Aspiring to Be a *Da Zhangfu*: Masculinization in Late Imperial Chinese Literature

Zuyan Zhou

ABSTRACT

While Confucianism demands a man's obedience to authority, it also endorses resistance to a dominant power which has become corrupt and degenerate. The virile impulse to preserve one's individual autonomy is developed in the writings of Xunzi and crystallizes in the Mencian persona of the *da zhangfu*, a mettlesome, awe-inspiring hero. Here I trace the resurgence of this Mencian ideal in the Ming in relation to the trend toward masculinization in Ming-Qing literature. While the despotism of the ruling clique led to political defiance, the ideological suppression of the Cheng-Zhu school triggered a new individualism, culminating in the cult of *qing* (passion): these were both functions of the scholars' turn to the Mencian ideal as a model of virility in shaping their identity. I first analyze the valorization of the masculine in Ming thought as shown in the lives and remarks of leading scholars. I then examine how the masculine ideal of the *da zhangfu* serves as a role model in political confrontation, a driving force in the cult of *qing*, and a source of inspiration leading to literary creativity and the development of personal authenticity. Finally I look at the literary *nüzhong zhangfu* ("heroes among women") as a derivative of the Ming/early Qing cult of the *da zhangfu*.

KEY WORDS

da zhangfu
Mencius
authenticity
nüzhong zhangfu
qiefu zhidao
masculinization
literary innovation
qing

In recent decades, with the introduction of feminist theory, the complexity and subtlety of gender issues in late imperial Chinese literature has fascinated scholars both in China and abroad and engendered growing scholarship in the Ming-Qing field. In this essay I will interpret the literati's compulsion to affirm their culturally-suppressed masculinity as a strong psychological impulse to shape their gender stance, and as part of a trend toward masculinization in the literature of the Ming and early Qing periods. I will argue that this impulse to affirm one's masculinity originates from Confucian thinking, where it is most prominently manifested in the Mencian ideal of the *da zhangfu*, a moral paragon in the literati's personal life and a model for characterization in their literary creation.

I will start with an examination of the masculine impulses in Confucian discourse, and then turn to an exploration of the popularity of the Mencian *da zhangfu* in Ming culture as a manifestation of such impulses. I then examine the literati's affirmation of a *da zhangfu* identity in both political conflicts and ideological confrontations as two prominent aspects of the masculinization trend. In the ideological arena I further investigate how the *da zhangfu* ideal stimulates literary innovation and the cult of *qing*. Finally, I will explore the cultural implications of the phenomenon of *nüzhong zhangfu* (heroes among women), a subject much discussed in recent feminist scholarship, in the context of the cult of the *da zhangfu* laid out here. Throughout my discussion historical texts will be used side by side with literary works, in the conviction that the parallels drawn between them will reinforce my interpretation of these issues.

Affirmation of Masculinity in Confucian Thinking

In Confucian discourse a man's gender status is flexible and complex. Although Confucian imperatives regarding filial piety and loyalty inspired Dong Zhongshu (179–104 B.C.) to give men *yin*–"feminine" status in political and familial hierarchies and led Arthur F. Wright to take "submissiveness to authority [and] to the mores and the norms" as salient attributes of the Confucian personality (Wright 8), a true Confucian is always ready to reject his submissive *yin* position when his moral vision prompts him to masculine action.

As means of upholding one's moral vision Confucius not only valorizes the masculine attributes of firmness (*gang*) and fortitude (*yi*) (Confucius 190), but even encourages martyrdom *(shashen chengren*, Confucius 223). The resolution of a Confucian gentleman in pursuit of a worthy cause is so irresistible that, as Confucius remarks, "The commander of the forces of a large state may be carried off, but the will of even a common man cannot be taken from him" (Confucius 119). The hidden strength of a Confucian man is also revealed in his penchant to retreat from the court in resistance to political decadence (Confucius 102), a masculine gesture that the master advocates and exemplifies in his own life.

Of Confucius' disciples Xunzi (fl. 298–238 B.C.) is among the most vociferous in affirming an individual's virile will in defense of autonomous selfhood *vis-à-vis* the degenerate Establishment. In his writings individuality is subsumed under the rubric of morality: "To follow the dictates of the Way rather than those of one's lord and to follow the requirements of morality rather than the wishes of one's father constitute the highest standard of conduct" (Knoblock 3: 251). The need for a militant will in defying power and authority is most clearly stated by Mencius (372–289 B.C.), Confucius' most eminent apostle. Mencius' firm belief in the goodness of human nature underlies his confidence in a man's capacity to be the equal of the sages. Thus in the voice of an unknown person Mencius asks: "They [the sages] are men, I am also a man. Why should I stand in awe of

them?" To reinforce his point he cites the Confucian Yan Yuan's remarks: "What kind of man was Shun [the ancient sage]? What kind of man am I? He who exerts himself will also become such as he [the sage] was" (Mencius 603). It is this conviction in one's moral capacity for sagehood that engenders Mencius' full confidence in the self, in the integrity of one's moral vision and in one's capacity to be a great man (*zhangfu*), which means the capacity to take a more masculine stance in political confrontation. Thus with deep conviction in his moral vision Mencius, in a well-known conversation with King Xuan of Qi, rhetorically justifies regicide by claiming that a tyrannical ruler is a scourge and a scoundrel (Mencius 494). What distinguishes Mencius from his spiritual predecessors is a valor most clearly manifested when he defies power and authority. Courage is thus a virtue constantly praised in his writings. It constitutes a quintessential quality of the *da zhangfu* and a masculinizing agent in the Confucian discourse. In Mencius' personal moral vision, then, assertion of individual autonomy, of autonomous selfhood becomes a fundamental compulsion: "I have not heard of one's principles being dependent for their manifestation on other men" (Mencius 972).

In Mencian thinking a man's courage in adhering to his *own* moral vision constitutes one of the basic components of manhood, and he expresses this view in gendered terms. To convey his feeling about men's lack of "authenticity" (authentic selfhood) he labels their submissive compliance and slavish demeanor "the way of the concubine" (*qiefu zhidao*, Mencius 650). To those petty-minded men who subordinate state welfare to personal interest, he applies the term *xiao zhangfu* (little men, Mencius 597); for the ideal (masculine) man he uses the Confucian term *da zhangfu*. This means a "great man" with an impeccable moral outlook and indomitable will power. The moral fiber of such a Confucian man-as-moral-paragon is so strong that he is "above the power of riches and honors to make dissipated, of poverty and mean condition to make swerve from principle, and of power and force to make bend" (Mencius 651). Although a modern feminist may revolt at Mencius' apparent valorization of the male over the female in the gendered terminology that he adopts, *qiefu zhidao*

and *da zhangfu* are rhetorical terms almost exclusively used by Mencius and later Confucians in reference to men's, not women's, positions in cultural and political conflicts. While they may presuppose a certain male-chauvinistic or patriarchal viewpoint, these are essentially the terms of a "gender rhetoric."

In Mencian writings the spirit of the *da zhangfu* is more closely associated with those who are politically disfavored. Mencius' teaching on *da zhangfu* thus provides a powerful discourse for dissidents who are either politically antagonized or culturally alienated. Throughout pre-modern Chinese history the ideal of *da zhangfu* served as a source of inspiration for Confucian scholars in their valiant resistance to power and authority, in defense of an autonomous, independent self. This ideal looms large particularly in times of tyranny and decadence when political despotism and ideological suppression call for men's masculine action. One such period was the Ming and the early Qing, often called the "eve of modern China," when political and cultural confrontation obliged each individual to choose his gender stance—slavishly cowing before the decadent imperial power and orthodox tradition or valiantly rising to challenge the Establishment. Within this cultural matrix, then, there was a rise in Mencius' status, a new cult of Mencian *da zhangfu*, a new valorization of the masculine, a trend toward masculinization both in the literati's personality-construction and in their characterization in literary narratives. It is no coincidence that masculine identity in Ming writings is often described or specified by the term *da zhangfu* while its/his feminine counterpart is often associated with the *qiefu zhidao*—rhetorical expressions that reveal a strong Mencian influence.

Mencian *Da Zhangfu* in the Ming Context: A Powerful Inspiration for the Trend of Masculinization

Mencius' appropriation in the Ming is quite dramatic. Though somewhat subdued by a heavy-handed royal purge in the early Ming, the sage remained a powerful inspiration for most scholars in their indefatigable striving for political and spiritual independence.

