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The Literary Voice of Widow Poets in the Ming and Qing[1]

Chang Kang-i Sun

In the postmodern world, it is difficult to find young widows. But in premodern China, young widows were always an important subject of literature. It is especially interesting to note that widows in ancient literature were usually *personae* created by male scholars. Thus, whenever widows are mentioned, we immediately think of several canonical pieces of "Widow *Fu* Poetry" (*Guafu Fu* 寡婦賦): for example, in Cao Pi's 曹丕 *fu* we read the sigh: "The lives of the people are difficult/ But the orphans and widows are most piteous" (唯生民兮艱危，於孤寡兮常悲);[2] and in Pan Yue's 潘岳 "Widow *Fu* Poem" we feel instead the chill of "Grief harrows my chest/ Tears cross my face and trickle onto my pillow" (氣憤薄而乘胸兮，涕交橫而流枕).[3] The reason that these ancient scholars enjoyed writing about this kind of topic was primarily because they deeply sympathized with the plight of widows who had no one on whom they could rely, but also sometimes used these *personae* to develop their own complaints of being undervalued and misunderstood.

But after the Ming and Qing dynasties - other than the "Widow *Fu* Poem" of He Jingming (何景明, 1483-1521) - we seldom see male scholars writing poetry utilizing widow characters. This is because by the Ming and Qing times, many widow poets themselves had appeared, and among female poets widows occupied a large percentage. Female poets of the Ming and Qing dynasties not only broke the monopoly over the platform of poetry that male writers held, but also shattered the monopoly male writers had over female thoughts and lives. The works of widow poets tended heavily towards personal lyricism, they often developed and expressed their own inner worlds, giving the reader an unequivocal sense of directness and trust. Whether it is in the variety of topics or in the methods of creativity expression, Ming and Qing window poets have contributed greatly to the Chinese literary tradition. This essay attempts to use the perspective of women's voices to introduce the unique characteristics of Ming and Qing widow poets, in order to explore the intertwining relationship between literary tradition and the individual feminine style.

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[1] I am grateful to Victoria Wu (吳禮蘭) for her tremendous help in translation and during the process of preparing this paper. I also owe special thanks to Alec Guojun Wang (王國軍) for locating several reference sources.

[2] For Cao Pi's "*Guafu Fu*", see Yan Kejun, 4: 4a-b.

[3] For Pan Yue's "*Guafu Fu*", see Yan Kejun, 90: 3a-b.

First it must be clarified that in the Ming and Qing dynasties, poems and songs composed by women flourished to a degree never previously achieved. Hu Wenkai's 胡文楷 book, *Lidai Funü Zhuzuo Kao* 歷代婦女著作考 (*A Study on the Works of Women throughout History*),[4] collected the works of 3915 women, most of whom were poets. It is worth noting that in this enormous collection of women, the majority fit into the category of "talented women whose lives were bitter" (in Chinese 才女命薄 "Cainü Mingbo"). They either died young, married unfittingly or became widows early. The 8th *juan* of Shi Shuyi's 施淑儀 *Qingdai Guige Shiren Zhenglue* 清代閨閣詩人徵略 (*Compendium of Qing Dynasty Lady Poets*), for example, collected the works of 165 women, of whom 73 had experienced all kinds of misfortunes. Such a topic holds 44.24% of the contents of the whole *juan*.[5] In summary, tragic fates seem to have almost deliberately befallen these talented women, or we can even say that the reason they became talented women may be related to the tragedies of their lives. From ancient times, both Western and Chinese scholars believed that a poet wrote his or her best work after encountering tragedy. Thus, in his poem-series *Yonghuai Guji* 詠懷古跡 (*Thoughts on Historical Sites)*, Du Fu 杜甫 said that Yu Xin's 庾信 poetry achieved the kind of greatness with the capacity to "shake the country" only in the hard times of "his late years" (庾信平生最蕭瑟，暮年詩賦動江關).[6] The English poet Samuel Butler also pointed out:

> And poets by their sufferings grow
> As if there were no more to do
> To make a poet excellent,
> But only want and discontent.[7]

Among the Chinese talented women with bitter lives, widow poets were the loneliest and suffered the most, and so their literary achievements were also the greatest. Many of them encountered in their youths the widow's dilemma of being unable to go on living, but unable to die. To a traditional woman, to lose her husband was to lose her means of support as well as her identity, and it was hard to avoid a sense of homelessness. Under the influence of the Neo-Confucian school of thought during the Ming and Qing dynasties, society's principles of ethics generally encouraged widows to remain chaste. Particularly if they were wealthy or had a social status, the majority of women who lost their husbands would choose the difficult path of remaining widows. In addition, whether they remained with their husband's families or returned to their parents' homes, widows were often viewed as an extra burden. In this regard, Fang Weiyi (方維儀, 1585-1668), the aunt of the famous Ming scholar Fang Yizhi

[4] Hu Wenkai 1985, revised edition by Zhang Hongsheng, 2008.
[5] See Lu Cao 1993, pp. 77-81.
[6] Qiu Zhaoao, ed. 1979, 17: 1499.
[7] Butler, p. 2.

(方以智, 1611-1671), had such deep feelings: married at seventeen, she was soon widowed and chose to return to her natal family as a widow. And along with her younger sister Fang Weize 方維則, who was widowed at sixteen, she passed the long, slow years together at home. From their poetry, we discover that from the beginning to the end, the two sisters experienced the desolate sense of homelessness. Besides lamenting their bitter lives, Fang Weiyi describes with candor the dejection of depending upon her parents for a living:

> Depending on my parents year after year,
> There are many sorrows in my heart.
> Time passes rapidly, and my hair is about to turn white,
> My chambers are empty, and alone, I pace aimlessly.
> All my life I have hindered by obstacles,
> How can I name them all? [...]
> ("Sorrows of the Heart")
>
> 長年依父母
> 中懷多感傷
> 奄忽發將變
> 空房獨彷徨
> 此生何蹇劣
> 事事安可詳 […]
> (《傷懷》)[8]

Compared to the Han woman Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君, also widowed at seventeen, the Fang sisters did indeed meet with drastically different fates. Young and newly widowed, Zhuo Wenjun was able to remarry the great poet Sima Xiangru 司馬相如, but the romantic elements of her elopement did not meet with criticisms of the later generations. In reality, whenever later scholars described Wenjun's character, they would rather exaggerate her good qualities. If Wenjun had lived during the Ming or Qing dynasties, it would have been highly unlikely for her to have escaped the fate of being a widow for life. Taking the Fang sisters as an example, both lived as widows for nearly 70 years and experienced the bitterness of loneliness. On the other hand, in the long, slow years of widowhood, writing poetry became their true vocation and literary innovation became their redemption.

Through Fang Weiyi, we deeply comprehend the reality of talented women having bitter lives. Her life experiences were indeed tragic: not long after her husband died, her daughter also passed away and so she lost all her sources of affection.[9] In her poem "Parted by Death" (死別離) she made use of a mournful language to describe the loneliness and pain of her inner heart:

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[8] *Wanqingyi Shihui*, 183: 527.
[9] See also Chang 1998, p. 88.

Since times of old we hear of separation;
Who has spoken of partings by death?
Yet whether it be by life or by death —
I face it all alone […]
That under the white sun there can be such torment,
My heart knows well, in vain.[10]

昔聞生別離
不言死別離
無論生與死
我獨身當之 […]
白日有如此
我心徒自知[11]

Compared to the famous lines from *Gushi Shijiu Shou* 古詩十九首 (*Nineteen Old Poems*), "On and on, going on and on/ Away from you to live apart" (行行重行行，與君生別離),[12] this poem manifests an entirely different concept. But the most significant point rests on the essential difference between life and death: in the *Nineteen Old Poems*, the wife, who, longing for her husband, complains about the wanderer for not wishing to return home. Even so, she at least never gives up hope, because as long as her husband still lives, there is the possibility of meeting him again. In comparison, however, Fang Weiyi's "Parted by Death" describes a kind of hopeless emotion: from the very beginning, the writer lets us know the complete hopelessness that death brings us. This is not only the condition of the widow in the poem, but it is also the condition of all widows and all people who lost their loved ones. Between separation in life and separation in death, we can see two kinds of entirely different attitudes towards life, and also taste the extreme differences between the literary images of wives and widows.

In contrast to the widow *personae* poetry composed by scholars of previous dynasties, the poetry written by Ming and Qing widows often conveyed a great deal of information beyond the ken of men. For example, the widow poetry of traditional male scholars is almost universally concentrated on the bitterness of living alone. But, in practice, for many widows, though loneliness is bitter, the difficulty of earning a livelihood seems even more difficult to endure, along with the realities of everyday life. In a traditional society in which women cannot be economically independent, to a woman having no one to rely upon in her life is evidently more frightening than feeling emotionally lonely. For some widows, the difficulties of securing a livelihood were fully expressed

[10] Translated by Paula Varsano, in Chang and Saussy 1999, pp. 286-87.
[11] *Wanqingyi Shihui*, 183: 527.
[12] Watson 1984, p. 96.

in their poetry. For example the famous woman poet Kong Yaopu 孔瑤圃 wrote: "Asleep on my pillow at night I begin to worry if there is sufficient rice for the morrow/ I wake in the chill morning but I have pawned my winter's clothes" (夜枕先愁明日米，朝寒又典過冬衣).[13] These are the widows with talent who are resigned to their fate; they use writing poetry as their only comfort in their difficult lives.

It is noteworthy that not all women who lost their husbands chose to remain widows for all their lives. In certain conditions, after their husbands died, some women were either willingly or forced to be buried with their husbands. Regardless of their reasons for suicide, it can be said that either dying with their husbands or living as widows evolved into the only two choices available for these women at that time. Its importance can be compared to the problem many remaining subjects of the Ming had to face at the end of the dynasty, whether or not to die for their home country. The best example is from Shang Jinglan (商景蘭, 1602-1676), a famous woman poet in the waning years of the Ming Dynasty, who compared the conditions of some widows with that of loyal subjects. After her husband Qi Biaojia (祁彪佳, 1602-1645) died following the fall of his mother country, Shang Jinglan wrote the poem "Mourning the Deceased" (悼亡):

> Your name will be known forever;
> I chose to cling to life.
> Loyal officials are called great,
> Parents who cherish their children are merely human.
> You lived as a righteous official;
> Your epitaph carries your name past death.
> Though the living and the dead walk on different roads,
> My chastity complements your integrity.[14]
>
> 公自垂千古
> 吾猶戀一生
> 君臣原大義
> 兒女亦人情
> 折檻生前事
> 遺碑死後名
> 存亡雖異路
> 貞白本相成[15]

At the beginning of this poem, the writer uses the three words "Chui Qian Gu" (垂千古) to illuminate her feelings regarding her husband's sacrifice for his homeland: Qi Biaojia's decision to live and die with the Ming Dynasty makes

[13] *Mingyuan Shihua*, 3: 139.
[14] Translated by Ellen Widmer, in Chang and Saussy 1999, p. 320.
[15] *Mingyuan Shihua*, 3: 139.

him a loyal subject of excellent character and it is in itself sufficient to keep his good name living forever. In another way, as the wife of a loyal subject, the fact that the poet Shang Jinglan still lives is not due to cowardice, but it is entirely due to the fact that she has sons and daughters who require care. Thus, at the end of the poem, she affirms the principle of "Zhen Bai Ben Xiang Cheng" (貞白本相成): dying for one's country and remaining a widow are both a kind of abnegation worthy of praise. This poem thoroughly expresses an understanding from a woman who has truly experienced the life of a widow. The 19th century female literary critic Shen Shanbao 沈善寶 in her *Mingyuan Shihua* 名媛詩話 praised this poem: "The poem's topic is broad; later people could not achieve its level".[16] But I believe the strength of this poem lies more in its shattering of the image of the traditional woman poet, because it uses the voice of the widow herself: a woman poet, in choosing between life and death, dares to express her desire to continue living and further affirms the meaning of continuing to live. A widow who chooses to live is a conscious choice, an expression of strength, implying a confidence even in facing a difficult life.

From poems and songs we often see the image of the hard-working widow, nightly teaching her son to read by the candlelight. That image of motherhood is both majestic and lonely. For instance, Zong Wan 宗婉, a woman poet widowed young, wrote in her poem "To My Two Sons" (感示兩兒): "Much of my life has been difficult as a mother and as a teacher, classes on the Four Books and Five Classics in the morning, and classes on poetry in the evening" (半生辛苦母兼師，朝課經書夜課詩).[17] Zhang Lingxian 張淩仙, famous for steadfastly remaining a widow, wrote in her poem "Thoughts at the End of the Year" (歲暮感懷) :

> Teaching my son to read before the light,
> The hundred things in my heart push at the waning of the year.
> Ten years after his death all news is gone,
> Wind and snow falls through the empty mountains, this home is cold.
>
> 燈前課子誦芸編
> 百事縈心逼歲闌
> 泉路十年音信斷
> 空山風雪一家寒[18]

This poem movingly describes the heartache and contemplations of a widow teaching her son by candlelight. After her husband dies, the poet takes on the responsibility of teaching her children, and during this chilly season at the end of the year, she cannot help thinking of her own loneliness and helplessness. Other

[16] *Ibidem*.
[17] *Wanqingyi Shihui*, 188: 706.
[18] *Qing Shi Biecai Ji*, 31: 571-572.

than the important duty of teaching her son, she also experiences on a deep level the suffering of "a hundred things" harrowing her heart "at the waning of the year", because there still were numerous chores - such as seeking money, paying off debts, etc. - she needs to resolve on her own, causing worrying and anxiety in her heart. All her helplessness and sorrow is indicated in the word "push" (*bi* 逼) along with the word "cold" (*han* 寒), reflecting the loneliness of a widow's heart.

