論　著

# Female Hierarchy in Customary Practice: The Status of Concubines in Seventeenth-Century China

Hsieh Pao-hua*

Chi Yün (*tzu*, Hsiao-lan 1724–1805), a prominent scholar-official in the early Ch'ing dynasty, records a story in *Yüeh-wei ts'ao-t'ang pi-chi (Incisive Views in A Humble Studio)* about two concubines of a grand family asking a professional female sorcerer regarding the dharma and karma of becoming concubines. The aged Buddhist sorcerer said:

> In the law of Hades, immense karma will not offset maximum dharma, whereas a little karma and dharma can counterbalance each other. You concubines of rich families certainly accumulated some merits but not ones great enough to eradicate your past sins, thus your present life is not perfect...①

* Associate Professor, Department of History, Greighton University

① *Yüeh-wei ts'ao-t'ang pi-chi (Incisive Views in A Humble Studio)* (henceforth YWTT PC 1980: 283); also see in *Nü-jen ching (Tests for Women)*, 3(2): 38a–38b. *Nü-jen ching* written by an anonymous author was published in the Kuang-hsü period (1875–1908). The author claimed that the book was written under the spiritual

The hypothesis inspired by the story is that the imperfect life of a concubine corresponds to her status and the related prestige she could acquire. Married and unmarried women were ranked into a female status order. In this hierarchical spectrum, a concubine's status entailed higher or lower rank and more or fewer privilege within and outside her husband's household. This hypothesis raises essential questions: How did a concubine define her place within the household female hierarchy and in a society made up of women from households of various classes? Did prestige associated with higher social status attained through the concubinage relationship attract women and their families from various levels of social classes?

It must be recognized that although a woman's status was affected by ritual and law, it was customarily influenced by other factors. How and to what extent did the female hierarchy, as defined by ritual and law, coincide with actual customary practices? Ming and Ch'ing ritual and law primarily defined a woman's status differentiation and obligation within the family, while custom further identified her status by comparing her with women both within and outside the family, as well as comparing the authority and related privileges associated to that status. Accordingly, I will discuss the customary point of view of the female domestic hierarchy, which includes the wife, concubines of different ranks, chambermaids, maids, and other women in the household.

Moreover, I will define the female hierarchy found in a society comprising women from households of various classes. Evidence shows that Ming and early Ch'ing women, as family members, often participated in

---

guidance of the goddess Kuan-in. The book shows its strong Confucian ideas of morality and condemns the western influence on the traditional family system. However, it offers profoundly valuable information which exposes many aspects of customs from ancient to late imperial China.

social activities not only within the extended family network, but also with associates of network members. Attention is thus given to the place of women in the larger society by discussing the deployment of women into different societal strata. To distinguish a woman's social status from that of women outside the family, I will compare their social classifications, simultaneously established and reinforced according to the social classification of husbands and in-laws. The emphasis on class differentiations among women from different families highlights the gulf in economic power between families. In considering social stratification, I will examine how women perpetuated the existing male power alignments, and how they derived social privileges from their husbands or masters.

## Wife and Concubines

The definition of wife, *ch'i*, means "one who is an equivalent counterpart of her husband," according to *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu (Analytical Dictionary of Chinese Characters)*,② but the phrase given there contains an additional implication not given in the literal translation, since there is a consonance between the character for "wife" and the character for "equivalence" used in the phrase, both pronounced *chi*. This implies that the characters for wife and equivalence have the same meaning. *Shih-ming (On the Explanation of Names)* also states that husband and wife are matched together in an equivalent relationship.③ "Nei-tse" ("Domestic Regulations"), a chapter of *Li-chi (Records of Ritual)*, includes a statement which indicates that after the betrothal ceremony a woman undergoing the Six Rites becomes a wife.④ Therefore, a wife could proudly say that she was "mar-

② SWCT, 12B:1a.

③ SM, 3:23b.

④ The Six Rites refer to *na-ts'ai, wen-ming, na-chi, na-cheng, ch'ing-ch'i, ch'in-ying.*

ried through a matchmaker and formal ceremonies"*(ming-mei cheng-ch'ü)*. This bespoke the importance of marriage ceremonies, the observance of which was indispensable to the legal consequences of marriage. Wedding rituals stressed that the wife was not to be easily divorced by the husband or his family without the consultation of her natal family.⑤ The principle of equivalence and complementarity between husband and wife acknowledged the wife's authority and duties as the principal mistress in her new household, and recognized that she would one day take her mother-in-law's place in the family. The wife was called *cheng-shih* (the principal consort) of her husband.

Originally, concubines were either the wife's attendants, criminals, or slaves. The institution of concubinage performed important functions in bonding social and political alliances through the customary operation of a

---

The entire marriage procedure was actually involved in the following important ceremonies: negotiating the marriage, presenting the betrothal gifts, presenting the valuables, the groom himself welcoming the bride, presenting the bride to her parents-in-law, the bride and groom presenting themselves at the family shrine, and presenting the groom to the bride's parents and relatives.(LC, 28:7a; see Ming and early Ch'ing's ritual texts: WKCLHT, 3:7a; HLTCEV, 3:11a–17a; CTLT, 3:10a; CLTC, 3:8b).

