failed eight times to obtain any degree beyond the *xiuca* 秀才 degree. In *Wangming qujia nianpu* 晚明曲家年譜, Xu Shuofang notes that Xu Wei began to practice swordplay and archery when he was only nine years old (57). He displayed his military genius in battles with Japanese pirates that troubled the Southeastern coastal region of the Ming. As an unrecognized expert in calligraphy, poetry, painting, drama and even war in his time, it is not surprising that he projected his dreams onto his character Mulan.

However, I argue that Xu Wei's depicting Mulan as a talented woman in the arts of *wen* and *wu* has another purpose. The marriage between Mulan and Wang Sixun reflects the notion of "companionate marriage" which was very popular on pages of drama and novels in Ming and Qing. As Ko defines it, "companionate marriage" refers to "a union between an intellectually compatible couple who treat each other with mutual respect and affection" (Ko, 1994:179). When Mulan meets her future husband Wang Sixun, she sings:

I've known for a long time

You are a learned scholar noted in court.  
I'm a little embarrassed  
To have just returned from battle  
And laid down my sword.  
You may not find in me  
A good match.  
But I'll enter your world  
And follow your career.  
I won't be like Sun Quan's sister  
Laying weapons in our bridal chamber. (Ma, 148)

Here, Mulan is saying she is more than a physically strong warrior. Though she used to practice swordplay and fight in battle, she is an educated woman, too. Therefore, she is able to enter the emotional and social universe of her future husband. Obviously she is a good match for this gifted scholar. Inspired by the cult of *qing* 情, Ming drama “prompted a new ideal of the respectable housewife: an inner helpmate who was at once an adept manager and her husband’s soul mate” (Ko, 1994:181). Xu Wei’s depiction of Mulan echoed the trend of romanticizing and idealizing love matches.

Mulan herself fits perfectly in the patriarchal society. She is a filial daughter. No one can criticize her for cross-dressing to save her father. Filial piety is her justification for leaving home. She keeps her virginity when she is out with men. She refuses to accept an official title or stay outside to make a career. She comes back to get married because only marriage can legitimate her. Everything she does is reasonable and good for her family and the society. It’s a story about

a woman who crosses the gender boundary without breaking or threatening the social boundaries.  
That's why she is well-accepted and generates so much popularity.

### 3.0 CI MULAN'S ON STAGE PERFORMANCE

The accepted wisdom suggests that the four-act *zaju* written in the Northern style lost more and more ground in the sixteenth century as long dramatic forms such as *chuanqi* 傳奇, written primarily in southern music, gradually rose. Many *zaju* plays were widely read but never got a chance to be put on stage. It is widely believed that over the sixteenth century, fewer *zaju* were written for actual performance. Though there is no performance record of *Ci Mulan*, I argue that *Ci Mulan* was written with actual performance in mind.

It is believed that Xu Wei's *Si Sheng Yuan* appealed to a wealthy and well-educated audience.<sup>10</sup> It is true that Mulan's songs are elegantly written and poetic diction is often employed. For example, after Mulan bids farewell to her parents, she sings:

We are not far from home yet;  
The Yellow River can still be heard.  
The horse lowers its head  
To point to the distant reeds  
And the wild geese.  
Suddenly, on my armor fall snow flakes;  
The thick parting sorrow  
Thins my peach blossom face.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Idema. *Blasé Literati*. 2004.pxxxviii.

When I think of the thick stitches in my jacket,

Tears fall like pearls on a broken lace. (Ma, 139)

Xu Wei used the poetic phrase “thick stitches” calling to mind a familiar notion of maternal love in these lines by poet Meng Jiao 孟郊 (751-814): “The thread from a loving mother’s hand/Is now in the jacket of her traveling son. Thick and close are her stitches/For fear of his late return” (Ma, 150). Xu’s allusion gives a new twist to this conventional poetic phrase: “from Meng Jiao’s mother-oriented love to Mulan’s filial thought toward her mother, [...] the use of images has certainly intensified and enhanced the overall poetic and aesthetic effect of the lyric” (Yen, 99). Since the people who were quite familiar with literary images such as “thick stitches” were basically educated people, it is possible that *Ci Mulan* was one of the *wenrenju* 文人劇 (literati plays) that might get staged in private settings.

The continuous economic growth throughout the sixteenth century stimulated the emergence of huge private fortunes. As private fortunes increased, more and more elite literati families established private theatrical companies for performances at home. Plays were performed for social occasions or when literati gathered in private settings to display their knowledge or taste in drama. Idema suggests Xu Wei’s composition of *Ci Mulan* reflects the growing popularity of private household troupes established by elite literati families: “These troupes mainly performed for the entertainment of their master and his male friends and will have preferred a repertoire of shorter plays for these private performances, in contrast to the full-length *chuanqi* plays that were performed at community festivals and family rituals for a large and mixed audience” (Idema, 1998: 553).

As playwrights, publishers and audiences, Ming elite literati were the principal promoters of drama activities. Drama as well as other literati activities were well accepted by the Ming

literati, as Katherine Carlitz notes, “largely because they were perceived as having a demanding intellectual tradition” (2005: 270). Carlitz’s study of Ming drama publishing demonstrates that it was the *jinshi*進士 holders and the non-*jinshi* holders with strong literati connections who were the most widely published. Moreover, degree-holding was positively correlated with the number of published works: the higher degree holders, the more published works.<sup>11</sup> Wang Anqi’s study of Ming *chuanqi* theater reveals that the Ming literati who established private theatrical companies were mainly *jinshi* holders. It was not until the Qing that the new rich merchants were major participants in the drama world.<sup>12</sup>

As *zaju* gradually became a sophisticated dramatic form performed at the court, “the nature of the audience may also have influenced the contents of these shorter plays and the way in which their action was staged” (Idema, 1998: 553). The audience expected not only elegant music and lyrics, but also enjoyment of visual aspects such as action or comic scenes that bring liveliness to a play.

In *Ci Mulan*’s case, the second act involves a battle against the bandit chieftain Leopard’s Skin:

Officers and soldiers: General, we are near the enemy’s camp now.

Xin [the commanding general]: Give orders to light the cannon! <sup>13</sup>[Cannons boom]

Xin: Recall the troops and go back. (Ma, 142)

The stage direction for Mulan’s fight with the bandit chieftain is only one line: “The bandit chieftain gets into the battle three times. Mulan charges out and captures him 淨扮賊首三出戰 木沖出擒介” (Ma, 142). Could it be possible to put actual fighting on stage? I believe that

---

<sup>11</sup> See attested editions and author information for *chuanqi* included in the late Ming anthology *Liushi zhong qu* 六十種曲(Sixty plays) by Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599-1659), cited in Carlitz. 2005. p270-272.

<sup>12</sup> See Wang. 1986. p99.

<sup>13</sup> Ma’s translation is incorrect. The Chinese character is 砲 which indicates that this artillery uses stones rather than gunpower.

even though the stage direction is short, there could be a long three-round, exciting performance showing Mulan's acrobatic fighting with the enemy. Putting such a fight on stage works to create an image of talented Mulan who really can fight. Given the fact that Mulan is physically talented as she demonstrated her skills in the first act, it is hard to imagine that there was no actual performance showing her excellent martial arts skills in battle.

