

# “Singing in Dis/Harmony” in Times of Chaos: Poetic Exchange Between Xu Can and Chen Zhilin During the Ming-Qing Transition\*

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## Abstract

“Singing in harmony” [*changhe* 唱和], responding to another person’s poem in accordance with certain formal and thematic rules, has been an important social function and primary channel of poetic production throughout Chinese literary history. Through a parallel or intertextual reading of Xu Can’s (ca. 1610-1677+) and Chen Zhilin’s (1605-1666) exchanged poetry during the Ming-Qing transition, I demonstrate the two interactive dimensions of their conjugal communication: First, that Xu Can, notwithstanding her role as a “traditional” wife, did not refrain from

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expressing her feelings and opinions about politics, historical change, and the official career of her husband. Second, the husband-wife *changhe* practice helped bring forth Chen Zhilin's political statement, a "turncoat's" voice we rarely hear in Chinese history. I argue that this conjugal relationship as reflected in their poetry was characterized by a degree of intellectual compatibility and mutual engagement scarcely to be found elsewhere. In addition, because women like Xu Can went beyond conventional gender roles to embody what they perceived as high values in reaction to the political turmoil created by dynastic transition, their decision accorded them and their works a special place in Chinese history.

**Key Words:** "singing in harmony", Ming-Qing transition, Xu Can, Chen Zhilin, Conjugal communication

## Introduction

"Singing in harmony" (*changhe* 唱和), responding to another person's poem in accordance with certain formal and thematic rules, has been an important social function and primary channel of poetic production throughout Chinese literary history.<sup>1</sup> This had long been a practice in the social life of the male literati, but it was not until the rise of a critical mass of women poets in the late imperial period that the phenomenon of women exchanging poems with their male or female literary companions became prevalent.<sup>2</sup> The woman poet Xu Can 徐燦 (ca. 1610-1677+, courtesy name Xiangping 湘蘋) has received much attention in both Qing

1 For a comprehensive survey of the *changhe* practice from the Eastern Jin through the Tang periods (317-907), see Zhao Yiwu 趙以武, *Changhe shi yanjiu* 唱和詩研究 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenyi chubanshe, 1997). Colin Hawes's study of the social function of poetry in the Northern Song also intensively examines the vibrant role of poetic exchange in the literati society. See Colin Hawes, *The Social Circulation of Poetry in the Mid-Northern Song: Emotional Energy and Literati Self-Cultivation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

2 There were indeed a few exceptional cases in which women such as Tang courtesans exchanged poetry with male literati. The earliest case of a couple singing in harmony is Qin Jia 秦嘉 and his wife Xu Shu 徐淑 of the Eastern Han (317-420), recorded in the *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*. See Xu Ling 徐陵, comp., *Yutai xinyong jianzhu* 玉臺新詠集箋注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 1, pp. 30-32.

and recent historical and literary criticism.<sup>3</sup> She has been particularly recognized for employing the masculine-style [*baofang*] lyric as a woman in order to express her loyalist emotions for the fallen Ming.<sup>4</sup> However, many of her song lyrics were written to her husband Chen Zhilin 陳之遴 (1605-1666, courtesy name Su’an 素菴), either as an initial address or a response to Chen’s writings.<sup>5</sup> A high-ranking minister in both the Ming and Qing, Chen Zhilin’s name occurs in various historical records. He also left behind a sizable collection of *shi*, *ci* and other genres of writings entitled *Fuyun ji* 浮雲集 (The collection of floating clouds), but his poetic voice has been over-shadowed by Xu Can’s as she has been accorded more recognition as an outstanding Ming loyalist and woman poet.<sup>6</sup> Even so, previous studies on Xu Can have not paid sufficient attention to the communicative context of her song lyrics.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the fact that *changhe* was a communicative activity between

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- 3 The *Qing ci jishi huiping* 清詞紀事匯評 includes a rather comprehensive collection of comments on Xu Can’s song lyrics by Qing critics. See You Zhenzhong 尤振中 and You Yiding 尤以丁, eds., *Qing ci jishi huiping* (Anhui: Huangshan shushe, 1995), pp. 65-66. For recent studies of Xu Can, see Kang-i Sun Chang, “Liu Shih and Hsü Ts’an: Feminine or Feminist?,” in Pauline Yu, ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 169-187; Chen Bangyan 陳邦彥, “Pingjie nü ciren Xu Can jiqi Zhuozhengyuan ci” 評介女詞人徐燦及其拙政園詞, in Cheng Yuzhui 程鬱綴, ed., *Xu Can ci xinshi jiping* 徐燦詞新釋集評 (Beijing: Zhuoguo shudian, 2003), pp. 1-25; and Deng Hongmei 鄧紅梅, *Nüxing ci shi* 女性詞史 (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000), pp. 271-291. For English translations of some of her poems, see also Kang-i Sun Chang and Haun Saussy, eds., *Women Writers of Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 337-350; Wilt Idema and Beata Grant, *The Red Brush: Writing Women of Imperial China* (Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 431-437.
  - 4 See, for example, Chang, “Liu Shih and Hsü Ts’an,” in Pauline Yu, ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, p. 183. Xu Can was considered the second greatest woman *ci* poet after Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084-c. 1151) by *ci* critics in the Qing. See You Zhenzhong and You Yiding, eds., *Qing ci jishi*, p. 65. However, Li Qingzhao was a song lyricist who insisted on the *wanyue* 婉約 or feminine quality as the orthodox form of the *ci*. Although many of her lyrics bear distinctive individual characteristics, her writings in the *ci* form can be generally categorized as the *wanyue* style.
  - 5 Chen’s dates are quoted from Jiang Qingbo 江慶柏, *Qingdai renwu shengzu nianbiao* 清代人物生卒年表 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005), p. 438.
  - 6 To my knowledge, only Liu Li 劉麗 has offered a brief and preliminary introduction of Chen Zhilin’s life and poetry. See Liu Li, “Chen Zhilin qi ren qi shi” 陳之遴其人其詩, *Gansu shehui kexue* 甘肅社會科學 1 (January 2008), pp. 110-113.
  - 7 In his commentary on Xu Can’s lyrics, Cheng Yuzhui has made a significant contribution by appending some of Chen Zhilin’s lyrics to Xu’s when they are exchanged verses. See Cheng Yuzhui, ed., *Xu Can ci xinshi jiping* (Beijing: Zhuoguo shudian, 2003).

individuals with equivalent cultural backgrounds, this practice, when conducted between husband and wife, has also been considered a salient symbol of “companionate marriage” in late imperial Chinese social and cultural life.<sup>8</sup> A husband and wife who could jointly compose verses and harmonize with each other’s poetry would be considered soul mates, enjoying equality and compatibility in their conjugal relationship.<sup>9</sup> Xu and Chen can be considered one of the best examples of a “companionate” couple who practiced *changhe*. Although Xu was Chen’s second wife (his first wife died), their marriage was a good match by all accounts. Both families were prominent in their local areas (Xu’s Wuxian, Jiangsu and Chen’s Haining, Zhejiang). Chen had already obtained the *jurem* degree at the time, and Xu was a well-educated daughter brilliant in many artistic fields such as poetry and painting.<sup>10</sup> Their compatible and affectionate relationship was facilitated by a shared passion for poetry. Each was the other’s critic. As Chen writes, “Xiangping loves my *shi* poetry more than my *ci*, whereas I love her *ci* more than her *shi*.”<sup>11</sup> Each considered the other the ideal reader of their work. In a lyric to Chen, Xu writes: “Leaning against railings, I feel listless. / Idly trimming the remains of the incense, / Alone, with whom can I talk?”<sup>12</sup> Chen echoes his wife in his lyric to the same tune: “My new lyric, who would understand and harmonize with it? / The song completed, I just sit with the burning incense.”<sup>13</sup> With emotional and artistic resonance between them, it is not surprising that Chen Zhilin uses the term “friend in the inner chambers” (*gui zhong you* 閨中友) to refer to his wife.<sup>14</sup> Whether in good or difficult times, whether they were living together or apart as a result of Chen’s travels, writing poetry was an important

8 This is Dorothy Ko’s term, by which she means “a union between an intelligently compatible couple who treat each other with mutual respect and affection.” See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 179-181.

9 Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 181.

10 Xu Yuanlong 徐元龍, “Jiazhuan”家傳, 1a, in Xu Can, *Zhuozhengyuan shiji* 拙政園詩集 (Baijinglou 拜經樓, 1803), Hereafter abridged as ZZYSJ.

11 Chen Zhilin, “Xu”序, 1a, in Xu Can, *Zhuozhengyuan shiyu* 拙政園詩餘 (hereafter abridged as ZZYSY). This collection was initially printed in 1653, but the edition used for this paper is in Xu Naichang 徐乃昌, comp., *Xiaotanluanshi buike guixiu ci* 小檀樂室彙刻閨秀詞 (Xiaotanluanshi, 1896).

12 ZZYSY, 2, 3a.

13 *Quan qing ci* 全清詞 (hereafter abridged as QQC) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 1:1, p. 429.

14 QQC, 1:1, p. 435.

means of communication between the couple.

Ironically, in harmonizing with each other’s poetry, Xu and Chen, more often than not, generated disharmony when they asserted their different opinions in this period of political disorder. The generic conventions of *changbe* practice changed over time, and the role of poetic exchange varied in different individual and social lives.<sup>15</sup> In his book *The Social Circulation of Poetry in the Mid-Northern Song: Emotional Energy and Literati Self-Cultivation*, Colin Hawes shows that Northern Song poets such as Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修(1007-1072) and Mei Yaochen 梅堯臣(1002-1060) playfully adopt exactly the same rhyme words of the initial poems but deliberately make counterarguments in their poetic response.<sup>16</sup> In Xu and Chen’s exchanged verses, the poets invariably follow (*ci* 次) each other’s rhyme schemes by using the same words in the same order.<sup>17</sup> However, when they use this form to express their disagreement, they are not making counterarguments merely for the sake of poetic exchange: one can observe that they felt compelled to exchange their opinions on the difficulties imposed upon them by the external world. While adhering to the conventions of *changbe*, especially using the same rhyme words to harmonize with each other’s poems, they manage to record their reactions to the real situations facing them and engage in serious discussions through this poetic medium. The meaning of their poems may have been compromised by literary conventions, but their intended messages to each other and potential audience are clear. Accordingly, the rhetoric in the *changbe* practice between Xu and Chen enables an exploration of the viewpoints and emotions they expressed in the context of their life experiences.