Like many other widow poets, the lonely and solitary Zhang Lingxian could only use poetry to entertain herself. In her poetry, we can read the drops of contemplation that occasionally trickles out from the everyday life experiences of a woman. Lyricism motivates women to unwittingly transcend the limitations of women's lives. In her *Zayong* 雜詠 (*Miscellaneous Poem*), she evokes this sense of transcendence:

> My home is by the green mountains,
> The green mountains cut off humanity.
> How many times has the vain world risen and fallen?
> The mountains still remain green.
>
> 家住青山側
> 青山斷塵跡
> 浮世幾興亡
> 依舊青山色[19]

From this poem we have learned that the writer lived next to a lonely green mountain. "The green mountains cut off humanity" vividly describes the seclusion of an individual from the outer world, a corner that has been sealed off and forgotten. And so, all human experience seems to have two sides: the sorrowful or the negative side of life can lead to a real comprehension of the positive side, and it is only in this condition of impecuniousness that the poet can truly understand the enduring quality of the green mountain. No matter how often the world rises and falls, or experiences vicissitudes, the green mountains will remain forever; they will not change because of the changes among humanity. Thus, in the loneliness of widowhood, the mountain becomes the only thing on which the poet can rely, as well as the only hope she can have in a lonely and difficult life.

Like the symbolism of the green mountains, the image of the lonely pine tree that appears in this type of poetry often represents the comfort in the heart of the widows. For example, Song Wanxian 宋婉仙, another woman widowed young, took the lonely pine to describe a self-affirming spirit of having passed through a cold frost but remaining proud and unbent. Her "*Gazing at a Mountain in Spring*" (後山春望) states:

[19] See Chang 1998, p. 93.

Trees cover a mountain, a common sight,
I only caress the lonely pine, reluctant to leave.
The deep green touches the sky, the shadow covers the ground,
This pine once endured through the snow and the frost.

滿山春樹尋常見
獨撫孤松未忍回
黛色參天陰覆地
曾經歷盡雪霜來[20]

Shen Shanbao once wrote a critique of the poem, saying: "This is the words of an experienced individual" (真乃閱歷之言). Indeed, no matter how difficult the life of a widow may seem, as soon as she recalls her character's similarity to that of the lonely pine, she can immediately achieve a kind of transcendent emotion, because it increases her hope to keep on living. Some widow poets even develop this into a kind of superiority complex.

This leads us naturally to the aesthetic concept of "Junzi" (君子), a concept popular in the tradition of Chinese literature. From ancient times, the *junzi* have always appreciated the faithfulness that the lonely, cold pine trees represent. No matter how desolate the place, no matter how cold the winter, this kind of tree, so resistant to frost, remains tall and green. So in the chapter "Utensils of Rites" (禮器, *juan* 23) of *The Book of Rites* 禮記, it is written: "The pines also have minds, their leaves and trunks do not change throughout the four seasons" (松柏之有心也，[…]故貫四時而不改柯易葉).[21] Likewise, in "The Biography of Bo Yi" (伯夷傳, *juan* 61) of *The Records of the Grand Historian* 史記, we can read: "It is not until the winter of the year that we realize the pines are the last to wither; it is not until the world is turbid that we see the pure and untainted beings […]" ("歲寒，然後知松柏之後凋。舉世混濁，清士乃見[…]").[22] It can be said that it is a recurring theme in Chinese literature to compare the pine that does not fear the cold or loneliness to an unyielding person of noble character like the *junzi*. Thus, when the Ming and Qing widow poets compared themselves to the tall, clean pines, as well as to other similar evergreen trees, we are witnessing a sort of feminine "ennobling" phenomenon. A widow willing to steadfastly follow the path of life, even in circumstances of personal detriment, is a lonely pine in winter, and at the same time she can also be compared to the strongest *junzi*.

Ever since the May Fourth Movement most people still consider widows to be society's victims, believing that once an individual has turned into a widow she become useless. In reality, to many Ming and Qing women, even

[20] *Mingyuan Shihua*, 2: 97.
[21] Sun Xidan, ed. 1989, 23: 624.
[22] *Shiji*, 61: 2126.

though remaining a widow was difficult, it had also many positive meanings. As long as a woman who has lost her husband considers continuous living as a kind of conscious decision, she can attach a richer meaning to her own life and her family. Though she no longer plays the role of a wife, she can become an even more virtuous and respectable mother competent in responding to the emotional climate of the family as well as the complex network of familial settings. Therefore, she can radically affirm her own self-worth inside the family she belongs to. And it may be because of these various reasons that many Ming and Qing women became capable managers of domestic affairs. They often assiduously handled the affairs of their households for the better part of their lives and finally received their reward in their twilight years: they watched their sons and grandsons passing the provincial imperial exams and becoming officials, as well as helping their sons' wives improve their skills in both domestic and literary affairs. Being the most respected matriarchs of the family, these widows set the example of erudition of the entire household. This kind of widow can surely be viewed as a *junzi*, a truly magnificent example of what Xun Zi 荀子 has said in his chapter "Dalue"(大略): "Unless it is during the cold winter, the pine's virtues cannot be seen/ Unless the work is difficult, the persons of noble character [*junzi*] cannot be identified" ("歲不寒無以知松柏，事不難 無以知君子").[23]

As it has been mentioned above, many Ming and Qing widow poets were determined to use the rest of their lives as an opportunity to strengthen themselves. They concentrated all their energy studying hard, with the hope of cultivating and promoting their literary talents. For example, after her husband Ge Zhengqi's 葛徵奇 death, the woman poet Li Yin 李因 began to live a widow's life "sitting alone writing poetry by the lit candles" (挑燈獨坐苦吟詩). The same can be said about the famous widow poet Gu Ruopu (顧若璞, 1592-ca. 1681), who expressed in a letter to her younger brother a similar desire:

> As the days and months accumulate, my knowledge also accumulates. The books and classics of the saints and wise men have educated my character and purified my heart. Along the way I have read *Sao* poems and *Ya* songs, along with *Ci* and *Fu* poetry. Wandering through these places, I hope I can express my sorrowful thoughts, as well as reveal my grievances, though fortunately I have not succumbed to mental depression. The spring birds and summer insects sense the passing of time; I lead all in writing and composing, and put the poems away in cases. And so, this is my cry against injustice.
>
> 日月漸多，聞見與積。聖賢經傳，育德洗心。旁及騷雅，共諸詞賦。游焉息焉，冀以自發其哀思，舒其憤悶，幸不底幽憂之疾。而春鳥夏蟲，感時流響，率爾操觚，藏諸笥篋。雖然，亦不平鳴耳。[24]

[23] Wang Xianqian, ed. 1988, 19: 506.
[24] Xie Wuliang 1979, p. 331.

In Gu Ruopu's letter, we hear the sound of a female Confucian scholar facing the battle of life. In dealing with all the tragedies of life, she does not passively lower her head to fate, but instead adopts an ideal of "a person of noble character [*junzi*]" remaining strong and steadfast. To use a contemporary outlook, she longed to refine herself to a true scholar, allowing herself to completely escape the narrow confines of women's lives.

In the 81 elegies mourning her husband written by Bo Shaojun (薄少君, d. 1625), we can further feel the masculine style expressed by this kind of female Confucian. Zhong Xing (鍾惺, 1574-1624), the editor of *Mingyuan Shigui* 名媛詩歸, remarks in a trenchant comment: " Her moral and intellectual outlook is unmatched by others" （器识便非他人可及）.[25] In the first poem of her "Mourning the Deceased" (悼亡), Bo Shaojun writes:

> The fame between the seas rapidly disappears,
> It is difficult to ask the heavens the reasons for ancient and contemporary strife.
> Though I mourn my husband, I have no wish to compose an inner-chamber lament,
> Mourning his death, I must sing masculine songs of iron drums.
>
> 海內風流一瞬傾
> 彼蒼難問古今爭。
> 苦君莫作秋閨怨，
> 薤露須歌鐵板聲。[26]

It can be said that, compared to the poetry that traditional male writers composed to mourn their wives, the poetry of Bo Shaojun is completely antithetical. For example, the Tang poet Yuan Zhen's 元稹 "Three Poems to Release Sorrow" (遣悲懷三首) has long been viewed as the epitome of elegies through the ages mainly due to the poem's moving emotions, which is sufficient to sadden the reader. But Bo Shaojun's elegy is the complete opposite of Yuan Zhen's style of gentle sorrow: the female poet does not use Yuan Zhen's sentimentalism, but instead uses the masculine image of the "iron drum". The beginning of the poem uses "the fame between the seas" to praise her husband, but laments that his fame "rapidly disappears" with his early death. It is the writer's inner sorrow that elicits her mood of "asking the heavens", ultimately writing almost a hundred solemn and stirring elegies for her beloved.

But there is another kind of widow who sought an aloof kind of attitude towards life. They have already surpassed the persistence of the vain world, and with a certain Taoist style, they used the mountains and water scenery to describe their emotions, making metaphorical comparisons on forests and

[25] *Mingyuan Shigui*, 34: 1a.
[26] *Mingyuan Shigui*, 34: 1a.

springs to express their wills. One of the most accomplished women poets of this type is Wang Hui (王慧, later 17th century), a writer frequently recommended and admired by male scholars. Wang Hui, originally from Jiangsu Province, was a prominent poet of the Qing Dynasty. She was the daughter of Wang Changyuan 王長源, a famous superintendent of the time. After she lost her husband, she turned into a prolific poet. She evocatively described the endless beauty of the region south of the Yangtze River, becoming one of the major landscape poets among women. In the famous poem-series *On the Road to Shanyin* 山陰道中, she writes like a wandering recluse:

> When I exit the city
> from the watchtower gate
> I lose completely
> all sense of spatial limits,
> Passing ten miles through
> the cool shade of the hills.
> Water and land rise to view
> by turns and sink away;
> My course lengthens out
> open and endless.
> Hills and mountains draw apart,
> each contour like no other;
> Bamboo and trees interlace
> making dense forest.
> Who would know
> under this impenetrable growth
> A stream is gliding through?
> On the stone bridge
> the road is obvious,
> Then I round a bend
> and confuse east and west […][27]

> 出郭忘遠近
> 十里清陰中
> 川陸互回沒
> 延緣遂無窮
> 岡巒去殊勢
> 竹樹交成叢
> 安知蒙密處
> 下有溪流通
> 石橋路可尋
> 一轉迷西東 […][28]

[27] Translated by Maureen Robertson, in Chang and Saussy 1999, p. 400.
[28] *Qing Shi Biecai Ji*, 31: 567.

The passage above was from the first piece of this set of travel poems. It can be seen through this poem that the author really enjoys traveling, especially the states of "gazing" and being "lost" in traveling. The act of traveling begins with the joy of "When I exit the city from the watchtower gate I lose completely all sense of spatial limits", and this climax is an experience of confusion and disorientation. In the eyes of the poet, the scenery of Shanyin is beautiful because it makes her course "lengthens out open and endless". When the poet gets lost and walks to the confluence of the mountain and stream, she sees only the road and the stream each flow on towards the distance. Actually, the emotion emerging from the act of traveling exactly reflects the open-minded view of life that the widow poet Wang Hui held: life is like a journey and even if you reach a dead end, you can still find a new path to move your steps on and continue your trip. This kind of life philosophy is even more vigorous than the Tang poet Wang Wei's 王維 verse "Going till I come to where the river ends/ Sitting and watching when clouds rise up" (行到水窮處，坐看雲起時),[29] because the female poet Wang Hui not only "sit[s] and watch[es]" the view before her eyes, but also walks along endless mountain paths. Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420) once eulogized the beautiful scenery of Shanyin, writing: "Walking up Shanyin road, the mountains and rivers reflect each other, and it is too much to take in all at once" (从山阴道上行，山川自相映发，使人应接不暇),[30] and so this place since ancient times has always been a famous scenery. But Wang Hui was able to extract from the distance view of Shanyin a basic principle of life; no wonder some critics frequently praised her. For example, Shen Deqian (沈德潛, 1673-1769) of the Qing Dynasty said: "Her poetry is clean, her level is unparalleled" (其詩清疏朗潔，其品最上).[31]

Another widow poet named Wang Su'e (王素娥, 16th century) also made a brilliant use of landscape poetry to transcend mere human life. From Shanyin, she particularly liked to observe the local landscape. From her poetry, we can feel a state of freedom. The following is a poem about wandering along the Qiantang River:

> The wind is gentle, the moon low, the water calm.
> In river country the weather has just turned clear and my joy is boundless.
> I try to make out a small boat, light as a leaf,
> Carrying the mountain colors across Xiling River.[32]
>
> 風微月落早潮平
> 江國新晴喜不勝
> 試看小舟輕似月

[29] Watson 1984, p. 202.
[30] See Chang 1998, p. 100.
[31] *Qing Shi Biecai Ji*, 2: 567.
[32] Translated by Norman Kutcher, in Chang and Saussy 1999, p. 171.

載將山色過西陵[33]

This poem describes a feeling that transcends the material world. The poet either rode a boat from near Xiling, or crossed the river from Hangzhou to the Xiling area. Regardless of her route, her state of mind can be described as "lighthearted". Her inner heart is relaxed and easy, so she naturally compares the boat that she rides to the crescent moon. In the mood described in the second line "In river country the weather has just turned clear and my joy is boundless", the poet suddenly imagines herself both in the boat and out of it. In visualizing herself out of the boat, and objectively judging the beauty around her, she sighs: "I try to make out a small boat, light as a leaf/ Carrying the mountain colors across Xiling River". The idea that the small boat can swiftly and lightly carry away the green mountain is indeed a beautiful image. And it is only when the poet's attitude is relaxed and joyous, when the poet is fully immersed into the beauty of nature, that she can truly understand. Wang Su'e's most outstanding literary contribution is that she was able to change the pain and sorrow into beautiful scenery, transforming the ever-popular words of sadness into observations of joy and appreciation. As a woman widowed young, Wang Su'e was obviously the kind of individual who could be satisfied with a simple life. In her life's journey she had clearly recognized the principle of "nothing lasts forever": she was neither stubborn nor possessive about the things in her life, but she wanted to continue journeying onwards.