Moreover, the typical Ming dramatic battle scene is different from the battle scenes of Yuan *zaju*. In *Mingren Zaju Xuan* 明人雜劇選 (An Anthology of Ming Dynasty *Zaju* Plays), Zhou Yibai 周贻白 contends that one of the distinctive characteristics of Ming *zaju* stage art is martial arts/fighting performance in war stories. He notes that in Yuan *zaju*, it was rare to present an actual fighting performance on stage. It was impossible to perform a battle between two troops in Yuan *zaju*, even though a fight between two characters was practical and manageable. The fight performance in drama could be traced back to Chinese ancient martial arts such as *jiaodi* 角抵 or wrestling that was popular in the Song and Yuan dynasty. Small combat between two characters could be found in plays such as Yuan *zaju* *Liuqian bingda dujiaoniu* 劉千病打獨角牛 (The Sick Liu Qian Beats the Unicorn Bull).<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it was still impossible to perform a big fight scene involving too many people. In Yuan *zaju*, whenever a big battle was involved, it was standard to get a minor character to play the *tanzi* 探子 (spy) role, briefly describing what he had seen at the field in a couple of lines. Or it was not unusual to use a flashback by a major character such as a general to describe the enemy general or battle array. Therefore, the action scene in Yuan *zaju* was never active or lively because it was substituted by an indirect narration.

---

<sup>14</sup> Yuan *zaju* produced by an anonymous author. For a discussion of the fight scene, see Zhou Yibai. *Mingren zaju xuan*.1985. P746-748.

In the early Ming period, the narration done by the *tanzi* role had more details about what happened at the field. The *tanzi* role told or even sang about characters' clothes, facial expression and so on. Fewer and fewer battle scenes were narrated by the *tanzi* role while staging an actual fighting scene was more standard in late Ming *zaju*. Ming *zaju* such as *Qitian dasheng* 齊天大聖 (Monkey King) and *Nao tongtai* 鬧銅臺 (A Fight at the Tongtai)<sup>15</sup> presented battle scenes by *caogu huizhen* 操鼓會陣 (drum and formation). Because more performers were involved in a parade and the drum music was deep, loud and strong, they created a vivid and bustling battle scene.<sup>16</sup>

In *Ci Mulan*'s case, there is no *tanzi* role describing Mulan's fight with the bandit chieftain, or a flashback by the general role. Therefore, I infer that there could be an actual performance of a three-round fight between Mulan and the bandit chieftain. The actual performance could be long and exacting with breathtaking acrobatics and booming cannons as background sound. *Ci Mulan*, "using the idea of scene developed from *chuanqi* dramatic form" (Zhou, 747), presents an actual fighting performance instead of the narrative by minor roles. The shift from oral narration to actual performance indicated that *Ci Mulan* could be written with an eye to actual performance.

The text of *Ci Mulan* in *Xu Weichang San Ji* 徐文長三集 published in Wanli 22 (1594) has a special stage direction at the end. The text is followed by a *yinshi* 音釋 (musical direction).<sup>17</sup> Besides the directions for tones, keys, and pronunciations, the *yinshi* begins with a stage direction:

---

<sup>15</sup> For these two plays by anonymous authors, see Zhou, Yibai. *Mingren zaju xuan*.1985.

<sup>16</sup> See Zhou, Yibai. *Mingren zaju xuan*.1985. p748.

<sup>17</sup> *Ci Mulan* in *Shengming zaju* 盛明雜劇 published in the Chongzhen era was illustrated, but it didn't have a *yinshi*.

Whenever Mulan practices the weapons or changes clothes and shoes, the performer needs to perform excellent kicking and jumping acrobatics. To avoid the confusion, the performer should sing only after each action has been performed...凡木蘭試器械換衣服須絕妙踢腿挑打每科打完方唱否則混矣...<sup>18</sup>

The dressing and undressing scenes are inevitable for *Ci Mulan* because the climax of the play occurs when Mulan changes her identity by changing her costumes. The first act of the play is given over to Mulan's practicing of martial arts and costume exchanging. She performs sword and spear dance, bow-drawing and getting-on-horse-pantomiming. Moreover, she unbinds her lotus feet and put on a man's clothes and an army cap. In the second act, when Mulan returns home, she needs to change back to her girl's dress. It has been suggested that scenes of dressing and undressing could present serious stagecraft challenges. However, writing with an eye to performance, Xu Wei had kept these challenges in mind, so he put explicit stage directions in the texts. Idema contends that the cross-dressing scenes in *Ci Mulan* introduced something new to performance: "dresstease"—changing clothes on stage. The actress who plays the heroine does not go off stage to change clothes; instead, she may change costumes on stage, "in full view of a select (male) audience" (Idema, 1998: 563).

When Mulan is with her fellow soldiers, there is a moment when the fellow soldiers joke about Mulan's strangeness: "this brother Hua is so strange, he never lets us see him shit or pee. 想起花大哥真稀罕，拉溺也不教人見" (Ma, 144). The stage direction in the Wanli edition says: "once Mulan finishes one piece of singing, she may dismount and say 'I am going to buy things' or 'I am going to relieve nature' before she goes off stage每木唱一曲完即下馬入內雲

---

<sup>18</sup> Translated by Xiaosu Sun. For the Chinese text, see Xu Wei. *Ci Mulan* in *Xu wenchang sanji*. 1968.

俺去買麼麼或明雲解手。”<sup>19</sup> It is obvious that Xu Wei created such scenes with a purpose. Since the audience knew more than the soldiers about Mulan’s real identity, then the punchlines “I am going to relieve nature” might make the audience laugh and then add more comic spirit to the performance.

The *zaju* form was originally singing-oriented with little weight given to acting/speaking parts. Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680) remarks that “high-status principal characters express themselves in songs, while the low-status minor ordinary characters merely speak 白雪陽春其調 而巴人下裏其言者.”<sup>20</sup> The term *binbai* 賓白 indicates that the speech, playing a “guest” role, is subordinate to the singing part. The Yuan playwrights concentrated on the singing part while paying little attention to the speeches by the minor characters. Some scholars suggest that the Yuan playwrights never wrote *binbai* 賓白. The speeches in *Selected Yuan Plays* 元曲選 are not reliable, since the speeches could be the improvisations done by the minor characters at performance or made by the editors.<sup>21</sup>

The Ming *zaju* playwrights also tended to balance between singing and speaking as they attempted to make very noticeable speeches. The speaking part in *Ci Mulan* stands out because the language is witty and sometimes even earthy. For example, the dialogues between Mulan and her mother are extremely common:

Mulan: Mother, my father is supposed to enlist. Why isn’t he going? 娘, 爺該從軍怎麼不去

Mother: He is too old to go. 他老了怎麼去得

---

<sup>19</sup> Translated by Xiaosu Sun. For the Chinese text, see Xu Wei. *Ci Mulan* in *Xu wenchang sanji*. 1968.

<sup>20</sup> Li Yu, quoted in Xu Zifang, *Ming zaju shi*. 2003. p91

<sup>21</sup> See Xu Zifang, *Ming zaju shi*. 2003. p90-91.