The couple’s *changbe*, I argue, provides an essential context for examining their poems written during the personal and political turmoil of the Ming-Qing transition. The poems in their poetic exchange, roughly forty in total, are executed in both *shi* and *ci* forms. Most of them were produced in the last decade

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15 In his study, Zhao Yiwu claims that rhyming and thematic echoing are crucial for determining the characteristics of poetic exchange in different historical periods. In particular, rhyming did not become a significant formal rule until the Tang period. See Zhao Yiwu, *Changbe shi yanjiu*, pp. 1, 418. See also Gong Bendong 龔本東, “Changbe shi yanjiu de ji ge wenti” 唱和詩研究的幾個問題, *Jianghai xuekan* 江海學刊 3 (March 2006), pp. 161-170.

16 See Hawes, *The Social Circulation of Poetry in the Mid-Northern Song*, p. 34.

17 Although they use the term *he* in some titles of their exchanges, a term referring to harmonizing with each other’s poems in a general sense, the couple’s actual practice, technically known as *ci*, was to use each other’s rhyme words in the same order.

of the Ming and the first decade of the Qing.<sup>18</sup> Through a parallel or intertextual reading of Xu Can's and Chen Zhilin's exchanged poetry, this paper aims to elucidate the dynamics of the husband-wife *changbe* during a traumatic period of disorder. I focus on two distinctive characteristics of their conjugal communication. First, Xu Can, notwithstanding her role as a "traditional" wife, did not refrain from expressing her feelings and opinions about politics, historical change, and the official career of her husband. Although Xu Can's poetic voice in the *ci* genre has been well-studied, by examining it in the context of conjugal communication we can see how it was framed by but went beyond the domestic realm. This will enable us to better understand her dual role as both wife and poet and bring attention to her agency in crossing gender boundaries. This article will also examine her *shi* poems, to which scholars have not yet paid much attention. Second, Chen Zhilin, a minister during the dynastic transition, seems to have felt compelled to state his political views and choices to his wife. In fact, one can observe from the corpus of his poetry that he discussed his politics and career more explicitly and more often with her than with others. The reasons for this are not stated explicitly. Perhaps he did not feel free to address these sensitive issues with his friends and colleagues. It is also possible that his relative openness with his wife was due primarily to her initiative and compelling communication. In any case, the husband-wife *changbe* practice helped bring forth Chen Zhilin's political statement, a "turncoat's" voice we rarely hear in Chinese history. Given that the couple's poetic exchange was impelled by the realities facing them, it also illuminates their different responses to tragic historical changes and their approaches to managing the crises in their personal lives. An examination of their conjugal communication through this particular form enables us to see how their voices constituted a dialogue, reflecting on and arguing against their respective positions. Reading the exchange side by side, as a dialogue, their differences are evident. By focusing attentively on the differing opinions and perspectives in their poetic exchange, I bring into relief the ways in which their poetic relationship took shape in a time of turmoil. This conjugal

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18 The first edition of Xu Can's *ci* collection was published in 1653. No more of her *ci* writings survived after this collection. The publication of her *shi* collection was complicated. According to Wu Qian 吳騫, who claimed that he acquired the collection from Xu's sixth-generation descendent and put it into print in 1803 for the first time, there is no indication of dates or attached prefatory texts to this collection. The titles of the poems, however, date up to 1850.

relationship as reflected in their poetry was characterized by a degree of intellectual compatibility and mutual engagement scarcely to be found elsewhere.

The bulk of the article will explore two major themes of the couple’s poetic exchange during the dynastic transition: 1) whether he should retire from officialdom; 2) the question of loyalty to the Ming. Although these issues were often interrelated, they also constituted two separate foci in their exchange. I conclude this article with observations on the last years of their life and the legacy of their poetry.

### To Withdraw or Not to Withdraw

The couple’s poetic exchange revolved around Chen’s official career. I would like to begin with their discussion of withdrawal from officialdom because of the obvious political hazards that attached to the decision. This is a theme that resounded throughout their poetic exchange even before the fall of the Ming.

To be understood, not to mention appreciated, the poetic exchange between Chen Zhilin and Xu Can must be read in light of the political and social reality which determined the ups and downs of Chen’s career and, consequently, the life trajectory of the couple. They married in the early Chongzhen Reign (1628-1644). Later, Chen Zhilin succeeded in passing the *jinsbi* examination on his fourth try in 1637, placed second (*bangyan*) in the palace examination.<sup>19</sup> He was accordingly appointed a compiler in the Hanlin Academy in Beijing.<sup>20</sup> However, this appointment marked the beginning of a long journey filled with misfortune. Chen’s career was affected by the Ming-Qing transition almost from the moment it began. The Qing, once established in 1636, began to aggressively attack Ming outposts. Chen Zhilin’s father, Chen Zubao 陳祖苞 (?-1639), was the Governor of Shuntian prefect at the time. In 1638, Hengshui 衡水, a city under his defense was lost to Qing forces. He was consequently arrested on charges of careless defense and connection with Manchu raids. He died the following year by committing suicide in prison. It was said that Chen Zhilin provided his father with poison after learning that the emperor would not pardon him and other arrested

19 Xu Shupi, *Shi xiao lu* 識小錄, in *Congshu jicheng xubian* 叢書集成續編 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1994), 89: 2, p. 91.

20 *Qing shi gao* 清史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 32, p. 9635.

officials.<sup>21</sup> Implicated in his father's crime and death, Chen Zhilin was dismissed from his official post and returned to his hometown with his father's coffin in 1639.<sup>22</sup> His career in the Ming thus ended before the fall of the dynasty. This was his first setback.

During the years after the couple's return to Jiangnan, internal rebellions and external attacks by the Qing began to push the Ming toward downfall. After the Qing established its rule in Beijing, Chen Zhilin began to seek opportunities for himself in the new government in 1645. He was appointed a Reader of the Hanlin Academy, and in just a few years was promoted to high positions such as the Right Censor-in-chief of the Censorate and the Minister of Rites.<sup>23</sup> This represented a major personal success for him, but his political career in the new regime was also stormy. He was impeached several times, briefly banished, and eventually exiled permanently. As F. W. Mote observes, the court's brutal treatment of officials when they were caught up in political failures or fell victim to power struggles remained a constant feature of post-Yuan political life.<sup>24</sup>

As Chen's wife, Xu Can was subject to the ups and downs of his political career. On the occasion of Chen Zhilin's being awarded a *jinsbi* degree, Xu Can composed a lyric to celebrate his success and to express the joy that this important event brought to the family. Her obvious pride as his wife surfaces in lines like: "Resonating with the sound of the bell, his name was announced in the jade hall. / The purple robe ornamented with pearls / Especially favored this young immortal!"<sup>25</sup> But the proud and happy feelings about Chen's official career expressed in the congratulatory lyric were momentary. After Chen embarked on his stormy journey as a minister of first the Ming and then the Qing, Xu Can began to express repeatedly in her poems to him her wish that he retire from office. She seemed to have had a presentiment of the dangers of political

21 Xu Shupi, *Sbi xiao lu*, in *Congshu jicheng xubian*, 89:2 pp. 91-92. Chen Zhilin wrote "Zufeng shilue" 阻封事略 and "Maojue bianzhen" 冒爵辨真 (authorship attributed to Chen by Lynn Struve), two statements to defend his father's merit obscured by Wei Zhongxian's eunuch party. For an introduction of these works, see Lynn Struve, *The Ming-Qing Conflict, 1619-1683: A Historiography and Source Guide* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1998), p. 203.

22 Lin Yongkuang 林永匡, "Chen Zhilin," in He Lingxiu 何靈修 and Zhang Jiefu 張傑夫, eds., *Qingdai renwu zhuanqao* 清代人物傳稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), p. 325.

23 *Qing shi gao*, 32, p. 9635.

24 F.W. Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 591.

25 ZZYSY, 3, 1a.



engagement. As a woman, she could not participate in, or even address, the political sphere, but in attempting to persuade her husband, the dominant presence in her life, she demonstrated keen awareness of and insights into the dark political climate. To withdraw or not thus became a recurring subject in the couple’s poetic exchange.

It was almost always Xu Can who initiated the discussion, although her poems were often responses to her husband’s. For example, in the poem, “In Reply to the Poem on West Lake Sent by Su’an 答素庵西湖有寄,” she writes:

Wild geese bring your brocade letter on a frosty morning,  
I can imagine the wretched sojourner’s face by the cold lamp.  
From now on you really should wake from your dream of office,  
We should grow old together on Deergate Mountain.  
For ten years, you competed for rank in officialdom,  
But in one day the emperor’s favor was abruptly withdrawn.  
I send word to the lake cloud: it is better to return to the hills,  
Don’t presume to rain down upon the human world.<sup>26</sup>

霜鴻朝送錦書還，知向寒燈慘客顏。從此果醒麟閣夢，便應同老鹿  
門山。

十年宦態爭青紫，一旦君恩異玦環。寄語湖雲歸岫好，莫矜霖雨出  
人間。

As implied in the title and first couplet, Chen’s original poem, which is not extant, might have been sent to Xu while he was traveling away from home. Whether or not Chen had expressed his intention to seek or continue an official career, it is clear in Xu’s poem that she firmly discouraged him from doing so. We lack reliable evidence for dating this poem. According to Chen Bangyan 陳邦彥, it was most likely written before 1644 since it is placed before a poem which, according to its title, was written in this year.<sup>27</sup> If that is true, then “the emperor’s favor was abruptly withdrawn” would refer to the Chongzhen Emperor’s punishment of Chen Zhilin’s father and subsequent removal of Chen from office in 1639. However, if we take literally the line “for ten years, you competed for rank in officialdom,” the poem could have been written in the late years of Chen’s

26 ZZYJ, 1, 23a.

27 See Chen Bangyan, “Pingjie nü ciren Xu Can,” p. 11. However, this may not be reliable evidence as I have found examples of poems that are chronologically misplaced in Xu’s collection.

official career and Xu Can could be addressing the setbacks Chen suffered at the Qing court. In any case, Xu's message is clear. In this poem, she appears to be mindful of the precariousness of officialdom and attempts to convince her husband to retire from office. Her voice is confident and pressing. In the lines, "For ten years, you competed for rank in officialdom, / But in one day the emperor's favor was abruptly withdrawn," she uses explicit terms to remind her husband not to be deceived by the illusory nature of officialdom, and urges him to learn a lesson from the mistakes he has made and withdraw from political life.

She refers to her husband as "the lake cloud," persuading "it" to return to the hills where clouds naturally rest. The term was used by the East Jin poet and hermit Tao Qian 陶潛(365-427) in his famous *fu* called "The Return" 歸去來辭 to express a desire to retire from his office.<sup>28</sup> Deergate Mountain (Lumen shan 鹿門山) was the place where the Eastern Han hermit Pang Degong 龐德公 and his wife retired. It later became more famous because of the Tang poet and recluse Meng Haoran 孟浩然(689-740), who also retreated to this mountain and wrote the "Song on Returning to Lumen in the Evening" 夜歸鹿門歌.<sup>29</sup> It is not surprising that as a learned woman Xu Can was familiar with the literati cultural ideal: withdrawal from political disorder to avoid trouble and preserve one's integrity.<sup>30</sup> In alluding to the reclusive ideal as she discusses her husband's official career, Xu Can is proactively advising her husband on how to live their life together, a life away from worldly vicissitudes and political struggles. If this poem was written during the Qing period, Xu's suggestion that her husband should retire was also, as will be discussed below, a strong political statement.