Mencius' defiance of tyrannical rulers in his famous comparison of the latter to foes and brigands (Mencius 734) easily aroused the hatred of the Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–98), who once issued an edict banning the sage's image from the Confucian sanctuary (Zhang Tingyu 3982). To check the spread of his subversive thinking the emperor ordered a scholar, Liu Sanwu, to compile an abridged version of *Mencius*, purging all the parts that challenge the absolute authority of the sovereign. Yet, despite the ruler's efforts to subdue the militant spirit in Mencius' writings, the assertion of this spirit manifests itself in the response of defiant officials. Braving the risk of death, Qian Tang protested against the emperor's attempt to remove Mencius' image from the Confucian temple, despite Zhu Yuanzhang's open warning against such protests. Sending his death-defying challenge to the emperor Qian declared: "If I die for Mencius, I will die in glory" (Zhang Tingyu 3982). In placing himself "above the power of force to make bend," Qian proves himself a *bona fide* Mencian *da zhangfu*, an icon he apparently worshiped and one with whom he was even ready to identify through martyrdom.

Throughout the Ming dynasty Mencius exerted a tremendous impact on literati culture. Opening Huang Zongxi's (1610–95) famous intellectual history *Mingru xuean* (Case studies of the Ming Confucians), one is impressed by the ubiquitous presence of Mencius' name in the literati's speeches. Confronted with the increasing despotism of the court, Ming scholars apparently saw a source of moral strength in Mencius, whose paragon of the *da zhangfu* served as a fountainhead of virility, of masculine energy for them in their resistance to political tyranny and ideological suppression. Thus when Chen Xianzhang (1428–1500), a distinguished pioneer of the School of the Mind, read of the "celestial people" (*tianmin*) in *Mencius*, spiritual brothers of *da zhangfu*, he at once saw in them a role model (Huang Zongxi 1: 48). Mencius was so venerated and admired that occasionally he was valued even above Confucius himself, as shown in the following remarks of Gu Xiancheng (1550–1612), a distinguished leader of the Donglin Party:

> Master Cheng in the Song dynasty said that Mencius' contribution to Confucianism was beyond description. Confucius only preached benevolence, but Mencius talked about righteousness on top of benevolence whenever he spoke. Confucius only discoursed on human will, but Mencius preached nourishing the potent passion nature. This is a tremendous contribution to Confucianism. (Zhang Xuan 2: 254)[1]

In *Mencius* the "potent passion nature" is presented as something "firm and great" (Mencius 530). Subordinate to human will (Mencius 528) it is a product of the "accumulation of righteous deeds" and an "assistant of righteousness" (Mencius 530). The kindred terms of "righteousness" (*yi*) and "potent passion nature" *(haoran zhiqi*) are associated with such qualities and concepts as "will power," "strength of character," "sense of justice," "fortitude" and "endurance," attributes that generally describe a man's masculine personality. Mencius' contribution, therefore, amounts to nothing less than the masculinization of Confucian discourse.

It is this masculine vein in Mencian thinking, as personified by the Mencian hero *da zhangfu*, that appeals most to the Ming scholars when the mounting political despotism called for their resolute action. As Ying-shih Yu's study indicates, Neo-Confucianism underwent a fundamental transformation from quietism to activism in the Ming, philosophically stimulated by Wang Yangming's emphasis on the "unity of knowledge and action." Political decadence had reached such a degree that it was no longer possible to contain the Confucian impulses to reorder the world in the realm of ideas: action had to be taken to remedy the world (Yu Ying-shih 117–19). Under such circumstances scholars must have felt an urgent need for a spiritual buttress in formulating their gender stance, and they instinctively turned to the Mencian model of the *da zhangfu*. Their fascination with masculinity and desire to be a *da zhangfu* are probably nowhere more distinctly spelled out than in the following remarks of Luo Yifeng (fl. late fifteenth century), an official during the Chenghua regime (1465–87) who declined official appointment and took seclusion after his

interference in court politics spelled disaster for his career.

> I am virile by nature, hence I am attracted to masculine souls. Such attraction is hard to explain in words, like the feeling of a hungry and thirsty man when he longs for food. If I cannot get such a man as my permanent companion, I respectfully befriend him. We converse on world affairs since the ancient time and I am all attention until out of admiration and adoration I shed copious tears. My worship for virility comes from my nature. Confucius says: "I have never seen a virile man." Mencius says: "I am skillful in nourishing my vast, potent passion nature. It is exceedingly great and exceedingly strong; it fills up all between heaven and earth. With such a nature one is above the power of riches and honors to corrupt, of poverty and mean conditions to make swerve from principle, and of power and force to make bend. Such a man of utmost sincerity and utmost virility may be called a *da zhangfu*." What I worship most is the "virility" in Mencius' words. (Huang Zongxi, *Mingru xuean* 30)

The Mencian *da zhangfu* that Luo praises here is nothing less than a truthful portrayal of his own personality (Huang Zongxi 30). Presenting a strategy for the emperor when taking an imperial examination, he cited a famous line from the Song Neo-Confucian pioneer Cheng Yi (1033–1107): "During the day a ruler should devote more time to meeting his ministers; he should spend less time with eunuchs and his consorts." When a court official endeavored to remove the second part of the line to avoid offending the emperor, Luo insisted on keeping it for its cautionary effect. In his life he never echoed others' words or bent in his will to achieve a goal. His uncompromising rectitude and strength of character led Huang Zongxi to rank Luo side by side with Wang Yangming (1472–1529) and Fang Xiaoru (1357–1402) as a leading scholar of the Ming.

To a certain extent, Luo Yifeng's personal cult of masculinity is shared by many Ming scholars; they express their gender preference in a variety of ways, all pointing to the valorization of the masculine. As

if to project his unbending will and moral rectitude, Hai Rui (1514–67) chose a gender-specific title, "Peak of Strength" (Hai Gangfeng), for himself. Commenting on the writings of his brother Huang Zonghui, Huang Zongxi remarks: "His works are pregnant with *yang* energy that envelops heaven and earth. When the *yang* energy is restrained, confined by the *yin*, it strikes and transforms itself into thunder; when the *yin* energy is restrained, engulfed by the *yang*, then wind is generated" (Huang Zongxi, *Huang Zongxi quanji* 10: 12). The valiant Confucian Yang Jisheng (1516–55) can be taken as the personification of "political masculinity" with his death-defying protest against the treacherous official Yan Song (1480–1567). Ming history records that before he was subject to a flogging in the court somebody offered Yang a giant snake's liver, which was believed to be able to alleviate pain. In declining the offer he said, "I have my own liver. Why should I have the liver of a giant snake?" (Zhang Tingyu 5542). His heroic spirit is dramatized in *A Tale of a Crying Phoenix* (*Mingfeng ji*), a historical play attributed to Wang Shizhen (1526–90), where he is portrayed as somebody "endowed with temperamental virility and a heart as pure as ice" (Wang 16). Echoing the Eastern Jin (317–420) scholar Tao Qian (367–427), Yang chants: "How can I bend my waist for five bushels of grain?" (Wang 16). When blamed by his wife for valuing virility over gentility, he defends his preference in these words: "Virility is essential for the existence of an empire" (Wang 39).

Ming scholars' valorization of masculinity is matched by their antipathy to effeminacy, particularly in political attitude. Derision of political opportunism, toadyism and sycophancy can be frequently seen in the writings of leading scholars, often couched in gendered terms. Disgusted with what he saw in the court, Hai Rui indicated in a memorial to the emperor: "Today big officials with high salaries are inclined to bootlicking, whereas small officials tie their tongues for fear of offending others" (Zhang Tingyu 5930). Elsewhere he writes in disgust: "All the feebleminded officials in the court behave like women" (Hai 634). In the early 1610s after the government had persecuted two intrepid thinkers, Li Zhi (1527–1602) and Monk Daguan (1544–1604), many timeservers kept their mouths shut.

Mocking this political effeminacy, Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) in a letter to a friend paints a highly satirical portrait:

> On such occasions, men are transformed into women. They walk with sidesteps and stand with bowed heads, uttering sweet words and putting on ingratiating smiles. Only thus can they keep their positions. Or they act like the tiny shrimps in the sea, floating or sinking under the sway of others. Only thus will they be praised for their virtues. (Tang Xianzu, *Tang Xiangzuji* 2: 1402)

This abject form of political opportunism is dramatized in *A Crying Phoenix*, where such men are satirized by a clown: "In today's world people conduct themselves like crickets, shutting up their mouths and concealing their tongues. Only thus do they feel safe" (Wang 16). Toadyism is presented in a more malevolent light in the characterization of Cao Wenhua who, in seeking the patronage of the powerful Yan Song, is ready to "suck carbuncles and lick asses" (Wang 11). Such satire appears in more explicitly gendered terms in Kong Shangren's (1648–1718) masterpiece *The Peach Blossom Fan* (*Taohua shan*), where the obsequious villain Ruan Dacheng shamelessly compares himself to a light-footed maiden, "ready to wear powder and rouge . . . to win a glance from the emperor" (Kong 168). Ruan's loss of masculinity, his political and by extension sexual impotence, is conveyed by a revealing nickname: he is addressed as "the soft thing in the pants" (*kuzidang li ruan*), where *ruan* (homophonous with his surname) means "soft" and *kuzidang* means "in the crotch of the pants." In some works such ridicule of political effeminacy develops into a deadly hatred. In the seventh tale of *Shengxiao jian* (*Cutting the Raw Silk*), the hero is so infuriated with the feminine bearing (*cili ciqi*) of the actor who plays the role of the eunuch Wei Zhongxian, that he rushes onto the stage to dispatch this embodiment of emasculation.