Mulan: Then, my sister and brother. Can they enlist? 妹子兄弟也就去不得

Mother: Are you insane? Don't you know how old they are? How can they go? 你瘋了他倆多大的人去得

...

Mulan: Look at your child now. Am I ready to go? 似孩兒這等樣兒去得去不得

Mother: [...] But you are a girl. When you travel with your fellow soldiers for thousands of miles, eating and sleeping together, there comes a moment when your you-know-what comes out. That's disgraceful. 你又是個女孩兒千鄉萬裏同行搭伴朝食你保得不露出那話兒麼 這成什麼勾當<sup>22</sup>

Mulan's fellow soldiers tease Mulan when they see Mulan for the first time: "This Hua Hu (Mulan) is a handsome fellow. He doesn't look like an officer, but a catamite. Later we can grab him to serve our needs 這個花弧生的好個模樣兒倒不像個長官是個秣秣明日倒好拿來應應急."<sup>23</sup> As we can see this is the language that we associate with uneducated folk rather than the literati. Why did Xu Wei use such non-literati language if he attempted to compose for a hyperliterate audience? I believe that the use of earthy or even coarse language by ordinary people reflects Xu Wei's idea of *bense* 本色 (literally "true color").

The notion of *bense* can be traced back to Wang Yangming's heart-and-mind philosophy or the notion of *tongxin* 童心 (childlike heart) of Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602) that was prevalent in the Ming literati writing. As Carlitz suggests, the literati use of common language in vernacular drama and novels can be perceived as "a gesture of opposition." The Ming literati were growing

---

<sup>22</sup> Translated by Xiaosu Sun. For the Chinese text, see Xu Wei. *Ci Mulan* in *Xu wenchang sanji*. 1968.

<sup>23</sup> See Idema. *Female Talent*. 1998. p560.

increasingly opposed to the civil service examination system, considering it “a hindrance to true literary cultivation” (Carlitz, 1997:212). For Ming literati, the childlike heart and the notion of *zhen* 真 (the genuine) were part of their weapons to oppose artificial learning and writing. Therefore, the desire to be genuine inspired the writing in vernacular genres. The literati who collected and imitated popular literary forms believed that the voice from the people, the untainted folk, was earthy and genuine. As Xu Wei noted, the voice of the people had more access to genuine emotion. “Whenever this moment in writing comes, earthy language could be used as long as the emotion was sincere or genuine. The more vulgar, the better.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, we are not surprised to find language in *Ci Mulan* that “strikes the common ear and affects the constant heart.”<sup>25</sup>

But we should not assume that *Ci Mulan* would appeal only to educated males. In *Technology and Gender*, Bray cited Tanaka Issei’s study of Ming and Qing local drama. The study reveals that women in late imperial China looked forward to going to plays staged in village and market towns:

Anyone attending a play at the lineage temple would imbibe, through the well-loved tunes, the thrilling pageantry and the breathtaking acrobatics that were part of any dramatic performance, an improving tale of dutiful wives, filial sons and loyal ministers. A play in a market town told subversive tales of romantic love, supernatural powers and martial prowess. The plots often involved cross-dressing heroines, young women who disguised themselves as scholars and passed the examinations with flying colors, or who carried out spectacular martial feats. A village play might carry a message of either kind, depending on whether the farmers’ taste or the landlords’ carried the day (Bray, 145).

---

<sup>24</sup> Xu Wei, quoted in Chen Fang. *Xu Wei jiqi si sheng yuan yanjiu*. 2002. p121. Translated by Xiaosu Sun.

<sup>25</sup> Feng Menglong, quoted in Carlitz 1997. p212

Even though no title was explicitly named, it is not difficult to associate the plots with Xu Wei's famous *Ci Mulan* and *Nü Zhuangyuan*. However, Bray points out that although plays on cross-dressing heroines provided alternative female roles, the freedom of imagination they offered was limited: "a woman could escape the conventional spatial boundaries and role models only by disguising herself as a man, and there were no plots in which a man assumed the dutiful role of a daughter-in-law. Even the most daring heroines left the audience in no doubt that a man's lot in life was the more enviable" (Bray, 145). Given the fact that the story of Mulan was known in almost every household of China, and that the play carried messages that reaffirm the conventional gender roles and Confucian social values, breathtaking acrobatics, as well as earthy and comical lines, then it is hard to imagine that *Ci Mulan* was not advertised in the public, not appreciated by common people, and not staged in community festivals.

#### 4.0 MULAN IN QING DYNASTY NOVELS

Though the story of Mulan was familiar to every household, authors in the Qing period (1644-1911) continued to add new twists to this old story and create more complex and intriguing images of Mulan. In *Sui Tang yanyi* 隋唐演義 (Romance of the Sui and the Tang, c.1675; first edition 1695) by Chu Renhuo 褚人獲 (c.1630-c.1705) and *Zhongxiao yonglie qinüzhuan* 忠孝勇烈奇女傳 or *Mulan qinüzhuan* 木蘭奇女傳 (Biography of Extraordinary Mulan),<sup>26</sup> Mulan commits suicide either to avoid unwanted marriage or display her loyalty to the ruler. *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* 北魏奇史閩孝烈傳 (first edition 1850) by Zhang Shaoxian 張紹賢 challenges the audience by an explicit depiction of Mulan having sex with her husband. When the happily-ever-after stories (*The Song of Mulan* and the *zaju Ci Mulan*) were still around and well accepted by the audience, what is the significance of having Mulan commit suicide as a way out of her difficulties? Why did authors in the Qing depict Mulan as a *lienü* 烈女 or a licentious warrior? What kind of message did these authors send to their audience?

As the title suggests, *Zhongxiao yonglie qinüzhuan* 忠孝勇烈奇女傳 provides an extraordinary Mulan who displays every aspect of a woman's virtue. As a "filial" daughter, Mulan goes to war in her father's stead. She was "brave" enough to fight the barbarians for the

---

<sup>26</sup> The author of *Zhongxiao yonglie qinüzhuan* 忠孝勇烈奇女傳 or *Mulan qinüzhuan* 木蘭奇女傳 (Biography of Extraordinary Mulan) is unknown. It is suggested that this novel was produced after 1732 or around 1827. See more discussion in the preface of *Zhongxiao yonglie qinüzhuan*.1990.

Tang emperor Taizong 太宗. Being a fearless and talented warrior who won many battles, Mulan was rewarded an honorable title “the general of Wuzhao 武昭將軍.” Unfortunately, the emperor was deceived by some slanderers claiming that his reign could be ended by someone of the surname Wu 武. It was believed that the general of Wuzhao was the one threatening the throne.<sup>27</sup> In order to display her “loyalty” to the emperor, Mulan, the “martyr,” committed suicide by literally cutting her heart out. Feeling deep regret, Taizhong honored the deceased Mulan with a title “chastity-martyr princess” and dedication of a shrine in her honor.