Traveling can expand people's mind, so many Ming and Qing widow poets who liked to travel became leaders of the female literary community of the time. The most significant example is the aforementioned Shang Jinglan. Wang Duanshu (王端淑, 1621-before 1685), a talented female writer of the early Qing period, once observed how Shang Jinglan's hometown Meishi 梅市 in Shanyin was extraordinarily beautiful: "The rich beauty of mountains, waters, gardens, and forests surpasses [Wang Wei's] Wangchuan [villa], so her works seems to have been aided by the rivers and mountains".[34] When her husband Qi Biaojia was still alive, Shang Jinglan had already enjoyed all the luxuries and comforts of the world, and had already seen the beautiful scenery of the "Jiangnan" (south of the Yangtze River). The couple even owned a few manor houses in the mountains, and so traveling had early become part of their daily routine. Later, the widowed Shang Jinglan - at the time she was forty-two years old - went to the mountains to write her poems, working together with members of her family as well as talented women who came from all over China. Under her leadership, her household practically became the center of feminine literature. The Qing poet and critic Zhu Yizun (朱彝尊, 1629-1709) once recorded in his *Jingzhiju Shihua* 靜志居詩話:"Madame Shang had two daughters-in-law and four daughters, who all could write poetry skillfully; whenever they had the

[33] *Mingyuan Shigui*, 26: 9b.
[34] *Mingyuan Shiwei*, 11: 1.

opportunity, they ascended the mountains, and she ordered her daughters and daughters-in-law to bring along brushes and ink, she gave everyone topics and rhymes, and everyone considered this a special event; her walls, gates and courtyards, grapes and trees, the blossoms of Chinese peony, were all used as topics; passing through Meishi and gazing into their home, it looks like the home of goddesses".[35]

Shang Jinglan was the first widow poet who truly promoted a sense of mutual endorsement between literary women. Because she was held in high esteem by women in the literary and artistic fields, and as she was considered the "best female poet of the Jiangnan and Zhejiang", many women looked up to her trying to follow her example. Among them, there was one in particular, Huang Yuanjie (黃媛介, 1618-1685), who came to pay her a visit (around 1654) in an incident that quickly turned into legend. After they met, the two poets immediately became close friends. Within a year, Huang Yuanjie lived in Shang Jinglan's home, and they began to enjoy traveling together, as well as writing poetry together. They often visited other Qi family villas such as the Yu Mountain manor and the Mi garden, and each time they produced exciting works together. In her poem "Traveling with Yuanjie to Yu Mountain" (同皆令[媛介]遊寓山) Shang Jinglan writes:

> Plum blossoms surround the path as our spirits aimlessly roam.
> Though there's a bright moon over the balcony, dreams do not come.
> Now the affairs of the world have faded away.
> How can I bear to know that my lovely guest is not yet at peace.[36]
>
> 梅花遶徑魂無主
> 明月當軒夢不來
> 世事只今零落盡
> 豈堪佳客更徘徊[37]

The manor where Shang Jinglan used to live with her husband Qi Biaojiao before his death, was located on Yu Mountain. Now, the women poets were once again roaming the old place, and naturally, their hearts were full of melancholy and sorrow, so they sighed "Plum blossoms surround the path as our spirits aimlessly roam." As the loyal subjects of the Ming Dynasty, Shang Jinglan and the Qi family both paid a high price - in 1645, when the Qing soldiers invaded Nanjing, her husband Qi Biaojia went on a fast and drowned himself in a fountain. After this tragic event, her oldest son Qi Lisun 祁理孫 and her second son Qi Bansun 祁班孫 joined the movement to revive the Ming Dynasty and were both captured. Lisun was eventually released, though he died

[35] See Chang 1998, p. 102.
[36] Translated by Ellen Widmer, in Chang and Saussy, p. 316.
[37] *Mingyuan Shiwei*, 11: 3.

not long after - he was only around twenty at the time. However, Bansun was exiled to Liaodong and a few decades later he managed to escape to Suzhou, where he died in 1673.[38] Thus, as a widow, as well as a female subject of the former dynasty, Shang Jinglan had fully experienced the tragedies of life. To others, the "bright moon" probably refers simply to the bright and beautiful moon, but for her, whose country and family were both lost, the "bright moon" (明月) referred eternally to the Ming (明) Dynasty, representing all that the dynasty itself had passed through the centuries. Thus, when she says "Though there's a bright moon over the balcony, dreams do not come", we perceive a note of melancholy in the poet's voice. It can be said that the "bright moon" has become a symbol of what Shang Jinglan had lost forever. Especially whenever she went to row a boat around the Yu Mountain manor, she always thought of the husband who had drowned himself, as well as the moon representing the fallen Ming Dynasty. The following is Shang Jinglan's "Rowing a Boat in Mid-autumn" (中秋泛舟):

> What happened to the autumn light to make the moon so hazy?
> The crystal dew is scattered across the green sky.
> In the wilderness drifts the fragrance and shadows of the osmanthus,
> Lotus blossoms emerge from the Red River.
>
> 秋光何事月朦朧
> 玉露澄澄散碧空
> 野外香飄丹桂影
> 芙蓉分出滿江紅[39]

The literal meaning of the poem is a description of the moon's color, but the metaphor relates to the poet's heart: just like that hazy moonlight, the poet's heart is also full of shadows. But in general the poem adopts a kind of transcendent aesthetic view. We see the crystalline dew, the osmanthus, and the lotus flowers comprising a lovely, desolate scene of mid-autumn, and can also visualize the scene of a leaf-like boat floating beneath the hazy moon. It is not until the end of the poem that we truly understand its hidden meaning: because "Red River" (which is also the name of the poet's ferrying boat) symbolizes the Ming Dynasty. There's also a story behind the river's name: the Ming founding Emperor Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 once walked with the general Xu Da 徐達 to buy boats in order to assess the Jiangnan area, but at the end of the year no one was willing to ferry them. Fortunately, by chance there was an impoverished old man coming with his wife in a small boat and they were willing to ferry them. After Zhu Yuanzhang became the emperor, he went to visit the couple , but they had no sons, so he made their nephew a minister and glorified their small boat

[38] Idema and Grant 2004, p. 429.
[39] Zheng Guangyi 1991, p. 1342.

painting it red. To this day, the boats in the river are almost all called "Red River".[40] Shang Jinglan apparently still called her family's small boat by the Ming Dynasty name. "Rowing a Boat in Mid-autumn" is thus an elegy for the Ming Dynasty but on the surface, this is a scenery poem with a fairly veiled meaning.

As a subject of the Ming Dynasty, Huang Yuanjie understood completely the hidden meaning of the moon, especially because she herself often used similar implicit images to capture complex moods. In the set of poems *Tong Qi Furen Shang Meisheng Qi Xiuyan Xiang Jun Zhang Churang Zhu Zhaobi You Yushan* 同祁夫人商媚生祁修嫣湘君張楚纕朱趙璧遊寓山 (*Wandering through Yu Mountaing with Madame Qi and Shang Meisheng, Qi Xiuyan, Xiang Jun, Zhang Churang and Zhu Zhaobi*), she strongly emphasizes this kind of descriptive style:

> The mountain embraces the deep green water,
> The pavilion conceals the green tree mist.
> The ravens perched in the trees cry beneath the moon,
> Turning the oars back before the frost.
>
> 山抱蒼潭水
> 亭藏碧樹煙
> 棲鳥啼月下
> 迴棹泊霜前[41]

The "moon" and "oar" in the poem can be explained as a personal allegory, embodying the kind of symbolic meaning that the Chinese particularly liked.[42] This type of poetry is unique because no meaningful deciphering process can prove its original meaning.

In the female ideal *literatus* represented by Huang Yuanjie, Shang Jinglan discovered a true friend: Shang herself was a middle-aged widow who had experienced a great deal of tragedy, while Huang was a woman who had married badly and wandered in destitution through other lands. It can be said that both of them lived on the "borders". Through the experiences of these two poets we can understand the mandatory psychological requirements of a successful woman writer: she needs both a personal sense of solitude, but almost must have a sense of emotional connectedness. This is the kind of "double spaces" that American feminists have often emphasized in recent years.[43] From ancient times, both in China and in the West, women after marriage largely expended their energy on raising children and handling their domestic responsibilities. Thus, how to break through the limitations of their lives and establish an individual independent

[40] See Chang 1998, p. 104.
[41] *Mingyuan Shiwei*, 9: 23.
[42] For the use of symbology in Chinese poetry, see Chang 1991, pp. 33-34, 60, 73.
[43] Miller 1993, p. 249.

space became the primary problem of all female writers. A person could only face herself in solitude, and then consciously choose to act and create her own space. Thus, solitude is not equal to isolation: solitude is a kind of new training, a level of self-satisfaction that only a person who did not feel originally lonely can achieve. As the feminist Jo Anne Pagano wrote: "I can be alone because I know that I am connected. The world does not fade when I am in solitude, because it is only in the world and in my connection to others that I am myself".[44]

Shang Jinglan and Huang Yuanjie are successful female writers who both understood solitude and also were capable of establishing emotional connectedness. In conclusion, it is their tragic lives that allowed them to escape the life burdens of many normal women, and thus allowed them to find the space to compose their poems. It was their mutual relationship that made it possible for them to walk away from a pessimistic and self-pitying world, and finally establish what Dorothy Ko called "a women's culture".[45] It may be more accurate to say that they promoted the lifestyle of a kind of female *literati* that was essentially the same as that of their male counterparts. Like male writers who were often underappreciated and misunderstood, many literary women such as Shang Jinglan and Huang Yuanjie with tragic lives, chose to walk towards a life of aesthetics. They dedicated their lives to writing poetry together, to enjoying travel, music, books, paintings, etc. On the surface, their female society was only consolidating sisterhood, but in reality they were realizing a masculine value system. Thus, the interests of men and women drew closer culturally: they finally had a common language. Especially for widows, this kind of female *literatus* lifestyle gave them a true understanding that transcended gender. On one hand, they created something that diverged from the source of tradition. On the other hand, they enriched the traditional literature and culture.

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[44] Pagano 1993, p. 53.
[45] Ko 1994, pp. 226-232.

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The Gendered Discourse of the Chinese Courtesan in "Du Shiniang Sinks her Jewel Box in Resentment"

Isaac Yue

The story "Du Shiniang Sinks her Jewel Box in Resentment" (*Du Shiniang Nuchen Baibaoxiang* 杜十娘怒沉百寶箱) was originally composed in the 17th century as a tale written in literary language (*wenyan* 文言) by Song Maocheng (宋楙澄, 1569-1619). It is perhaps best known today as one of the one hundred and twenty vernacular short stories (commonly known in Chinese as *huaben* 話本) collected by Feng Menglong (馮夢龍, 1574-1646) in his *Sanyan* 三言 (*Three Words*) collection. The story's presentation of a strong female protagonist, whom Allan H. Barr considers to be "one of the most memorable women characters in traditional Chinese literature",[1] is not only inspirational to later writers of works such as *Honglou Meng* 紅樓夢 (*The Dream of the Red Chamber*), it also challenges our conception of Ming Dynasty China as a period dominated by patriarchal thinking - an impression that is sustained by the development of such maxims as "the woman who is without talent is virtuous" (女子無才便是德).[2] Beginning with the argument that the Chinese courtesan (*ji* 伎/妓) occupies a uniquely ambivalent role within the sexual hierarchy of Imperial China, in the sense that their appeal to the *literatus* is sustained in spite of their "immoral" nature, this paper makes use of the story of "Du Shiniang" as a case study, and considers the implications of the vernacular language to the dualistic presentation of the courtesan in the tradition of China's vernacular fiction.

1. The Courtesan and the Literati: A Gendered Perspective

In his recent study of the lives of women in the Ming Dynasty, Henry Shih-Shan Tsai (Cai Shishan 蔡石山) forms a decidedly negative view on

[1] Barr 1997, 107.

[2] For more information on the development of this concept during the Ming Dynasty, as well as the history of the suppression of the development of women in China in general, see Ho [Lau] Clara Wing-chung 1998.

the issue of prostitution and the men and women involved in such activity, and goes as far as to denote a correlation between the pursuit of such promiscuous activity by the Ming officials and the fall of the dynasty.[3] It is an attitude that is traceable to as early as the Qing Dynasty, when Yan Si'an (嚴思庵, 1650-1713) comments in *Yan'e Erze* (豔囮二則 *Two Erotic Traps*) that:

> 明萬曆之末，上倦於勤，不坐朝，不閱章奏。輦下諸公亦泄泄遝遝然，間有陶情花柳者，教坊婦女，競尚容色，投時好以博貲財。
>
> Toward the end of the Wanli Period (1573-1620), the senior officials became lazy and neither attended court nor read the official documents. The officers beneath them also became negligent and inattentive. Some of them even frequented brothels and favored the licensed prostitutes. They bid against each other for the women as a means to accumulate wealth.[4]

Although the moralistic standpoint of these critiques is justifiable, it is at the same time important for us to recognize that prostitution played a vital role in the overall cultural discourse of Imperial China, a discourse from which a sense of ambiguity toward the established gender role of the time can be construed. As Clara Wing-chung Ho (He Liu Yongcong 何劉詠聰) demonstrates, concurrent with the development of Neo-Confucianism thinking since the Song Dynasty, the inclination to draw a distinct line between the concepts of 'talent' (*cai* 才) and 'virtue' (*de* 德) became firmly established as a social norm, in which women were judged favorably or otherwise according to their degree of association with the latter at the expense of the former.[5] However, the courtesans represent an interesting exception to this rule. For example, of the eighty-four female lyricists recorded in *Mingci Zong* 明詞綜 (*The Collection of Lyrics from the Ming Dynasty*), as many as twenty-six can be confirmed to have come from a courtesan background - a fact which demonstrates deliberateness in the cultivation of literary talents by the courtesans. There are also numerous documented cases of courtesans excelling in other forms of literary arts, ranging from different forms of literary composition to musical and drama performances. Such records not only attest to the undeniable literary contributions of the Chinese courtesans, but also reflect the reality of the courtesans' ambiguation of the distinction between talent and virtue, a distinction the Neo-Confucians were anxious to maintain. It is a paradox that

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[3] Cai Shishan 2009, 266.
[4] *Lidai Biji Xiaoshuo Jicheng*, 43: 425.
[5] See Chapter Two of Ho [Lau] Clara Wing-chung 1987.

is best illustrated in *Wanli Yehuo Bian* 萬曆野獲編 (*The Random Observations from the Reign of Wanli*), in which we find the following scene of young girls being auctioned off as either prostitutes or concubines in Yangzhou (揚州):

> 又見購妾者多以技藝見收，則大謬不然。如能琴者，不過〔顏回〕或〔梅花〕一段，能畫者，不過蘭竹數枝；能弈者，不過起局數著；能歌者，不過〔玉抱肚〕〔集賢賓〕一二調。
>
> When making a purchase, most [people] look for the quality of talent and fall victims to swindling schemes. A girl who professes musicality with the *qin* can in fact only play one segment of either *Yanhui* or *Meihua*; a professed painter knows only how to draw a few sticks of bamboos or orchids; to profess competence in 'go' means the girl is able to initiate a game on the game board, but nothing beyond that; and a girl who says she can sing means she knows one or two simple tunes, like *Yu Baodu* or *Ji Xianbin*.[6]

The above observation by Shen Defu (沈德符, 1578-1642) reveals two important points. One, regardless of the social norm of the time, officials or other men of affluence clearly considered 'talent' to be a desirable quality in prostitutes and concubines. Two, the human traffickers were well aware of this and exploited their customers by emphasizing the supposed talent of the young women. However, as is demonstrated in such contemporary writings as *Wenshi Muxun* 溫氏母訓 (*Mrs. Wen's Motherly Advice*), which advocates that "women should only recognize a few basic Chinese characters such as firewood, rice and fish, to learn anything beyond this would bring no benefits, only harm" (婦女只許粗識柴米魚肉數百字，多識字，有損無益),[7] the orthodox gender discourse of the time remained fundamentally opposed to the idea of education for women. Within this context, the perspective patron's interest in the talent of the courtesans is in clear violation of society's established gender expectations. What prompted this development is an interesting question, the answer to which may lie in the traditional emphasis on arts, music and literature in the training of the courtesan.