Da Zhangfu as a Role Model in Political Confrontation

The Mencian discourse, with its confrontational overtones, proves to be a constant inspiration to the Ming literati-officials when they face mounting despotism in the imperial court. In his own time Mencius posed as an advisor, a councilor, even a teacher of the rulers. His somewhat democratic ideal of a more egalitarian relationship between subject and ruler, once strongly impacting on Song Confucians like Zhu Xi, now influenced Ming scholars in their rejection of their *yin* status in favor of a more independent position in the court.

The scholars' masculine stance in politics finds expression first in their confrontation with and critique of the emperor. A prime case is the life of Fang Xiaoru, a scholar deemed by his contemporaries to be the reincarnation of Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi (Huang Zongxi 1969, 20). Summoned four times by the Yongle Emperor (r. 1403–24) to draft an edict to justify his usurpation, Fang refused to appear in court. When finally forced to go, he put on mourning clothes and wailed in the court. Compelled to write, he brandished his brush and composed the following words in front of the outraged ruler: "Prince Yan [the Yongle Emperor], the villain, usurped the throne." For his unadulterated integrity and political virility he was honored by Huang Zongxi as a "forefather of the Ming scholars" (*xuezu*, Huang Zongxi 244). Throughout the Ming dynasty Fang Xiaoru served as a model *da zhangfu* for scholar-officials in their political opposition and an archetype for literary characterization.

In the late Ming, Fang Xiaoru's masculine stance is matched by Hai Rui (1513–87), whose well-known "On Safety" (*Zhian shu,* Hai 217–21) blames the Jiajing Emperor (r. 1522–66) for many social evils prevalent at the time. Legend goes that before submitting the essay Hai Rui bought a coffin and sent all his servants home in anticipation of the death penalty. Hai Rui exemplifies the moral courage of a *da zhangfu.* His footsteps were closely followed during the Wanli period (1573–1619) by Tang Xianzu (1550–1616), who

embraced political disaster by writing a similar piece, "On Executives and Censors" (*Lun fuchen kechen shu*), which directs its critical barbs at the very top echelon, the emperor not excluded (Tang Xianzu 2: 1275–81).

A self-consciously masculine defiance of royal authority is also celebrated in the literature of this period. In *Investiture of Gods* (*Fengshen yanyi*), a historical novel with possible allusion to Ming politics, two ministers, Du Yuanxian and Mei Bai, lose their lives when remonstrating against King Zhou's sexual debauchery. Their Chinese names mean "primal iron" (Yuanxian) and "plum & cypress" (Mei Bai). Both names have masculine connotations: iron is a common trope for strength, the plum blossom is noted for its will-power in defying the snow, and the cypress is known for the fortitude of its evergreen leaves and hardwood trunk. The two martyrs thus embody the heroic spirit of the Mencian *da zhangfu*, and their affinity with Mencius' thinking is spelled out in the novel by another hero, Huang Feihu ("Huang the Flying Tiger"), who directly quotes Mencius' words when commenting on their martyrdom: "When the prince regards his ministers as the ground or grass, they regard him as a robber and an enemy" (Xu 49).

The literati's defense of their characters' masculine stance in challenging benighted rulers is also seen in Li Zhi's commentary on the classic novel *The Water Margin*. In Li's view all 108 outlaws in Liangshan (Liang Mountain) are in fact paragons of loyalty and righteousness (*zhongyi*) due to their resolution to share rewards and punishments, and to live and die together. With his devotion to the sovereign and his ready embrace of death, Song Jiang is taken as a martyr to Confucian morality (Li Zhi, *Li Zhi wenji* 1: 102). By associating the outlaws with such Confucian virtues as "loyalty" and "righteousness," Li Zhi clearly intends to moralize the rebels' masculine, subversive action against the ruler. A similar endeavor can also be seen in *A Tale of a Sword* (*Lin Chong baojian ji*), a drama by Li Kaixian (1502–68) that is developed from *The Water Margin* and takes clear thrusts at Ming politics. After Lin Chong embarks on the path of rebellion as a consequence of his persecution by the

treacherous minister Gao Qiu and his son, the dramatist puts the following lines in Lin's internal monologue to justify his subversive action: "If a great man (*da zhangfu*) cannot achieve everlasting fame, he should at least seek eternal notoriety. The popular saying certainly rings true that a great man is never free from cruelty (*wudu bu zhangfu*) when you look back at him in the future" (Li Kaixian 2: 49). In justifying political revolt and portraying a rebel as a great man (*zhangfu*), the dramatist affirms the masculine stance in politics that he himself embodies. Though loyalty to the sovereign is never questioned, the challenging of benighted rulers is often glorified in Ming literature as part of the celebration of the masculine stance characteristic of the Ming liberals' gender discourse.

The masculine stance of the Ming *da zhangfu* also finds expression in the Ming literati's defiance of villainous potentates and tyrannical eunuchs, the byproduct of decadent regimes. Yang Jisheng's (1516–55) martyrdom in impeaching the powerful Yan Song (1480–1567) can be viewed as a prominent case of such a gender stance. In the dramatic version of this historical event, *A Crying Phoenix*, the playwright inscribes Yang's political virility in his own body, one armed with "an iron liver and a stone kidney" (*tiegan shidan*, Wang 57). In response to his wife's concern for his safety, Yang defends his position with these words: "A great man (*lie zhangfu*) does not keep his life at the expense of righteousness. An extraordinary man (*qi nanzi*) would devote his life to a worthy cause." It is clear that he is fashioning his identity on the model of the Mencian *da zhangfu*. The Confucian martyrdom that Yang embraces embodies the highest degree of political integrity and moral virility, quintessential virtues of a Confucian hero.

Such virtues are also celebrated in Li Yu's (1611–71) play *A Handful of Snow* (*Yipeng xue*), which dramatizes another scholar's confrontation with Yan Song and his son Yan Shifan (?–1565). Aware of the extreme danger of his mission, Fang Hao carries an ax on his shoulder when he makes his formal complaint about the powerful Yans, a dramatic gesture that shows his determination to lose his head (Li Yu, Yipeng xue 159). The drama ends miraculously with the

emperor's endorsement of Fang's complaint and his punishment of the villains, a dramatic touch that once again celebrates the masculine stance in politics.

A similar confrontation can be found in Li Kaixian's play *A Tale of the Sword*. Though the antagonism presented here is between Lin Chong and the father and son of the Gao family, many critics believe it actually alludes to the Ming scholar's confrontation with Yan Song and his son. The "sword" image of the play's title not only serves as a thematic thread linking plots, it is also metonymically associated with its master Lin Chong and his gender stance. The hero remarks: "The sword is just like my own feet and hands" (Li Kaixian 1: 26). Since he expects to use the sword to "eradicate evils and wipe out villainy" (Li Kaixian 1: 26), the weapon marks his will-power and masculine political standpoint. Lin Chong's wife Zhenniang reminds him of the famous Shangfang Sword of ancient times, which was granted by an emperor to behead a treacherous minister (Li Kaixian 1: 10). Metaphorically Lin Chong's political actions, his repeated protest against evil ministers, turn his own sword into a kind of Shangfang Sword. He believes that there are two kinds of swords: "The brave sword kills only one enemy, the wise sword takes on thousands opponents" (Li kaixian 1: 9). His repeated warnings to the emperor, to the imperious minister Tong Guan and then to the treacherous Gao Qiu clique, serve as a virtual sword pointing at political villainy. When Gao Qiu schemes to lure Lin Chong into his lair in order to frame him, he is trying, in fact, not only to deprive him of his treasured sword but also to suppress his political virility. After many vicissitudes the play ends with the miraculous return of the sword to the hero, with the emperor's endorsement of the execution of Gao Qiu. Through his virile act of rebellion Lin Chong does succeed in turning his treasured weapon into a Shangfang Sword.