Mulan appears as a rather minor character between chapters fifty-six and sixty in *Sui Tang yanyi*. Mulan, depicted as a half-Han Chinese (father was a non-Han Chinese, mother a Han-Chinese) fighting against the Han Chinese, is notably different from the most well-known version. Mulan’s identity as a Han maiden fighting the barbarians is inconsistent, though the central filiality and loyalty motivations are maintained. Idema notes that “only in the final years of the Qing is Mulan turned into a Han dynasty Chinese maiden patriotically fighting the northern Xiongnu.” (2004:679) After Mulan arrived home, she found her little sister Youlan 又蘭 and learned that her father died of illness and her mother remarried. Meanwhile, the Turkish Khan knowing Mulan was a beautiful talented warrior, summoned her to be his concubine. Mulan refused to marry the Turkish Khan and committed suicide.

In both *Zhongxiao yonglie qinüzhuan* and *Sui Tang yanyi*, Mulan’s tragic ending represents Mulan as a chastity-martyr woman who killed herself either to display her loyalty to the ruler or to avoid unwanted marriage. This could be interpreted as an echo of the intensification of the “cult of chastity” in the Qing. “The cult was central to Qing political culture,

---

<sup>27</sup> In history, it is the empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624-705) who took over the throne and established her own dynasty Zhou 周.

making female virtue integral to imperial state building and the civilizing project that legitimated it” (Rawski, 2006:1201).

By the Qing period, the chastity cult had long been a state policy, and the court honored chaste widows who committed suicide to avoid unchaste behavior. Carlitz’s study on female virtue in the discourse of the Ming dynasty shows that stories about women killing themselves to avoid remarriage or serving their bodies to marauding bandits were in local gazetteers, memoirs of literati, illustrated compendiums of exemplary lives, fiction and drama. The stories established a specific genre “whose heroine was young, dedicated to Confucian virtues, and prepared to undergo horrific ordeals in their defense. This Ming genre set the pattern for the Qing, so the broad outlines of the discourse on female virtue changed little over the last half millennium of imperial Chinese rule.” (Carlitz, 1994:102)

The notion of filial piety appears often in Chinese literature, extolling the feats of filial daughters feeding or saving their parents by serving their own bodies. One of the famous stories about sacrificing one’s body for the sake of a parent is the legend of *Guanyin*’s female incarnation as the Princess Miaoshan 妙善 in *The Precious Scroll of Incense Mountain* 香山寶卷. Being a filial daughter, the princess Miaoshan offered her own eyes and arms to be eaten by her father as medicine.<sup>28</sup> Carlitz notes that before the Ming, most stories on filial daughters were about saving their own parents. However, a typical Ming story of a filial woman was about a filial daughter-in-law serving a porridge of her own blood and little finger to the mother-in-law or breastfeeding the mother-in-law,<sup>29</sup> which indicates that “her body was now dedicated primarily to her husband’s lineage.” (Carlitz, 111) In the Qing novels, a woman’s body is

---

<sup>28</sup> See the story of Miaoshan in *Personal Salvation and Filial Piety: Two Precious Scroll Narratives of Guanyin and Her Acolytes*. Translated by Wilt Idema. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> See in *Ming History, Lienü Zhuan*, discussed in Carlitz, 1994. p111-112.

dedicated to the state, and the body is commonly used as a metaphor of loyalty. The core of filial stories has been transformed from saving one's own parents to saving the husband's patriline, and by extension, the country. For example, in *Sui Tang yanyi*, the father figure was even taken out of the picture. Mulan's father died before she came back from the battle field. Mulan's mission was to save the Khan who was surrounded by the Han army. *Zhongxiao yonglie qiniuzhuan* is not very much centered on Mulan saving her father, but on Mulan's loyalty to the emperor.

It is not uncommon for the Han-literati to project their loyalty to the chastity-martyr women. For example, *zaju* play *Hangong Qiu* 漢宮秋 (*Autumn in the Han Palace*) by the Yuan (1280-1368) playwright Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠 retold the legend of Wang Zhaojun 王昭君<sup>30</sup> in a more tragic way. In earlier versions, Zhaojun's story signified the tragedy of exile. However, rather than having Zhaojun marry the barbarian leader in other versions, Ma's story has Wang Zhaojun commit suicide. Ma's adaptation, as Besio suggests, signifies "the idea of a Han woman faced with assimilation into the northern sphere had become more than tragic, it had become unthinkable." (Besio, 275) Threatened by the invading Xiongnu, the Han emperor Yuandi was forced to give up his beloved concubine Wang Zhaojun to Huhanye, the leader of Xiongnu. Yuandi accompanied Zhaojun to the northern border. Asserting her love of Yuandi, Zhaojun threw herself into the river at the border between the Han and the Xiongnu. Given the fact that Ma Zhiyuan lived in the Yuan which was ruled by the Mongols, Wang Zhaojun's loyalist suicide in *Hangong Qiu* has been read as Han-literati sentiment. Wang Zhaojun's suicide has been turned into a model of female chastity for women who "in the years to come, would choose to

---

<sup>30</sup> A palace woman of the Han Dynasty who was given in marriage to the leader of Xiongnu. The legend of Wang Zhaojun could be traced back to the *Han Shu* 漢書. See more discussion in Besio, 1997.

kill themselves rather than risk capture by this next wave of ‘northern barbarians,’” (Besio, 276) and by extension, a symbol of male loyalty to the Han ruler.

If women can resist sexual penetration, China can resist penetration from the barbarians. “Stories of resistance to remarriage and to rape were universally exalted because they dramatized loyalty.” (Carlitz, 1994:113) The portrayal of Mulan as a chastity-martyr woman would fit the intellectual atmosphere of the seventeenth century which had witnessed the Ming loyalists choosing suicide over surrender to the Manchu rulers. In *Zhongxiao yonglie qiniuzhuan*, Mulan cuts her heart out to display her loyalty to the Han Chinese emperor Taizong. Even though Mulan was a half-Han Chinese in *Sui Tang yanyi*, her refusal to marry the Turkish Khan still could be interpreted as her loyalty to China. Hegel argues that Chu Renhuo demonstrated his anti-Manchu sentiments in Mulan’s death scene:

Not showing the least bit of fear, Mulan finished dressing and then went outside to speak to those who had come for her. The orders of your fierce ruler are nothing that we common people would dare to disobey. But I wish you to take me to my father’s grave in order that I may bid him farewell. Only then will I accompany you into the place.” The guard agreed; calling Wu Liang to accompany her mother to the grave, she climbed into the carriage. Mulan bowed four times to the grave mound, wept loudly for a time, then stabbed herself and died. (Hegel, 206)

Chu Renhuo, who had seen the fall of the Ming, displayed his anti-Manchu feeling through his depiction of Mulan a half-Han Chinese woman who “would prefer death by her own hand to serving a foreign ruler.” (Hegel, 206) Hegel suggests Chu’s personal experience may indicate that

Chu Renhuo, who was not an active Ming loyalist, secretly held Ming sentiments.<sup>31</sup> Chu Renhuo's recent ancestors were elite literati trained under the Ming. Chu never served in any official position, nor did he earn any higher degree under the Manchu, which may have been due to his political choice. Hegel argues that Chu Ren Huo's other courtesy names<sup>32</sup> could be allusions to anti-barbarians. The *zi* Jiakuan 稼軒 duplicates the *hao* 號 of Xin Qiji 辛棄疾(1140-1207), a Southern Song (1127-1280) military general fighting against the invading Jurchens 女真, who was also famous for being a patriot poet. Chu's other *zi* Xuejia 學稼, presumably means "learn from [Xin] Jia [Xuan]," and may give a hint of his anti-Manchu sentiments.