⑤ Traditional Chinese divorces were of four kinds: mutual consent; seven conditions (*ch'i-ch'u:* disobedience to parents-in-law, barrenness, adultery, jealousy, incurable disease, loquacity, and theft) with three limitations (*san-pu-ch'ü* lack of close relatives to return to, performance of three years mourning for her husband's parents, or wealth in her husband's family when they had been poor at the time of her marriage); breaking the bond *(i-chüeh)*; and wife's or concubine's suit. Divorce suits initiated by wives or concubines were rare since they were subordinate to their husbands. Divorce by mutual consent was in practice the most common occurrence in all situations and was usually based on a breach of the seven conditions with three limitations, or on a breaking of the bond. The structures for these two kinds of divorce required several stringent conditions for the divorce of a wife, while requiring less for the divorce of a concubine. They protected wives, and, to some degree, concubines married through rites, from being easily sent away by their husbands (Tai, 1978).

system of bride-accompaniment among the feudal lords. In the period of Spring and Autumn (722–484 B.C.E.), when a woman from a ruling family married, two other ruling families of the same surname would send young women as bridal companions. These bridal companions might have been the bride's sisters, cousins, or maids.⑥ The custom was also followed in a high official's marriage. Eventually, the women would become the groom's concubines. Whereas the bride was identified as the principal wife, her sisters or cousins were identified as secondary wives, and her maids were identified as *ying*. In "Shih hun-li" ("Ceremony of Marriage of the Scholar Class"), a chapter in *I-li (Etiquette and Ritual)*, the character *ying* means the service of cleansing paraphernalia for personal needs; according to the *I-li* explanation, it also means sending bridal companions.⑦ By the time of the documentation of *shih* class marriages in the *I-li*, the giving of daughters as secondary brides had ceased, and the only females who came into a marriage with the bride were her maids.⑧ In addition to the wife's maids, some concubines were originally criminals or slaves. The character *ch'ieh* first appeared in "ch'ü-li"("The Rhymes of Rites"), a chapter in *Li-chi*.⑨ In the Han Period (206 B.C.E.–219 C.E.) *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu, ch'ieh* is given the meaning of criminal women and slaves who became the concubines of noblemen.⑩ They were a source of prestige, used as presents or as rewards to noblemen and high officials.⑪ *Pai-hu t'ung (Writings from White-Tiger Hall)* says that *ch'ieh* means a woman was received regularly because of her inferior position.⑫ As the system

---

⑥ ILCCCT, 2:26a; TCCS, 39:23b.

⑦ IL, 29:2b.

⑧ Thatcher, 1991:31, 50.

⑨ LC, "ch'ü-li" pt. II, 1:14a.

⑩ SWCT, 12B:1a.

⑪ Chao, 1977:81–85; Thatcher, 1991:31–32.

⑫ PHT, 9:15b–16a.

developed, the women were taken for serving, accompanying, entertaining, or giving birth to sons. Both *ying* and *ch'ieh* were the women who served beside their husbands, and were thus called *ts'e-shih or fu-shih* (in either case meaning secondary consort).

Although there were no defined ceremonies for taking concubines in Ming and early Ch'ing ritual texts, according to custom, concubines were acquired through three major methods: marriage, purchase, and promotion from maids. Generally, concubinage by marriage served the purpose of marriage in the situations where a concubine was desired or required by a man or his family, but for some reason she was not acceptable as a wife. In such cases, marriage as a concubine, when it was effective, acted as a link connecting the two families. A woman who was married as a concubine often came from a "respectable family" *(liang-chia)*,⑬ but usually from a lower social stratum than her husband. However, surviving evidence shows that it was also possible for a woman of equal social status to be married as a concubine, particularly under certain circumstances. A woman who did not have a respectable family background at all could still be married as a concubine to a man of a respectable family by reason of her personal attributes, such as character, beauty, talent, or wealth.

There were at least three major forms of marriage as a concubine: simple concubine-marriage, *chien-t'iao* (inheriting two families) marriage, and *liang- t'ou tso-ta* (equal status) marriage.⑭ Under either of the latter

---

⑬ In traditional China, *liang-chia* referred to the families without criminal history or above "mean" class. In Ming and early Ch'ing Codes, slaves, prostitutes, and singers were identified as "mean"*(chien)* people.

⑭ The custom of marriage under the *liang-t'ou tso-ta* system was often followed when a man had already married a wife, but they did not live together for some reasons, such as separation without divorce or simply the holding of an official position, which allowed him to have a separate residence in another province. He could always take or marry a concubine, but if the woman he wanted came from a good family of equal social status, her parents would object to her becoming a simple

two systems, a concubine would be given the additional title of *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* (equal status wife), and would be treated as a wife. But, according to the Ming and early Ch'ing Codes, while her marriage was accepted as official in legal terms, she was still considered a concubine.⑮ Usually the family status of the woman who was married under the title of *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* was close to the family status of her husband. This was seldom the case in simple concubine-marriage. For all three forms of concubine by marriage, there was a different set of customary procedures to be followed. The marriage ceremonies for the systems of *liang-t'ou tso-ta* and *chien-t'iao* also included the Six Rites, the same as for marrying a wife.

---

concubine, or in some cases that he himself so greatly admired and respected the woman that he did not want to take her as a concubine without formal ceremony. In either of these cases, the man had the option of marrying the woman in the title of *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* under the system of *liang-t'ou tso-ta*. In addition to the general motivations for provision of descendants, for the satisfaction of erotic desires, or for showing success and social status as the other forms of concubinage stated above, marriage under *chien-t'iao* served specific purposes. It was often motivated by the need for additional heirs customarily practiced in the situations where a man had inherited more than one family or where a woman needed her own son to inherit her natal family name. In the first situation, the man would be an only son of a family where another branch of the family was heirless. For example, the man could be both the only son of his father and at the same time the adopted son of his sonless uncle. Since he therefore inherited from two families, at least one of his sons would inherit from the family of his uncle. In order to ensure the birth of heirs for his own and his uncle's families, he would marry a concubine from a respectable family. Thus her son(s) would be dignified enough to inherit either of the two families, especially if both the families which he inherited were of high social status. The second situation, where a woman's family had no male offspring, was known as an "extinguished family"(*hu-chüeh*). The daughter of such a family had a duty to continue her father's name. She usually adopted an uxorilocal marriage to bring in a son-in-law. They would inherit the family property and their son(s) would continue the family line; or she might marry into her husband's family, either as a wife or as a concubine, after which one of her sons would inherit her natal family's name and property (Hsieh, 1993; Chü 1961:91–94).