Although Chen's poem that prompted this reply is not extant, other poems do survive in which the couple also discuss their troubled life. In suggesting they dwell in seclusion, Xu Can was not merely comforting Chen Zhilin but offering a

28 For Tao Qian's *fu*, see Yuan Xingpei 袁行霈, ed., *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu* 陶淵明集箋注(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2003), pp. 460-478. For an English translation of the *fu*, see James Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 254.

29 For this poem, see *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 59, p. 1630.

30 For a study of the changing concept of the recluse in literature from antiquity to the late Qing, see Li Chi, "The Changing Concept of the Recluse in Chinese Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 24 (1962-63), pp. 234-247. For a book-length study of the evolution of the practice of reclusion from early China to the Six Dynasties, see Alan Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

serious proposal for dealing with the vicissitudes of the human world. Indeed, she expressed this intent repeatedly in her other poems to Chen. She seemed to have learned a hard lesson from the brutal politics in the court and hoped to change their life. Although Chen continued to be appointed to high official posts during the Shunzhi Reign (1644-1661), his political life was frequently disrupted by the emperor’s distrust, and by interrogations and attacks from his enemies. The two poems titled “On a Cold Night, Composed at Random” 寒夜偶成 inform us of Chen Zhilin’s inner struggle over whether to retire due to the difficulty of fulfilling his political ambitions. The first one reads:

In this autumn, vapors of war ferment a strange chill,  
Pillow shaken by the endless wind, my sleep is disturbed.  
Old bones now need to be near the charcoal brazier,  
The wild, stout heart should yield to the angler’s pole.<sup>31</sup>  
Reading official documents all year long, I rarely compose verse,  
Refugees are everywhere, but it is difficult to offer strategies.  
When a hundred thousand troops are dispatched south in urgency,  
I feel for the speeding supply ships all along the river’s bank.<sup>32</sup>

頻秋兵氣釀奇寒，撼枕終風臥未安。老骨漸須親獸炭，壯心今合付  
漁竿。

窮年案牘題詩少，載道流亡獻策難。十萬橫磨南下急，可憐飛輓遍  
江干。

This and other poems in the group were perhaps written around 1655. They are placed right after a poem titled “Thinking about Return at the End of Year” 歲暮思歸, in which the author suggested that he had served the Qing for about ten years: “Embarking on the worldly road—myriad zigzags, /Counting with my fingers, it will have been a decade by next spring.” According to Lin Yongkuang, between 1653 and 1655 Chen made painstaking efforts to solve the financial, military, and agricultural problems that faced the Qing government, despite suffering from the distrust of the emperor.<sup>33</sup> The difficult issues he addresses in these poems appear to be connected to his governmental service in these years.

31 The angler’s pole, by convention, evokes the image of a recluse.

32 FYJ, 7:16, b, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書 (Jinan: Qilu shushe chubanshe, 1997), *jibu* 集部, vol. 197, p. 640.

33 Lin Yongkuang, “Chen Zhilin,” p. 328.

He also indicates in the poems the ongoing wars of the time. Facing this period of chaos and confronted with the difficulty of “offering strategies,” he thinks of retiring. However, his “feeling for” the difficult political situation and desire to offer his assistance seem to compel him to set aside these thoughts.

In response to Chen, Xu Can composed two poems using the same rhyme words. In the second, she engaged with Chen’s poem line by line, and clearly offers her opinion about his struggle:

Your hesitation about leaving or staying worsens the seasonal cold,  
This heart should beg the Buddha for safety.  
In sorrow, thousands of trees have yellowed on traveler’s ridges,  
In dreams, the fragrant lake makes the fishing pole half emerald.  
Sparrows’ gate has been deserted since days of yore,<sup>34</sup>  
Getting your memorials approved is harder than in past years.  
Flying high and sinking low, you should long have known that  
empty fame misleads,  
There is no merit near the Milky Way; your colored brush has dried  
up.<sup>35</sup>

去住躊躇逼歲寒，此心應乞梵王安。愁中客嶺黃千樹，夢裡芳湖碧  
半竿。

羅雀門從當日冷，批鱗書比去年難。浮沉久識虛名誤，霄漢無勞綵  
筆干。

This poetic exchange returned to the topic they had discussed before. As always, the wife insistently persuades the husband to give up his pursuit of superfluous things such as office and fame. In reply to his poem, she observes his apparent difficulties (lines 5-6) and feels deeply for the hardships in his career (lines 7-8). In his line, “The wild, stout heart should yield to the angler’s pole,” Chen indicates his inclination to retire from public service. His wife echoes and rationalizes this message in her response. For a solution to his problem, she

34 The term “sparrows’ gate” alludes to the story of Zhai Gong 翟公 in the *Shiji* 史記, in which he claims that after he has lost power he can catch sparrows by setting nets in front of his gate because visitors rarely arrive. See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2002), 120, p. 3114.

35 *ZZYSJ*, 1, 28a. Milky Way refers to the imperial court, and the colored brush alludes to the story of Jiang Yan 江淹(444-505) who acquired in his dream a brush of brocade which inspired him to write great works, but whose talent was later used up.

suggests that he should turn to the Buddha for peace and safety. Historical records indicate that Xu Can remained a Buddhist throughout her life, and was especially devoted in her later years.<sup>36</sup> Her engagement with the Buddhist idea here was not merely rhetorical, but based on her conviction that the religion provided a means of transcending the hardships in their lives.

In this poem, Xu Can’s tone in speaking to her husband is much more insistent than in others. Although she was an outsider to his political world, as an intimate companion, her eagerness to share her insights with him surfaces in the text. For the first time she expresses impatience with the husband’s year-long hesitation. She even sounds critical in the last couplet. In observing the ups and downs in his career, she comes to the conclusion that he was misdirected by the pursuit of “empty fame.” In using the allusion to the brush of Jiang Yan, a metaphor to refer to a situation in which a person’s talent has been exhausted, she may not suggest Chen’s lack of talent, but definitely points out his limited ability to deal with the difficult politics in which he was involved.

In influencing her husband’s perspective and political choice, Xu Can was not always straightforward and disproving. As the following example shows, she also knew how to indirectly evoke beautiful images to raise Chen’s spirits when he expressed despondency. In this case, Chen initially wrote “To the Tune Nian nu jiao: Two Lyrics on My Feelings Stirred by the Rain at West Lake” 念奴嬌：西湖雨感兩闌. The first lyric reads:

After twenty years or thereabouts,  
 I sigh that the hair on my temples is not as it was before,  
 But the mirror lake is still like yesterday.  
 To the fleeting music of strings and pipes, greens fade, reds bloom,  
 How many times have we been to this painted bridge and jade pavilion?  
 Severing ties of love,  
 Spilling blood of separation,  
 The detestable wind and rain return over and over again.  
 Rarely drinking, tired of flowers,  
 I let the beautiful lake treat me with contempt.<sup>37</sup>

36 See, for example, *Qing shi gao*, 508, p. 14050.

37 The term Xi Zi, originally referring to the legendary beautiful woman Xishi 西施 of the Yue Kingdom (496 B.C.) of the Spring and Autumn period (770.B.C.-476. B.C.), is often used as an

What's more, the hiss of the spattering rain  
 Wakes me up from my hangover and lingering dream:  
 A wanderer for half my lifetime.  
 Brocade curtains, gold filigree carriage, horses with pearl-strung  
 reins,  
 At this place, old silence and desolation.  
 I force myself to strum a silver zither,  
 Reluctantly tapping sandalwood clappers,  
 A stream of tears drops onto my breast.  
 Suddenly my eyes are startled,  
 Several dark green peaks as though pared sharp.<sup>38</sup>

廿年光景，嘆鬢毛非故，鏡湖猶昨。送綠催紅絃管急，幾度畫橋瓊閣。吹斷情絲，灑添離血，風雨迴迴惡。酒疏花倦，但供西子輕薄。那更繁聲碎點，向酣餘喚醒，半生飄泊。錦帳鈿車珠勒馬，是處舊蕭索。強按銀箏，勉敲檀板，綆涕胸中落。驀然驚眼，數峰青黛如削。

As in Xu Can's poem quoted above, the title of this song lyric is also related to the West Lake, a famous site in Hangzhou, not far from where the Chen family used to live. It is a recurrent image in both Xu and Chen's collections, and is often evoked in poems that present reflections on life or retirement, especially when considering whether to retire. Although it is almost impossible to date this song lyric exactly, it must have been written sometime during the later stages of Chen's life and career after he had already endured many hardships. As the opening lines suggest, his youthful days are gone. His official career is symbolized by the images, "brocade curtains," "gold filigree carriage," and "horses with pearl-strung reins." In contrast to the luxury and prestige implied by these images, however, is a deep sense of despondency. At the scene of the lake in the rain, he expresses a torrent of emotion: frustration, grief, shame, and sorrow over his life and his career. The rainstorm is rendered relentless and violent in his depiction.

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alternative name of the West Lake after Su Shi 蘇軾(1036-1101) used it as a metaphor for the lake in one of his two poems titled "Drinking on the Lake While It was Clear First and Then Raining Afterwards" 飲湖上初晴後雨. See Su Shi, *Su Shi shiji he zhu* 蘇軾詩集合注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001), p. 404.

38 *QQC*, 1:1, p. 437.

Given the personal perspective projected in the lyric, a reading of the storm in nature as a metaphor of the destructive dangers of officialdom seems compelling. By the lines "Severing ties of love, / Spilling blood of separation, / The detestable wind and rain return over and over again" in the first stanza, the poet seems to be suggesting that the cruelty of the "storm" is separating his family. In the second stanza he continues to describe how its hissing sounds interrupt his dream, forcing him to face the depressing reality: "A wanderer for half my lifetime."

Having read her husband's words, Xu Can projects a completely different point of view in her lyric responding to the same tune, subtitled "Stirred by the Rain at West Lake, following Su'an's Rhyme" 西湖雨感, 次素庵韻:

Quietly chatting by a rainy window,  
 In this floating life I sigh: why must we  
 Affirm today and deny yesterday?  
 Many times we have sung in harmony by the green mountains,  
 Their brow-like shapes still facing our pavilion.  
 Splashing on roads, wheels are fragrant,  
 Moistening flowers, cups are full,  
 The rain seems not as bad as last fall.  
 Embroidered curtains just rolled up,  
 The whole tower filled with thin green mist.  
 Why don't we bob in a leaf of a boat in the mist?  
 To lovely spots along the two lakes,<sup>39</sup>  
 Just let the wind blow us to anchor.  
 While the clear sounds of the mountain and streams still ring in our  
 ears,  
 Jade zither and golden strings resonate from the hidden bank.  
 Off the top of my head,  
 It inspires me to write a poem,  
 Beside my pillow, it drips into my dream.  
 In vain I cherish the shattered jasper goblet.  
 Never tiring of looking at each other,

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39 It is not clear whether the poet refers to two famous lakes in the Jiangnan region where they lived, the Tai Lake in addition to the West Lake, or the two parts of the West Lake separated by Su Di 蘇堤(Su Dongpo's Dike).