Other than Chu's courtesy names and his personal experience, I argue that other evidence in Chu's *Sui Tang yanyi* may demonstrate Chu's anti-Manchu feelings. In Chu's story, Mulan was once defeated and captured by the Han-Chinese female general Dou Xianniang 竇線娘. Compared to other versions in which glorious victory is always on Mulan's side, Chu's version depicts her capture and wretched defeat. Given the fact that in *Sui Tang yanyi* Mulan was a half-Han Chinese fighting against the Han-Chinese, her capture by a Han-Chinese woman is worthy of note. When Mulan was defeated, she was called *jienu* 羯奴 by Dou Xianniang. *Jienu* literally means the barbarian slave, designating the uncivilized barbarians in the Chinese language. The Manchus had intensified *wenziyu* 文字獄(taboo-words-censorship) since the Kangxi reign (1667-1772), therefore, it is sensitive to employ terms such as *yi* 夷, *fan* 藩, *man* 蠻 to designate non-Han ethnic groups or depict the conflicts between Han and the northern ethnic groups such

---

<sup>31</sup> See Hegel. 1981. p206-207.

<sup>32</sup> It was standard for the educated men in ancient times to acquire courtesy names: *zi* 字 and *hao* 號. *Zi* is given upon reaching maturity; *hao* is usually self-selected. For example, Chu Renhuo's *zi* is Jiakuan 稼軒 or Xuejia 學稼, *hao* Shinong 石農. Xin Qiji's *zi* is Youan 幼安, *hao* Jiakuan 稼軒.

as Tujue 突厥 or Jurchens 女真. However, Chu chose to depict the conflicts between Tujue and China and portray the famous heroine Mulan who was easily defeated by a Han Chinese woman.

Mulan even made no effort to resist: “All right, I am willing to surrender. But I have parents living in the North, so please release me. I will come back to serve under your [Han] ruler after I settle my parents at home.”<sup>33</sup> Mulan then revealed her true identity and told the story of going to war in her father’s stead. Moved by Mulan’s filial devotion, Dou Xianniang forgave Mulan and wanted to treat her with respect: “You are such a filial daughter! I did not expect that the bold Northern people would bear such a great filial daughter. I want to respect you with good manners.”<sup>34</sup> Mulan responded: “Your highness [Dou Xianniang], you are as superior as a golden bough with jade leaf, while I am just a low-class fool. I am so grateful for your generosity, how could I dare to expect more from you.”<sup>35</sup> I argue Dou Xianniang accepted Mulan because she felt that the Han Chinese succeeded in spreading their Confucian values among the barbarians. The bold people in the North accepted the notion of filial piety and then became civilized. In other words, it would be possible for Dou Xianniang to see Mulan as a successful example of cultural assimilation. This scene, Dou Xianniang forgiving Mulan because of her filial devotion; a fearless non-Han Chinese warrior becoming humble and obedient when she was defeated by a Han female general, may indicate that Chu’s writing was based on a sense of cultural superiority. Chu Renhuo’s writing on the conflict, even though the setting was disguised in the end of the Sui (589-618), his choice of terms, and the failure of Mulan reveal his feelings of being conquered by the descendants of these non-Han ethnic groups.

---

<sup>33</sup> See *Sui Tang yanyi*. P436. Translated by Xiaosu Sun.

<sup>34</sup> See *Sui Tang yanyi*. P437. Translated by Xiaosu Sun

<sup>35</sup> See *Sui Tang yanyi*. P437. Translated by Xiaosu Sun.

Louise Edwards's study shows that women warriors assume a fighting function in the Qing texts, "the causative and rationalizing moral principles are either filial piety (*xiao*) or loyalty (*zhong*). Each of the women assumes the role of an aggressor, not in response to her own particular goals and ambitions in life, except in so far as the goals and ambitions are to become filial and loyal." (Edwards, 237) In *Sui Tang yanyi*, Mulan obviously fits in this model at the very beginning. However, when Mulan came home from battles, she found that her father had died and mother had remarried. If filial piety is the rationalizing moral principle that enables Mulan to perform as a cross-dressing warrior within the patriarchal society, Mulan's parents cannot justify her extreme behavior in terms of filial piety anymore. Mulan was supposed to go back to her inner chamber, get married and continue her husband's patriline. Unlike the happily-ever-after versions, Mulan in *Sui Tang yanyi* refused to get married. She wanted to stay in the outside world and make her career as a female general. If her loyalty to the Turkish Khan was her appropriate motivation to fight, her surrender to the Han army had already betrayed her Khan, let alone her refusal to marry the Khan. Parental absence and her unmarried status eventually nullified Mulan's fighting function. As a woman who is unable to fulfill filial duty and loyalty, Mulan does not fit into the patriarchal society anymore. As a single woman armed with extraordinary martial arts, she becomes potentially dangerous, a threat to the orthodoxy. Therefore, I infer, Chu Renhuo's choice for Mulan's fate is reasonable: Mulan has to die. She is paying the price for being an extraordinary woman who deviated from the patriarchal society.

Mulan's refusal to marry also could be interpreted as a token of refusal of sexuality. Chinese culture established complex attitudes towards female sexuality. Female sexuality was viewed as sinful and dangerous. Nevertheless, male sexuality continued to be seen as pure, as men take credit for producing heirs to continue the patriline. Ahern's research on the pollution of

Chinese women suggests that menstrual blood is pollution and the dirt of birth is unclean even though it is associated with happy events—births: “Both menstrual and postpartum discharges are unclean, though the quantities of effluvia associated with birth make that event much dirtier. As one of my informants put it, ‘Menstruation is like one-hundredth of a birth.’” (Ahern, 194)

The birth of the historical Buddha is marked as divine: “His [the Buddha] mother dreamed that a white elephant had entered her womb. After ten lunar months, as she strolled in a garden, the child emerged, not by the usual route, but from under her right arm.” (Lopez, 37) This is a story of virgin birth: the mother conceiving and giving birth without sex and blood. However, it’s interesting to see that the mother of the Buddha died seven days after the birth. Why was the mother figure taken out of the picture right after childbirth? We have no definite answer to the death of the mother. However, one possible way to understand it is that the story has been sanitized, sending the message that childbirth is pollution.