Relevant to our gender discussion here is Li Kaixian's adaptation of Lin Chong's tale from Shi Nai'an's fiction. The dramatist incorporates into the earlier fiction two important episodes in Lin Chong's characterization, those describing his impeachment of Tong Guan and Gao Qiu. These added touches, most likely alluding to the

contemporary officials' impeachment of Yan Song and Yan Shifan, drastically reinforce our sense of the hero's masculinity. The image of the sword also undergoes a significant change: at first a piece of false evidence in a frame-up that leads to Lin Chong's arrest, it becomes a highly gendered metonymy symbolically projecting his masculine stance in politics, a dramatic badge of his *da zhangfu* identity. In late Ming and early Qing literature the sword is a highly gendered image widely adopted in the literati's writings (see Zhou 114–17). Li Kaixian's selection of the sword-image for the title of his play reveals a conscious effort to masculinize his hero.

The Ming scholars' valiant resistance to the eunuchs' dominance also contributes to the trend of masculinization in literature. Ming history records quite a number of cases of Confucian officials' refusal to kowtow in front of the powerful head eunuchs, the *de facto* rulers in the court (Huang Zongxi 1969, 70; Zhang Tingyu 2: 1040). The prominent statesman Wang Yangming was flogged in his early political career for attacking the eunuch Liu Jin's (1451–1510) atrocities (Huang, Zongxi, Mingru xuean 81), and the eminent scholar-official Liu Zongzhou (1578–1645) suffered a loss of salary for protesting against the powerful eunuch Wei Zhongxian (1566–1627). In its resistance to eunuch politics the Donglin Party stood out as a prominent force of integrity and virility. Many of its members embraced punishment as a badge of honor, and its leader Gao Panlong (1562–1626) drowned himself in a pond to protest his purge from a ranking position by the diabolical Wei Zhongxian (Twitchett & Mote 766).

We get glimpses of the Donglin Party's masculine political stance against the Wei Zhongxian clique in many Ming literary works. Prominent among them are *A Song of Purity and Loyalty* (*Qing zhong pu*), a drama by Li Yu, and *A Dream of Yin-Yang Realms That Cautions the World* (*Jingshi yin-yang meng*), a novel by Chang'andaoren Guoqing. Both works portray scholars' heroic resistance to the Wei clique due to its arrest of the well-known Donglin Party member Zhou Shunchang (1584–1626). A man of high principle, Zhou was known for his irreconcilable antagonism to

eunuch politics. As a local judge he once arrested and punished the lackeys of the eunuch tax collectors. When a celebrated Donglin member, Wei Dazhong (not related to Wei Zhongxian), was arrested by the Wei clique and passed Zhou's home in Suzhou, Zhou threw a banquet for him, accompanied him in bed for three nights, and then betrothed his daughter to Wei's grandson. Blamed by a petty official for this public affront to Wei Zhongxian, Zhou roared in anger: "Don't you know there are men who do not fear death? Tell Wei Zhongxian. I am the former official Zhou Shunchang." Pointing out a finger he then started condemning the eunuch tyrant (Zhang Tingyu 6353). His defiance eventually led to his arrest and secret execution by the Wei clique.

As a dramatic presentation of Zhou's heroism *A Song* opens with the hero's self-introduction, illuminating his political virility: "[I am] endowed with bones as strong as steel, with a heart as incorruptible as ice" (Li Yu, *Qing zhong pu* 6). The first scene, entitled "In Defiance of Snow," implicitly compares Zhou to the snow-defying Han scholar Yuan An (?–92) and the equally snow-enduring flower plum blossom, a symbol of spiritual masculinity used pervasively in Ming and early Qing literature (see Zhou 81–85, 111–14, 189). Zhou's political virility is most graphically presented in Scene 15, "Angry Condemnation at the Inquisition," where he turns the court into a battlefield and angrily proclaims Wei Zhongxian's crimes in front of the arch-villain himself. Interrupted by the courtiers, he kicks over two tables and beats them with his handcuffs. After his teeth are knocked out, he spits bloods on the faces of his antagonists. Although the scene is largely based on historical fact, Zhou's face-to-face confrontation with Wei is probably a dramatic touch added to highlight his courage in directly challenging the head eunuch.

But Zhou Shunchang is not the only *da zhangfu* figure in this play; both *A Song* and *A Dream of Yin-Yang Realms* devote considerable space to celebrating the heroic action of the Suzhou people against the eunuchs' attempt to arrest Zhou. On the day when the decree of arrest is officially proclaimed, the whole city of Suzhou takes to the street with the people's cry of grievance resounding for

ten miles. A citizen's challenge of the legitimacy of the decree ignites instant rebellion; one official is killed and many are injured. Although the resurgence is ruthlessly suppressed, it demonstrates the "masculine" political stance taken by nearly all the residents of the city, an unusual event in Ming politics.

During the Ming-Qing transitional period the *da zhangfu* spirit manifested itself most clearly in scholars' valiant resistance to the alien regime. Many followed in the footsteps of Emperor Chongzhen (r. 1628–44) and committed suicide in a gesture of martyrdom, although the emperor's own motive for suicide was (of course) hardly a majestic one.[2] Upon the fall of the Southern Ming, Liu Zongzhou fasted for twenty-three days until he died, while Qi Binjia (1602–45) plunged into a pond to embrace death. Arrested by the Qing army after his failed rebellion, Chen Zilong (1608–47) also committed suicide, dying a martyr's death. Participating in an anti-Qing battle at the tender age of fifteen, the celebrated hero Xia Wanchun (1631–47) became a martyr in the following year.

Just as valiant as their actions is the spirit of their writings. Before his execution the precarious hero Xia Wanchun composed these lines in prison to express his ready acceptance of death: "Marching on the road toward death, the hero feels he is taking a splendid journey" (Xia 265). Before committing suicide Qi Binjia put the following lines in his will: "With a smile on my face I enter the nether realm; but my potent passionate nature will remain forever between heaven and earth" (Qi 222). A powerful *yang* spirit thrives in the writings of these heroes who, with their firm commitment to a noble cause and relentless striving for moral integrity, contributed significantly to the increasing political masculization of the period.

Da Zhangfu as an Inspiration for Personal Authenticity

If the Mencian ideal of the *da zhangfu* leads to scholars' virility in political confrontation, Mencian discourse also proves a constant inspiration for the Ming scholars in their struggle for spiritual independence and personal authenticity. Discoursing on the literati's

gender identity the eccentric scholar Wang Gen (1483–1540) remarks:

> One studies to be a teacher, a master and a lord. Let all the world rely on you, and you do not rely on the world. Otherwise you will behave in the way of a concubine (*qiefu zhidao*). (*Mingru xuean* 218–19)

In applying the Mencian term *qiefu zhidao* to describe the mode of "dependence on the world," Wang Gen implicitly gives to spiritual independence the male gender-valuation of the *da zhangfu*. The gender contrast between these two political/ideological positions is delineated in more revealing detail in the following remarks of Li Zhi, though the pejorative image of "concubine" is now replaced by that of a "petty man," and "great men" (*daren*) and "masculine men" (*zhangfuhan*) serve as models of independence:

> Great men protect others, whereas petty men only seek protection. . . . Today most people belong to the protected. . . . At home they seek protection from parents. . . . In the court they seek patronage from the grand secretary. . . . In cultivating sagehood they seek the auspices of Confucius and Mencius. In writing they imitate the models of Ban Gu (32–92) and Ma Rong (79–166). In doing all these they take themselves as real men, while in fact they behave like children. The difference between a great man (*haojie*) and a petty man lies only in whether they give or seek protection. (*Lishi Fenshu Xufenshu* 67)

Li Zhi's disdain for the "petty men" stems from a deep antipathy to their slavish, dependent, feminine mentality which runs contrary to the masculine spirit of late Ming liberal thinking. This independent spirit is valued so highly because it lies behind the late Ming literati's questioning of the absolute authority of ancient sages like Confucius and Zhu Xi. The contrast between the two gender stances is again brought out metaphorically in Li Zhi's examination of his own political/ideological positions before and after the age of fifty-four, at

which time he withdrew from the court:

> Before fifty I lived like a dog. When those in front of me barked at a shadow, I followed suit. . . . But now I do not bark any more. I used to be a dwarf, but in my old age I have turned into a giant. (408)

The "dog" that parrots others' barking is obviously Li Zhi's term for "the way of the concubine," whereas the "giant" (*changren*) here is the Mencian *da zhangfu*, through which he projects his defiant soul. Li seems to deliberately avoid using Mencian terminology, probably as a way to distance himself from an eminent predecessor whom he takes on elsewhere (see Li Zhi, *Cangshu* 519–22).