Two peaks jut into heaven, solitary and sharp.<sup>40</sup>

雨窗閒話，嘆浮生何必，是今非昨。幾遍青山酬對好，依舊黛眉當閣。

灑道輪香，潤花杯滿，不似前秋惡。繡簾纔卷，一樓空翠回薄。擬泛煙中片葉，但兩湖佳處，任風吹泊。山水清音聽未了，隱岸玉筍金索。

頭上催詩，枕邊滴夢，謾惜瑤卮落。相看不厭，兩高天際孤削。

The husband and wife writes about the same lake at the same moment, but present two contrasting scenes and moods filtered through their different perspectives. While employing exactly the same rhyme words: *zuo* 昨, *ge* 閣, *e* 惡, *bo* 薄, *bo* 泊, *suo* 索, *luo* 落, *xue* 削, Xu rephrases them in order to construct a cluster of beautiful images describing the natural scene in the rain. She might have had some difficult times in the past, she suggests, but now she feels things are “not as bad as last fall.” She encourages her husband to see and enjoy the bright side of the situation. The rain, in her presentation, only evokes poetic visions and tender emotions. She intends to show that some aspects of their life have changed, but nature will always be there to greet them as long as they love and understand each other. In her alternative version of the green peaks that knife painfully into the last lines of Chen’s lyric, Xu replaces the disturbing image with a pair of companions who have affection and appreciation for each other, evoking not only the inviting natural landscape but also the emotional support she and her husband provide each other: “Never tiring of looking at each other, / Two peaks jut into heaven, solitary and sharp.” These lines are derived from Li Bai’s 李白 (701-762) quatrain, “Sit alone in front of Jingting Mountain” 獨坐敬亭山, in which he implies his disillusionment with officialdom by emphasizing an affinity with nature in the concluding lines: “Never tiring of looking at each other, / There are only Jingting Mountain and me.”<sup>41</sup> Xu’s adaptation of these famous lines significantly mitigates the hostility of nature conveyed by the image Chen uses, becoming a wholehearted invitation to him to enjoy the pleasures of mountain and river, the ideal life of a recluse. Moreover, the image of the two peaks jutting into the sky and “never tiring of looking at each other” symbolizes

40 ZZYSY, 3, 5a-b.

41 See *Quan Tang shi*, 182, p. 1858.



Xu Can’s love and support: she assures him of her presence if he chooses to retreat to the mountains and rivers.

Although there were moments of hesitation and self-struggle, Chen Zhilin was never convinced to live as a private citizen. In fact, he was persistent in pursuing his political career in the Southern Ming and Manchu regimes. The tragedy of his family, triggered by the father’s official employment, did not discourage him from his attempt to return to the political arena. After the Chongzhen emperor committed suicide in Beijing in 1644, Ming officials in the south wanted to enthrone a prince distantly related to the royal line in order to establish a resistance government.<sup>42</sup> Chen Zhilin also decided to act. He first presented himself to one of the candidates for the throne, the Prince of Lu, who was taking refuge in Hangzhou at the time, but was not welcomed because the prince had heard negative comments about him from local people. He then went to see the newly named Hongguang 弘光 emperor in Nanjing in 1645. He received a post, but gave it up and returned home shortly thereafter because of the impending attack on Nanjing by Qing troops.<sup>43</sup> There is not much information on the reasons behind Chen Zhilin’s involvement in the Southern Ming resistance forces, but his subsequent flight from Nanjing and later surrender to the Qing certainly suggested a fragile allegiance to the Ming regime. His claim that “he and the Ming court became enemies because of his father’s death” in his statement of surrender further complicates our understanding of his motivations.<sup>44</sup> What was consistent was a desire to keep his official career going. It is understandable that Chen, born into an affluent family that produced several generations of scholar-officials and a top-two *jinsbi* degree holder (*bangyan* 榜眼), would find it difficult to give up his ambition to seek official power and prestige.<sup>45</sup>

His lyric entitled “To the Tune Yu meiren: Stirred by Feelings”虞美人：感懷 may give some indication of his intentions:

When I was young, I also said Buddhism was a good way,  
But let me wait until fleeting fame comes to an end.  
Dispirited in Jade Halls—for how many springs?

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42 For a study of the history of the Southern Ming, see Lynn Struve, *The Southern Ming 1644-1662* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

43 Lin Yongkuang, “Chen Zhilin,” p. 326.

44 Lin Yongkuang, “Chen Zhilin,” p. 326.

45 Lin Yongkuang, “Chen Zhilin,” p. 325.

Hair on temples thin and frosty—I'm still stuck in the capital's  
dust,  
A leaf of a boat lost in vast wild waves.  
Why not lower the sail and return home?  
Inside Peach Blossom Spring, as chaotic as tangled hemp,  
Rather, times of peace would have misty clouds.<sup>46</sup>

少年也道空門好。且待浮名了。玉堂潦倒幾何春。猶儘婆娑霜鬢滯  
京塵。

狂瀾一葉茫無據。何不收帆去？桃花源裏亂如麻。還是太平時節有  
煙霞。

In this lyric he describes his career in Jade Halls, meaning the Hanlin Academy, as dispirited and stymied. He is passively stuck in his position, and facing a precarious and perplexing future like “a leaf of a boat lost in vast wild waves.” Given the situation, he poses a rhetorical question in the beginning of the second stanza, “Why not lower the sail and return home?” Although the last two lines are somewhat ambiguous, the implication is that his answer to this question is “no.” Peach Blossom Spring is an allusion to Tao Qian’s famous work, which is portrayed as a utopia hidden from the vulgar world.<sup>47</sup> The allusion has been used in Chinese literature innumerable times. In particular, Ming loyalists used it to highlight the motif of refugees living in the hidden land to escape the chaos caused by the Qin dynasty (221 B.C.-207 B.C.), and, by extension, to convey their refusal to serve the Qing regime.<sup>48</sup> Thus, Tao Qian’s withdrawal from Jin officialdom and the utopia created in his writing resonated with pro-Ming and anti-Qing sentiments. To my knowledge, only Chen Zhilin has use the phrase “as chaotic as tangled hemp” to characterize Peach Blossom Spring as an undesirable place. Perhaps he was implying his disinclination to associate with the motley assortment of refugees who had resolved to leave official life, or simply the impossibility of finding a land of peace during this period of disorder. As he

46 *QQC*, 1:1, pp 426-427.

47 See Yuan Xingpei, *Tao Yuanming ji jianzhu*, pp. 479-489. For an English translation of the poem, see Hightower, *The Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, p. 254.

48 For a discussion of Ming loyalists’ adoption of the images of Tao Yuanming and Peach Blossom Spring, see Li Jianfeng 李劍鋒, “*Ming yimin dui Tao Yuanming de jieshou*” 明遺民對陶淵明的接受, in Zuo Dongling, ed., *Mingdai wenzue guoji xueshu taolunhui lunwen ji* 明代文學國際學術討論會論文集 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2005), pp. 441-458.

suggests in the last line, only during an age of peace can one really enjoy “misty clouds,” a trope signifying a beautiful landscape, and, by extension, a life of religion apart from the mundane world. Another possible reading of these lines may be that they describe a mind fraught with contradictions. Although it is difficult to determine exactly what he means in the last two lines, it seems clear that he intends to suggest that this imagined utopia is not an ideal place for him, at least not for the time being. By subverting the well-known allusion associated with the icon Tao Qian, Chen Zhilin openly rejects the literati ideal of reclusion. Thus, he turns down his wife’s proposal of withdrawal. Perhaps, as he admits in the opening lines, “fleeting fame,” or “empty fame” in Xu Can’s words, was still controlling his life.

### “Turncoat” and “Loyalist”

Chen’s choice to remain in officialdom rather than honoring the ethical and cultural norms of his time exposed a disparity between his and Xu Can’s life philosophies. The divergence in the way the couple understood and reacted to their historical circumstances was even deeper when they wrote on the subject of Chen’s decision to serve the new dynasty. After Chen chose to serve the Qing, the issues of loyalty and his own political choice became major themes of the couple’s exchanged verses. The couple’s different perspectives on the dynastic transition, more specifically, on loyalty to the Ming versus redefined allegiance to the Qing, accounts for a second major dimension of their poetic dialogue.

The *Qing shi gao* 清史稿 records, “In the second year of the Shunzhi Reign, [Chen] came to surrender.”<sup>49</sup> There is a negative undertone in this entry of the standard history. Chen’s decision to serve the alien regime was considered ignominious at best. While a large number of Ming officials made the same decision as Chen, including the most prominent political and literary figure Qian Qianyi 錢謙益(1582-1664), many Ming loyalists chose to fight for the Ming, commit suicide or retire from public life rather than collaborate with the Qing.<sup>50</sup>

49 *Qing shi gao*, 32, p. 9635.

50 For statistics and a list of ministers who served the two dynasties, see Frederic E. Wakeman, Jr., *The Great Enterprise: the Manchu Reconstruction of Imperial Order in Seventeenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 1129-1137. For a collection of Ming loyalists’ biographical

Certainly, to many of his contemporaries and later historians, Chen's eagerness to serve the Qing was an affront to Chinese ethical standards of loyalty to one's native dynasty. His contemporary Xu Shupi 徐樹丕(1596-1683), for example, judged him harshly: "In his statement of surrender, he claims that his father died for the Qing, which really reveals that he has a disguised face but no heart. Indeed, even dogs and pigs are better than him."<sup>51</sup>

Significantly, his wife Xu Can took up the loyalist stance. Although she demonstrated an obvious aversion to politics in her writing after Chen's dismissal from office during the Ming, she expressed deep loyalty to and nostalgia for the fallen Ming in her later writings. As Mote suggests, Ming loyalists were emotionally attached, not to the "shoddy politics" of the past dynasty, but to its cultural values.<sup>52</sup> More importantly to them, loyalty defined one's integrity. Xu Can was principled in this respect. Xu Can moved to Beijing with the family a year or two after Chen took up office.<sup>53</sup> Although following one's husband was a duty expected of a wife, Xu chose to voice her different perspective on life and history, and was persistent in her political stance even though it conflicted with her husband's.