⑮ Chü, 1961:121.

The ceremonies for a simple concubine-marriage were less complicated. However, a matchmaker, a witness, and a betrothal based on a marriage agreement or a contract between two parties were legally required, even though parental approval and other ceremonies were not often acquired.⑯

⑯ See a detailed discussion in Hsieh, 1993. No Ming and early Ch'ing document, however, of such an agreement for a simple concubine-marriage remains; nevertheless, in fictional accounts, the concubine's family would send the woman's date of birth and her marriage contract to the groom's family; then the woman's family would receive in return the price of the bride. A matchmaker was required to formally negotiate the terms of the agreement between the two families. A witness to the marriage was also necessary both for the negotiation between the two families and for the wedding ceremony. This witness could be one of the concubine's parents, grandparents or uncles. If the concubine was a widow and lived at home, she herself decided her remarriage under the agreement of the elders of her marital or even natal families. The witness to her wedding could likewise be an elder of her marital or natal family. But the ceremony could not be conducted until she had completed the mourning period for her deceased husband. For instance, *Chin-p'ing-mei* recounts the procedures by which a widow remarried as a concubine and describes the motivations of both the husband and the widow herself. In the story, Meng Yü-lou was in charge of the large legacy of her deceased husband, a rich merchant who died without an heir. With her beauty, wealth, and middle class background defined by her deceased husband's social status, Yü-lou could easily remarry as a wife of a lower class family. Therefore, Hsi-men attracted to her beauty and wealth could not have her by simply taking her as a concubine, but had to please her and propose marriage. Yü-lou accepted Hsi-men's proposal because she was attracted to his handsome looks and his wealth. It was neither for *liang-t'ou tso-ta* nor for *chien- t'iao* purpose, but was a simple concubine-marriage. Their marriage was through a betrothal ceremony based on an agreement, but not the whole *six rites*. In the absence of her parents and parents-in-law who were dead, the closest living elder relative of Yü-lou's was an old aunt of her deceased husband. She had a say in the marriage but the ultimate decision on the remarriage was Yü-lou's. Therefore, Hsi-men sent a matchmaker with presents to please both the old aunt and Yü-lou, and ask for their consent to a marriage agreement. After Yü-lou had agreed, Hsi- men presented some golden ornaments as betrothal presents. On the day for receiving the bride, Hsi-men himself did not go, but his servants came to receive Yü-lou. The aunt, as the guardian and witness of the ceremony, approved Yü- lou's remarriage, and successfully dealt with

Most concubines were purchased or promoted from maids, who were also purchased from markets through contracts. Some concubines were given to their husbands as gifts from the government or friends for specific purposes. The status of the concubine entering her husband's household through the latter methods is not discussed in this paper, since those concubines were relatively few. The women for sale were usually daughters or wives from poor families, maids or concubines driven out of rich families, and entertaining women. Formal wedding ceremonies were not performed when a man purchased concubines; the family background of a concubine was of no concern; the natal kin connections of a concubine were ignored; and there was no dowry or bride price transfer. The process of taking a maid as a concubine, called *shou-fang* (taking as a legal consort), necessarily had a formal ceremony and festival for rectifying her position of concubine before the relatives. These different ceremonies for marrying a wife and taking concubines officially defined the status differentiation between the wife (the superior) and the concubines (the inferior).

In the inner quarter, the wife was accorded a higher place, right below her mother-in-law, in the female hierarchy. She was the manager of the household having official authority over concubines, chambermaids, maids, children, and servants. The concubines called her "sister" or "mistress" (*chu-mu*), depending on the local customs. The ritually and legally pre-eminent status of the wife was customarily reinforced by ceremonies in which concubines ritually demonstrated their inferiority. These ceremonies differed from region to region according to various local customs and the method by which a concubine had entered her husband's family. More specifically, the domestic rank given to a concubine was officially recognized

---

the opposition of the other relatives of Yü-lou's deceased husband. Also before the ceremony, Hsi-men hired monks to appease the spirit of Yü-lou's deceased husband (CPM, 7).

by the degree of formality and of complexity in the ceremonies performed upon her entrance into the household and by her presentation to the wife.

A concubine married as a *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* met the wife as an equal, since they both entered the household through similar ceremonies. This equality could be officially acknowledged even by the wife herself. The following instance in *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan (Marriage of Ill Omen)* provides a statement made by *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* T'ung Chi-chieh, when the husband, Ti Hsi-ch'en, told her to present her respects to his principal wife. Chi-chieh questioned whether or not the principal wife had a social pre-eminence superior to her own:

> "Who is the elder sister? I am not pleased even though so many people call me *nai-nai* [mistress]... You see, she is standing there and waiting for me to present my respects to her. Let her come over and greet me. How can she expect me to do this first?"[After a moment], she turned to Su-chieh [the wife] and said, "We do not need to figure out the order between you and me, you must be older than me, so you are the elder sister. Please stand on the left side of me."They bowed four times to each other.
>
> Chi-chieh said again, "I think your home town [Shantung] also has the same custom [as mine in Peking] that after a person receives greeting from another person, they need to return greeting in the same way. Therefore, it is my turn to stand on the left side of you [to accept your greeting]. Haven't you any humility?"Su-chieh herein let Chi-chieh stand on her left side, and they bowed to each other again [the left standing is superior to the right one according to Ming custom]...⑰