In late Ming liberals' desire for authenticity, the courage to adhere to one's own vision in defiance of orthodoxy becomes a sign of masculinity, hence a source of dignity, self-respect and self-aggrandizement. In a letter to a friend Li Zhi responds to public criticism of his heterodoxy: "Nowadays the vulgar and the hypocrites all take me as a heretic. I might just as well take myself as a heretic, so that they will not be able to fabricate other artificial names for me. How about that?" (Li Zhi, *Li Zhi wenji* 1: 7). Palpable in these words is a sense of pride in defying the establishment. And such heresy is taken by some of his like-minded friends as the virtue of a great man. In his preface to Li Zhi's radical book *Cangshu* (*A Book to Be Hidden*), his friend Mei Guozhen writes: "Since the ancient times great men always differ in their views from the multitude. . . . My bold-hearted friend Mr. Li is just such a great man. . . . He judges historical figures completely according to his own standards, not in the least affected by the Confucian tradition" (Li Zhi, *Cangshu* 3). Associating anti-conventional stands with a great man's virtue, such a view apparently takes heresy as a sign of masculinity, a quality that makes Li Zhi a *haojie* (outstanding man).

Yuan Hongdao also perceives an association between spiritual independence and masculinity, one which he conveys through the imagery of the Mencian *da zhangfu*. In the following quotation one

can easily catch the sense of the author's integrity and self-respect as he heroically defies conventions:

> A phoenix does not cohabit with ordinary birds, just as a kylin does not stay in a stable with horses. A great man (*da zhangfu*) should conduct himself with utmost freedom, taking delight in his own leisure. How can he follow others in tears and laughter, letting others thread his nose [like an ox] and control his head [like a horse]? (Yuan Zhongdao 2: 756)

The masculine fiber of the late Ming anti-conventional stance is probably nowhere more graphically presented than in Huang Zongxi's portrayal of the comrades of Li Zhi and Wang Gen in the Taizhou school:

> Scholars [in this school] can often fight dragons and snakes with bare hands. . . . They can no longer be bound by the orthodox. . . . They have turned heaven and earth upside down. Before them there was no precedent, after them there will be no equals. (Huang Zongxi, *Mingru xuean* 11)

Late Ming individualistic thinking not only affects the "left wing" of Wang Yangming's School of the Mind, even scholars not ideologically affiliated with this school use gendered terms in affirming their own authenticity. For instance, the well-known scholar Lü Kun (1536–1618) remarks that "The mind is endowed with an unhidden truth; it will not do to impose an idea on it. Even though the tongue is cut off, one cannot blindly parrot others' views" (Lü 17–8).

During the period of the Ming-Qing transition, Chen Que (1604–77) stands out for his masculine standpoint in affirming personal authenticity. Following Wang Yangming's thinking he firmly believes in every man's potential for sagehood (Chen Que 151); he takes on the Confucian authorities when their teachings conflict with his personal beliefs. In "A Debate on 'The Great Learning'" (*Daxue bian*), he challenges the Neo-Confucian masters Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi by

alleging that this classic piece has nothing to do with the ancient sages Confucius and Zengzi, but derives its ideas from Chan Buddhism (Chen Que 552). The validity of such an assertion notwithstanding, Chen's courage in taking on the Neo-Confucian authorities demonstrates a masculine stance and defiant soul typical of his times. In defense of his bold challenge he claims:

> Dao is shared by all the sages, and known to all the ages. It is not one person's private property. If you believe it, preach it. If you doubt it, keep the question in your mind. If it is right, follow it. If it is wrong, go against it. (Chen Que 565)

Commenting on such ideological (indeed "philosophical") defiance, Huang Zongxi writes in his inscription on Chen Que's grave:

> He relies on nobody in his study and is not restrained by any personal concern. He will not echo others if they do not accord with his own thinking, even though ancient sages have set the tone. Therefore, his words often stun the world. (Chen Que 3)

Huang Zongxi highly praises Chen Que's defiant stance, just as he himself expresses similar views in his own writings (Huang Zongxi, *Huang Zongxi quanji* 10: 341). The reason he gives moral support to Chen Que's challenge of Zhu Xi, though he may not fully agree with Chen's view on "The Great Learning," is that, like Chen Que, he apparently sees in the dominance of Neo-Confucianism a restraint on ideological freedom. It is no surprise to find in his writings a complaint about the frequent quotation of Zhu Xi's words in Ming scholars' writings: "Here is a quotation from Zhu Xi, there is also a quotation from Zhu Xi" (Huang Zongxi 1: 48). Late Ming scholars' liberalism is essentially a concerted endeavor to take on the ideological monopoly of the orthodox, and in such an ideological confrontation their own masculine standpoint is thrown into relief.

Da Zhangfu as a Model for Literary Innovation

Ming ideological confrontation also appears in the opposition between two schools of poetics (aesthetics), the Archaist School represented by the "Former and Latter Seven Masters" and the Individualist School represented by the three Yuan brothers. In carving out a space for an innovative new genre, the literature of inner sentiments (*xinling wenxue*), in a literary field dominated by their poetic predecessors, the three Yuan brothers take courage from the discourse of masculinity and pose themselves as *da zhangfu* in literary creation. Emphasizing the expression of self and the realization of individuality, the literature of inner sentiments develops as a result of the emerging individualism of the late Ming, which in turn is influenced by the Mencian conviction in the ultimate integrity of the human soul.

In a well-known episode, when Luo Rufang (1515–88) consulted Yan Jun after he failed to reach spiritual tranquility by suppressing his personal desires, Yan turned to the Mencian theory of the origin of the four moral principles inherent in human feeling[3] and encouraged Luo to follow his nature as a way to spiritual freedom (Huang Zongxi 1969, 227). This inward turning towards personal nature, instincts and impulses, which contributes to the individualistic thinking of the late Ming, owes much to Mencius' thinking. Philosophically, Wang Yangming's influential theory on man's originally "good mind" (good consciousness, *liangzhi*) originates from Mencius' belief in the innate goodness of human nature. According to his disciples, Wang even cast his "hero of authentic will" in the image of the Mencian *da zhangfu*, as shown in the following remarks of Wang Longqi (1498–1583):

> During the Hongzhi (1488–1505) and Zhengde (1506–1521) regimes, my master advocated literary innovation. While Li Mengyang (1475–1531) and He Jingming (1484–1522) started the movement, my master responded and supported them. But later he stayed away from it, and many people felt it a pity. My

> master said with a smile: "If you can write like Han Yu (768–824) and Liu Zongyuan (773–819), you are only a scholar; if you can compose verses like Li Bai (701–762) and Du Fu (712–770), you are only a poet. But if you are determined to study the philosophy of the mind with Yan Yuan and Min Shun as your models, won't it be a supreme enterprise? When you establish a thesis and build a theory, you should get inspiration from your inner soul in defiance of all the world has to say. Only this is the behavior of a *da zhangfu*. To rely on others and to try to imitate them can only be mediocre tricks. (Huang Zongxi, *Mingru xuean* 3: 13)

The Archaist School of the mid-Ming literary movement advocated imitation of ancient styles in reaction to the stagnant writing conventions of the time. Although it aimed at literary reformation, this school went against the individualist spirit emerging in the late Ming. Note the appearance of the Mencian *da zhangfu* in the above passage, which Wang Yangming apparently takes as support for his theory of the originally good mind in his own critique of the Archaist School.

This gendered rhetoric is again picked up by Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) in his discussion of the literature of inner sentiments. In a critique of the archaists' theory that "essays must imitate the patterns of Qin and Han, poetry must follow the model of the High Tang," Yuan writes in a letter to his friend Tao Wangling (b. 1562):

> I recently started reading extensively the poetry and essays of the Song dynasty. . . . Some of them are in fact superior to the writings of Qin-Han and the High Tang. . . . Chinese poetics turned narrow and restrained in the late Tang; it is Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) and Su Dongpo (1037–1101) who rectify it, turning it into a torrential sea. The reason that they did not imitate their predecessors in the Han and Tang is because they were capable of doing so. We cannot blame a great man (*zhangfu*) with the usual attitude of a petty woman. (Yuan Hongdao, *Yuan Hongdao* 2: 743)

The metaphor of the "torrential sea" in Yuan's observation refers to the expansion of possible subjects and the radical innovation in technique in the literature of the Song dynasty. In his valorization of Song writings over Qin-Han and High Tang, Yuan is ostensibly making a subjective judgment on some literary phenomena, but in fact he is issuing a challenge to the literary agenda of the archaists. From Yuan's gender-sensitive perspective his powerful literary predecessors, such as Li Mengyang and He Jingming, resemble "petty women" (*qiefu*) in their slavish adherence to tradition. Only path-blazers such as Su Dongpo and Ouyang Xiu, with their courage to explore virgin literary territory, are honored as *zhangfu*.