Of the thirteen official histories of the Chinese dynasties compiled after the Sui Dynasty (including the *Draft History of the Qing*, known in Chinese as *Qingshi Gao* 清史稿), ten contain a specific section on the deeds of 'virtuous women' (*lienü* 列女). This high ratio is indicative of the increasing importance placed by society on the concept of virtue in the

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[6] *Wanli Yehuo Bian*, pp. 700-701.
[7] *Wenyuan ge Siku Quanshu*, 717: 523.

education of women. In spite of this, students of Chinese history today are far less likely to recognize the name of a famous virtuous woman than a celebrated courtesan, because it is not the former whom the poets eulogized and immortalized in their verses but the latter. For example, although the name Yu Xuanji (魚玄機, 844-869) never appeared in either of the official histories of the Tang Dynasty, her fame as a poet-courtesan is secured through her own works as well as those dedicated to her by Wen Tingyun (溫庭筠, 812-870). The number of biographies dedicated to Yu - a rough search reveals no less than seven monographs on this topic published in Chinese since 1980 - also dwarfs the combined sum of studies devoted to virtuous women throughout Tang history. Other courtesans who in similar manners became well-known through their literary productions - and connections to well-known poets and writers - include: Su Xiaoxiao (蘇小小, 479-502), Xue Tao (薛濤, 768-832) and Liu Rushi (柳如是, 1618-1664). These cases demonstrate two important factors which contributed to the fascination of these women to the Chinese *literatus*. The first is obviously their distinctive literary/artistic talent which men both admired and appreciated. The second and perhaps the more important factor is their ability to interact with the *literatus* on an intellectual level, especially in the form of poetic dialogue (*he* 和).

Indeed, compared to the 'ideal' wife who is brought up in the virtuous way, it is not difficult to imagine an accomplished poet or lyricist forming a close bond with the courtesans, who were able to not only appreciate but match their literary talent. In fact, it is through this unique relationship between the *literatus* and the courtesans that the lyric (*Song Ci* 宋詞) was able to flourish and overtake poetry (*shi* 诗) as the most celebrated literary form during the Song Dynasty. As Ye Jiaying 葉嘉瑩 points out, in the beginning, the lyrics "developed mainly as a form of musical entertainment at the banquet. They were purposely written as melodies to be performed by courtesans, and all deal with the themes of love and separation" (本來是歌筵酒席之間，交給那些美麗的歌妓酒女去傳唱的歌詞，所寫的是男女愛情相思離別的內容).[8] This is an important observation that further pinpoints the interconnection between the *literati*'s appreciation of literary features and his infatuation with the courtesan's talents for music and dancing. This also helps to explain why the latter is often emphasized by vernacular stories as a desirable quality in the education of the courtesan.

To sum up, although the practice of prostitution remains an inexcusably exploitative social institution, its manifestation in Imperial

[8] Ye Jiaying 1989, 5-6. See also Li Jianliang 1999.

China ironically introduced a set of parameters that operates against the orthodox discourse of sexism of the time. The fact that it is through the pursuit of the courtesans that the talents of women were recognized and appreciated - in spite of the social norm of the time which emphasized the opposite - demonstrates the unique dualistic identity of the courtesan figure, in terms of her being symbolic of both oppression and liberation. The way this set of bipolar paradigms operates within the portrayal and conceptualization of the courtesan offers further insights into the representation of its figure in contemporary literature.

2. The Representation of the Courtesan in Vernacular Writings

During the Ming Dynasty, the image of the courtesan as a fine art connoisseur is an idea in part sustained by her obvious talents, and in part perpetuated by myths. There is no denying that they had such aptitudes, such as in the case of "The Eight Belles of River Qinhuai" (*Qinhuai Bayan* 秦淮八豔) who were admired as much for their beauty as their talents, which range from poetry and music to a general knowledge of politics. The representation of the courtesan in contemporary literature also played a part in the successful permeation of this image to the different *strata* of society. For example, *Xihu Youlan Zhiyu* 西湖遊覽志餘 (*Travel Book of the West Lake*) records the story of a man reciting the notable lyrics of "Garden of Aroma" (*Manting Fang* 滿庭芳) composed by Qin Guan (秦觀, 1049-1110), but he made a mistake with one of the rhymes and is duly corrected by an observant courtesan. The man then challenges the courtesan to completely rewrite the lyrics using his wrong rhyme, and is impressed when the courtesan rises to the challenge and composes a brilliant verse on the spot.[9] Similarly, in *Nenggai Zhai Manlu* 能改齋漫錄 (*Miscellanies of the Nenggai Chamber*), there's a story concerning Su Shi (蘇軾, 1037-1101), who feels surprised when a courtesan is able to solve his riddles, both poetical and rhetorical in nature. In the end, Su is so impressed by the young woman that he advises her to embrace Buddhism and become a nun.[10] Although these two works of the Song Dynasty are arranged in the form of *biji* (筆記) in literary written language, they reflect the inheritance of the Tang ideal of the courtesan as a beautiful and talented women. At the same time they served to reinforce this image into an archetype, to which the

[9] *Xihu Youlan Zhiyu*, p. 304.
[10] *Nenggai Zhai Manlu*, p. 483.

Ming Dynasty vernacular stories would refer a few centuries later.

Indeed, stories such as "The Oil Vendor who Won Over the Queen of Flower" (*Maiyou Lang Duzhan Huakui* 賣油郎獨佔花魁) and "The Blissful Union of Shan Fulang in Quanzhou" (*Shan Fulang Quanzhou Jia'ou* 單符郎全州佳偶), besides providing a description of courtesans' outstanding beauty, also give prominence to their remarkable talents. See for instance the passage that follows:

> [瑤琴] 吹彈歌舞，無不盡善。[…] 聞得他寫作俱高，求詩求字的，日不離門。
>
> [*Yaoqin*] is the embodiment of perfection in singing, dancing and in a variety of musical instruments. […] She also writes a fine hand of calligraphy, with people approaching her on a daily basis to ask for her poems and handwriting.[11]

And:

> 春娘從小讀過經書及唐詩幹首，頗通文墨，尤善應對。鴇母愛之如寶，改名楊玉，教以樂器及歌舞，無不精絕。
>
> From a young age, the Spring Maiden [*Chunniang*] has been taught to read Confucius classics and poetry of the Tang Dynasty. She is fairly literate, and is well-versed in couplets. The mistress of the brothel considers her a treasure. She has renamed her Yang Yu and trained her in the arts of singing, dancing and [playing] musical instruments, in which she excels.[12]

The similarity of tones and nature between these seemingly obligatory passages found in Ming vernacular tales is indicative of the influence of this archetype on contemporary storytelling. However, unlike most narratives written during Tang and Song dynasties, the gendered dichotomy laying behind the conception of the courtesan is no longer suppressed or downplayed in the endeavor to highlight the courtesans' supreme talents; on the contrary, it emerges as a legitimate concern which is often left exposed by the comparatively realistic approach of the these stories itself. This is a development in both contextual and linguistic terms, in the sense that it deals not only with the emergent trend of telling courtesans tales starting from their own prospective - in contrast to their appearance in a random encounter with a *literati* - but is the result of a more detailed exploration of their

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[11] *Xingshi Hengyan*, p. 35.
[12] *Gujin Xiaoshuo*, p. 247

gendered discourse. The exploration of such a problematic topic witnessed the transition from the literary text to the vernacular one, which Patrick Hanan considers to be "referential and denotative" in opposition to the elegance and evocativeness of the former.[13] The emergence of this new kind of text seems also to be instrumental in enabling the articulation of the suppressive nature of the sexual industry. In addition, taking again "The Oil Vendor" as an example, by the acknowledgement of the protagonist's multitudinal talents, one can also find the following descriptions, typical of the stories of that time:

> 將美娘灌得爛醉如泥。扶到王九媽家樓中，臥於床上，不省人事。此時天氣和暖，又沒幾層衣服，媽兒親手伏侍，剝得他赤條條，任憑金二員外行事。金二員外那話兒，又非兼人之具。輕輕的撐開兩股，用些涎沫，送將進去。比及美娘夢中覺痛，醒將轉來，已被金二員外耍得勾了。欲待掙紮，爭奈手足俱軟，繇他輕薄了一回。
>
> When [Wang Mei] was completely overcome by intoxication, they escorted her into Madam Wang's chamber and laid her unconscious on the bed. The weather was warm then and the girl was not heavily dressed. Madam Wang personally assisted Wang Mei in stripping her clothes off, in order to let the wealthy Jin Er to do as he pleased. That particular part of Jin Er's body was nothing short of extraordinary. He gently forced open her legs, moisturized her with his saliva and then forced himself inside her. The pain woke the girl, but it was already too late. She tried to free herself, but could summon no strength to her limbs.[14]

As an art form that developed out of China's oral tradition, vernacular stories strove first and foremost to entertain the masses. Thus, unlike the self-expressive *biji* written in literary language, there is a much higher demand for literary devices capable of engaging in character development such as the ones used in vernacular stories; and as illustrated in the above narrative, the tendency to portray the courtesan as a multi-dimensional character is featured much more prominently in vernacular stories. It is, however, an endeavor that naturally demands attention to the less desirable aspects of the profession, including rape and other types of physical violence that are often conceived as a logical extension of the experience of these women. Although the vivid portrayal of such acts, as exemplified above, does not necessarily negate the stories' overall intention to cast the courtesan in a positive light, it nevertheless serves as a powerful reminder about the less glamorous side of their career, and the reality that their profession

[13] Hanan 1967, 175.
[14] *Xingshi Hengyan*, p. 36.

sometimes demands the woman to be "treated not as a complete being but as a means to the customer's sexual goals".[15] It is a process of objectification that is further reinforced by the detailed depiction of the rape and bullying endured by the courtesan. From a psychological standpoint, the commitment of such acts of violence is also understood to be linked to the desire to "dehumanize their intended victims and look on them not as people but as inanimate objects".[16] In other words, although the portrayal of the courtesans as victims adds an important dimension to these stories, it also contributes to the de-glorification of the ethereality of courtesan, and results in a more accurate reflection of the ambiguous gender position of the courtesan as both a commodity and a fantasy. The *biji* stories that are written in literary language, by contrast, are not bounded by such constraints and can be much more focused in their sympathetic imagination of the courtesans.

Besides the difference in aim between the *biji* and vernacular tales, another factor which contributed to the re-emplacement of these women within their appropriate gendered discourse is found in the nature of the vernacular language itself. In the above passage, for example, the decision to evoke the term "chengkai" 撐開 - 'force open', of which a more literal translation would be 'lever open' - to depict the spread of the maiden's legs is typical of the vernacular language in its metaphorical and slightly exaggerated tone, whilst a similar scene written in literary language would simply have employed the word 'open' (in Chinese "kai" 開). Moreover, as Liu Guo 劉果 was able to discover through her survey of the *Sanyan* collection, in both the normative and non-normative context, the vernacular language in which these stories were written contains distinctive imprints of the prevalent Neo-Confucian gendered discourse of the time and constricts women to the "subservience to men and their whole feudal clan" (成為男性和整個封建家族的附庸).[17] Thus, as in the case of depicting these women as victims, although the diction of the vernacular stories is by no means reflective of a conscious desire, on behalf of the *literati*, to de-mystify the courtesan, the transition of the literary representation of these women - from their ethereal and muse-like appearance in the poetry and essays of Tang and Song dynasties to the paradoxical imagination of them as simultaneously tainted and chaste in Ming vernacular literature - is in a way inseparable from the fact that the vernacular language not only contains a wider range of vocabulary, but also from the fact that much of these vocabulary is innately

[15] Overall 1992, 716.
[16] Nagler 1982, 12.
[17] Liu Guo 2008, 3.

reflective of China's patriarchic sexual hierarchy of the time. It is a discourse that manifests itself vividly in Feng's vernacular rewriting of the story of "Du Shiniang".

3. Gendered Politics in "The Faithless Lover" and "Du Shiniang"

Concerning the tradition of the *Geisha* in Japan, Liza Dalby summarizes the phenomenon as a "Paradox of Modernity".[18] It is a description that applies equally well to Imperial China's fascination with the courtesan. Although the manifestation of this paradox in Ming vernacular tales, as observed, is not necessarily intentional or even consciously realized by the storytellers, the courtesan's character development and the type of diction used in the vernacular language are nevertheless both illustrative of the ambiguous position occupied by these women and the ubiquitous nature of their gendered discourse. In Feng's rendition of the story of "Du Shiniang", this unintentional juxtaposition between authorial intention and the professional nature of the courtesan - the latter further supported by the sexist characteristics of the vernacular language - results in a unique tension that mirrors the actual social ambiguity of the courtesan.