After the fall of the Ming, loyalism became a major motif in Xu Can's lyrics. "Man jiang hong" 滿江紅 is a tune pattern often used by male poets to deal with the subjects of heroism and historical contemplation.<sup>54</sup> As Kang-i Sun Chang points out, Xu Can deliberately chose tunes such as "Man jiang hong" to express her political sentiments.<sup>55</sup> Her song lyrics to the tune "Man jiang hong," subtitled "Stirred by Events" 感事, conveys a mood that is distinctly loyalist:

Fleeting is the splendor of Nature—

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notes and poems, see Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯, ed., *Qing shi jishi* 清詩紀事, *Ming yimin juan* 明遺民卷 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1987).

51 Xu Chupi, *Shi xiao lu*, in *Congshu jicheng xubian*, 89:2, p. 91.

52 Mote, *Imperial China 900-1800*, p. 850.

53 Chen Bangyan, "Pingjie nü ciren Xu Can," p. 14.

54 Many scholars have noted this association. See, for example, Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China*, p. 816; and Grace S. Fong, "Engendering the Lyric: Her Image and Voice in Song," in Pauline Yu, ed., *Voices of the Song Lyric in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 140. For a focused study of Ming-Qing women's appropriation of this poetic dimension to represent their political sentiments, which includes a section on Xu Can's loyalist lyrics, see Xiaorong Li, "Engendering Heroism: Ming-Qing Women's Song Lyrics to the Tune *Man jiang hong*," *Nan Nü: Men, Women, and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 7:1 (April 2005), pp. 1-39.

55 Chang, "Liu Shih and Hsü Ts'an," p. 183.

Desolate again is  
 The cool season of autumn.  
 Listening here: the sound of pounding clothes so hurried;  
 A line of wild geese honking sadly.  
 I lament the affairs of the past—hearing the *Jade Tree*,  
 The song of picking lotus is far away—the cuckoo weeps blood.  
 Sighing over those years now gone—  
 Wealth and nobility have flowed away east.  
 The golden goblet is broken.  
 The wind with the rain—  
 Have they ever stopped?  
 Raising my head, I gaze afar—  
 The moon of my homeland.  
 I see steel halberds everywhere,  
 Among a myriad mountains clouds pile up.  
 Beside axes and adzes sorrows still remain,  
 Warships are scattered, gone with the tide.  
 And now today,  
 There are only heartbreaking steles—  
 To record heroic deeds in vain!<sup>56</sup>

過眼韶華，淒淒又，涼秋時節。聽是處，搗衣聲急，陣鴻淒切。往事堪悲聞玉樹，采蓮歌杳啼鶉血。嘆當年，富貴已東流，金甌缺。風共雨，何曾歇。翹首望，鄉關月。看金戈滿地，萬山雲疊。釜鉞行邊遺恨在，樓船橫海隨波滅。到而今，空有斷腸碑，英雄業。

The poet begins by mourning ephemeral natural glories, but, as one goes on to read, seasonal change becomes a compelling trope of the dynastic change. Images such as the “jade tree” and the “golden goblet” gradually reveal that the theme of this lyric is the expression of concern for her lost country. She is not lamenting autumn but actually sorrowful that the golden days of her former country have gone. As the chilly and desolate autumn comes, the “song of picking lotus” associated with the beautiful summer of her homeland fades into memory. What she hears now is the saddening music of the “Jade tree” and the cries of “the

56 ZZYSY, 3, 6a-7b. For another English translation of this poem, see Wilt Idema and Beat Grant, *The Red Brush*, pp. 433-434.

weeping-blood cuckoo.” The “Jade tree,” which stands for “Yushu houting hua” 玉樹後庭花 (the jade tree and flower in the backyard), is the title of a tune created by the last emperor of the Chen dynasty. It becomes a convention for referring to the music of a fallen dynasty. The image of “the weeping-blood cuckoo” goes further to convey a strong loyalist voice. It originates in the legend of Wang di, the king of Shu, who lost both his love and country and after death turned into a cuckoo weeping tears of blood. While poets of earlier periods such as Li Shangyin 李商隱 (? 813-858) more often used the image code to express undying feelings for lost love, late Ming poets like Chen Zilong 陳子龍 (1608-1647), imbued it with more political connotations.<sup>57</sup> Using the same image to characterize her deep sorrow over her fallen dynasty, Xu Can’s voice echoed Chen Zilong. Finally in the end of the first stanza, “the golden goblet,” an image borrowed from the biography of Hou Jing 侯景 (503-552) in the *Liangshu*, which symbolizes the undivided wholeness of the country, is unambiguously announced “broken.”<sup>58</sup> What remains are the scars everywhere caused by war: deserted weapons, bloody execution sites, and unattended warships. Most heart-breaking to the woman poet are the steles that record the deeds of heroes “in vain.” The diction, imbued with a strong emotional tone, suggests her deep disappointment that there was no hero who was able to rescue the Ming from calamity. Perhaps her husband was among those who had disappointed her.

But Chen Zhilin had his own rationale. Although the above lyric was not addressed to Chen Zhilin, he did read it and had much to say about the subject that his wife broached. He responded with two for one, subtitled “Moved: Two Lyrics Harmonizing with Xiangping’s Rhyme” 感興次湘蘋韻兩闕. The second lyric more directly addresses the issues raised in Xu Can’s poem:

A myriad shades of purple and red,  
Thereafter comes naturally a season of fading and scattering.  
Worldly affairs, like dreams, are hard to predict,  
We don’t have to lament.

57 For Li Shangyin’s use of the legend, see his poem titled “Jin se” 錦瑟 in *Quan Tang shi*, 539, p. 6148. On the loyalist sentiments expressed in Chen Zilong’s poetry, see Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Late Ming Poet Ch’en Tzu-lung: Crises of Love and Loyalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), Chapter 6. For Kang’s discussion of the poem in which Chen uses the image of cuckoo, see p. 84.

58 On the biography of Hou Jing, see Yao Silian 姚思廉, comp., *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 56, p. 862.

After ten years, the war of the dragons is still not over,  
 Between heaven and earth, dark blood is spilled.  
 Only the cold wind swirls the clouds above the Five Tombs,<sup>59</sup>  
 The West Mountain is breached.<sup>60</sup>  
 The dancing at midnight  
 Has now stopped.  
 To express my sorrow over the past,  
 I invoke the bright moon.  
 Gazing at Jiangnan, I want to compose a rhapsody  
 But brocade stationery is hard to fold.  
 What significance is a dynasty’s domain of mountains and rivers?  
 Heaven’s heart only waits for flowers to blossom and wither.  
 Who played chess to gamble for a villa—  
 The achievement of East Mountain.<sup>61</sup>

萬紫千紅，自合有、飄零時節。看世事、夢夢難問，不須悲切。龍  
 戰十年猶未了，乾坤灑盡玄黃血。但寒風、吹卷五陵雲，西山缺。  
 中夜舞，而今歇。訴往恨，邀明月。望江南欲賦，錦箋難疊。一代  
 河山何許事，天心只等花開滅。歎圍棋、賭墅是何人，東山業。

Just as Xu Can echoed Chen’s rhyme scheme in previous exchanges, Chen echoed hers now. Accordingly, the rhyme endings of this poetic exchange are all the oblique-toned characters: *jie* 節, *qie* 切, *xue* 血, *que* 缺, *xie* 歇, *yue* 月, *die* 疊, *mie* 滅, and *ye* 業. The special sound effect of the oblique tone conveys forceful emotions. Once again the exchanged verses represent two contrasting perspectives. While the wife is saddened by “the desolate autumn,” the husband thinks that it merely follows natural law. While the wife’s heart is transformed into “the cuckoo weeping blood” singing about her constant sorrow and love for the former dynasty, the husband sees dynastic transition as a violent game played between men warring for supremacy; the winner owns the state. In posing the rhetorical question, “What significance is a dynasty’s domain of mountains and rivers?” he proceeds to attribute dynastic changes to the will of Heaven, the

59 The Five Tombs originally refers to the tombs of the Han emperors, and by extension the place of nobles. Chen is using the Han to stand for the Ming tombs.

60 West Mountain is located to the northwest of Beijing.

61 *QQC*, 1:1, p. 435.

mysterious “Heaven’s heart,” suggesting that historical changes are like the change of seasons, beyond the control of ordinary people; eventually, people make peace with their historical circumstances. Unlike Xu Can who tends to employ image codes that convey emotional intensity, Chen adopts symbols and vocabulary derived from the politics of the male-dominant world in order to reveal what he understands to be the truth about dynastic change. As summed up in the line, “Worldly affairs, like dreams, are hard to predict, / We don’t have to lament,” Chen Zhilin attempts both to soothe his wife’s troubled feelings and to justify his decision to serve the new dynasty.

In addition, in the second stanza, he compares himself with two historical figures. First, he makes a gesture towards Yu Xin 庾信(513-581) as a potential role model; Yu was held in prison in the north during the Liang (502-557) and Chen (557-589) transition and wrote a *fu* entitled “Lament for Jiangnan” 哀江南賦, in which he expresses his deep sorrow over the fall of the Liang and his own exile.<sup>62</sup> However, declaring that he cannot model himself on Yu Xin, Chen quickly dismisses the possibility of living an exiled and nostalgic life. His real hero was Xie An 謝安(320-385), who as commander of the southern forces at the famous Battle of the River Fei, demonstrated his magnificent composure by playing chess with his nephew Xie Xuan 謝玄(343-388) during the battle. The winner of the game would receive ownership of Xie An’s retreat on East Mountain.<sup>63</sup> By alluding to the story of Xie An, a man who successfully returned to the political arena from his retreat on East Mountain, Chen directs his wife and other potential readers to understand him from this positive historical perspective.

The above lyric by Chen provides a rare opportunity for us to examine the defenses offered by one who chose to serve two regimes, one whose perspective on dynastic change transcended particular ethnic or political affiliations. Other Ming scholar-officials who also took official posts in the Qing seem to have been more reluctant to take up their new political roles. One of the most celebrated

62 For Yu Xin’s *fu* see *Yu Zishan ji* 庾子山集, in Wang Yunwu 王雲五, ed., *Guoxue jiben congshu* 國學基本叢書 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1969), 264:2, pp. 62-122. For an English translation and commentary of Yu Xin’s rhapsody, see William T. Graham, JR, *The Lament for the South: Yu Hsin’s ‘Ai Chiang-nan Fu’* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980). See also, Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Six Dynasties Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 181-184.

63 See the *Jin shu* 晉書, in *Er shi wu shi* 二十五史 (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1936), 2:79, p. 214.



poets in the late Ming and early Qing, Wu Weiye 吳偉業 (1619-1692), for example, eventually succumbed to repeated invitations by the new government and pressure from his family and friends (including Chen Zhilin, who was the father-in-law of Wu’s daughter).<sup>64</sup> However, after serving in the Qing’s Imperial Academy for a few years, he suffered from a sense of guilt for the rest of his life,<sup>65</sup> and often expressed his loyalty to the Ming in his verses. To give another example, Qian Qianyi not only openly proclaimed his regrets, but also involved himself in anti-Manchu activities.<sup>66</sup> Chen Zhilin’s lines written in his late years, such as “If not the floating fame, what else has misled me? / I regret that I have seen the flowers in the spring garden of a different time,”<sup>67</sup> also suggest a degree of regret over his decision to resume his official career under the Qing. However, these regrets were generated more by setbacks in his career than out of his loyalty to the Ming.