But Yuan Hongdao's praise of Ouyang Xiu and Su Dongpo is apparently not without a self-conscious reference to his own age. Like the Song, the late Ming was a time noted for literary innovation. In Yuan Hongdao's writings scholars' boldness in challenging the prevailing literary conventions is often couched in masculine terms, suggesting its inherent virility. Commenting on the writings of Xu Wei (1521–93), a literary genius who refuses to follow the beaten path, Yuan says: "Wenchang's (Xu Wei's title) taste does not accord with the time. In anger and defiance he criticizes all the leaders in the literary arena. His reputation, therefore, never spreads outside his own region. What a pity!" (Yuan Hongdao, *Yuan Zhonglang quanji* 1: 1). It is precisely Xu's literary "eccentricity," his courage in adhering to his personal style or literary "individualism," that strikes a ready cord in Yuan. He firmly believes that Xu's writing, which "rises in defiance of all the decadent conventions of his age [...,] will eventually get a fair judgment in the future" (Yuan Hongdao 1: 2). From Yuan's perspective Xu Wei, like Su Dongpo and Ouyang Xiu in the Song, is a "great man"; Yuan therefore identifies this innovative soul with Li Bai and Du Fu, commonly thought to be the greatest poets in Chinese literature (Yuan Hongdao 3: 41).

In fact, Yuan Hongdao's reverence for Xu Wei reveals the affinity between two kindred souls. As a pioneer of the literature of inner sentiments Yuan, like Xu Wei, is determined to adhere to an "authentic" literary practice. His authentic spirit can be clearly sensed

in the following observation on art and literature:

> A great artist takes as his master objects, not people; a great scholar learns from his own heart, not from Dao; a great poet seeks inspiration from the myriad phenomena in the world, not from his predecessors. (Yuan Hongdao 1: 9)

In his resolve to follow personal instincts and his refusal to be bound by conventions, Yuan is subconsciously molding a masculine identity on the model of the *da zhangfu*. Such a gender stance is clear in the following comments on Yuan Xiaoxiu (1570–1623), his younger brother and a co-champion of the literature of inner sentiments:

> As he grew up his courage became stronger, his observation sharper. He took himself as a great man (*haojie*) and would befriend the great men in the world. . . . As he traveled widely with footsteps reaching half of all the lands, his writings also improved accordingly. Most of his works directly express what lies in his soul, free from the bondage to set patterns and established regulations. He never wrote unless he felt an urge from his heart (Yuan Hongdao 1: 5).

Yuan Hongdao describes his brother's writing as a contrast to that of the archaists, who follow the way of ancient times. The portrait he presents here also mirrors his own identity. Like his brother, Hongdao was also fashioning himself on the model of "a great man" (*haojie*) in his defiance of conventions and his endeavor to originate a new genre in Chinese literature.

Da Zhangfu as a Driving Force in the Cult of *Qing*

In the ideological realm the late Ming liberals' anti-establishment sentiments also find expression in the initiation of the cult of *qing* (passion, emotion, sentiments). While sexual desire is

endorsed in the writings of early Confucians, such as Mencius, it was taken as a dangerous impulse, hence was restrained and suppressed by the orthodox after Neo-Confucianism gained dominance in the Song. Recent scholarship in the West has ably researched the phenomenon of the cult of *qing* (Martin Huang 5–56; Anthony Yu 53–109); here I will put this phenomenon in the context of the trend toward masculinization and look at how the cult of *da zhangfu* influenced the cult of *qing*.

A common approach used by leading Neo-Confucians of the Song to suppress human love is the antithetical treatment of *li* (heavenly principle) and *yu* (human desires). Although the word *yu* can refer to diverse human desires, its immediate connotation is sexual impulse. This dualism is also accepted by the influential thinker and pioneer of the School of the Mind, Wang Yangming, who repeatedly preaches "the purging of human desires and the identification with the heavenly principle" as a necessary means to achieving sagehood (Huang Zongxin, *Mingru xuean* 100, 116, 122, 123, 126). Although in Wang's writings *yu* has a wide range of connotations, it apparently includes sexual desire as a negative element to be purged. The cult of *qing* which affirms the legitimacy of sexual impulses thus runs against both the rigid Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy and the teachings of the influential leader of the School of the Mind. To initiate this anti-hegemonic cult took a great deal of courage; it can therefore be viewed as a part of the trend toward masculinization.

It was certainly brave of He Xinyin (1517–79) to admit in the Ming that "the mind cannot do without desire" (He 40), even though he immediately cautions against an unlimited indulgence in sexual desire. A more radical stand is taken by Li Zhi when he affirms the need to be selfish (Li Zhi, Congshu 3: 32, 544). In the drive to assert one's authentic self, the courage to admit one's sexual desire constitutes for some scholars a quintessential quality of the great man (*nanzihan*). This is shown in the following poem by Tang Yin (1470–1526), "Sitting Silently in Front of the Burning Incense":

In front of the burning incense I sit in silence.

The mouth murmurs, the mind thinks.
Are there malicious plots in the mind?
Are there deceptive words from the mouth?
Only when the mouth matches the heart,
Will true virtues be originated. . . .
The ancients took [food and] sex as human needs,
But people today think it is a shame.
Please sit down and listen to my words:
"All men inevitably are going to die.
A great man (*tangtang nanzihan*) is the one who in death
Can face his living identity without shame." (Tang Yin 15–16)

The courage to be honest in admitting his own sexual desire is taken by Tang Yin as a defining quality of the great man. This suggests the suppressive atmosphere of the time. Such a "manly" quality is also perceivable in the statements of Xia Tingmei (fl. seventeenth century), an obscure farmer who became a member of the leftest Taizhou School. Turning to the Mencian ideal for inspiration in ideological confrontations, Xia remarks:

> To be a *da zhangfu*, one has to follow the authority of one's own mind and act only according to one's authentic will. To be swayed and led by worldly conventions and others' behavior is the way of the concubine. (Huang Zongxi, *Mingru xuean* 6: 78)

It is in the spirit of the *da zhangfu* that Xia goes on to launch the following challenge to the orthodox creeds of his time:

> Who separated heavenly principle and human desires? If you ponder this question, you will find yourself enlightened and confused alternatively. If you are enlightened, human desires are heavenly principle; if you are not enlightened, even heavenly principle becomes human desires. (78)

Questioning the separation of human desires and heavenly principle,

of course, aims at legitimizing the former and laying an ideological foundation for the emerging cult of *qing*. That is why liberal-minded scholars of the late Ming often echo similar views, as shown in the following remarks of Chen Que:

> Zhou Dunyi's (1017–1073) teaching on the elimination of desires is actually Buddhist, although he does not use the name of Buddhism. We Confucians only talk about restraint of desires. In the human heart there is originally no heavenly principle, which can only be seen in human desires. If they are proper, human desires are actually heavenly principles. Without human desires we can hardly speak of heavenly principles. (Chen Que149)

This line of argument with its deliberate blurring of the division between human desires and the heavenly principle presents another case of Chen Que's defiant challenging of orthodoxy. Although the legitimization of human desires, along with the cult of *qing* that it stimulates, sometimes does lead to the over-indulgence of desire and to venereal disease in some scholars, such as Tu Long (1543–1605), and a curtailed life in others, such as the three Yuan brothers, it plays a pivotal role in liberating human love, particularly in the realm of thinking and literature.

While the value of love becomes more widely accepted in seventeenth and early eighteenth century Chinese literature when the cult of *qing* flourished, it took a considerable amount of courage to affirm the value of *qing* when its cult was initiated in the sixteenth century. That is why a scholar like Tang Yin associates masculinity with the courage to admit one's sexual desire. A similar gender position can be found in Tang Xianzu's *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting*), the most influential literary work in the foundation of the cult of *qing*. Among Tang Xianzu's contemporaries more orthodox scholars such as Lü Kun censured the concept of *qing*, while the radical Li Zhi paid a dear price for fueling this new cult: his praise of Zhuo Wenjun, which apparently contributed to the *qing* cult, was considered a "moral crime" and prompted his arrest. Tang's friends also frowned

upon his indulgence in *qing*: one reprimanded him for composing "excessively florid lines" (Tang Xianzu 1999, 2: 1401), and another reproached him for his obsession with drama (Chen Jiru 2: 855). In glorifying *qing* in spite of his friends' attempt at dissuasion and the antagonism of the orthodox, Tang was taking the masculine, confrontational stance of the *da zhangfu*. Anthony Yu uses the phrase "utmost daring" (Anthony Yu 105) in reference to Tang's composition of *The Peony Pavilion*.