---

⑰ HSYYC, 95:935–940. *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan*, with 100 chapters, was written and published between the late Ming and early Ch'ing (Wang, 1970:218; Liu, 1976:9). The story was set in the Ming Cheng-te reign (1506–1521) by the author who

A concubine who was purchased or promoted from a maid had to greet the husband, the wife, and even the other concubines as an inferior. *T'an-tz'u, T'ien-yü-hua (Heavenly-Rain-Flower)* provides such an example:⑱

> After getting off the sedan chair, Wei Kuei-hsiang was led by a matchmaker to the main room of the house, where her master and mistress sat together on seats facing the south. She was ordered to bow to them. Then all of the people in the household came to see her and were ordered to call her *i-niang* (minor mistress). Also, the new concubine would meet the other concubines and all the relatives in her husband's household for the purpose of being acknowledged by them.⑲

---

called himself "Hsi-chou sheng" ("A Scholar of theWestern Chou"), whose real name has been discussed by many scholars without coming to a final conclusion (Hu, 1986; Liu, 1953, 1976; Wang, 1970:220–224). Aside from a small number of scholarly articles dealing with the question of authorship, there have been virtually no serious studies of the novel as a literary text. As a result, it is known primarily to specialists and only for its central thematic element (Plaks, 1977:543–581; Chu, 1978). Yenna Wu's dissertation, which contributes a literary analysis on its theme, rhetoric and authorship, has been so far the most comprehensive literary study. The novel has been greatly valued as a profound narrative account of social history. See Wu, 1988, 1995.

⑱ T'an means to play stringed musical instruments, and *tz'u* means words, speeches, tales, stories, etc. They were originally performed for audiences by storytellers with the accompaniment of stringed instruments such as lutes. The name *t'an-tz'u* comes from these usages. In written records, the term *t'an-tz'u* first appeared in the middle of the 16th century, and in the latter half of that century it rapidly developed in the southern coastal areas of China. Scholars began to take notice of *t'an-tz'u* and to write stories in its form after it became popular. Numerous *t'an-tz'u* works with highly literary expressions were created by the end of the Ming dynasty for the purpose of reading enjoyment. However, most of them were lost. The extant works of this genre, amounting to over a hundred and seventy books, are mostly products of the Ch'ing period.

⑲ TYH, 13:499. *T'ien-yü-hua*, written in the form of a *t'an-tz'u*, is the only fictional

In the ceremony of shou-fang, a promoted concubine was required to present her inferiority by bowing to the wife and to concubines of higher positions. The following arena is from the novel *Lin-lan-hsiang*

---

source used in this study which at present some scholars believe was written by a woman, T'ao Chen-huai, according to the author's preface. Nevertheless, an older theory which has not been well proven implies that the book was written by Hsü Chih-ho, a Hanlin academician of the Wan-li reign (1573–1619), to entertain his aged mother who loved to read *t'an-tz'u* (see the editor's preface of the novel, Shanghai, 1936). Toyoko Yoshida Ch'en in her study on the novel believes that quite probably the stated author, T'ao Chen-huai, did exist and some of the sentiments expressed in the novel clearly appear to be from a woman, although the life of T'ao Chen-huai is very obscure. In the preface to the novel, T'ao Chen-huai implies that she was a native of Wu-hsi (in modern Kiangsu) and grew up during the turbulent times of the late Ming and early Ch'ing period. The novel was completed and published around 1651, according to the author's preface. The meaning of the title, "T'ien-yü-hua,"is not very clear since the author did not explain it in the story. Its literal meaning, "Heaven rains flowers,"might refer to an event which occurred during the reign of the Emperor Wu-ti of the Liang dynasty (502–549): Yün-kuang, a monk, chanted a sutra so sincerely that Heaven was impressed and rained flowers. T'ao Chen-huai's motivation was supposed to have been to present the work so sincerely as to impress Heaven (Ch'en Toyoko, 1974:52–54). Many other *t'an-tz'u* authors are also women who were the most avid readers and came to be interested in writing stories themselves. There are at least 21 *t'an-tz'u* works known today written by women. Some of them wrote romantic stories in the popular vein, while some of the others created stories of a more serious nature based on their own family lives. The question of the exact date and place of the creation and publication of some of these works can not be answered inasmuch as the identities of the authors are extremely shadowy. The authors who were historically identifiable in private writings were all from scholarly families of high social rank, whereas the families of many of the other authors who must not have had high enough social standing were not mentioned, and some of them could not even have their writings preserved until today. The only sources for their biographies are the prefaces and other autobiographical statements presented in their works. Being isolated from society, those female authors did not seem to write their works for the performance of story tellers. It seems more probable that they wrote for such readers as their female relatives and friends (T'an, 1936, chap. 2).

*(Forest-Orchid-Fragrance)*:

> In the ceremony, T'ien Ch'un-wan, assisted by maids, bowed to Mrs. Keng and the senior relatives, then bowed to the principal wife, and then to the other three concubines of higher position than her. After the ceremony, people enjoyed a large festival from morning until night.⑳

The ceremonies in which a concubine presented herself to the wife not only recognized the wife's official status and reaffirmed the wife's superior position in the female hierarchy, but also differentiated concubines with regard to each other. The particular position of each concubine was most often set according to when and how she had entered the household. Fictional sources usually ranked concubines by number primarily in accordance with the way in which they had entered the household and secondarily by the date of their entry. If they entered at the same