Childbirth enables ordinary women to continue the patriline and fulfill the duty of filial piety on one hand, while being associated with the sin of sexuality and the evil rebirth in hell on the other. If childbirth was polluting and dangerous and could possibly condemn a woman to hell,<sup>36</sup> then for women the only way to avoid evil karma was to deny sexuality. “In Buddhist religious systems, one gains merit by renouncing those activities of daily life that are polluting. These renunciations generally involve assuming a vegetarian diet, but they may also include vows of sexual abstinence.” (Sangren, 12) Marjorie Topley’s study shows that there were women in nineteenth-century Guangdong who took vows of spinsterhood and organized themselves into sisterhood. Guanyin 觀音 was “an important inspiration for marriage resistance

---

<sup>36</sup> See the legend of Mulian.

movement in nineteenth-century rural Guangdong.”<sup>37</sup> One may argue that Guanyin sometimes is associated with sexuality. It is true that there are stories of Guanyin appearing in the form of a prostitute.<sup>38</sup> But the point is not getting sexual pleasure. These stories highlight that “whoever had sex with her was said to free from sexual desire forever.” (Yu, 424) Guanyin uses her body to seduce men and later leads them to realize the wisdom of the Buddha. Therefore, sex is just an expedient means of getting enlightenment. The other *bodhisattva* who sometimes is associated with marriage resistance is Mazu 媽祖 (the queen of heaven 天後). Watson suggests that some oral myths of Mazu “contain strong hints that, in addition to her services to male seafarers, she had special relationship with spinsters and other unmarried women.” (297) In some versions of Mazu legend, Mazu killed herself in order to avoid marriage arranged by her parents.<sup>39</sup> *Bodhisattvas* such as Guanyin and Mazu are worshipped as the protectors of mothers and givers of children. They are addressed as mother 媽, or associated with reproduction. However, none of them accepted wifhood or bore a child. “Escape from female pollution requires that a woman’s connection to procreation be denied.” (Sangren, 13) In this way, I also see Mulan’s sexual denial is a way of getting divine power.<sup>40</sup> Guanyin and Mazu and Mulan deny their sexuality in order to empower them through separation from the pollution of childbirth. They get extraordinary divine power from being celibate. In other words, they have detached themselves from childbirth or sexuality, thus, they eventually became divine.

---

<sup>37</sup> Marjorie Topley, “Marriage Resistance in Rural Kwangtung,” see in Sangren, 1983, p12.

<sup>38</sup> See in Yu Chunfang, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara*. 2001, p424.

<sup>39</sup> See Watson, 1985, p297.

<sup>40</sup> In *Biography of Mulan*, Tang Taizong honored Mulan with dedication of a shrine in her honor. Mulan has been worshipped as a deity since Tang dynasty in Henan province. A Mulan shrine could be found in the city of Shangqiu, Henan province.

## 5.0 LICENTIOUS WARRIOR

*Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* 北魏奇史閩孝烈傳 (first edition 1850) by Zhang Shaoxian 張紹賢 challenges the audience with an explicit depiction of Mulan having sex with her husband. Since it seems Mulan had been treated as a chaste woman for centuries, then why did Zhang Shaoxian have this famous heroine suddenly become a licentious woman?

It is suggested that Zhang's story is based on Xu Wei's *zaju Ci Mulan*, as the plots, characters' names and settings are similar to those in *Ci Mulan*.<sup>41</sup> In fact, this novel of forty-six chapters borrows elements from various versions of the Mulan story. For example, a subtle sexual mood was implied in various Mulan story versions. Women's bound feet, other than a symbol of disciplines and female virtue as Ko suggests, have been treated as a symbol of sexuality. Erotic fiction would describe a hero attracted to the heroine because of her tiny feet. The man squeezing women's bound feet are favored images in erotic fiction.<sup>42</sup> The bound feet motif was in both *zaju Ci Mulan* and *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan*. As I discussed before, the play gives many details about Mulan's bound feet and a "secret recipe" that may shrink natural feet back to golden lotuses. In the novel, besides a depiction of Mulan's worries about her unbound feet, there is a description of Lu Wanhua squeezing Mulan's feet in order to check her true identity. In the play, Mulan's fellow soldiers made jokes about her going to bathroom. In the

---

<sup>41</sup> See the preface of *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* 北魏奇史閩孝烈傳. 1990. p1.

<sup>42</sup> See McMahon 1995, p127, p130, p133.

novel, Mulan's fellow soldiers made erotic jokes ever since they met "him." There is this thread of subtle sex sense which can be traced back to previous versions, but the sexualization of Mulan is obviously intensified in Zhang's story as the author depicts Mulan having sex in front of the audience. Moreover, several important changes mark a departure from the previous versions.

Mulan was portrayed as an invincible female warrior who was easily able to defeat many enemies on her own. In this story, armed with magical power, Mulan was able to defeat enemies with ease. She was capable of doing magical military formations and using magical arrows. Fan's research shows that in traditional Chinese military romance, it is not uncommon for female warriors to employ magic. "Female warriors must rely on supernatural powers and magical weapons to outshine their male counterparts." (Fan, 92) Supernatural five-colored stones were employed by Deng Shanyu in *Fengshen yanyi*. The Daoist celestial general Tang Saier in *Nixian waizhuan* could perform magic to predict weather and shorten time.<sup>43</sup> However, I argue that this extraordinary Mulan was different from these female warriors and the Mulan image in previous versions. I argue that in this story, Mulan was no longer invincible; her extraordinary strength was much weakened and her feminine aspects stand out. There are scenes in which Mulan felt sick and even vomited blood after a hard fight with enemy. When Mulan was slandered by the co-general who took credit for her performance, she did nothing to speak out. It is also because Mulan in this story was overshadowed by a male deity—Li Jing李靖, Heaven Pagoda King. Mulan's supernatural power was received from Li Jing who helped Mulan defeat the enemy:

Seeing flying daggers in the air, Hua Mulan started chanting 'Heaven Pagoda King, please help your disciple to destroy the evil daggers and capture the enemy.' After the chanting, Mulan aimed at the flying daggers. Once her

---

<sup>43</sup> See more discussion of female warriors' magical tricks in Fan, 1992.

magical arrow hit a flying dagger, the dagger immediately disappeared. This magical arrow was indeed the celestial dragon that transformed itself to destroy the evil enemy!<sup>44</sup>

In Zhang's novel, Mulan and a young man in her village named Wang Qingyun 王青雲 were engaged before she went to war. A female general Lu Wanhua 卢玩花 fell in love with Mulan whom Lu thought was a handsome young man. Unwilling to tell her cross-dressing story, Mulan was forced to wed Lu Wanhua. At the wedding night, Mulan revealed her true identity. Moved by Mulan's filial devotion, Wanhua forgave Mulan and they became sisters. At the end, Wang Qingyun married both Mulan and Lu Wanhua.

The sisterhood motif was not brand new, because in Chu Renhuo's *Sui Tang yanyi* Mulan also developed a strong bond with the Han female general Dou Xianniang. One may argue that the *ernü gongshi yifu* 二女共事一夫 (two wives serving one husband) in *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* is a new plot, however, I believe that the idea of Mulan and a female general marrying the same husband was implied in *Sui Tang yanyi*. In *Sui Tang yanyi*, Mulan was supposed to deliver a letter for Dou Xianniang to Dou's beloved general Luo Cheng 羅成. After Mulan committed suicide, Mulan's little sister Youlan 又蘭 delivered the letter in Mulan's stead. Finally, Luo Cheng married both Dou Xianniang and Youlan who could be interpreted as a part of her sister Mulan. What makes *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* so different from other versions is its final scene, an explicit sex depiction of the husband making love with Mulan and Wanhua. McMahon notes that "The classic romances are devoid of descriptions of sex, although they vary in whether or not they allow the unmarried lovers to embrace or hold hands." (McMahon, 104) In

---

<sup>44</sup> See in *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* p523-524. Translated by Xiaosu Sun.

chaste romance, “female heroes traditionally cannot be shown having sex. True heroines must be chaste; even their male counterparts must know self-control.” (McMahon, 126) It is this sex scene that changes the tone of *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* from the seemingly “chaste romance” to the “erotic romance.”