For example, at the beginning of the story, the protagonist Du Shiniang is introduced in the narrative by the following verse:

> 渾身雅艷，遍體嬌香。
> 兩彎眉畫遠山青，
> 一對眼明秋水潤。
> 臉如蓮萼，分明卓氏文君；
> 唇似櫻桃，何減白家樊素。
> 可憐一片無暇玉，
> 誤落風塵花柳中！
>
> Elegance and glamour runs through her entire body,
> As does a delicate aroma;
> Her arching eyebrows are picturesque like the distant azure hills,
> Her eyes are limpid like the water in autumn;
> With a pair of cheeks that resemble the sepal of a lotus,
> She is like the reincarnation of Zhuo Wenjun;
> With a pair of lips that are reminiscent of a cherry,
> She bears the veritable likeness of Fan Su;
> Unfortunate for this piece of unblemished jade,

[18] Dalby 2008, 69.

> That she has fallen into the world of decadence and lust.[19]

Although the musical talent of Du - which, as demonstrated, represents an important constituent of the appeal of the courtesan - is not emphasized until much later in the story, her *literati* quality is importantly put on full display in the above eulogy of her beauty. And in such eulogic lines, the descriptions given of "distant azure hills" and "unblemished jade" are all unmistakably chosen to embody the Chinese ideal of the cultured and literary (*wen* 文) man. The endeavor of the author is here unmistakable. Immediately following the above poem, the text, not unexpectedly, delves into the unchaste side of the courtesan's career and recounts the loss - depicted as a sort of "transaction" - of Du's virginity at the age of thirteen. Deserving particular attention is the fact that the term 'breaking the melon' (*pogua* 破瓜) is (mis-)used to denote this episode. According to the Qing Dynasty scholar Yuan Mei (袁枚, 1716-1797), the origin of this term is traceable to as early as the poetry of the Sui Dynasty, and it is sometimes misinterpreted to signify "menstruation", in the sense that having broken open a melon, red juice flows out of it. However, the term actually denotes the specific age of sixteen, and refers to the breaking up of the character for 'melon' (*gua* 瓜) in written Chinese, in which the character for 'eight' (*ba* 八) appears twice.[20] While Yuan's scholarship points to the reality that the term was already commonly misused during the early Qing Dynasty, he seems inexplicably unaware of the nature of its misconnotation in the vernacular tradition. Besides the story of "Du Shiniang" which specifically mentions the "breaking of the melon" and the age of thirteen in the same sentence, in *Xihu Jiahua* 西湖佳話 (*Blissful Tales from the West Lake*) - a collection of vernacular short stories of the early Qing Dynasty - the following scene is also found:

> 既是主意定了，不消再說，待老身那裏去尋一個有才有貌的郎君，來與姑娘「破瓜」就是了。
>
> Now that your mind is completely made up, let us stop talking. I will proceed to seek you a man who is as handsome as he is talented, and have him "break your melon".[21]

Both the context in which this sentence is evoked and the identity of the

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[19] *Jingshi Tongyan*, p. 509
[20] *Suiyuan Shihua*, pp. 452-453.
[21] *Xihu Jiahua*, p. 89.

protagonist of this tale - the historically famous courtesan Xu Xiaoxiao - allow no room for the misinterpretation of this term as anything other than to depucelate. It thus appears that in vernacular tales there exists a tendency to make use of this term in a sexual context, perhaps as a humorous allusion creating a kind of connection between sex and food. Although there is currently insufficient evidence to allow a thorough investigation on the nature of this semantic deterioration, the evocation of the word 'break' (*po* 破) does underpin the term with a slight hint of forcefulness and degradation, which is coherent with the patriarchal characteristics of the vernacular language. It is an observation that is further substantiated by the fact that the term is applicable exclusively to women. Thus, not unlike the evocation of the term 'force open' in "The Oil Vendor", regardless of the author's endeavor to produce a positive image of the courtesan, the employment of the vernacular language in this case becomes subconsciously counteractive to his intention. The result is a sustained tension that mimics the gendered dilemma of the courtesan as a simultaneously virtuous and immoral character.

In order to better illustrate the subject, it is useful now to turn our attention to "The Faithless Lover" (*Fuqingnong Zhuan* 負情儂傳) - the original story of "Du Shiniang" written in literary language - and consider the way it differs from its vernacular adaption made by Feng. In its initial introduction of the courtesan to the audience, Du is described in the following terms:

> 女姿態為平康絕代，兼以管弦歌舞，妙出一時。
>
> Her femininity is unsurpassed by anyone of the Pingkang district.[22] Her remarkable skills with the wind and string instruments, and her talents in singing and dancing further made her the darling of the age.[23]

Like its vernacular counterpart, the unique appeal of the courtesan is here clearly spelt out through the equal emphasis paid to Du's femininity and musical talents. Unlike the vernacular version, however, "The Faithless" neither features an episode on the loss of Du's virginity, nor does it evoke such dictions or idioms as "breaking the melon" to underpin the narrative with a gendered context, implying the objectification of the female body.

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[22] Regarding the two systems of prostitution developed during the Tang Dynasty - the civilian *yuehu* (樂戶) and the governmental *jinü* (伎女) - the former is sometimes known by the districts in which they operate, mainly the Pingkang (平康) and the Beili (北里) districts. The term "Pingkang" here is thus synonymous with prostitution in general.

[23] *Jiuyue Ji*, p. 112.

Such examples adequately exemplify the fundamental difference - both in the nature of the writing and the characteristics of the language - between Song's original conception of the story of "Du Shiniang" written in literary language and its vernacular re-adaptation. This difference is, moreover, found throughout the story. For instance, when Li starts running out of money in his courtship to Du Shiniang, Madam Du's displeasure is summarized by her objection to "the monopolization of Du Shiniang by Li" (被李公子占住).[24] The inclination to objectify the courtesan is denoted by the usage of the term 'monopolization' (*zhanzhu* 占住) in describing the relationship between Li and Du - an implication that is not present in Song's literary language, which simply states that "Madam has grown tired of [Li's] frequent visits" (女郎母頗以生頻來為厭).[25] Similarly, in urging Li to accumulate enough money to purchase her freedom from the brothel, the presence of sexism is revealed through Du's envisioning of herself "being the rightful property of the man" (妾身遂為君之所有).[26] By contrast, the evocation of the phrase "to plan to obtain me as a wife" (謀妾身)[27] comes across as much more neutral and devoid of such patriarchal overtone.

As one of the best known vernacular stories from the Ming Dynasty, the story of "Du Shiniang" has inspired numerous studies on its historical and cultural significance. Zhou Xianshen 周先慎, for example, considers the story to be a critique of the suppressive social order of feudal China, in which "the structure of society serves to prevent, destroy, and threaten Du Shiniang's desire for love and the realization of her dream" (社會勢力在阻撓、破壞和威脅著杜十娘的愛情追求和美好理想的實現).[28] While Qian Ma ponders the interconnection between the concepts of marriage and tragedy in order to establish Du's ending as necessitated by the story's tragic nature.[29] Instead of contributing to this existing debate on the intention of the story, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the uniqueness of this vernacular story in its unintentional reflection of the bipolar cultural discourse concerning the figure of the courtesan in late Imperial China. This figure is achieved unconsciously *via* the difference in nature of the *biji* story, which does not necessitate the comprehensive character development of the courtesan, and the nature of literary language, which is not as gender-sensitive in its lexicons. Although David D. W. Wang's attribution of

[24] *Jingshi Tongyan*, p. 510.
[25] *Jiuyue Ji*, p. 112.
[26] *Jingshi Tongyan*, p. 511.
[27] *Jiuyue Ji*, p. 113.
[28] Zhou Xianshen 2004, 263.
[29] Ma Qian 2004, 212-213.

the paradox of late-Qing courtesan novels to the writers' attitude to "render their 'immoral' desire in moralistic terms"[30] is an equally appropriate description of the situation of the vernacular stories of the Ming Dynasty, by using the story of "Du Shiniang" as an example, some attempts have been made to explore this concept from a linguistic perspective and to consider the role of the vernacular language in the manifestation of this social discourse. It also demonstrates the extent to which the vernacular courtesan stories of the Ming Dynasty can be understood as a vivid reflection of the bipolar gendered conception of the Chinese courtesan.

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[30] Wang 1994, 231.

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Study on the Development of the *Tuntian* System in Northern Xinjiang during the Qing Dynasty

Zhang Anfu and Alessandra Cappelletti

The *tuntian* 屯田 (agricultural settlements) have been firstly established in Xinjiang during the Qing Dynasty, when the three emperors Kangxi, Yongle and Qianlong conducted the military campaigns for the annexation of the North-western Territories.[1] The role of the first *tuntian* was mainly to supply Qing garrisons and troops with agricultural products and any kind of logistic support. During the Qianlong reign, after the conquest of the Zunghar Basin[2] and the squashing of violent rebellions in the area, the headquarters of the Qing court's department controlling the whole Xinjiang were established in Yili and Urumqi. During the same period several agricultural settlements started to be established in northern Xinjiang, among them: *Bingtun* 兵屯 (military agricultural settlements), *Qiantun* 遣屯 (exile agricultural settlements), *Qitun* 旗屯 (banner or Manchese agricultural settlements), *Huitun* 回屯 (Hui or Muslim agricultural settlements) and *Mintun* 民屯 (civilian agricultural settlements). With the rapid expansion of those settlements, the Han and Tang strategic pattern of *Zhong Nan Qing Bei* 重南轻北, or "developing the South and ignoring the North", was completely revised, and the economy of northern Xinjiang started to develop at a fast pace.

1. The Conquest of the Zunghar Basin and the Establishment of the Tuntian System

Since one of the main aim of the Qing court was to conquer the frontier territories in the north-west, a war campaign was launched against all the hostile populations in the area. The conflicts which followed this political and military decision required large scale military operations, mainly due to the long distance which separates Xinjiang from China's Central Plains. Logistic problems and lack of provisions became serious issues, which needed to be solved urgently: the necessity of a system of agricultural settlements came out from this particular situation. The development of the settlements represented a substantial support against the raids and incursions by the local nomadic powers. In fact, the

[1] According to the Chinese sources, the Western Territories are an area which includes today's Xinjiang.

[2] For place names we use the form commonly used in English, mainly *pinyin* and the Uyghur/Kazakh spelling.

Qing armies succeeded in the conquest and stabilization of the troubled Zunghar Basin, and effectively responded to the influence of Tzarist Russia.

1.1 The struggle against the hostile populations in the North-western Regions

When the Qing armies crossed the Jiayuguan Pass,[3] a point which was still unclear was how much military strength was going to be needed in order to control the area. The focus of the Qing court strategy was the conquest of the territory and its unification within Inner China, together with an effective solution for the troubled political situation in the *san fan* (三藩), or the so-called "Three Border Provinces". The major cause of concern for the Qing court was the hostile populations who controlled the area. Just before the arrival of the Qing armies, the Mongol Erdeni Batur, his son Sengge and other Zunghar leaders, organized the populations of the area into a confederation. The increased strength of their armies enabled them to gain control over the territories on the northern edge of the Tianshan Mountains, including Yili (also written "Ili"), Yadan, Urumqi and Barkol. Free to move unhindered for more than 5000 *li*,[4] they gained influence over the Mongol tribes living along the Volga River, the populations in the Qinghai-tibetan Plateau and those in the steppes of Mongolia. It was during the rule of Galdan Boshugtu Khan that the power of the Zunghar tribes reached its highest point, leading to a conflict with the Kaerka tribes in Qinghai in the 16th year of Kangxi reign (1677). Since the military strength of the Qing Dynasty was almost entirely involved in the Three Border Provinces front, the court could not do more than underestimating the threat posed by Galdan and his tribes. The broader strategy of the Qing mainly consisted in adopting political measures aimed at settling difficult situations, focusing on precautionary actions, and carefully analyzing the political and military trends case by case. In the long term, this strategy proved to be successful.

During his military campaign, Galdan did not succeed in occupying Qinghai, and focused his strength on the Muslim territories of southern Xinjiang: he took possession of Hami, Turpan, Karghalik and Kashgar. The districts of southern Xinjiang remained under the Zunghar control for almost a century. By the end of the 23rd year of Kangxi rule (1684), the whole North-western Territories became a Zunghar possession: with its centre in the Yili River valley, the reign included the Ob River, the south of western Siberia Plains as well as its northern frontier. Expanding along the Irtysh River until the Altai Mountains, the possession stretched from the Balkhash Lake on the

[3] "Jiayuguan" was considered the westernmost settlement in the Qing Empire, the desert pass which separated Chinese civilization from the "Western Barbarians", as all the populations living outside the Chinese Empire are named in historical sources.

[4] One *li* corresponds to 500 metres approximately.

south-west, up to the Ob River in the west, covering the whole north-west. In the 27th year of the Kangxi reign (1688), at the beginning of June, Galdan splitted the left group of the Khalkha tribe into two parts: the Tusiyetu and the Chechen. He was convinced that in this way he could succeed in conducting a more effective military attack. In the 29th year of the Kangxi rule (1690), during the first month of the lunar year, Galdan launched a military attack from the Khobdo region, in today's western Mongolia, at the feet of the Mongolian Altai range. After a raid in the territory of the Khalkha tribes, the Galdan cavalrymen eventually defeated the Qing armies on the Ulghui River. When he reached Ulan Butung, only 700 *li* distant from Beijing, Galdan started to represent a serious threat for the stability of the Qing Dynasty. In consideration of these new circumstances, emperor Kangxi himself conducted three victorious campaigns against Galdan armies. The outcomes of these defeats were that Galdan lost consensus among his own populations, and, as a consequence, part of his cavalrymen deserted. According to Chinese historical sources, since he could not see any way out from this situation, he eventually "poisoned himself to death".[5] After the death of Galdan vast areas of the North-western Regions were still under the Zunghar tribes control, and the annexation of Xinjiang could become a reality only during the Qianlong reign. Another factor which needs to be considered is the interests of Tzarist Russia in the Chinese northern territories, including the north-east. Tzarist Russia started to gain influence in the area since the dynastic change from the Ming to the Qing court, in the 17th century. As early as the 16th century, the Tzarist armies crossed the Urals, eventually entering in Siberia. After the middle 17th century, they were already beyond the Baikal Lake.