---

⑳ LLH, 43:329–331. *Lin-lan-hsiang*, containing 60 chapters, was edited by "Sui-yüan hsia-shih"(A content and humble scholar), and was published in the K'ang-hsi reign (1662–1722) of the early Ch'ing dynasty. This novel is relatively unstudied: the real name and life of the author, and the exact time when it was composed and published are unknown. We do know that the author lived in the late seventeenth century and understood the customs of the period very well. Although this novel is not as widely known as the previous two, it is considered by some Chinese scholars to be one of the greatest novels of the seventeenth century. The novel's title contains the names of its three principle heroines: the wife *Lin* (forest) Yün-p'ing, *Lan* (orchid) representing the concubine Yen Meng- ch'ing, and another concubine Jen Hsiang (fragrance)-erh. The name of Yen Meng-ch'ing referred to as Lan or Orchid was based on the story of Yen-Chi from *Tso-chuan* (Commentary of *Tso-chuan*). In this allusion, Yen-Chi, the favorite virtuous concubine of the King of Cheng state in the Spring and Autumn period, dreamed that Heaven bestowed on her an orchid, the elegant flower which Chinese use to describe a woman's virtue and refined beauty. As a reference to Yen-chi, the author created Yen Meng-ch'ing and implied that she was as virtuous and beautiful as Yen-chi (Yü, 1984:1–2). See the overly virtuous wife and concubines in the novel discussed in Keith McMahon, 1995, chap. 9.

time through the same method, they would be ranked by their age.㉑ A concubine married as *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* was confident of her position; she ordinarily held the first position among the concubines.㉒ A simple marriage-concubine, even though not as *p'ing-t'ou ch'i*, still had a higher position than a purchased concubine regardless of when either entered the household.㉓ In many cases a concubine promoted from a maid had the lowest position vis-a-vis the other concubines, and was usually ranked lower than the other concubines even if she had entered the household earlier.

For instance, in the novel *Lin-lan-hsiang*, Master Keng Lang had one wife and five concubines. The second and the third concubines were married, and the fourth and the fifth were concubines advanced from maids. Jen Hsiang-erh, the fourth mistress, became concubine before the second and the third mistresses, but was ranked after them because she had been promoted from a maid.㉔ In another novel, *Chin-p'ing-mei (Gold-Vase-Plum)*, master Hsi-men had five concubines. The fourth concubine Sun Hsüeh-o was promoted from maid and did not take the third place after the third mistress died. Instead, Meng Yü-lou, a widow of a rich merchant was married and became the third concubine.㉕ Many a promoted concubine had qualms about stripping off her self-identity of maid before others who remembered her previous status. Some kept an inferior-status attitude when dealing with the wife and other concubines, whereas others manifested shrewish behavior generated by their inferior-status conflicts.

---

㉑ Shih, 1956:19.

㉒ e.g. HSYYC, 95:784–789.

㉓ e.g. LLH, chap. 2.

㉔ LLH, chaps. 2 & 13:97–98.

㉕ CPM, chaps. 7 & 11.

In *Chin-p'ing-mei*, Sun Hsüeh-o's situation illustrates that a concubine promoted from maid might hold a very inferior status compared with the married or purchased concubines and could be treated badly by them because of her background. After she became a concubine, Hsüeh-o continued to do her supervisory work in the kitchen where she had worked when she was a maid. She was looked down upon by the wife and the married or purchased concubines; although they called her "sister," they treated her as a maid. She was not usually invited to participate in the family's social events. When master Hsi-men and his wife and other concubines went out for entertainment or social activities, they left her at home. Hsüeh-o was neglected by her husband and "sisters" partly because she was not as comely as her "sisters," and because she seemed to indicate that she felt inferior to other women. Yet, she often tried to give other concubines difficulty, especially the purchased concubine, P'an Chin-lien, by criticizing her before the wife and other concubines. She wanted them to know that although she was an ignorant promoted concubine, she understood her proper conduct according to her status. She indicated that Chin-lien displayed conceit because she did not recognize her own inferiority and behaved beyond her limited standing.㉖

A different outcome was expressed in *Lin-lan-hsiang*. T'ien Ch'un-wan's promotion from maid to concubine to *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* shows us the rank order among the wife, the concubines, and the maids. Her humble reaction to her promotions indicated that the hierarchical structure clearly differentiated among these three ranks from the superior to the inferior. She had been promoted in the domestic order, but influenced by her lower class background, she retained her inferior attitude. Her expressions of discomfort, despite her actual position, disarmed her husband and gained protection from the other women of the household. Her story follows.

---

㉖ CPM, chaps. 11 & 15.

After the ceremony of promoting a maid to concubinage, T'ien Ch'un-wan became a concubine, ranking as the sixth mistress of Keng Lang. But she had difficulty in adapting to her new circumstances and could not act the same as the other concubines, especially those who were married. She continued to serve her husband as a maid, thereby showing her inferiority to the other concubines. She said to her husband, "The other mistresses have been so nice to me that they have promoted me to serve you as a concubine. I dare not stand as an equal among them. The other maids are still my sisters as before; I could not accept being called sixth mistress by them."㉗ Later, when she was adopted by the wife of her husband's uncle, a duke, her social status again rose to match the status of her new family. Further, her adoptive mother who wanted one of Ch'un-wan's sons to inherit the uncle's family name decided that Ch'un-wan should become a *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* of Keng Lang by *chien-t'iao*. Ch'un-wan cried as she bowed to thank the uncle's wife. Feeling great pressure about being promoted to be *p'ing-t'ou ch'i*, she said to Hsüan Ai-niang, a married concubine, "Being born in the lower class, I am ashamed and fearful of reaching someday a position higher than you."㉘

The status differentiations among the wife and concubines defined their benefits according to their rank order—which chambers they could live in, the quality and the quantity of furniture and clothing they could have, the number of maids who attended them, the amount of the monthly stipends they received, and their seating arrangements at family functions. Fictional sources show that the locations of their chambers were specifically arranged according to the hierarchy of living compartments. A typical traditional Chinese household was structured in tiers which reflected the status of the members. The closer one was to the front, the higher

㉗ LLH, 43:331.