To a degree Tang Xianzu's masculine stance is also artistically inscribed in the characterization of his literary heroes and heroines. Although in *The Peony Pavilion* the hero Liu Mengmei emerges at the beginning as a feeble scholar in search of a patron to promote his career, and is symbolically identified with the feminine image of the "willow" (*liu*) through his surname, the play dramatizes the process of his masculinization under the influence of *qing*. After he falls in love with Du Liniang in her ghost form, Liu risks his life in unearthing her corpse (to make possible her spiritual reawakening). In the final scenes, when he confronts Liniang's father Du Bao in the court, Liu virtually acts as Tang Xianzu's mouthpiece, a champion of free love in defiance of conventions; symbolically he identifies with the masculine image of the "plum blossom" (*mei*) inscribed in his name. Similar masculine veins can also be traced in Du Liniang's characterization: her violation of the codes of womanhood in refusing to be confined to her boudoir, her abandoning of her maidenly reserve and adoption of an active, male mode of courtship, and her persistent identification with the heroic aspect of the plum blossom imagery throughout the drama all point to an affinity with the masculine principle (see Zhou 78–81, 84–6). In his characterization of this destined couple, therefore, is projected the dramatist Tang Xianzu's masculine stand, his challenging of the cultural and literary conventions.

The maculinization trend is more prominent in Meng Chenshun's (1600–55) tragedy *Mistress and Maiden* (*Jiao Hong ji*), which dramatizes a more vigorous and heroic defense of free love. In her search for a kindred soul (*tongxin zi*) the heroine Wang Jiaoniang

seals a conjugal pact with her cousin Shen Chun. When their innocent love is crushed by a powerful villain who intends to impose himself on the beauty, the girl commits suicide and the man starves himself to death by fasting. The play ends with the transformation of the two lovers into a pair of mandarin ducks after their joint burial, thus celebrating *qing* in a most lyrical and touching way. In their martyrdom to love and resistance to patriarchal oppression, Shen Chun and Wang Jiaoniang are *da zhangfu*. Their masculine stance, in fact, constitutes an important part of the gender paradigm of the scholar-beauty romances, of which this drama may be taken as a forerunner.

In the scholar-beauty romances that emerge and thrive along with the cult of *qing,* the protagonists are *caizi* (talented scholars) and *jiaren* (beauties), and their masculine nature is shown largely through their confrontational stance in the related realms of politics and ideology. Both in political and ideological conflicts *qing* fuels their combative spirit and (thus) their "masculinity." Following Du Liniang's footsteps, the *jiaren* of this genre often breach the rule of boudoir confinement in their active pursuit of love. Their rejection of the feminine principle is also shown in their courage to resist the intrusions of an ostensibly more powerful patriarchal culture, which often come in the form of an imposed marriage with an ugly villain. In *Yu zhiji* (*A Jade Paper Cover*) the heroine, Guan Tongxiu, wields her dazzling sword in a dramatic show of intended suicide, driving back the attempted sexual advances of the prime minister's son; in *Tiehuaxian shi* (*Romance of the Sword-Flower Immortal*) the chaste courtesan Shui Wusheng carries a sharp knife with her, in order to resist any attempt on her virginity. The masculine gender position that *jiaren* assume in their pursuit of love is also dramatically projected in the male garments they occasionally don in the game of romance, as in *Baigui zhi* (*The Tale of White Jade*), *Yu Jiao Li* (*The Romance of Three Ideal Lovers*) and *Chun Liu Ying* (*A Happy Triangle*).

As a marginal man in pursuit of love, the *caizi* is constantly locked in combat not only with repressive conventions but with powerful villains who covet his lover. As if to test his masculinity,

these romances are often set in the time of a well-known diabolical power, be it Yan Song in the Ming, Jia Sidao (1213–75) in the Song, or Li Linfu (?–752) in the Tang. It is in valiant resistance against the perversity of such figures that the scholar-hero affirms his political virility. The heroes in "A Tale of Mandarin Ducks" (*Yuanyang pu*) and *A Union in a Dream* (*Mengzhong yuan*) both risk deposition to impeach Yan Song. The protagonists in *A Union of Mandarin Ducks* (*Yuanyang pei*), *A Tale of Red Plum Blossoms* (*Hongmei ji*) and *Romance of the Sword-flower Immortals* all take action to combat Jia Sidao. Similar confrontations can be traced to Feng Menglong's collections (Feng 287–311, 533–64). Even after he has entered the bureaucracy the *caizi* may face a gender crisis similar to that of the *jiaren*, when the powerful men above him force him to marry their daughters or to be their homosexual partner. The genre celebrates the *caizi*'s masculine stance in resisting such an imposed *yin* status in marital matters: in *Liangjiao hun* (*Two Ideal Matches*) he resigns from office in protest; in *Fenghuang chi* (*The Phoenix Pond*) he appeals for imperial interference; in *Renjian le* (*Happiness in the Human World*) he flees from confinement by his victimizer, the prime minister, with wit and courage. Both in the games of politics and in romance the *caizi* assumes the role of a *da zhangfu*.

The cult of the *da zhangfu* and the cult of *qing* reinforce each other as two powerful components of late Ming ideological and literary construction. While the ideal of the *da zhangfu* inspires scholars, such as Xia Tingmei, to critique the orthodox tradition in their affirmation of human love, the revalorized *qing* inspires literati to create *da zhangfu* heroes in literature, contributing to the trend of ideological-political masculinization.

The *Da Zhangfu* and His Female Twin, *Nüzhong Zhangfu*

The masculine stance taken by women gives rise to a character-type popular in the writings of late Ming and early Qing, "*nüzhong zhangfu*" (heroes among women). In "deconstructing" this ostensibly pro-feminist image, Western feminist scholarship in recent decades

tends to emphasize its latent conservative connotations. Scholars have suggested that the ideal of "heroes among women" is actually dedicated to accepted social ideals (Zeitlin 130), that it is subservient to a patriarchal cause (Edwards 92), that it implicitly acknowledges male superiority (Levering 150–51). In the creation of this female character-type do literati scholars inscribe patriarchal values? The cult of *da zhangfu* traced here provides us with a cultural context by which to better understand its female twin, *nüzhong zhangfu*. The literati's motivation in creating this character-type may be inferred from the ways in which they adapt the original model from history or the antecedent literature in their re-creation of the image. The changes they make reveal the values or gender stance that they intend to celebrate. Let us now turn to a few well-known *nüzhong zhangfu* for a closer analysis.

Written in 1565, the historical play *A Crying Phoenix* portrays a hero among women, Lady Yang, as a reflection of contemporary politics. In the historical records Yang Jisheng's wife sent a memorial to the emperor offering to die in place of her husband, but her petition was intercepted by Yan Song (Zhang Tingyu 5542). In the play she commits suicide on the execution ground by her husband's side to protest his persecution, thus taking an action that did not happen in her actual life. By making her real-life intended martyrdom a dramatic reality the play adds majesty and heroism to her characterization.

A playwright's manipulation of history for the purpose of masculinizing his heroine is also found in another historical play, Kong Shangren's masterpiece *The Peach Blossom Fan*. A striking feature of this play is its intricately conceived title image: this is a fan which has the heroine's blood splashed on it during her resistance to an imposed marriage. Thus the "peach blossom fan" embodies her heroism and reinforces the masculine stance shown in her earlier rejection of the trousseau sent by Ruan Dacheng. Despite the playwright's claim of fidelity to history in composing this play, the plot is in fact fabricated from a story heard by Yang Longyou's page boy (Kong 5). Similarly, no historical record can verify Li Xiangjun's valiant accusation of Ruan Dacheng and Ma Shiying in the

"Accusation at the Banquet" scene, where she turns a dramatic performance into a political confrontation, identifying herself with the defiant second-century literatus Mi Heng (Kong 161–63). Apparently fabricated by the playwright, the episode again dramatically reinforces the heroic dimension of Xiangjun's character.

Similarly, in Li Kaixian's drama *The Tale of a Sword* Lin Chong's wife Zhenniang undergoes a process of masculinization when the playwright adapts her story from the earlier fiction *The Water Margin*. Originally personifying nuptial fidelity, Zhenniang develops into a hero in the world of politics. She tells her husband of the historical episode of the Shangfang Sword, encouraging him to use his sword to behead treacherous officials. After Lin Chong's arrest she composes a memorial to vindicate his innocence and then risks her life in a suicide attempt in order to make the emperor take her appeal seriously. Facing Gao Qiu's sexual advances she is ready to embrace death rather than yield to humiliation. She is dramatized as such a righteous and intrepid hero that she makes the male general pale before her.