Chen Zhilin’s historical insights and experience with politics may have allowed him to transcend such ethical values as loyalty. Perhaps he thought that his wife was politically naïve in her on-going emotional attachment to the fallen Ming. However, Xu Can seemed less convinced that he made the right choice in returning to officialdom. In a lyric written later on the occasion of revisiting the residence they occupied in the Ming, she expresses deep regret about their return to the capital:

To the Tune Fengliu zi: Stirred by the Past, Written with Su’an  
 It seems like only yesterday,  
 But looking back it has already been ten autumns.  
 By the Ink-washing Pond,  
 We had built our study.  
 With southern papers and ivory brushes,

64 Xu Shichang 徐世昌, ed., *Qing shi hui* 清詩匯 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1963), 21, 18a.

65 Frederic Wakeman, Jr., “Romantics, Stoics, and Martyrs in Seventeenth-Century China,” *Journal of Asiatic Studies* 43:4 (August 1984), pp. 631-665. On Wu Weiye, see also Wai-ye Li, “History and Memory in Wu Weiye’s poetry,” in Wilt L Idema, Wai-ye Li, and Ellen Widmer, eds., *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 99-148.

66 For a discussion of Qian Qianyi’s poem in this regard, see Kang-i Sun Chang, “Qian Qianyi and his Place in History,” in Wilt L Idema, Wai-ye Li, and Ellen Widmer, eds., *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature*, p. 211.

67 FYJ, 7, 9b, in the *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 197, p. 636.

We made a special kind of elegance and charm.  
 At this courtyard covered with wilted red petals,  
 How often spring wanted to depart,  
 But stayed for us.  
 After the night rain, flowers stooped,  
 In the light breeze butterflies careened.  
 With the crystal curtain rolled up,  
 It was time to comb my hair.  
 The West Mountain is still there,  
 But does it know why I'm leaning against the railing?  
 I'm afraid to raise my eyes.  
 Even if I could brew wine with Forgetting-Sorrow,  
 It would only stir my grief.  
 I urge the peach blossoms of former seasons,  
 Not to bloom by the green pond;  
 The swallows of the past,  
 Not to fly over the vermilion tower.  
 I regret terribly this new pair of wings,  
 Leading us astray, to the Isle of Ying!<sup>68</sup>

風流子 同素菴感舊

只如昨日事，回頭想、早已十經秋。向洗墨池邊，裝成書屋，蠻箋  
 象管，別樣風流。殘紅院、幾番春欲去，卻為個人留。宿雨低花，  
 輕風側蝶，水晶帘卷，恰好梳頭。西山依然在，知何意憑檻，怕舉  
 雙眸。便把紅萱釀酒，只動人愁。謝前度桃花，休開碧沼，舊時燕  
 子，莫過朱樓。悔煞雙飛新翼，誤到瀛洲。

In the first stanza, Xu Can recalls the good times they had in this old house. Among her recollections are vivid vignettes of herself and her husband enjoying "singing in harmony" with their matched talents and elegance. In addition to their intellectual compatibility, the images of butterflies, night rain and flowers placed before the line describing the scene of combing her hair in the morning also suggest their harmonious sexual life. But the beautiful memories are soon subverted in the second stanza by her regretful feelings stirred by their current

68 ZZYSY, 2, 7b.

situation. The West Mountain, her quiet friend who probably had shared many of her secrets before, still stands, but the poet is no longer confident to face it because of her complicated situation. The Forgetting-Sorrow wine can only stir more sorrow. Finally, she gives voice to the pain she is feeling but in an indirect and metaphorical way, urging “the peach blossoms of former seasons” not to bloom again and “the swallows of the past” not to return to a tower no longer what it was. These images are respectively derived from two different poems by Tang poet Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫(772-842), which were originally meant to express the irony that while things remain the same, people and time have changed.<sup>69</sup> But Xu Can recontextualizes them to convey a sense of political poignancy: one should not betray the time to which he or she belongs. Elsewhere she also adapts these allusions in a song lyric to the tune “Yong yu le.” To better understand the meanings she consistently intended to convey, I quote its first stanza here: “Intact are the peach blossoms, / As always are the swallows, / But the spring sights are greatly changed./ The Master Liu of former days, / The Director Jiang who returned—/ Who can bear recounting past events? / [...] / Ah, eternal plaint For rivers and hills like these, / Their grandeur cast away in a blink.”<sup>70</sup> In addition to Liu Yuxi’s poem, she alludes to the story of Director Jiang / Jiang Zong 江總(519-94) who had to leave his office in the capital due to military riots and dynastic change. By “the Master Liu of former days” and “the Director Jiang who returned,” I believe that Xu Can refers to ministers who served both Ming and Qing, such as her husband. Although she does not repeat these names in the above-quoted song lyric to the tune “Fengliu zi,” she still uses the images of “peach blossom” and “swallows” of the former days to address Chen Zhilin. Her use of the negative form of the imperative sentence structure, “*xin...*” and “*mo...*” (Don’t...), makes her tone extremely compelling.

Her sorrowful feelings culminate in the last lines, regretting terribly a new pair of wings that had led them astray to the Isle of Ying. The Isle of Ying, *Yingzhou*, refers to both an isle of immortals and the Hall of Literature established by the Tang emperor Taizong (627-649), an institution that recruited scholars for their outstanding literary talent. Being admitted to this hall was a

69 For Liu Yuxi’s poems, see *Quan Tang shi*, 365, p. 4117.

70 ZZYSY, 3, 6b. Trans. by Charles Kowong, in Chang and Saussy, *Women Writers of Traditional China*, pp. 348.

great honor, called “*deng Yingzhou*”登瀛洲(entering Yingzhou).<sup>71</sup> Xu Can uses the term in the latter sense to suggest Chen Zhilin’s similar position in the Qing Hanlin academy, but subverts its positive meaning with her outcry of extreme regret. She is not proud of his “honorable” position, but deeply troubled by it. By “a new pair of wings,” she may also imply her own mistake in following her husband to the new regime.

Touched by his wife’s writing, Chen replied with the lyric “To the Tune Fengliu zi: Harmonizing with Xiangping’s Poem on the Old Residence”和湘蘋舊邸感賦. Here I quote only the first stanza:

I am really old now—  
 Look at the hair on both my temples,  
 Haggard, not because of the autumn.  
 Sighing that, among flowers and birds,  
 Golden orioles still come  
 To the pavilion where there is no one,  
 Green fire begins to flow.  
 At my old haunt  
 I tied my horse to the withering willow again,  
 But not even for a split second could I retain [what has gone].  
 The Dharma eye observing emptiness,  
 Must have shed tears.  
 The Chan mind is entangled,  
 How can I turn back?<sup>72</sup>  
 [...]

如今真老矣，看雙鬢，憔悴不須秋。嘆有花鳥間，金衣還到，無人  
 亭上，綠火方流。舊游地，衰楊重系馬，一霎也難留。法眼觀空，  
 定應垂涕，禪心沾絮，怎地回頭。

The old place also brings with it many unpleasant memories, reminding Chen of his traumatic experiences during the former dynasty. In reply to Xu Can’s outcry, “I regret terribly this new pair of wings, leading us astray, to the Isle of Ying,” Chen’s response, “The Chan mind is entangled, / How can I turn back,” is now less certain in tone.

71 *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書(Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 102, p. 3796.

72 *QQC*, 1:1, p. 436.

Life in the new dynasty was difficult for both. Xu Can suffered bitter irony, torn between her loyalty to the Ming and her husband's surrender to the new dynasty. Pressured by Xu Can (and presumably also by his own conscience), Chen, too, was struggling with his choice of serving in Qing officialdom and he painstakingly attempted to defend it in his writing. In addition, he suffered from the uncertainty of his career due to the factional strife in which he involved himself. Significantly, he communicates with his wife his feelings about these difficulties, though often in response to a poem from his wife. Consider the following exchange in the form of lyric to the tune "Nian nu jiao." Xu Can initiated the exchange with the lyric subtitled "Early Winter" 初冬:

Yellow flowers have withered,  
 I see the azure sky is clear of clouds—  
 Not a trace in plain autumn.  
 My thin silk robe is cold as water,  
 Frost lingers on flowers and rocks all over the yard.  
 Looking back to the city by the river—  
 Crops high and low,  
 Appear white in disorder under the cool moonlight.  
 Before my eyes, or in dreams,  
 I don't know where my homeland is.  
 Hard to find a moment of leisure such as now,  
 Chanting long or reciting briefly,  
 We could call it a golden moment.  
 The ivory plectrum and oriole's songs still intoxicate my ears,  
 But tonight I woke up from my tipsiness.  
 How much the rosy cheeks  
 Have faded secretly in the mirror,  
 No need for the work of dust and sand.  
 In this vast Yan Mountain,<sup>73</sup>  
 Since ancient times, how many travelers have been detained?<sup>74</sup>

黃花過了，見碧空雲盡，素秋無跡。薄薄羅衣寒似水，霜逗一庭花

73 Yan Mountain is located to the north of Beijing, expansively ranging from Jixian, Hebei, to the east coast. It symbolically stands for the northern frontier in Chinese poetic conventions.

74 ZZYSY, 3, 5a.

石。回首江城，高低禾黍，涼月紛紛白。眼前夢裡，不知何處鄉國。  
難得此際清閑，長吟短詠，也算千金刻。象板鶯聲猶醉耳，卻是酒  
醒今夕。有幾朱顏，鏡中暗減，不用塵沙逼。燕山一片，古今多少  
羈客。

Chen Zhilin responded with the lyric to the same tune, subtitled “Harmonizing with Xiangping’s Rhyme”和湘蘋韻:

The bright moon as ever  
Lights up ten thousand *li*: how many old traces!  
War drums are silent; the night on the river is quiet,  
I see only the autumn rock piercing the sky.  
Yuanliang in desolation,  
Zishan in exile,<sup>75</sup>  
But they still live till their hair turns gray.  
On a cushion of flowers, with butterflies as friends,  
This body has lain in the kingdom of fragrance.  
However, behind gauze curtains dreams are cut short,  
Brocade reins prick my skin,  
And the frosty wind stings.  
Who would give me a hand to pluck the strings,  
If I wanted to perform the song of Yan Terrace?  
Where can I find Dog Butcher to be my company night and day?<sup>76</sup>  
Purple thorns fill my breast,  
Red dust blows into my face,  
Can I ask who is pressing me?  
I want to write a song about Jiangnan,  
But how sad! Where is the song writer?<sup>77</sup>  
依然明月，照茫茫萬里，幾多陳跡。戰鼓無聲江靜夜，惟見插天秋

75 Yuanliang is the courtesy name of Tao Qian, who is discussed earlier in this paper. Zishan is the courtesy name of Yu Xin, who was detained by the Western Wei as a result of an ambassadorial mission in his late years.