McMahon suggests that the chaste romance or classic, beauty-scholar romance is about a couple (sometimes a man and two women) who “represent the best in intelligence, looks, and moral character that civilization has to offer.” (McMahon,103) Their love follows the arrangement of the parents and matching the wealth and rank of the two families. Similar to other happily-ever-after versions, it seems Mulan in *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan*, did not break orthodoxy. As a filial daughter, she gets married after fulfilling her filial duty. Mulan and Wang Qingyun were engaged according to the arrangement of their parents. Mulan, Qingyun and Wanhua indeed all embody the best in intelligence, looks, and virtue. At this point, the story of two beautiful and talented women becoming co-wives of the hero seems to fit into the category of chaste romance.

As for polygyny, according to McMahon’s standard of chaste romance, the wives are equal in the chaste two-wife romance. While in erotic romance, “the polygamist’s women split among themselves the superior features of the monogamist’s chaste wife; that is, one wife might be intelligent, another beautiful, and a third valiant.” (McMahon, 104) In Mulan’s case, I argue that Mulan and Wanhua are not equal. Mulan and Wanhua once had a discussion on their status in this polygamist marriage. In order to repay Wanhua’s generosity, Mulan persuaded Wanhua to marry her fiancé Wang Qingyun as the first wife. Wanhua responded: “We cannot break the rules of hierarchy. According to common rules, you are engaged to Mr. Wang so that you should be his wife. Besides, you are older than me, therefore, I shall be his concubine instead of his

wife.”<sup>45</sup> Regarding their family background, beauty, and intelligence, Mulan is no better than Wanhua. However, Mulan is superior to Wanhua in terms of her female virtue as Mulan possessed an honorable title: the lady of first-class *jiexiao* 節孝一品夫人; Wanhua was honored as the lady of *zhongyi* 忠義夫人. In the sex scene, the husband made love with Mulan at first and then with Wanhua, which implied Mulan’s superior status.

Portrayal of sex details of married couples in literature has been regarded as pornography. Confucian ideology established negative views regarding unmarried and married couples seeking too much sexual pleasure. Young people’s sex out of wedlock has been viewed as dishonor. As Mencius said:

When a man is born his parents wish that he may one day find a wife, and when a woman is born they wish that she may find a husband. Every parent feels like this. But those who bore holes in the wall to peep at one another, and climb over it to meet illicitly, waiting for neither the command of parents nor the services of a matchmaker, are despised by parents and fellow-country men alike.<sup>46</sup>

As for married couples, having too much sexual pleasure is regarded as one of the five unfilial actions.<sup>47</sup> It is because reproduction, as just a way of continuing the family lineage, is more like a family matter than a private matter between the couple. “‘Children appear to be the solution to adult problems that the Chinese take very seriously indeed’, namely continuation of the family line and assured support for parents in old age.” (Bray, 336) As a result married couple’s sexuality, if it’s not aimed at reproduction, is regarded as licentious.

---

<sup>45</sup> *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhua* 1990.p322. translated by Xiaosu Sun.

<sup>46</sup> From *Mencius*, III.B.3. p107-108, translated by D.C. Lau. Penguin Classics, 1970. It was also quoted in the Ming’s *Guifan* 閩範 (Female Exemplars) by Lü Kun 呂坤(1536-1618).

<sup>47</sup> Other unfilial actions are laziness in the use of one’s four limbs; being addicted to gambling and alcohol; being fond of money and selfishly saving money for one’s wife and children; and being fond of bravery and fighting. See in *Mencius, Li Lou* 離婁 (part II), translated by He Zuokang. Beijing: Sinolingua, 1999. p271-272.

Edwards suggests that a sexual theme has long been featured in the literature of woman warriors. “Part of the fictional and dramatic success of the woman warrior lies in her power to titillate the reader is a subtle sexual sense. [...] Significantly; a triangular link between battles, flowers and sexual titillation has evolved within the literary discourse of China.” (Edwards, 249)

In Ling Mengchu 凌濛初(1580-1644)’s *Pai an jing qi* 拍案驚奇, Tang Saier 唐賽兒 was depicted as licentious. She developed a sexual relation with a Taoist priest and later she was murdered by her young lover, whom she kept by her side for sexual pleasures.<sup>48</sup> Van Gulik notes that “Chinese literature often refers to sexual congress as a ‘battle,’ and later sexological and erotic books worked out the details of the coitus as military moves on the battlefield.”<sup>49</sup> In Mulan’s case, Mulan, Wanhua and Wang Qingyun are all military generals, therefore, the sex scene involving three of them is significant. If the motif of bound feet and the erotic jokes in previous versions just provide a subtle sexual mood, then the sexual battle between Mulan and her husband in Zhang’s story sets a high erotic scene. Mulan at this point is becoming a licentious warrior whose sexual power has been realized.

Stories about female warrior are always titillating. The characteristics of these women spending years outside, fighting with extraordinary strength, rejecting the gender order of patriarchal society—make them ideal figures for sexualization. The transformation of Mulan from a chaste heroine to a licentious warrior suggests that people have questioned the chastity of Mulan who had been accepted as a chaste filial woman.

---

48 See more discussion on Tang Saier in Hsu Pi-Ching’s “Tang Saier and Yongle: Contested Images of a Rebel Woman and a Monarch in Ming-Qing Narratives.” *Ming Studies*. Number 56, Fall, 2007.

49 Van Gulik, *Sexual life in Ancient China* quoted in Edwards, 1995, p249.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Looking at the five versions of Mulan story that I discussed above, I believe the evolution of Mulan may tell us about the fascinations of the audience and the fantasies of the authors.

Through the study of *zaju Ci Mulan*, I have questioned the idea that Ming *zaju* were not written with an eye to performance. Xu Wei created scenes that were very entertaining for Ming audiences. In performance, there may have been swordplay, acrobatics and bustling battle scenes, which added more visual aspects to the performance. The play was widely read and may have been staged by household troupes for male audiences in the Ming literati world, who would appreciate its poetic and witty prose. Nevertheless, it may also have appealed to common people, particularly ordinary women who may have watched performances at the community festivals. Xu Wei depicted a female character who crosses the ambiguous gender boundary without threatening the male-centered world. Mulan fits herself into the Chinese gender system by outstandingly representing female virtue. The seemingly unconventional idea of cross-dressing ultimately reaffirms the hegemonic orthodoxy of Xu Wei's time.

