

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.

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