76 These two lines allude to the story of Jing Ke and his friend called “goutu” (dog butcher), who attempted to assassinate the First Emperor of Qin. For a biography of Jing Ke, see the *Shiji*, 86, p. 547.

77 *QQC*, 1:1, p. 437.

石。元亮荒涼，子山流落，尚有頭堪白。花茵蝶友，此身曾臥香國。  
 無奈剪夢羅帷，刺肌錦轡，偏有霜風刻。擊筑燕臺誰把臂，安得狗  
 屠朝夕。紫棘填胸，紅塵扑面，試問誰相逼。江南欲賦，可憐何處  
 詞客。

In describing this bleak northern scene in late autumn and early winter, both authors expressed their nostalgia for their native home in Jiangnan and their discontent at being “detained travelers.” Xu Can’s loyalist sentiment towards her former country still lingered, as the terms “crops” and “homeland” in the first stanza suggest. The “crops” [*hesbu* 禾黍, literally millets], ritual objects placed in the national alters, are an important medium through which the Minister of Zhou mourns the loss of his country in the *Book of Songs*.<sup>78</sup> It thus became a conventional term in the Chinese literary tradition standing for the sorrow over one’s lost country. The employment of this image clearly revealed Xu Can’s persistent political stance. In concluding this lyric, she adopted a broad historical perspective: “In this vast Yan Mountain, / Since ancient times, how many travelers have been detained?” Perhaps she aimed to comfort both her husband and herself by portraying their own circumstances as part of history.

The husband understood his wife’s political sentiment and attempted to reflect on his current situation in relation to her perspective. As mentioned above, he had once explicitly rejected the cultural ideal represented by Tao Qian, identifying instead with Xie An, a hermit who returned to society and successfully fulfilled his ambition. However, in the above lyric he re-evaluates the image of Tao Qian: Although Tao Qian faced adversity and Yu Xin was detained in the north, they lived peaceful lives. Chen enjoyed a privileged and luxurious life surrounded with “a cushion of flowers” and “butterflies as friends,” but it turned out to be a beautiful dream ironically broken by “gauze curtains” and “brocade reins,” objects that seem magnificent but are actually destructive.

Whether expressing his true intention or making a vain gesture, Chen expresses in this lyric that he wished to take heroic action like Jing Ke’s 荊軻, but had no comrades. His allusion to the story of Jing Ke both echoes and contradicts what he writes to Xu Can elsewhere, “Magnificent mink furs and jades laugh at the lotus-leaf raincoat, / There have never been grieved heroic

78 The title of this song is “Shuli,” Mao no. 65. For an English translation of this poem, see Arthur Waley trans., *Book of Songs* (New York: Grove Press, inc., 1960), p. 91.

songs performed in the land of Yan and Zhao!”<sup>79</sup> The second line is a rebuttal of what is said by convention, “Since ancient times the land of Yan and Zhao has produced numerous men who performed grieved heroic songs,” dismissing the heroic tradition associated with the capital’s land where had produced heroes like Jing Ke.<sup>80</sup> Whether or not this truly represents Chen’s own voice, these lines describe disappointment with the fact that those who pursue privilege and wealth appear to be better off than those who choose to be politically disengaged; that choice precludes heroic actions. In these lines and the above lyric Chen denies the existence of loyalist heroes and thus extricates himself from the heroic role. At the end of the lyric, Chen once again gestures toward his wish for the literary fame of the loyal and nostalgic Yu Xin. Yet, even as he expresses his sorrow over the fall of his former country, his circumstances prevent him from acting as he wishes. His song ends with a voice trapped by this wretched situation.

### When Riches and Nobility Fade into Memory

Chen Zhilin himself seemed not to have harbored any hard feelings about his wife’s disagreements on his political choices, but sympathized with her suffering. After they settled down to a relatively calm life in the capital, Chen Zhilin made efforts to collect, edit, and publish Xu Can’s *ci* collection, the *Zhuozhengyuan shiyu* (The song lyrics of the Inept Administrator’s Garden). He also wrote a preface, dated 1650, six years after he entered the Qing court. In his preface, actually a memoir of their personal life, Chen Zhilin summarizes their experiences during the years of the late Ming and early Qing. “Singing in harmony” between husband and wife is a focal point throughout his account of their conjugal life. In concluding his preface, he expresses a particular wish to Xu Can: “Now the turmoil is gradually coming to an end, and life is becoming more peaceful and enjoyable day by day. I hope that after seeing how wonderful this collection is, Xiangping could try to un-knit her eyebrows [cheer herself up] and moisten her

79 FYJ, 7.9b, in the *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 197, p. 636.

80 For famous examples in making similar claims, see Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824), “Song Dong Shaonan xu” 送董邵南序, in Qu Shouyuan 屈守元 and Chang Sichun 常思春, eds., *Han Yu quanji jiaozhu* 韓愈全集校注 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1996), vol. 4, pp. 1602-1604; and the Tang poet Qian Qi’s 錢起 (710?-782?) poem “Feng xiazhe” 逢俠者, in *Quan Tang shi*, 339, p. 2683.



brush with ink [start writing].”<sup>81</sup> It would appear that Chen Zhilin assembled this collection of his wife’s lyrics in order to compensate her for the suffering to which he had subjected her.

During his service in the Qing court Chen Zhilin survived several impeachments and a short-term banishment, but he was finally convicted for bribing a eunuch to form a clique in the court in 1658. His life was spared by the emperor, but he was banished to Shengjing (present day Shenyang). His property was confiscated, and his family, including his mother, brothers, wife, and children, were all sent into exile with him. He died in exile and Xu Can escorted his coffin back to his hometown Haining in 1671.<sup>82</sup>

In a lyric written earlier, on the occasion of revisiting their old house during the Ming when the couple returned to Beijing, Xu Can recalls what she had said to Chen Zhilin before he lost his office in the previous dynasty:

Stopping beneath the flowers of Joint Happiness,  
 At that time I had said to you:  
 “Happiness and sorrow last but a moment;  
 Flowers are like dreams,  
 How can they ever last?”  
 Truly, nowadays,  
 The terrace is empty, flowers gone;  
 Wild grass in chaotic mist.  
 [...] <sup>83</sup>

合歡花下留連，當時曾向君家道。悲歡轉眼，花還如夢，那能長好。  
 真個而今，臺空花盡，亂煙荒草。

These ominous warnings suggest an approach to life that Xu Can would like to share with her husband. The tree of Joint Happiness (silk tree), which was actually located in their courtyard in Beijing, is another recurrent image in their poetry. As its name suggests, the image of the tree symbolizes the love between man and woman. It became a hub of memories, through which both Xu Can and Chen Zhilin recollected precious moments of the days when they lived together in Beijing. In his preface to Xu Can’s *Zhuozhengyuan shiyu*, Chen describes the

81 ZZYSY, “Xu,” 2a.

82 *Qing shi gao*, 9636, p. 14050.

83 ZZYSY, 2, 8a.

happiness and joy they shared under the tree. Unfortunately, Chen notes, the tree was destroyed during the dynastic calamity; only “Xiangping’s fine lines about it still ring in my ears.”<sup>84</sup> Perhaps, the “fine lines” he remembered included Xu Can’s ominous warning about the impermanence of flowers. But, instead of withdrawing from office he allowed history to repeat itself.

The days in exile were difficult and bitter. Born and raised in the Jiangnan region, their life in cold and bleak Manchuria was physically and emotionally challenging. Writing poetry offered them rare moments of comfort and mutual support in the alien climate. The writings of their late years indicate that they finally turned to Buddhism to seek spiritual consolation. Xu Can maintained her affinity for Buddhism, and she fully devoted herself to religious practice after Chen Zhilin died.<sup>85</sup> But, as we have seen in the lyric quoted above, Chen experienced a dramatic change in his beliefs: “When I was young, I also thought Buddhism was a good way, / But let me wait until fleeting fame comes to an end.”<sup>86</sup> Now, having lost everything, perhaps he thought it was the right time to return to Buddhism. Religious activities, such as visiting famous temples and monks, comprise one major theme in their poetry. As the following lines from Xu Can’s “Harmonizing with Su’an’s Writing on Copying the Diamond Sutra” (*He Su’an xie Jingang jing zuo* 和素菴寫金剛經作) show, copying and studying sutras were very much a part of their everyday life; it was through the agency of these meditative activities that they were able to transcend the harsh conditions of life in banishment:

Morning after morning, we explore the prajna,  
 Deep in our hearts, we wake from worldly ideas.  
 As we gradually understand the meaning of the sutra,  
 We simply forget autumn on the frontier.<sup>87</sup>

朝朝探般若，塵念醒心頭。漸解經中義，混忘塞上秋。

This poem suggests that the couple has finally reached a common understanding, and obtained some peace of mind following the loss of public honor, personal riches and their native dynasty. When Chen Zhilin named his collection *Fuyun* (floating clouds), he seems to have accepted the idea that his wife had repeatedly

84 ZZYSY, “Xu,” 1a-b.

85 ZZYSJ, “Jiazhuan,” 2a.

86 *QOC*, 1:1, pp. 426-427.

87 ZZYSJ, 1, 12a-b.

expressed, that riches and nobility are as fleeting as clouds. In his preface he poses the question rhetorically in relation to his poetry: “Can’t we stop the intrigue and competition for rank and cease to fight for beauty? I name this collection *Floating Clouds* to indicate my intent.”<sup>88</sup>

## Conclusion

Inasmuch as Chen Zhilin and Xu Can discussed serious matters regarding Chen’s career and political choices in their poetic exchange, their *changhe* went beyond the conventional “singing in harmony” between husband and wife. Examining their exchanged verses in pairs, we can see that Xu Can was outspoken in her loyalist position. In her examination of the companionate couple Shi Chengjin 石成金(1659-ca.1740) and his wife née Zhou 周氏(1674-1732), Dorothy Ko claims, “no matter how much singing in harmony there was at home, she remained an inner helpmate and was never called upon to partake in his world in a public capacity.”<sup>89</sup> Elsewhere I have examined the poetic exchange between another couple, Li Yuanding 李元鼎(1595-1670) and Zhu Zhongmei 朱中楣(1622-1672).<sup>90</sup> To appreciate the rarity of Xu Can’s courage in speaking out her opinions, it is useful to compare her voice with that of Zhu Zhongmei. A twice-serving minister, Li Yuanding had a career similar to Chen Zhilin’s, and Zhu Zhongmei exchanged poetry with Xu Can several times. However, Li and Zhu fashioned their numerous poetic exchanges in a remarkably different manner. They never openly disagreed with each other in these poems, but sought harmony in both rhyme schemes and thematic concerns. We do not know whether they simply avoided the sensitive issue of loyalty as subject matter or did not include all the poems they wrote in the published collections. In her own poems Zhu Zhongmei infrequently and indirectly voiced her sorrows over the fall of the Ming. Although, like Xu Can, she also attempted to persuade her husband to retire, she does not convey any strong or negative reactions to his political decisions when

88 FYJ, “Xu,” 1a, in the *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 197, p. 591.

89 Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, p. 183.