Already in the 16th century, the Tzarist armies crossed the Urals and entered Siberia, while, in the mid-17th century, they were crossing Baikal area and the Stanovoy range. The Tzarists reached the Amur River in north-eastern China, and at that point they met the resistance of the Khalkha tribes from north and of the Oirats from west. Moreover, following the military attacks launched by the Qing garrisons against the Tzarist armies, two bilateral agreements were ratified: the Sino-Russian Treaty of Nerchinsk[6] in 1689, and the Treaty of Kyakhta in 1727. The treaties clauses basically settled the disputes on the boundaries of the north-eastern frontier territories of the Qing Empire. This notwithstanding, the Tzarist forces did not stop the incursions into the territory of Xinjiang. In the 54th year of Kangxi reign (1715), lieutenant colonel Buchholz moved towards the Irtysh River with four thousands soldiers of the Tzarist army, in an attempt to establish a military outpost in Xinjiang. In the 29th year of Qianlong reign (1755), taking advantage of the upheaval led by Amursana, the Tzarists accepted the deserting soldiers in their ranks and raided the territories and their wealth. The Russian long-term strategy was aimed at establishing a

[5] See *Shengwu Ji*, 3: 121.

[6] The Treaty of Nerchinsk was the first bilateral agreement signed by Russia and China.

Tzarist stronghold in the Chinese northern territories, and this was a reason of constant concern for the Qing court.

1.2 The annexation of Xinjiang and the emergence of the Tuntian System

During the Kangxi reign, the *tuntian* were not yet in the national strategic agenda of the Qing, but they were still considered as "emergency units" to be mobilized in case of attack. Thus, the existence of the settlements was strictly connected to military needs: they were established and dismantled according to specific war circumstances. We can then assess that during the first Qing period, the *tuntian* system and the settlements distribution were not the result of a long-term strategic plan. In the conflict against the Zunghar tribes, the Qing armies often turned out to assume a passive standing, for this reason the conquest of Xinjiang was accomplished only in the mid-18th century. During this annexation war, where Galdan and his cavalrymen represented the major threat, the Qing armies needed to cover very long distances in order to supply cereals to the detached garrisons. They used to provide these isolated outposts with fresh provisions, for this reason the involved military units were named production brigades, and they were exposed to the severe difficulties related to transporting foodstuffs for thousands of *li*. In the 35th year of Kangxi reign (1696), when no battles took place but a lot of potential conflicts were arising, the Qing court sent soldiers deep into the desert, for more than 3000 *li*, mainly following three different paths. On the middle and western paths, the necessary provisions for one soldier needed to be transported with four horses: the result was that more than five thousand carriages were used in total. Each garrison needed to cover more than one hundred *li*, and, considering the difficult routes of the time, incidents like abandoned stuffs and frequent delays increased gradually. "Where the land is sufficiently hard, after one day of rest it is possible to proceed for more than thirty *li*, while where there are sand hills, after one day of halt it is possible to cover no more than twenty *li*. If it happens to meet a strong wind, it is impossible to avoid the consequences, thus the provisions for eighty days cannot smoothly reach the destination".[7] Even though increasingly strict orders were issued on the necessity to deliver the provisions on time, in reality the freight never "reached the army post according to the original schedule". Emperor Kangxi, who himself went on three expeditions beyond the northern Mongolian frontier, knew perfectly the difficulties entailed by such kind of long journeys: "we covered a long distance, and we got to understand the situation beyond the northern Mongolian frontier. From the ancient times it is widely acknowledged the impossibility to send an army in those territories, and the situation, up to now, did not change. The majority of the route is on barren land, in some areas there is no water, then there is the stony Gobi Desert, where the

[7] *Qinzheng Pingding Shuomo Fanglüe* vol. 24. See also Zhang Yuxin and Zhao Shuqing 2006, 52.

transportation of provisions becomes particularly difficult. When it starts raining, it becomes complex to find firewood for cooking, because it is impossible to get an overall idea on the morphology of the area, how is it possible even to think of moving!".[8] These experiences of Emperor Kangxi had a deep impact on the subsequent strategy for the development of the *tuntian* system in Xinjiang.

During the war against the Zunghar armies, the Qing court started to establish agricultural settlements in Barkol.[9] Since the area of Barkol represents a strategic mountain pass which at the time controlled the only way to enter and exit Xinjiang, its position had a highly strategic value. In the 54th year of Kangxi reign, special Qing missions started to survey and examine the *mu*[10] of arable land, with the purpose to start farming in the area.

In the spring of the 55th year of Kangxi reign (1716), 500 soldiers-farmers reached Barkol with the special task of starting to reclaim and cultivate new land: in that same year the harvest was exceptional. Following that positive experience, the military units in Barkol increased in number and strength: Manchu and Han officers and men constituted 23 units in total, occupying more than 200 *li*. The area of the *tuntian* was also expanded, as it is evident from the maps of the time, where the three settlements of Tuhuluke 图呼鲁克, Duerboerjin 杜尔博尔金 and Halawusu 哈喇乌苏 were already present. The whole area received a big benefit from the development of these first agricultural settlements. In the 61st year of Kangxi reign (1722) the harvest of highland barley reached approximately 150.700 pecks,[11] while during the first year of Yongzheng reign (1723) it arrived at 210.600 pecks, basically the quantity of foodstuffs necessary for the army in times of war. Following this first experience, agricultural settlements were gradually established also in Hami and Turpan. As mentioned before, because the establishment of *tuntian* was not part of a long-term plan, as a consequence, its existence was linked to the fluctuations of the conflict with the Zunghar tribes, thus they were dismantled and re-established according to any peculiar situation. For instance, in the 7th year of Yongzheng reign (1729), a new war broke out between the Qing armies and the Zunghar tribes. Bloody battles took place in Kobdo and Turpan, while simultaneously the *tuntian* in Barkol and Turpan developed and strengthened. From the third month of the 9th year (1731) to the 5th month of the 10th year (1732) of Yongzheng reign, the Zunghar troops besieged for four times the districts of Luguqing 鲁谷庆, Halahuo 哈喇火 and other settlements. Eight thousand Qing soldiers were simultaneously dispatched to seven different areas,

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[8] *Qing Shilu - Da Qing Shengzu Ren Huangdi Shilu* 180, 5: 928-929.

[9] A steppe and mountainous area close to today's city of Hami.

[10] 1 *mu* corresponds to 0.07 hectares and to 20 square metres, that means approximately 1/6 of an acre.

[11] A peck is an imperial and U.S. customary unit of dry volume, corresponding to 2 gallons or 8 dry quarts or 16 dry pints. Two pecks make a "kenning" and four a "bushel".

in such a dispersion of military force that it became difficult to figure out the real extent of the fighting. The troops settled in Barkol hastened to the front lines to provide military support and provisions to the armies, the latter were so exhausted that they could not go on fighting anymore. When both parts reached a peace agreement in the 12th year of Yongzheng reign (1734), the Qing armies withdrawn and the *tuntian* in Barkol were dismantled.

During the reigns of emperors Kangxi and Yongzheng, the Qing court kept on sending troops to the North-western Territories, in the attempt to restrain the upheavals of the Zunghar tribes. Small scale *tuntian* were set up by private soldiers, with the aim of storing up foodstuffs for the armies: their establishment was only due to the Qing court urgency to solve the war issues with the Zunghars. The settlements were mostly concentrated in the battle areas of Barkol, Turpan and Hami, and they were established and removed according to contingencies. The development of the *tuntian* was very slow, mainly due to the strategy of *Fu Ze She Pan Ze Fa* 服则舍叛则伐 ("if there is submission then slacken the reins, if there are revolts then crack down"), which had been previously adopted by Qing Dynasty towards the Zunghar populations.

From a broader perspective, we can say that the establishment of the *tuntian* was an attempt to consolidate and strengthen the military front line of the Qing army in the North-western Territories, as well as an effort to create settlements in which military needs and agricultural production systematically matched in a comprehensive organization, always in the strategic framework of pacifying the border regions with the policy of *Tunken Shubian* 屯垦戍边 ("reclaiming new land and protecting the frontiers").

Fig. 1.2 Ruins of Qing Dynasty's Balikun *tuntian*

2. The Development of the Tuntian and the Social Stability in northern Xinjiang under emperors Qianlong and Jiaqing

More than seventy years were necessary to the Qing court to win the military campaigns against the Zunghars. The three emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong reigned from the battle of Ulan Butung, in the 29th year of Kangxi reign (1690), until the 22nd year of Qianlong reign (1757), when Amursana fled to Russia and then passed away. Only afterwards the war reached its conclusion. Even if the main battleground was in the north of Xinjiang, the war had a broader scope, and its circumstances affected the whole area, also having an impact on the territories of Qinghai and Tibet. While the *tuntian* system has its origins in this annexation war, gradually its scope and function took a broader stance in the imperial national defence system. Thus, while it was fundamental when dealing with the Zunghar tribes, it later came out to be a strategic pillar for the defence of the national and territorial unity of the country, as well as a deterrent against the intrusions of foreign powers.

During the Qianlong reign, the strategic value of the *tuntian* system in Xinjiang was increasingly acknowledged by the court: in the framework of the broader national strategy, a major consideration was attached to the *tuntian*, while more and more debates concerned the issue of the agricultural settlements. Consequently, the *tuntian* system developed in its expansion and organization.

2.1. The annexation of Xinjiang and the "*tuntian* policy"

The hostility of the former leadership of the Zunghar society did not stop during the Qianlong reign. For instance, Amursana and the other chiefs grasped any available occasion to gather their armies and rise to rebellion, representing a serious threat to the security of the Qing court in the north-western frontier regions. The Zunghar question was then one of the main issues in the Qianlong policy, since it represented a threat to the new-born Chinese nation state.[12] Internal power struggles and political tensions gradually weakened the leadership of the Zunghar tribes, providing the Qing court with a good opportunity to exterminate the enemies, and eventually conquer Xinjiang. Barkol became the centre of military operations in the north-west: two garrisons, counting 50.000 soldiers and 150.000 war horses, settled in the area. In case of war outbreak, the necessity to take measures in the agricultural policy would have arisen, and the experience of agricultural-military settlements in Barkol became a precious precedent. As a first step, in the 22nd year of Qianlong reign (1757), two hundred rank-and-file soldiers were transferred from the banner

[12] Millward (1997) gives a clear and detailed historical explanation on how the Chinese nation-state was born in the Qianlong period.

camps of Jiangxi and Gansu to Talenaqin, close to the oasis city of Hami. There, agricultural settlements were established under the command of one thousand generals. The Qing government addressed generals and commanders (*Tongjun* 统军)[13] with the following orders: "it is better not to leave the territory and continue to garrison the territory. The order for rank-and-file soldiers is to continue cultivating, and ask them to reclaim more and more *mu*",[14] "with the aim of avoiding excessive expenses to provide foodstuffs to soldiers and to increase the fiscal revenues".[15] As a consequence, new *tuntian* were established in each conquered area in an effort to consolidate the Qing control. All in a row from Barkol, Urumqi, Bizhan and Toksun, the *tuntian* expanded until Karashar. This fast development of the *tuntian* system was an efficient device to ensure the supply of necessary provisions for the army, to guarantee the production and delivering of foodstuffs to soldiers, together with representing an effective mechanism of control which contributed to integrate the frontier region into the rest of the country. At the same time, once the Xinjiang internal turmoil was settled, the power of the Qing Dynasty in the north-west was strengthened and a major support was provided to the development dynamics of the Xinjiang *tuntian*.

After the taming of the revolts led by the Zunghar leaders, the Qing central government gained direct control over the territory north and south of the Tianshan ranges, from the Altai ranges westwards, south-east of the Balkash Lake up north until the Zaysan Lake, and in the south down to the Karatagh ranges. All these territories lie in important strategic locations: "On the east the Great Wall looks like a barrier, on the north Mongolia acts like a shelter, on the south it borders and gets protection by the Tibetan high peaks, while on the west there are onion-like mountain ranges which make it safe. Lying along the ridge on the mainland 'Divine Continent',[16] it seems to be based on a high building: the region is entitled with all the characteristics of a vassal state composed by different reigns, and it can act as a solid fence. Xinjiang is not only a protective shield for the narrow area east of the central Shanxi plains and Gansu, representing a cushion against the perils of the Hehuang River,[17] but we can say that one movement there would be enough to affect the whole of the Central Plains of China".[18]

Considering these strategic assessments made during the Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns, we shall acknowledge that the stability of Xinjiang became a central issue for the political situation of the whole

[13] Military title.
[14] *Qing Shilu - Da Qing Gaozong Chun Huangdi Shilu* 562, 16: 127.
[15] *Qing Shilu - Da Qing Gaozong Chun Huangdi Shilu* 524, 15: 607.
[16] In Chinese 神州大陆 "Shenzhou Dalu", is one of the several expressions employed to name the Chinese Empire.
[17] 河湟 Hehuang is one of the several names of the northern section of the Yellow River. The reference area in the text is Qinghai Province.
[18] *Xinjiang Zhigao*, 1: 161.

North-western Territories, especially for Qianghai and Tibet. As reported in the quote taken from *Xinjiang Shizhi* 新疆史志 (*Xinjiang Historical Records*), the regional stability became a question of prime national relevance, since the turmoils in the area could eventually have an impact on the whole country, as *per* a chain reaction mechanism.

In an overall assessment on the role of the *tuntian* in the Qing Dynasty, we can conclude that, during the Kangxi reign, the integrated system of agricultural settlements and warfare operations did not bring stability to the region, not even in terms of political arrangements and border security. Only during the 24th year of Qianlong reign (1759), after the suppression of the Zunghar upsurges, the financial burden represented by the military campaigns in the north-west was fully acknowledged by the imperial court. Only then, major attention was attached to the policy of "reclaiming new land and protecting the frontiers", a strategic view attaching utmost importance to the *tuntian* system. Since then, the stabilization of the region was mainly pursued through the establishment of large permanent contingents and the promotion of large-scale agricultural activities. Accordingly, Qianlong went a step further in expanding the military settlements of the Green Banner and a new large-scale civilian *tuntian*. And considering the whole system became a key factor in the imperial policy towards the North-western Regions, a supervising structure was needed. As a consequence, a new peculiar military-civilian establishment, whose influence changed in strength and degree according to political circumstances, started to gain power in Xinjiang.