㉘ LLH, 48:371.

one's status. Conversely, the further away from the front, the lower the status. Therefore, the location of the front compound was superior to the secondary compound, which was superior to the back compound. Moreover, the eastern chamber was superior to the western one, the right one was superior to the left one. The rules for the seating arrangements around the table at family or social meals were also structured. According to the Ming custom, the seat facing the south was superior to the one facing the north, and the one facing the east was superior to the one facing the west.

The following example in *Lin-lan-hsiang* draws a detailed picture of the settings of chambers and the number of maids which the wife and the concubines had according to their ranks:

> The principal mistress and wife, Lin Yün-p'ing, occupied a chamber in the main tower at the front of the compound; the second mistress, Yen Meng-ch'ing, had her chamber in the eastern part of the compound next to Yün-p'ing's; the third mistress, Hsüan Ai-niang, had hers behind that of Meng-ch'ing; the fourth mistress, Jen Hsiang- erh, and the fifth mistress, P'ing Ts'ai-yün, both had their chambers in a minor tower in the western part of the compound where Hsiang- erh lived in the eastern section and Ts'ai-yün lived in the western section. Both Yün-p'ing and Meng-ch'ing had five maids, Ai-niang had four, and Hsiang-erh and Ts'ai-yün both had three.㉙

These differences defined the women's hierarchical status respective to their family backgrounds as well as the ways they entered their husband's household: Lin Yün-p'ing was the principal wife from the upper social class, Yen Meng-ch'ing was a married concubine from the upper social class, Hsüan Ai-niang was also a married concubine but from the middle

㉙ LLH, chap. 15:114.

class, Jen Hsiang-erh and P'ing T'sai-yün were both concubines promoted from maids with lower class origins.㉚

A similar arrangement of chambers was described in *Chin-p'ing-mei*. The principal wife, Wu Yüeh-niang, occupied the first unit at the front of the compound. Two higher ranking concubines, Meng Yü-lou and Li Chiao-erh, had their units near the middle of the compound. Two other concubines, P'an Chin-lien and Li P'ing-erh, who entered the Hsi-men household later then Yü-lou and Chiao-erh, had their chambers in the garden but ahead of Sun Hsüeh-o's, a concubine with lesser tenure who, until her promotion, had been a maid. Hsüeh-o's chamber was only slightly ahead of the kitchen; however, in relative terms of status, both were well forward of the servant quarters situated at the very rear of the compound.㉛ The rules for the seating arrangements were also mentioned several times in different chapters of this fictional account. At the regular family dinner or a special festival, the husband, the wife, and the concubines had certain assigned seats according to their rank order. The husband and the wife always sat in the superior places (*shang-shou*), and the concubines sat in the inferior places (*hsia-shou*), beside the husband and the wife according to their ranks.㉜

The distinction of status between wife and concubine, clearly defining the authority of the superior, was emphasized since the wife held the position of principal mistress. The encompassing Confucian rule on boundaries between the sexes shown in *Li-chi* orders that "men should not speak of what belongs to the inside of the house, nor women of what belongs to the outside."㉝ Adding clarity to the rule which concerns

---

㉚ LLH, chap. 15.

㉛ CPM, chap. 21.

㉜ CPM, chaps. 10, 19, 21, 24, 30.

㉝ LC, "Ne-tze," trans. Legge, vol. 1:454–455.

the division between inner and outer precincts of the household provides guidance on the separate responsibilities of husband and wife. The rule dictates that "outside affairs should not be talked of inside the threshold of the women's apartments, nor inside affairs outside of it."㉞

The theory of the division of household responsibility was in actuality put into practice. While admitting that the power to decide the issues of wealth remained in the hands of the elder males of the family, modern scholars such as Niida Noboru and Shiga Schuzo have pointed out the not-insignificant place of the wife in domestic finance from the Sung period forward.㉟ Joseph McDermott, using the sources of family financial planning, reveals that many housewives of elite Ming-Ch'ing families did take active charge of finances and became domestic bursars. Many of them engaged in large financial transactions by recording account books, investing in interest-bearing loans, and purchasing additional property. The wife as a basic financial resource and symbol of power in the family was illustrated in great detail in fictional sources as well. In *Chin-p'ing-mei*, the principal wife, Wu Yüeh-niang, managed the keys of containers of wealth. Hsi-men Ch'ing trusted her with great amount of silver he regularly accumulated from his pawn shop or received from bribery. As another example, the principal wife in *Lin-lan-hsiang*, Lin Yün-p'ing, kept a detailed record of the family's financial concerns. She maintained regular accounts of the expenses of daily necessities, seasonal festivals and sacrifices, social gatherings for eating and drinking, wedding and funerals, children's education, and servants' payments, etc.

The wife wielded the highest authority as the principal mistress in the female quarter after the death or the absence of the mother-in-law, or if

---

㉞ LC, "Chü-li," trans. Legge, 1967, 1:77.

