

MASTER'S THESIS

Gender, emotions, and texts: writings to and about husbands in anthologies of Qing women's works

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**Gender, Emotions, and Texts:
Writings to and about Husbands in Anthologies of Qing Women's Works**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Philosophy**

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Abstract

This dissertation studies women's writings to and about husbands contained in anthologies of Qing women's works. With an increasing rediscovery of anthologies authored by women, voices of women in late imperial China can be heard more easily. While the concept of viewing women as victims in history is fading out in the intellectual academia, current scholarship is paying attention to the agency and subjectivity of women in Qing China. Echoing this research trend, my study examines women's texts, particularly those addressed to and about husbands, as a means to approach the larger question of how intellectual couples shared their emotions after marriage. Through an investigation into women's literary works which demonstrates the various aspects of the marital life of their authors, my research aims at further elucidating the emergence and prevalence of "companionate marriages" among the gentry class, especially in the Jiangnan region, thus broadening our understanding of gender interaction in Qing China.

As previous scholars have offered a sound basis for conceptualizing women and gender in history, I refer to 'gender' as one of the theoretical frameworks in my study. I also adopt a thematic approach to probe the emotional world of literary wives in general as reflected in their writings. Hence, I categorize the content of my sources into four main parts with explanations of different subject matter, including marital sentiments, intellectual pursuits, leisure entertainments, and sorrowful events. Through this study, I attempt to answer the following questions: As composing for husbands had become popularized in the Qing period, what was the subject matter of women's expression? How did writing women portray their self-image as companionate wives in writings addressed to their husbands? In what historically significant ways could women's writings reflect their marital lives?

It is expected that my study will contribute to an original exploration of texts by both famous and anonymous Qing women writers; and will not only provide a dynamic picture of gender relations between husband and wife, but also a fuller understanding of traditional family life. In a broader sense, to study the active participation of women beyond their domestic duties helps further document a more comprehensive picture of the social and economic history in Qing China.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Declaration..... | i |
| Abstract..... | ii |
| Acknowledgments..... | iii |
| Table of Contents | iv |
| Lists of Abbreviations | vi |
| | |
| 1. Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 Objectives | 1 |
| 1.2 Literature review..... | 6 |
| 1.3 Sources..... | 14 |
| 1.4 Gender, Emotions, and Texts: Methodological notes | 20 |
| 1.5 Content of writings to and about husbands..... | 24 |
| | |
| 2. Marital Sentiments | 28 |
| 2.1 Narrating conjugal love..... | 28 |
| 2.2 Expressing lovesickness..... | 32 |
| 2.3 Showing kind concern for husband’s well-being..... | 41 |
| 2.4 Giving advice | 45 |
| 2.5 Reporting the family situation | 49 |
| 2.6 Receiving husband’s letter and seeing husband’s return..... | 52 |
| 2.7 Summary..... | 54 |
| | |
| 3. Intellectual Pursuits..... | 56 |
| 3.1 The civil examination and erudite wives | 56 |
| 3.2 Emotional support for taking the civil exam | 58 |
| 3.2.1 Farewell for the examination | 59 |
| 3.2.2 Consolation for failure | 64 |
| 3.2.3 Congratulations for success | 67 |
| 3.3 Literary sharing..... | 70 |
| 3.3.1 Academic discussion..... | 70 |
| 3.3.2 Sharing teaching duties | 73 |
| 3.3.3 Composing on husband’s behalf..... | 75 |
| 3.3.4 Inscribing poetry on paintings | 77 |
| 3.4 Singing in harmony..... | 81 |
| 3.4.1 Linked-line composition..... | 83 |
| 3.4.2 Joint composition..... | 86 |
| 3.5 Summary..... | 89 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 4. Leisure Entertainments | 92 |
| 4.1 Leisure amusements..... | 93 |
| 4.1.1 Making fun with a husband | 93 |
| 4.1.2 Watching the moon and chatting intimately | 97 |
| 4.1.3 Appreciating musical performances..... | 102 |
| 4.1.4 Having refreshments: Wine and tea | 104 |
| 4.2 Outdoor activities..... | 109 |
| 4.2.1 Sightseeing..... | 109 |
| 4.2.2 Boating..... | 113 |
| 4.2.3 Admiring flowers | 116 |
| 4.3 Summary..... | 118 |
| | |
| 5. Sorrowful Events | 120 |
| 5.1 Separation in life..... | 120 |
| 5.2 Sickness | 129 |
| 5.3 Parting at death | 135 |
| 5.4 Summary..... | 145 |
| | |
| 6. Conclusion | 146 |
| 6.1 Concluding remarks and observations | 146 |
| 6.2 Significance and limitations..... | 151 |
| 6.3 Future research directions..... | 153 |
| | |
| Appendix I: List of Anthologies Consulted..... | 156 |
| | |
| Appendix II: A Preliminary List of Writings to and about Husbands by Qing Women Contained in Anthologies..... | 162 |
| | |
| Appendix III: A Preliminary List of Writings to and about Husbands by Qing Women with Available English Translations in Modern Anthologies..... | 228 |
| | |
| Works Cited | 235 |
| | |
| Curriculum Vitae..... | 265 |