2.2. The establishment of a military-civilian leadership and the beginning of direct rule over the region.

With the conquest of Xinjiang, the administration of the region and the policies to be implemented became source of major concern for Emperor Qianlong. In this context, he often emphasized that "since *de facto* Yili returned under the Qing control as a frontier territory, its status shall be considered as shifted from a simple protecting pass in the Western Territories to a national strategic area". With a foothold in the area since the antiquity, the Chinese Empire always considered Yili as a buffer territory between the civilized "centre of the world" and the "barbarian peripheries". A new policy was thus planned and prepared, feasible and practicable projects started to be implemented as "necessary plans for long-term safety and peace", and as a guarantee of an effective imperial control on the area. At this point, "the relationship between the resident soldiers and the *tuntian* members became critical".[19] The Qing court decided to establish a military-civilian joint administration, a new administrative and management system which entailed the integration and mutual support of three main pillars: a comprehensive governmental structure was established, for military needs a big

[19] *Qing Shilu - Da Qing Gaozong Chun Huangdi Shilu* 609, 16: 841.

army was stationed, while on the economic level the slogan was still "reclaiming new land and guarding the frontiers". In this way, the traditional indirect control over the region switched to direct rule.

In the 10th month of the 27th year of Qianlong reign (1762), the imperial court officially announced the appointment of the Yili Secretary General and the establishment of a Military General Headquarter in Xinjiang[20] (briefly named Yili Military Governatorate).[21] At the same time, an edict was issued: "Since now on, the city of Yili in northern Xinjiang will house a permanent garrison and an agricultural colony. A Governatorate will be established, and the Governor will be in charge of military affairs".[22] The Military Governatorate set up in Yili became the Qing ruling center in Xinjiang. This city on the northern belt of the Tianshan Mountains was chosen for its strategic geographic position, acting as a hub between the northern and southern parts of the region. The military policies for the whole region were planned at the Governatorate, and the orders spread towards West and East. Yili is a highly strategic area dominating the north and supervising the south; moreover, it has a favourable geographic position in defending the frontier against the Tzarist infiltrations. At the time Yili covered an area 750 km. long from east to west, stretching for 550 km. from north to south, including the vast territory of the Balkash Lake, from the east to the south. The Yili Governatorate was the highest administrative and military body of the Qing Court in Xinjiang. Stationed in the favourable but remote town of Yili, it represented the central government of the Qing Dynasty in every aspect - military, political and administrative - for the whole Xinjiang. The Yili Governor was the highest authority in the hierarchical ladder, which included, from the top to the bottom: the "Ministerial Councellor" (*Canzan Dachen* 参赞大臣), the "Ministerial Commander" (*Lingdui Dachen* 领队大臣) and the "Commander in Chief " (*Dutong* 都统).[23] The main responsibilities of the Qing bodies in the region were to handle the administrative and military affairs at a local level, including the dispatch of orders to the resident garrisons and the arrangement of defensive measures, together with managing the agricultural and stockbreeding activities, production tasks, the handling of the check-posts inside the support units, patrolling the frontiers and defending the territory. In order to guard the borders and taming the turmoil in the region, the Qing government adopted a policy of "integrating border defensive measures with agricultural tasks".[24] In the framework of the Qing strategic plan, Xinjiang northern belt was considered as the main station for troops on duty. Yili and Urumqi were the most important bases for garrisons and *tuntian*, and soldiers recruited from all

[20] In Chinese 总统伊犁等处将军 "Zongtong Yili Dengchu Jiangjun".
[21] In Chinese 伊犁将军 "Yili Jiangjun".
[22] *Qing Shilu - Da Qing Gaozong Chun Huangdi Shilu* 673, 17: 519.
[23] Commander in Chief of one of the "Eight Banners", the military-administrative organizations of the Manchese ethnic group during the Qing Dynasty.
[24] *Qing Shigao*, 137: 3509.

over China converged there with the main tasks of reclaiming the land and protecting the frontiers. A special meaning was attached to the military garrisons of the Eight Banners,[25] which had a leading position on the rest of the resident soldiers. "Among the resident troops there were soldiers of Manchurian, Mongolian, Suolun 索伦,[26] Chahaer 察哈尔 and Oirat origins, together with field officers of the Green Banner, all of them operating in turn. They constituted the resident army in charge for the stabilization of the area, and could alternatively serve as regular farmers and workers. They all listened to the orders of the Military Governatorate in Yili, and could be deployed in massive formations. The garrisons had their headquarters in Urumqi in the east, in Tarbaghatai in the north, and in the Muslim towns in the south. Their organization was arranged into different units, in charge of cultivating the land and defending the frontiers. Once the units were dispatched, they were ready to receive new orders, while being in constant contact with those in Hami and Barkol, outside the western pacified frontier".[27]

The Manchu armies behind the front line in Wushi, Aksu, Yarkand, Yenghissar, Kashgar and Tarbaghatai were ready to relieve the garrisons on the front line from their agricultural and military tasks, since soldiers did not have their families together with them and moved easily from one place to another. The *Taizhan* (台站) and *Kalun* (卡伦) were important Qing outposts in frontier areas: the *Taizhan* were mainly set up in the communication hubs, while the *Kalun* were inspection posts. "The *Kalun* and the *Taizhan* expanded from Hami westwards, northwards to Barkol, and from there again westwards to Kucha, and on the north to Urumqi. From Kucha the outposts continued to develop, until the western city of Wushi, and again westwards to Yarkand and Kashgar. In the south they arrived to Khotan. In consideration of the number and location of the *Kalun*, it was clear that the great majority was established where the frontier garrisons were settled".[28] They were all set up in strategic passes, and, since after the fall of the Han Dynasty the frontier regions in north-western China remained unguarded, their distribution followed the western national frontiers. Thus, "it was not unreasonable to take a few small pieces of land from the Russian territory, and to allow our people to populate them".[29] The "integration of border defence policies and land reclamation measures" not only strengthened the Qing military presence in the region, but also promoted, on a certain degree,

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[25] The Eight Banners were administrative divisions into which all Manchurian families were organized. This structure provided the basic framework for the Manchurian military organization. The fundamental unit of the banners was the "companies" (佐领 *zuoling*), some of which reflected pre-existing lineage or tribal connections in their membership, while others deliberately overrode such connections in order to create a more centralized military force. Each company required, in principle, to provide 300 soldiers to a larger banner army.

[26] Official minority in China having Manchu-tungus origins, also known as Solon Ewenki.

[27] *Qingchao Tongdian* ch. 70. See also Gao Jian and Li Fang 2007, 64.

[28] *Qing Shigao*, 120: 4081.

[29] *Qingdai Zhong'e guanxi Dangan Dubian*, 2: 178.

the socio-economic development in Xinjiang. During the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns, five main different kinds of Xinjiang *tuntian* can be identified: *Bingtun* (兵屯), *Fantun* (犯屯), *Mintun* (民屯), *Qitun* (旗屯) and *Huitun* (回屯). Here follows a list of the different characteristics of the main military-agricultural settlements in Xinjiang:

1) *Bingtun* and *Fantun*. The *Bingtun* were agricultural settlements with a military past. The term mainly indicated agricultural settlements where residents were rank-and-file soldiers coming from the green camps, and at the beginning and in the mid-Qing Dynasty always had a dominant position. During that period the main locations of these settlements in the northern Tianshan belt, in places like Chöchek, Yili, Urumqi, Turpan, Hami, Barkol, Gucheng and Kuerkalawusu. They accounted for approximately 40.000 men, most of them with their families, since they represented the permanently resident army. Concerning the southern belt of the Tianshan, in Kashgar there was the biggest Qing military outpost, with more than one thousand soldiers. In places like Yenghissar, Yarkand, Hotian, Wushi, Aksu, Kucha and Karashar, detachments numbering hundreds of permanent soldiers each were established. In the periods of postwar economic recovery, the problems related to the provisions for soldiers and high-ranking military officers were difficult to solve locally. The large-scale *tuntian* were then part of a long-term strategic policy aimed at keeping military settlements for frontier defence.

The green military-agricultural camps, in the whole Xinjiang, were organized in two different systems: they were receiving order either from the Urumqi provincial commander-in-chief, or from the Yili Military Region. The officers and soldiers at the Urumqi green camps, except for part of them with drills and garrison duties, were mainly engaged in agriculture. The basic work unit for the soldiers of the green camps employed in agricultural production was the *tun* (屯), an agricultural-military settlement or simply a "camp". Inside the area of the camps fortified castles were built: these fortresses hosted the government headquarters and residences for officials. The soldiers dormitories, the residences for the families, the weapons warehouses, the agricultural tools storehouses, the granary and so on, were all guarded by security personnel who, relying on the fortress position and equipments, could respond to potential enemies, and returned to agricultural production once the conflicts were settled. The rank-and-file soldiers belonging to one camp were approximately a hundred, but their number varied according to the peculiarities of the different locations. The biggest camp might have had 250 soldiers, while the smallest one, like the one in Aksu, could have even only 15 residents. The distribution of settlements is shown in Fig. 2.2: as it is clear from the picture, they were spread all over the borders.

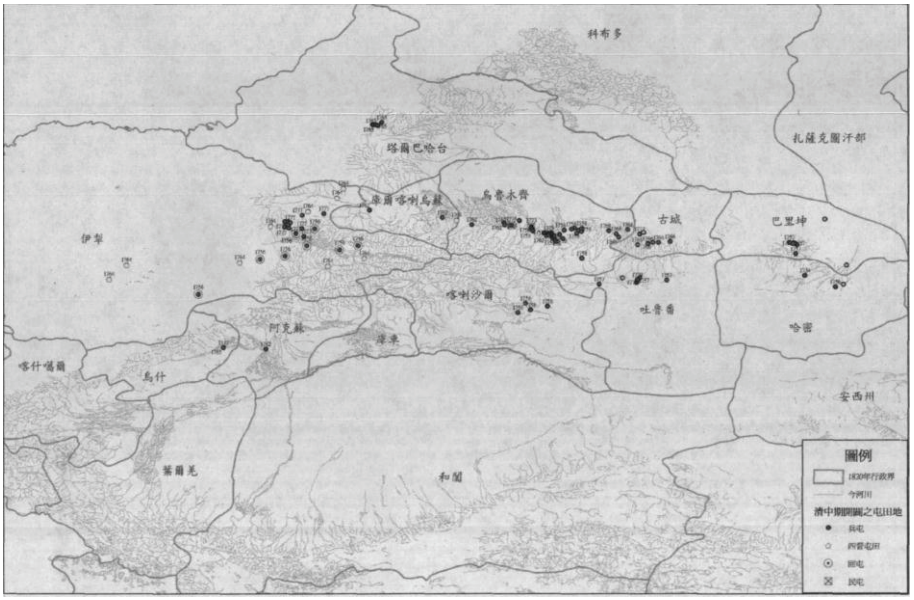

Fig 2.2 Distribution of the Qing Dynasty's *tuntian*

The *Fantun*, literally "camps for criminals", were also called *Qiantun* (遣屯), or "exile camps". These were a kind of *tuntian* established by criminals and exiled people, mostly receiving orders from the *Bingtun* (military camps), and belonging to their same organization. Thus the government official in charge of supervising the *Bingtun* could consider the *Fantun* as a kind of additional organization. Their reclamation areas were mainly distributed in Hami, Urumqi, Korla, Wusu (also written "Usu"), Jinghe, Yili, Chöchek, Pizhan and Karashar.

In summary, the distribution of the *tuntian* in Xinjiang during the Qing Dynasty can be described as follows: the *Bingtun* were mainly concentrated in northern Xinjiang, while in the south there were just a few settlements. The *Qiantun* were only in the north and in the east of the region. The *Bingtun* had the advantage that soldiers were engaged also in agricultural works, and their organization was flexible enough to be fast in operations, easily growing or reducing itself on the basis of the contingent needs. Both on the political and military level, the *Bingtun* had a fundamental role.

During the first period of Qing control over the region, the measures adopted on agricultural activities aimed at self-sustenance, and the agricultural policy in general quickly solved the problems related to the provisions for the rear troops permanently settled in the region, and the positive effects of these measures were quickly evident. On the other side, the *Bingtun* represented a kind of militarized production totally controlled by the state, thus it was not for soldiers initiative that agricultural works were implemented, and the central government still needed to provide agricultural tools and materials, together

with salaries, provisions and funds for the troops. In this situation, the production costs were considerably high. After the 35th year of Qianlong reign (1770), because of the fast development of agricultural production, the price of grain in the whole region decreased: in the Urumqi area "one *dan* (石) of wheat decreased to the market price to five *qian* (钱), and it was even difficult to sell it".[30] The price of grain in the market was approximately only one fourth of the production costs sustained by the *Bingtun* for its plantation: the market price of grain was much lower than its production costs. As a consequence, the *Bingtun* started to be dismantled on a large-scale. As a consequence, the expansion of the *Mintun* became a strategic necessity to develop and stabilize the society of the north-west.