My interpretation of three novels on Mulan produced in the Qing shows how complex and intriguing the Mulan story could be. She has been labeled by the Chinese as a patriot heroine, however, she sometimes appears in novels as a non-Han maiden fighting against China. She has been praised as an invincible warrior, but she sometimes could be easily defeated and captured. Mulan's tragic suicide could be interpreted as a symbol of loyalty, which parallels other

evidences indicating the author's anti-Manchu sentiments. Meanwhile, I argue her refusal to marry a barbarian ruler also could be interpreted as her denial of sexuality. Through sexual denial, she either detaches herself from childbirth pollution and then becomes divine; or makes herself potentially dangerous for the patriarchal society and gets killed because of her extreme behavior. As a female warrior, Mulan's sexuality has been questioned as a fun part of a cross-dressing story which is always titillating. Mulan as a cross-dressing heroine has already broken gender boundaries, however, Zhang Shaoxian's story goes beyond that and breaks more boundaries by depicting Mulan having sex in front of the audience. The sexual mood could be sensed in previous versions even though they are somehow veiled. Zhang's story revealed Mulan's licentiousness by depicting a female warrior fighting in war as well as in bed, which ultimately transformed the story from a chaste romance to an erotic romance. Mulan's image has been changed in different contexts as the layers of significance that she represents increased over time. She could be a symbol of filiality, chastity, loyalty and sexuality, or even a symbol of a mixture of all above. Her complex image may fulfill male authors' fantasy of a woman who has it all.

I have little information about the readers of novels on Mulan. However, I infer that only educated people would have access to the more private media—books. Therefore I could not help but wonder what would be the educated people's response to Mulan killing herself or having sex? Would it be possible for an educated female reader to have access to Zhang Shaoxian's story, and then what could be her reaction to the explicit sex scene? This inquiry opens up another area for further investigation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahern, Emily M. "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women." *Women in Chinese Society*. Stanford: Stanford University, 1975. 193-214.
- Besio, Kimberly, "Gender, Loyalty, and the Reproduction of the Wang Zhaojun Legend: Some Social Reminiscences of Drama in the Late Ming." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*. 40.2 (1997): 251-282.
- Bray, Francesca. *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley: University of California, 1997.
- Carlitz, Katherine. "Desire, Danger, and the Body: Stories of Women's virtue in Late Ming China." *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State*. Ed. Christina K. Gilmartin, Gail Hershatter, Lisa Rofel and Tyrene White. Cambridge: Harvard University. 1994. 101-124.
- . "Style and Suffering in Two Stories by 'Liangxian.'" *Culture and State in Chinese History*. Ed. Theodore Huters, R. Bin Wong and Pauline Yu. Stanford: Stanford University, 1997. 277-235.
- . "Printing as Performance." *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*. Ed. Cynthia J. Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow. Berkeley: University of California. 2005. 267-297.
- Chen, Fang 陳方. *Xu Wei jiqi Si Sheng Yuan yanjiu* 徐渭及其《四聲猿》研究. Hongkong: hongda chubanshe, 2002.
- Cole, Alan. *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University, 1998.
- Chu, Renhuo. 褚人獲 *Sui Tang Yanyi*. 隋唐演義. Taipei: Shijie Shuju 世界書局, 1962.
- Edwards, Louise. "Women Warriors and Amazons of the Mid Qing Texts Jinghua Yuan and Honglou Meng." *Modern Asian Studies*. 29.2 (1995): 225-255.
- Fan Pen Chen. "Female Warriors, Magic and The Supernatural in Traditional Chinese novels." *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*. Vol. 2. Albany N.Y.: State University of New York Press. c.1991. 93-109.

- Hsiung, Ann-Marie. "A Feminist Re-Vision of Xu Wei's Ci Mulan and Nü Zhuangyuan." *China in a Polycentric World: Essays in Chinese Comparative Literature*. Ed. Zhang Yingjin. Stanford: Stanford University, 1999. 73-89.
- Hegel, Robert E. *The Novel in Seventeenth-Century China*. New York: Columbia University, 1981.
- Idema, Wilt. "Female Talent and Female Virtue: Xu Wei's *Nü Zhuangyuan* and Meng Chengshun's *Zhen Weiji*." *Ming Qing xiqu guoji yantaohui wenji* 明清戲曲國際研討會文集, ed. by Hua Wei and Wang Ailing. Taipei: Zhong Yang Yan Jiu Yuan, 1998. 549-571.
- . "Blasé Literati: Lu T'ien-Ch'eng and the Lifestyle of the Chiang-nan Elite in the Final Decades of the Wan-Li Period." *Erotic Color Prints of the Ming Period with an Essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty*. Brill: Leiden, 2004.
- . "Evil Parents and Filial Offspring: Some Comments on the *Xiangshan Baojuan* and Related Texts." *Studies in Central and East Asian Religion* 12.1 (2001): 1-40.
- Ko, Dorothy. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth Century China*. Stanford: Stanford University. 1994.
- . *Every Step a Lotus: Shoes for Bound Feet*. Berkeley: University of California. 2001.
- Lee, Jeanne M. *The Song of Mulan*. Arden NC: Front Street, 1995.
- Luo Yumin 駱玉明. *Zhongguo wenxueshi* 中國文學史. Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1996.
- Liang, Yicheng 梁一成. *Xu Wei de wenxue yu yishu* 徐渭的文學與藝術. Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1976.
- Ma, Qian. *Women in Traditional Chinese Theater: The Heroine's Play*. Lanham: University Press of America. 2005.
- McMahon, Keith. *Misers, Shrews, and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction*. Durham: Duke University. 1994.
- Rawski, Evelyn S. "Economic and Social Foundations of Late Imperial Culture." *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. Ed. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn R. Rawski. Berkeley: University of California. 1985. 3-33.
- . Rev. of *Disgraceful Matters: The Political of Chasty in Eighteenth-Century China*, by Janet M. Theiss. *Journal of Social History*. 39.4 (2006): 1200-1203.
- Sangren, P. Steven. "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the 'Eternal Mother.'" *Signs*. 9.1(1983): 4-25.

- Xu, Shuofang 徐朔方. *Wanming Qujia nianpu* 晚明曲家年譜. Vol.II, Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1993.
- Xu, Zifang 徐子方. *Ming zaju shi* 明雜劇史. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003.
- Xu, Wei 徐渭. *Xu Wenchang sanji* 徐文長三集. Taipei: Guoli zhongyang tushuguan bianyin, 1968.
- Yu, Chunfang. *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara*. New York: Columbia University. 2001.
- Yen, Pingchiu. *Proverbs, Songs, Epic Narratives, Folklores of East Asia*. Lanham: University of Press of America. 1997.
- Wang, Anqi 王安祈. *Mingdai chuanqi zhi juchang jiqi yishu* 明代傳奇之劇場及其藝術. Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1986.
- Watson, James L. "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou Along the South China Coast 960-1960" *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*. Ed. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn R. Rawski. Berkeley: University of California. 1985.
- Zhou, Yibai 周贻白. *Mingren zaju xuan* 明人雜劇選. Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1985.
- Zhongxiao yonglie qinüzhuan* 忠孝勇烈奇女傳 or *Mulan qinüzhuan* 木蘭奇女傳 in *Guben xiaoshu jichen* 古本小說集成. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990.
- Zhang, Shaoxian 張紹賢. *Beiwei qishi guixiao liezhuan* 北魏奇史閩孝烈傳 in *Guben xiaoshu jichen* 古本小說集成. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990.