㉟ Niida Noboru, 1952:243–310; 1962:365–92; Shiga Shuzo, 1971:415–506, 537-58; McDermott, 1992:47–52.

they did not live together. *P'ing-t'ou ch'i* normally shared the authority of the wife. In *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan, p'ing-t'ou ch'i*, T'ung Chi-chieh, and her husband Ti Hsi-ch'en lived together before the wife, Hsüeh Su-chieh, came to join them. At first, Chi-chieh held the position of regular household manager. She thought that she should turn over the position of household manager to Su-chieh, since she was the principal mistress. An elderly maidservant, Ms. Lo, had enjoyed being the chief servant under the authority of Chi-chieh. At the impending arrival of Su-chieh, Ms. Lo immediately recognized that if Su-chieh became the household manager, she would be replaced by a servant whom Su-chieh trusted. Therefore, Ms. Lo schemed to protect her self-interest. She persuaded Chi-chieh, who was unwilling to give up her power and who promptly learned her legal status:

> [Ms. Lo said], "You don't have to give up your position. Legally, you have the right to be the manager of this household. Besides, you have our support. Don't be afraid of her... If we form a united team, how can she threaten you?" With Ms. Lo's support, Chi-chieh retained the mantle of authority, telling Su-chieh, "From now on, if you behave well, you will be treated as my sister and the servants will respect you as a mistress. I will give you good food, nice clothes, and also let our husband sleep with you."㊱

Chi-chieh's legal status of *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* gave her the official right to be the regular household manager. This was supported by custom and could not be challenged by the wife. Furthermore, Chi-chieh could insist on maintaining the position of the regular household manager because she had given her husband two sons, while the wife had produced no children. Chi-chieh was thus favored by her husband and she knew that Su-chieh and their husband did not have a good relationship. The story

㊱ HSYYC, 95:784–789.

clearly demonstrates how powerful a concubine could become; she might be able to undermine the wife's authority when she was a *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* and was also the permanent household manager. Su-chieh was frightened by Chi-chieh's power which was supported by her established status in the household, and did not dare move against her authority, but tried very hard to please her.

In theory, the wife and *p'ing-t'ou ch'i* were the permanent household managers; however, there is evidence that as minor mistresses, other concubines also have taken occasional turns as temporary household managers or even have become the regular household managers by gaining the support of the husband or an in-law, if the in-laws were alive and lived with them. By gaining the power inherent in the official position, managing the finances of the household offered a concubine the best opportunity to enhance her domestic standing. In addition to controlling daily household expenditures, a temporary household manager could become powerful by overseeing the servants and managing many other family affairs. Nevertheless, non-*p'ing-t'ou ch'i* concubines who became temporary or regular house managers were not able to threaten the superiority of the wife, but had to work together with, or below, her.

In *Chin-p'ing-mei*, when concubine P'an Chin-lien took a turn as a temporary household manager, although she still needed to report her decisions to the wife, she directed servants who did not dare oppose her authority when she served as the household manager. She resented having to ask for the wife's instructions every time she had to make a decision on family affairs. Once she decided herself to reduce the expense of the family social activities, such as the amount of money or presents for a relative's funeral or birthday. The relatives who were offended became angry and complained to the wife, who eventually had to apologize to them. Chin-lien carefully controlled the household's daily expenses by checking the

servants' shopping receipts and cooking items. The servants who cheated were subjected to curses and scolding, and some of them were eventually beaten by Master Hsi-men Ch'ing. They were all resentful. They could not argue with Chin-lien, but her shrewish management aroused complaints that although only a temporary household manager, she had violated the wife's superior authority for final decisions regarding family affairs.㊲

Various sources suggest that as the principal mistress of the inner quarter, the wife could exert her authority to punish the concubines in an extreme way. She could mercilessly humiliate them and force them to obey or sell them if they were purchased, since, more or less, they were family property. Moreover, being the legal mother of all her husband's children,㊳ the wife might further assert herself by separating concubines from their children, especially the sons. Among the alternatives, the threats of selling the concubines and keeping their children were the most powerful means to control them. Such cases are often exposed in Ming and early Ch'ing true stories. In contrast, there are few stories of what concubines did to the wife, nor are there many extant judicial cases of wives being accused (before the authorities) of humiliating or selling a concubine. This indicates that such a case, unless it became a homicide, was not usually considered a matter for the courts. The following case, with its intricate plots, was chosen to illustrate the wife's authority in this regard. (The husband was unaware of the sale until it was too late to

---

㊲ CPM, chap. 79.

㊳ There were four degrees of mothers in traditional Chinese law and ritual. The first degree mothers were adoptive-mother (*yang-mu*), biological-mother (*sheng-mu*), and foster-mother (*tz'u-mu*); the second degree mothers were divorced-mother (*ch'u-mu*) and remarried-mother (*chia-mu*); the third degree mother was concubine-mother (*shu-mu*); and the fourth degree of mother was nursing-mother (*ju-mu*). Only the wife was the legal-mother, the absolute first degree mother for all of her husband's children.

prevent it.)

In *Chia-ching i-lai nei-ko shou-fu-chuan (Biographies of Senior Grand Secretaries in Chia-ching Reign)*, Hsia Yen (1482–1548), one of the Senior Grand Secretaries (*shou-fu*) in the reign of emperor Shih-tsung (1521–1566), did not know that he had an heir before he died. His son was born to a concubine, who, after she had become pregnant, was forced to remarry by the sonless wife. The truth was hidden from Hsia Yen, who was often away from home because of his political career. The wife told him that the concubine had misbehaved and was already sent away. After Hsia Yen died, the wife, worried that the Hsia family line would be extinguished, wanted the concubine's son to return to the family. The son had been raised by his biological mother who later lost him. Unfortunately, after being separated, he died from an illness in childhood.㊴ The case reveals the lack of a concubine's right to her own offspring.