90 Li Xiaorong 李小榮, “Luanshi de hexie: Ming qing guodu shiqi Li Yuanding he Zhu Zhongmei fuqi de shige changhe,” 亂世的和諧：明清過渡時期李元鼎和朱中楣夫妻的詩歌唱和 in *Qingdai wenxue yanjiu jikan* 清代文學研究集刊 (forthcoming).

exchanging poetry with him. On the contrary, she attempted at times to understand his situation and help him out of dilemmas. Li surrendered to the Qing in 1644, but, implicated in a criminal case, was dismissed from his office in 1646. In 1651, upon the emperor's recall, he decided to return to Qing officialdom again. During his trip to the capital, he wrote the following lines: "We indeed should have grown old together on Deergate Mountain, / For what matters am I coming out to pay back the emperor's favor" 攜隱誠堪老鹿門，江湖何事拜君恩? Unable to provide any reasons by himself, in concluding the poem he turns to his wife for understanding: "My intent, without you, with whom could I discuss" 此意非卿孰與論? In response, Zhu Zhongmei wrote: "I understand that you came out just for the people" 知君自爲蒼生出。<sup>91</sup> In this way, as an insightful and agreeable wife, Zhu came up with a reason that could salvage her husband's decision.

One of their preface-writers, Li Kai 李楷 (fl. 1656), gives the following comment on their *changhe* practice: "Husband and wife cannot always follow each other [physically], but they can do so by writing poetry to each other. As the ministers follow the ruler, the wife should follow the husband. This is the ultimate principle in this world! I trace the principal of Yuanshan [Zhu Zhongmei's style name] to Sima [Li Yuanding]" 夫婦未之恒隨也，而詩以隨之。妻之隨夫，臣之隨君，天下之大經存焉！吾于遠山推本于司馬。<sup>92</sup> To Li Kai and, by extension, Li and Zhu who agreed to include this preface, poetry is a device to substantiate a conjugal relationship, and in that relationship the wife should be in compliance with the husband. Her poems, of course, are supposed to be in harmony with her husband's in both form and content. In the case of Zhu Zhongmei and the above-mentioned née Zhou in Ko's study, one can say that a cultured wife could only earn recognition of her literary talent within the socio-cultural boundaries of the inner chambers.

As a woman of the gentry class playing her wifely role, Xu Can like née Zhou and Zhu took no political action on her own, but symbolically she did transcend gender norms by expressing her differing views on her husband's conduct and decisions in his career, frequently questioning his judgment. In their exchange of poetry, Xu Can demonstrated both literary skill and historical

91 Li Yuanding and Zhu Zhongmei, *Changhe chu ji* 倡和初集, 2.1a-b, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol. 196, pp.75-76.

92 Li Kai, "Xu" 序, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu, jibu*, vol.196, p. 80.

knowledge that matched that of her husband. She was not afraid to express her opinions about her husband’s decisions or her true feelings for the past dynasty. Chen’s poems in reply show that he respected his wife and took her opinions seriously. Thanks to Chen Zhilin’s special efforts, Xu Can’s *ci* collection has been preserved for later generations.<sup>93</sup> Ironically, it was only Xu Can and her works, especially her *ci*, that have been celebrated by posterity. In spite of the fact that her poetic engagement with politics as subject matter was to a large extent framed by the *changhe* practice with her husband, Xu Can stood out and was recognized as a prominent woman poet. Her name and writings were frequently included in Qing poetry anthologies and poetic criticism. Qing critics reserved special praise for Xu Can’s achievement in the *ci* genre, claiming that she was the greatest female lyricist of her time.<sup>94</sup> This praise is particularly impressive, ironic even, inasmuch as she appropriated subject matter that normally was restricted to the social world of men. Her sustained loyalist sentiments were much appreciated by Qing critics, as exemplified by this comment by the *ci* scholar Tan Xian 譚獻 (1832-1901): “In expressing sentiments about the ‘rise and fall,’ the Grand Secretary (Chen Zhilin) pales beside her.”<sup>95</sup> The term “sentiments about the ‘rise and fall’” (*xing wang zhi gan* 興亡之感) does not refer simply to feelings about historical transition in general, but specifically to patriotic sentiments for a fallen dynasty valued in the Chinese ethical system.

However, Chen’s description of his political struggles and his rationalization of his “betrayal,” constitute a “turncoat’s” statement that is not less compelling. Despite traditional Chinese ethical values, there is no reason to conclude that their poetic exchange on weighty political matters is anything but equal. Their poetic exchange reveals their ability to view their own circumstances from broader historical perspectives. However, Chen’s poetry expresses inconsistent senses of self. The adoption of different or even contradictory images not only suggests his complicated personality, but also reveals the poignant irony that wound through his life and career as a result of his own choices and the upheavals in the larger world. In contrast to his inconsistency in moral

93 Xu’s *shi* collection was not put in print until 1803 by Wu Qian 吳騫 (1733-1813). See Wu Qian, “Xinke Zhuozhengyuan shiji tici” 新刻拙政園詩集題詞, 1a, in ZZYSJ.

94 The *Qing ci jishi huiping* collects all these critical remarks. See You Zhenzhong and You Yiding, eds., *Qing ci jishi huiping*, pp. 65-66.

95 As quoted in Chen Bangyan, “Pingjie nü ciren Xu Can,” p. 10.

orientation, Xu Can remained steadfast in her beliefs. It is because of her articulation of loyalist sentiments and Chen's political ambivalence that she, rather than he, was recognized and praised by literary critics and historians. Although the collection of Chen's *Fuyun ji* is voluminous and has received some positive comments, the reception of his poetry was affected by the negative image generally held by his contemporaries and later writers. Deng Zhicheng 鄧之誠 (1887-1960) once commented that "his personality is not worth mentioning. As for his *shi* and *ci*, they are quick-witted in ideas and fresh in expressions. Only they are slightly burdened with the poet's talent."<sup>96</sup> Evaluating a literary work in terms of the author's talent (*cai* 才) and virtue (*de* 德) had deep roots in the Confucian tradition.<sup>97</sup> Deng's view of talent as the poet's burden implies Chen's lack in virtue, which consequently does harm to his poetic achievement. New scholarly trends have led to a reevaluation of *erchen* 貳臣 (twice-serving ministers) like Qian Qianyi, but these reevaluations have not challenged Chinese ethical standards. Instead, they have explained Qian's decision to serve the Qing from other angles.<sup>98</sup> The case of Chen Zhilin has not yet attracted much attention. By examining his poetic communication with his wife, this study has attempted in its limited scope to bring his voice to the fore without simply reiterating the ethical judgments that have obscured or marginalized an important aspect of history. His complex life and poetry in more dimensions deserve an independent study.

Xu Can and Chen Zhilin played out an ironic motif found in social and cultural life during the Ming-Qing transition, a motif which Wai-yee Li identifies in her essay on the image of late Ming courtesans: some women were able to exemplify high moral standards even while the men in their lives failed to preserve integrity by compromising with the new dynasty.<sup>99</sup> A well-known example of a couple whose experiences in some way paralleled Chen Zhilin and

96 As quoted in Qian Zhonglian, ed., *Qing shi jishi, Shunzhi chao juan* 順治朝卷, pp. 1558-1560.

97 For a discussion of the relationship between talent and morality in literary practice by authors of both genders, see Kang-i Sun Chang, "Ming-Qing Women Poets and the Notions of Talent and Morality," in Theodore R. Hutters and Pauline Yu et al, eds., *Culture and State in Chinese History: Convention, Accommodations, and Critiques* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 236-258.

98 For a discussion of how Qian Qianyi's contemporaries and later generations evaluated his works and political choices, see Chang, "Qian Qianyi and his Place in History," pp. 199-218.

99 Li Wai-yee, "The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," in Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang, eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 72.

Xu Can's was Qian Qianyi and Liu Shi 柳是(1618?-1664). The famous courtesan who later became the concubine of Qian Qianyi, Liu Shi once attempted suicide when she failed to persuade Qian Qianyi to become a martyr for the Ming.<sup>100</sup> Liu and Xu differed, however, in how they acted out their loyalty. As the modern biographer of Liu Shi, Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, suggests, Liu rarely wrote poetry after the fall of the Ming but devoted herself to loyalist activities.<sup>101</sup> Xu Can relied more on her literary agency, namely writing poetry, to assert her political position. Women were supposed to stay away from politics and follow their husbands, but women like Liu Shi and Xu Can went beyond conventional gender roles to embody what they perceived as high values in reaction to the political turmoil created by dynastic transition. Their decision accorded them and their works a special place in Chinese history.

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100 There are several records, such as Gu Ling's 顧苓 biography of Liu Shi, mentioning this detail. In his biographical study of Liu Shi, Chen Yinke examines these records and confirms that they are "credible." See Chen Yinke, *Liu Rushi biezhuàn* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), pp. 827-832.

101 Chen Yinke, *Liu Rushi biezhuàn*, p. 1012.

## 不和諧的唱和：明清之際 徐燦與陳之遴的詩歌唱和

李 小 榮

### 摘 要

唱和，依照相同形式和韻律作詩對其他人的詩作作出反應，是傳統中國詩歌創作的渠道及社會功能之一。本文通過對明清易代之際女詩人徐燦與其夫婿陳之遴間的詩歌唱和的細讀，探討他們夫妻交流中以下兩個互動的維度：一、儘管在很多方面扮演傳統妻子的角色，徐燦還是勇於表達她不同於丈夫的遺民立場以及對其政治生涯的獨特看法，二、在和妻子的對話中，陳之遴也懇切地表述出其政治掙扎與對自己「背叛」明朝的合理化，留下中國歷史上罕有的「貳臣」聲音。本文的結論是，這對夫妻在詩歌唱和中表現出一種在其他場合罕見的在政治文化見解上旗鼓相當的夫妻互動。此外，由於她們有超於傳統女性角色的政治表現，易代之際的女性如徐燦與柳是連同她們的作品會在中國歷史上佔有一席特殊地位，甚至超出她們的夫婿或其他男性文人。

**關鍵詞：**唱和、明清易代、徐燦、陳之遴、夫妻交流