In scholar-beauty romances female masculinization is conceived by male authors with wild imaginations. As a dramatic presentation of gender displacement, cross-dressing is a powerful instrument in such romances. In *Chun Liu Ying* the cross-dressing Miss Bi, pursuing love, is addressed by her lover as a "*nüzhong zhangfu* superior to men" (Nanxuan 133). Seen from the perspective of gender fluidity, the male, active mode of courtship perceivable in Du Liniang's breach of the boudoir confinement rule is here dramatically externalized in the male garments worn on female bodies. The male authors' masculine stance in asserting human desire and nuptial freedom is symbolically projected onto their heroines' male garments.

The above discussion of *nüzhong zhangfu* in *A Crying Phoenix*, *The Peach Blossom Fan*, *A Tale of the Sword*, and the scholar-beauty romances shows a shared inclination on the part of literati authors to strengthen their female characters' gender position in literature. Whether by adapting historical records, incorporating fictional elements into historical plays, expanding plots from antecedent

literary sources or fabricating dramatic plots, the literati authors have made a conscious endeavor to masculinize their female characters. Viewed in the context of the cult of *da zhangfu*, the phenomenon of mushrooming *nüzhong zhangfu* in late Ming and early Qing literature may suggest the literati's inscription of the idealized masculine gender stance in their own perception, in the characterization, of their heroines.

The masculine stance of the *da zhangfu*, then, inspires Ming scholars in their confrontation with the orthodox tradition and imperial power primarily in the closely-related domains of politics and ideology. A gender analysis of this period's female heroes reveals that it is precisely in these two realms that heroines are masculinized by literati into *nüzhong zhangfu*, as shown in Lady Yang's majestic suicide, Li Xiangjun's angry condemnation of the Ruan clique, Zhenniang's (political) protest in the court and the *jiaren*'s (ideological) cross-dressing pursuit of love in defiance of oppressive conventions. These *nüzhong zhangfu* may thus be seen as a derivation of/from the *da zhangfu*, a female species of the male moral model, ideal and paragon. All the adaptation, variation and dramatization aim at masculinizing the heroines, making them *da zhangfu* among women. If the *nüzhong zhangfu*, in their deviation from cultural norms, may still seem to uphold the highest traditional (ultimately patriarchal) ideals, as some feminist critics have suggested, most likely it is because the basic values that constitute the *da zhangfu* identity which lies behind their conception come from the Confucian discourse. In a sense the defiant spirit of the Mencian discourse is assimilated, transformed, and appropriated by some Ming and early Qing scholars in order to create in their works *da zhangfu* and *nüzhong zhangfu* characters who can challenge the decadent aspects of the Establishment, whether imperial tyranny, political corruption or outmoded conventions. In comparison with this form of decadence, *qing*-passion is something fresh, innocent, natural, healthy, pure, original.

Here then we have traced a cultural and historical trend regarding gender roles and positions in pre-modern China. The

tendency to valorize the masculine in the Ming and early Qing was a result of the literati's resistance to political despotism and ideological oppression. As a philosophical basis and stimulus for such a trend, Mencius and his moral paragon the *da zhangfu* gained wide popularity among literati scholars. Transplanted from its Warring States context, the image of the *da zhangfu* became a model and indeed a source of virile energy, dynamic male sexual power in late imperial China; as such it inspired and prompted defiance of the establishment—political, ideological, moral, cultural—on the part of both men and women. The *da zhangfu* ideal lay behind, as model and stimulus, the trend toward masculinization in the literature as well as culture of this period; it invigorated the new cult of *qing*-passion, and inspired scholars in their literary creativity, their narrative and dramatic innovations, as well as encouraging them in their political and ideological confrontations.

NOTES

[1] I want to convey thanks to the University of Hawaii Press for permission to use this and a couple of other translated passages that originally appear in my book *Androgyny in Late Ming and Early Qing Literature.*

[2] For discussions of Emperor Chongzhen's dubious martyrdom, see Zhao 77; Wakeman 47–50.

[3] Mencius presents the four origins of moral principles inherent in human feeling as the followings: "The feeling of commiseration is the principle of benevolence. The feeling of shame and dislike is the principle of righteousness. The feeling of modesty and complaisance is the principle of propriety. The feeling of approving and disapproving is the principle of knowledge" (Mencius 550).

WORKS CITED

Chen, Jiru. "Mudan ting tici." *Tang Xianzu yanjiu ziliao huibian.* Comp. Mao Xiaotong. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986. 2: 855.

Chen, Que. *Chen Que ji.* Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979.

Confucius. "Confucian Analects." *The Four Books*. Trans. James Legge. New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp, 1966. 1–306.

Edwards, Louise. *Men and Women in Qing China: Gender in the Red Chamber Dream*. New York: E. J. Brill, 1994.

Feng, Menglong. *Quanxiang gujin xiaoshuo*. Xiamen: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 1980.

Hai, Rui. *Hai Rui ji*. Comp. Chen Yizhong. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962.

He, Xinyin. *He Xinyin ji*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981.

Huang, Martin W. *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U, 2001.

Huang, Zongxi. *Mingru xuean*. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1965.

_____. *Mingru xuean* (an abridged version). Comp. Miao Tianshou. Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1969.

_____. *Huang Zongxi quanji*. Vol. 10. Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1985.

Knoblock, John. *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Work*. Vol. 3. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988.

Kong, Shangren. *Taohua shan*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1994.

Levering, Miriam L. "Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism." *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*. Ed. Jose Ignacio Cabezon. Albany: State U of New York, 1985. 137–56.

Li, Kaixian. *Lin Chong Baojian ji*. Taipei: Tianyi chubnshe, 1983.

Li, Yu. *Yipeng xue*. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989.

_____. *Qing zhong pu*. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1990.

Li, Zhi. *Cangshu*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962.

_____. *Lishi Fenshu Xufenshu*. Kyoto: Zhongwen chubanshe, 1971.

_____. *Li Zhi wenji*. Comp. Liu Yousheng. Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000.

Lü, Kun & Hong Yinming. *Shenyin yu & Caigen tan*. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000.

Mencius. "The Works of Mencius." *The Four Books*. Trans. James Legge. New York: Paragon Book Repreint Corp, 1966. 429–

1014.

Nanxuan heguanshizhe. *Chun Liu Ying*. Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1985.

Qi, Binjia. *Qi Binjia ji*. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1960.

Tang, Xianzu. *Tang Xianzu ji*. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1973.

_____. *Tang Xianzu quanji*. Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1999.

Tang, Yin. *Tang Bohu quanji*. Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1985.

Twitchett, Denis & Mote, Frederick W. *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol. 8. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998.

Wakeman, Frederic Jr. "The Shun Interregnum of 1644." *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China*. Eds. Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills Jr. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979. 39–87.

Wang Shizhen (attributed to). *Mingfeng ji*. Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1959.

Wright, Arthur F. "Values, Roles, and Personalities." *Confucian Personalities*. Ed. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1962. 3–23.

Xia, Wanchun. *Xia Wanchun ji qianjiao*. Ed. Bai Jian. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991.

Xu, Zhonglin. *Fengshen yanyi*. Taipei: Guiguan tushu gufen gongsi, 1990.

Yu, Anthony. *Rereading the Stone: Desire and the Making of Fiction in Dream of the Red Chamber*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997.

Yu, Ying-shih. "Toward an Interpretation of the Intellectual Tradition in Seventeenth-Century China." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100.2 (1980): 115–25.

Yuan, Hongdao. *Yuan Hongdao ji qianjiao*. Ed. Qian Bocheng. Shanghai: Guji chubnshe, 1981.

_____. *Yuan Zhonglang quanji*. Ed. Yang Jialuo. Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1965.

Yuan, Zhongdao. *Kexuezhai ji*. Ed. Qian Bocheng. vol. 2. Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1989.

Zeitlin, Judith T. *Historian of the Strange, Pu Songling and the*

Chinese Classical Tale. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993.
Zhang, Tingyu, et al. *Mingshi*. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.
Zhang, Xuan, comp. *Xiyuan wenjian lu*. 1632. Reprint. Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1968.
Zhao, Yuan. *Ming-Qing zhiji shidafu yanjiu*. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999.
Zhou, Zuyan. *Androgyny in Late Ming and Early Qing Literature*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2003.