2) *Mintun*. The fast development of the *Mintun*, the so-called "civilian settlements", and in particular the attraction of large-scale migration waves of Han Chinese from Inner China, is the most outstanding feature of the Qing Dynasty *tuntian* in Xinjiang. The term *Mintun* - and also *Hutun* (户屯), or "familial settlements" - indicates the settlements established by families of farmers coming from Inner China and moved to Xinjiang. They were mainly poor farmers from Jiangxi and Gansu, but also merchants and relatives of the soldiers already on duty and settled in Xinjiang. In the 20th year of Qianlong reign (1755), after the conquest of the region by the Qing armies, the Emperor conceived the idea of sending people from Inner China to Xinjiang, with the task of engaging in farming activities. The Emperor believed that in this way "it could have been possible to populate the frontiers, at the same time relieving the situation of the jobless poor farmers from Inner China. The latter could have the chance to become wealthy and to be able to grow their children. In this way, only one measure was necessary to solve two issues".[31] Keeping the *tuntian* policy as strategic leading idea, since the 26th year of the Qianlong reign (1761) the *mintun* started to flourish in the northern Tianshan belt. The *mintun* system in the area developed quickly, and the settlements became larger and larger: from Balikun on the east, to Urumqi and Yili, where there was a *bingtun*, a *mintun* was also established. On this point, we need to explain that, under the Qing governatorate in Xinjiang, different policies were implemented for Han and Muslim people respectively. For instance, during the development of the *tuntian* system, the strategy of "developing the north and ignoring the south" was followed: migrants were actively encouraged to move from the south of the region to places like Balikun, Urumqi and Yili, Chöchek, all in the northern Tianshan belt. In the southern Tianshan belt, different policies for Han and Muslim people were implemented, for example it was not allowed to migrants from Inner China to move there. These policies on the development of the *tuntian* had an impact on the situation and some complexities currently

[30] *Qing Shilu - Da Qing Gaozong Chun Huangdi Shilu* 867, 20: 632.
[31] *Qing Shilu - Da Qing Gaozong Chun Huangdi Shilu* 877, 20: 746-747.

exploding in southern Xinjiang.

Local administrative headquarters had the responsibility of managing the *mintun*. The latter were organized on the basis of the same system in force in Inner China: the *lijia* (里甲). The management of the whole organization was constituted by the head of the *li*[32] of the *qu* (渠)[33], as well as the defence apparatus itself, who were all in charge of bureaucratic affairs, tax collection, production and irrigation works. Every *li* was composed by three hundred families, while every *jia* by thirty. Along with the development of the *Mintun* facilities, the local basic structure of the Qing government was progressively established and improved. In the 38th year of the Qianlong reign (1773), a Governatorate of the Western Territories - named *Zhenxi Fu* 镇西府 - was set up in the Balikun area, in charge of the *Mintun* in the counties of Balikun and Qitai, while the sub-prefecture administration of Dihua[34] - the *Zhili Zhouguan* 直隶州管 - had jurisdiction over the *Mintun* located in the Urumqi area and in the counties of Fukang, Manas and Changji. The development of the civilian settlements gave a strong input to the migration waves from Inner China: an increasingly huge number of families moved to Xinjiang, starting a process of integration between the different ethnic groups of the region and the migrant population from Inner China, at the same time speeding up, mainly through an integrated institutional and fiscal system, the formation of a Chinese nation state. In the Chinese sources, a particular strong emphasis is put on the consolidated centripetal force bringing together the Central Asian ethnic groups of Xinjiang and the populations in the rest of China. The Qing strategy of sending flocks of migrants from Inner China to Xinjiang with the task to produce, live, populate the frontier and develop a form of social production, had the effect of transferring the central control in the North-western Frontier, and, on a small degree, of stabilizing the area.

Masses of farmers from Inner China, organized in planned migration waves, moved then to Xinjiang to reclaim new land and engage in production. Although at the beginning the investments by the central government were huge, as soon as the farmers arrived in Xinjiang started cultivating and producing, profits quickly arose. In particular, when the government started to release the certificates of land use to these migrant families, the settlements started to represent a fiscal revenue for the centre: the government not only did not need to invest in the production costs anymore, but, on the contrary, every year taxes on grain production were regularly collected as fiscal revenues. After the mid-Qianlong reign, all the settlements were gradually transformed into *Mintun*, and their agricultural production in the region became a stable and reliable economic base for the centre. In the region the achievements were so

[32] Sub-prefectural level administrative unit in force during the end-Ming and beginning-Qing period.
[33] Military unit in force during the end-Ming and beginning-Qing period
[34] "Dihua" is the name of the Xinjiang capital Urumqi before 1949.

outstanding that "money was more than enough, the food was abundant, the goods were in surplus, and officials and private individuals were all rich".[35] "According to new regulations and measures, settlers in Xinjiang could not rely anymore on the rations and payments that the seventeen provinces in Inner China were previously providing, and, even informally, they could not expect anymore any kind of help from the three provinces on the east, which used to give support to the army".[36]

From a broader perspective, planned migration to Xinjiang and the settlement of huge numbers of peoples in the *tuntian* was a successful device to solve the problem of surplus of population in Inner China: with the "assignment of *mu* of land to these people", the North-western Frontier started to be developed and populated, while the border defense system was also strengthened. In this framework, Chinese scholars and politicians recognize that the mixing of populations from Inner China with local ethnic groups - mainly the fact that they were living in the same society - opened the way to the formation of common cultural values, and, on a certain degree, it helped the consolidation of a "Chinese nationality" (*Zhonghua Minzu* 中华民族). During this historical process, the multiethnic society of Xinjiang emerged, with its members living together in the same area. Uyghur, Han, Hui, Manchurian, Mongolian, Kazakh, Kyrghiz, Uzbek and Russian people, according to the narrative of Beijing authorities, built a common environment in this frontier region. The *Mintun* then became a fundamental strategic system to develop and shape Xinjiang, both on an institutional and demographic levels: what the Qing Dynasty had in mind was not only the promotion of development in the local society and economy, but also the protection of the oneness of the country, consolidating at the same time the defence system on the Chinese north-western border. In this respect, Emperor Daoguan declared: "*tuntian* is only a concept, but it represents a perfect system to bring peace to the frontiers, improve people's lives, make the food abundant and provide a security apparatus".[37] Even though this is a Qing Dynasty assessment on the Xinjiang *tuntian*, it still represents a widespread idea, through the ages, of the ruling centre about Xinjiang and the *tuntian*.

3) *Qitun* and *Huitun*. The *Qitun* or "banner camps", are a kind of *tuntian* established with the labour force of the former soldiers of the Eight Banners. Mainly settled in the Yili area starting from the 7th year of the Jiaqing era (1802), their establishment was an answer to the needs of soldiers: employing the militaries in agricultural activities, on one side the soldiers-farmers could provide to their self-sustenance; on the other side, a benefit was gained for both

[35] Gong Zizhen 1975, 113.
[36] *Ibidem*.
[37] *Qing Shilu - Da Qing Xuanzong Cheng Huangdi Shilu* 197, 36: 1110.

agricultural production and military defence. The Eight Banners troops were the core garrisons of the Qing army: while receiving a preferential treatment, they represented the major force in charge of the defence of the frontier territories. The troops of the Eight Banners on garrison duty in Yili were organized in five battalions: the Manchurian, the Xibe (or Sibo), the Suolun, the Chahaer (or Chahar) and the Oirat Mongols battalions. They were the backbone of border defence, and represented the main part of the workers at the *Kalun* posts, with the task of guarding the frontiers as well as farming the land. Alternating military training and agricultural work, the garrisons became engaged in border defence on a long-term basis, and provided a fundamental contribute to the development of Xinjiang and the consolidation of the border defensive system.

The *Huitun* were a form of *tuntian* where Uyghur people, recruited by the Qing government, were stationed and engaged in agriculture. They were mainly in Hami, Turpan and Yili. During the first stages of the annexation war, it was in Turpan and Hami that the first garrisons settled down and started to engage in agriculture in an effort to solve the problems of the provisions for the armies. After the Qing government integrated the region into its territory, Yili became the headquarter of the Military Governatorate, representing the Qing control in the whole Xinjiang. In order to guarantee the supply of provisions to stationed troops, the Qing government started a large-scale project to establish *Huitun*. As a result, "Governor Ha called Muslim populations from places like Aksu. Over the years, 6.383 Muslim families in total were stationed in Yili, and, except for 323 families in charge of funerals and services, six thousand Muslim families were all tax payers. Out of the sixty Muslim families of miners, thirty continued digging in search of iron, they were engaged in agricultural activities".[38] Accordingly, during the Daoguang period the resident families in the *Huitun* reached the eight thousand units. The *Huitun* were an important part of the *tuntian* system in Yili, an area which gradually became the centre of the *Huitun* in Xinjiang. The grain produced by the *Huitun* satisfied the necessities of the great part of Han and Mancurian officers, as well as men stationed in Yili, as it is stated in the report "Inventories and storages" (*Kuchumen* 库储门) contained in chapter 8 of *Qinding Xinjiang Shilüe* 钦定新疆识略 (*Knowledge and stratagems on Xinjiang compiled and published by imperial order*) of the first year of the Daoguang reign (1821). The request for grain supply during the last years of Qianlong reign reached more than 166.000 *shi* (石), while at the beginning of the Jiaqing era it decreased to slightly more than 135.000 *shi*. The provisions of grain were all supplied by the *Huitun* and *Bingtun* in Yili: every year "it was possible to obtain grain from the five granaries of the Muslim cities of Huiyuan, Huining, Gulezha, Suiding and Taleqi, and from the Green camps".[39] From these accounts it comes out clearly that the *Huitun*, in the framework of the *tuntian* system of Xinjiang in Qing times, had a fundamental

[38] Yong Baozuan and Ma Dazheng 1990, 230.
[39] *Qinding Xinjiang Shilüe*, 8: 948.

role.

Conclusions: Role and Meaning of the Tuntian System in northern Xinjiang during the Qing Dynasty

With the development of different kinds of settlements, it was during the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns of Qing Dynasty that the greatest expansion of the *tuntian* was reached in Xinjiang. The *tuntian* system in the region not only promoted the local economy and matched the needs of the stationed armies, but it also gave an important contribute to the consolidation of the border defence system and the stabilization of the social environment. In summary, the military-agricultural settlements gave an important contribution to the long-term Chinese control of the North-western Regions. The Qing court, with the strategy of "developing the north and ignoring the south", actively promoted the stationing of troops to open up wasteland in the northern belt of the Tianshan Mountains. The control on the Nort-western Frontiers was then strengthened, while the previous economic pattern of "promoting the south and ignoring the north" was completely reversed. In this context, the economy of the area north to Tianshan developed quickly: this historical strategies and policies opened up the way to the current success of Tianshan northern belt as an economic centre, including the Urumqi and Yili areas, and outlined the later patterns of economic development. In particular, considering the rapid development of an oasis economy in this northern belt, many people from southern Xinjiang and Inner China started moving north: the northern Tianshan belt finally became the economic centre of the whole region, leaving behind the southern areas. If we take into consideration the economic patterns in the region, along with the development of the different forms of settlements and reclamation measures during the Qing Dynasty, we can assess that militaries, prisoners and exiled people, poor families, temporary personnel and peddles, all reached the same goal by going through different routes. They took along their families to settle in Xinjiang, gradually establishing villages and small towns. On this basis, in the northern Tianshan belt groups of small new towns started to appear. For example, Yili originally was a "spacious place, where not even city walls could be found".[40] From the 25th year of Qianlong reign (1760), the stationed armies and flourishing *tuntian*, together with the General Military Governatorate, were constantly considered as the centre of the Yili area. Huiyuan, Huining, Suiding, Guangren, Xichun, Zhande, Gongchen, Ningyuan and Taerqi were established as nine satellite towns. In *Yijiang Huilan* 伊江汇览 (*Collection of Works on the Yili River*) we read: "If we have to report on the settled armies in garrison duty in the Yili area, the merchants come and go, soldiers and civilians converge there, all the different cities have a big single market as meeting place, the

[40] *Xiyu Wenjian Lu*, 1: 346.

hamlets are close together in serrate formation as wild gooses in a row, while in the open spaces out of the cities there are cultivated farmlands, scattered like the pieces on a chessboard"; "wheels of vehicles and horses' hooves, merchants taking measures to stabilize the commodities' prices, villages and hamlets connected and mutually assisting each others, signs of human habitation everywhere. In a place where in the former years there was just a vast empty space, today there are no differences with Inner China". As Urumqi, Changji, Hutubi and Manas, where the main waves of migrants were directed, also other cities developed with the same rapidity. Because plenty of people from the Central Plains and inhabitants of the southern belt of the Tianshan moved to the north of the region, the ethnic pattern of Xinjiang changed, and a process of intermingling and development of the ethnic groups took place. Concerning with the language, habits, culture and faith, everything in the territory started mixing up and being integrated. And in the plans of the central authorities, the way to a common development should be eventually opened.

On the other side, since the Qing court adopted the political and economic strategy of "promoting the north and ignoring the south", during the first period of military settlements development aimed to exploit the wasteland, a related policy of ethnic separation was implemented. This especially happened since migrants from Inner China were banished from settling and engaging in agriculture in the southern Tianshan belt. And according to the official narrative, this became one of the reasons for the comparatively backward economic situation in the southern area of the region. Because the land reclamation process in the south started relatively late, the scale of the local economy cannot be compared with the economic development in the north.

The development of oases cities in Xinjiang reached Balikun to the east, Yili in the west, Chöchek in the north and, on the south to Kuerkalewusu. The soldiers of the Green Banners, Uyghur farmers, Han migrants, exiled and prisoners, merchants, all of them invested in the vigorous mass campaign of developing and cultivating the wasteland. The grain produced in the northern Tianshan belt not only could fully satisfy the needs of the Qing troops set up for patrol and defence, but even the storage rooms were full. For instance, in the last years of Qianlong reign, the grain preserved in the Yili warehouses was more than 500.000 *shi*, a quantity which could provide food to the armies stationed in Yili for at least three years".[41] The fast economic development in the northern Tianshan belt not only solved the problems related to provisions for the armies, not only alleviated the financial burden on the government; most importantly, it started the opening up of a kind of oasis agriculture, establishing at the same time modern farming and commercial system. Moreover, if we consider the distribution of the economic development in the frontier area, the strategy implemented since the Han and Tang dynasties onwards of "promoting the south and ignoring the north" changed completely, and with it, the settlements

[41] Zeng Wenwu 1936, 317-318.

presence in the area and their development pattern changed accordingly.

The northern Tianshan belt became the focal area of development in the region, with Balikun, Qitai, Urumqi and Yili as new developing cities. For example, "In the Yili area, the grain spades were extremely flourishing, day by day the land was more fertile, in every season the harvests were rich, while rice and food were in surplus. In a few decades, there will be the possibility to rest and consolidate the strength, since the products will be abundant also for the common people. The native land of Wusun people, will be like a bustling metropolis".[42] This trend of economic development had deep consequences on the regional situation during the future Republican period as well as during the People's Republic.

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[42] *Xiyu Tuzhi Xiaozhu*, 32: 456.

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