In addition to separating concubines and their sons, numerous real and fictional stories of the Ming and early Ch'ing era examine how powerful wives could with their authority manipulate concubines and make their lives miserable. In these cases the husbands were either henpecked or tolerant because they did not want family conflicts. The tragedy of purchased concubine, Hsiao-ch'ing, was written into many different forms of literature in the late Ming period. The following story is based on the description in the opera *Liao-tu keng chi (An Antidote of Jealousy)* by Wu

---

㊴ CCILNKSFC, 3:180. The story was also recorded in PCCSY, pt.I:18. Similar cases are shown in many other sources. In *Wu-tsung shih-lu (Veritable Records of Emperor Wu-tsung)*: Secretarial Court Gentleman *(shang-shu)* of the Board of Rites Liu Chi's wife threw away a concubine's son when he was an official at capital. The son was adopted by the people who found him abandoned on the street and was returned to the Liu family when he was 8 years old (WTSL, 4:7). Another case see *Tsui-wei lu (Records of Guilt)*: Official Ju Ling in the late Ming dynasty had a jealous wife, his concubine and her son were not allowed to come home until he died (TWL, 1986:1958–1959).

Pi and Chu Chin-fan's *Hsiao-ch'ing niang feng-liu-yüan chi (Romance of Hsiao-ch'ing)*. Hsiao-ch'ing became an outstanding courtesan in Yangchow after her mother died and she was sold to be the concubine of Feng Yün-ch'iang (1575-ca. 1661), the son of a high ranking official in Hangchow. Beautiful and talented, she was hated by the shrewish and jealous wife. After entering the Feng household, she was ordered by the wife to live in a secluded and poorly built house, and was prohibited from seeing her husband, a henpecked man. The wife further planned to sell Hsiao-ch'ing when her husband was not at home. However, without a wish of continuous living, Hsiao-ch'ing died two years after she entered the Feng household at the age of seventeen before she could be sold. Hsiao-ch'ing thought that tolerance was virtuous and death was a salvation from the suffering of the present life. Within a decade of her death, Hsiao-ch'ing's story became a symbol of the suffering concubine under the power of the wife. Most of her personal writings and book collection were burned by the wife. Fortunately, eleven poems and a letter to her friend were saved. Her works were copied and circulated privately, and later were published.㊵ The following poem reveals the sadness she felt in her

㊵ Stories about Hsiao-ch'ing can be found beginning in the 1620s. Ming scholar Ch'ien Ch'ien-i (1580/82–1664), for example, wrote that Hsiao-ch'ing was a fictitious character, her biography and poetry made up by a certain scholar named T'an as adivertisement. However, by the nineteenth century, Hsiao-ch'ing's story had secured its place in West Lake lore, where a tombstone was erected for its renovations. In Feng Meng-lung's *Ch'ing-shih lei-lüeh (Anatomy of Love)* probably published by 1631, Hsiao-ch'ing showed her talent at rhyming games which she learned under her mother, a female tutor, from a very early age. Her literary excellence became a popular theme in the writing of seventeenth century male literati, who were ambivalently fascinated with the new breed of accomplished women. Hsiao-ch'ing lore was first popularized in the form of biographies, which were realistic in content and matter of fact, such as "Hsiao-ch'ing chuan," written by Chu Chin-fan and was published in 1629. The dramas about Hsiao-ch'ing, by contrast, are more fantastic. There were more than fifteen such Ming operas, many

marriage as a concubine:

> Blood and tears fall upon the spring clothes.
> The wind blows into the house of the retired scholar on the hill.
> Three hundred plum trees suddenly
> Become trees of the broken heart.㊶

## Concubines, Daughters(-in-law), Chambermaids, and Maids

The differentiation between the status of a daughter-in-law, the wife of a son, and a concubine of the father was complicated. In ritual and law there were no mourning relationships between a concubine of the father and a daughter-in-law. Neither had an obligation to wear mourning clothes in the event of the other's death. The status differentiation between them was only based on generational differences. In theory, a daughter-in-law should respect her father-in-law's concubine as a senior; but in reality, the concubine did not always receive this respect, mainly because she had to yield to a daughter-in-law's authority as a partial household manager. A daughter-in-law officially shared her mother-in-law's duties in family worship and managing the household. If the mother-in-law or the wife could not wield her authority as household manager, or needed an assistant, she usually chose a daughter or a daughter-in-law to fill in. A daughter-in-law, especially the wife of the eldest son, was customarily considered as the official successor as household manager after the retirement of the

---

of which were popular even among the illiterate, such as *An Antidote of Jealousy*, issued between 1628 and 1644 by Wu Pi. Her tragedy of becoming the concubine of Feng Yün-ch'iang probably had been covered up by some of his friends for the purpose of preserving his honor (Ch'en Yin-k'o, 1980:448; Widmer, 1989:7).

㊶ N.B.: The azalea bush is literally called "tree of the broken heart" in Chinese. HCNFLYC, "Hsiao-ch'ing chuan" (Biography of Hsiao-ch'ing), 1b.

mother-in-law. Only if there were no daughters-in-law would the concubine become a choice.㊷ An unmarried daughter was also considered a closer relative than a concubine in many families. These customs show that a daughter-in-law was superior to a concubine in certain circumstances.

An early Ch'ing case in *Hong-lou-meng* highlights these customs. In the story, Ms. Wang, wife of the head of the family, was the principal household manager of the Chia family after the retirement of her mother-in-law. Her assistant was her niece, Wang Hsi-feng, wife of the head of the family's nephew. Once in a while, when Hsi-feng was ill, Ms. Wang needed another assistant, and the daughter-in-law, Ms. Li, was usually chosen to temporarily replace Hsi-feng. The concubine of the head of the family, Ms. Chao, was not considered as a primary candidate for the household manager position. She had to bow to Ms. Li's authority. Moreover, since Ms. Li was not experienced, Ms. Wang would also choose a daughter, the capable and reliable T'an-ch'un, to aid Ms. Li as assistant household manager. Ironically, T'an-ch'un was Ms. Chao's daughter.

Even though she was T'an-ch'un's mother, one instance shows that Ms. Chao found herself in an unpleasant situation, inasmuch as she had to defer to her own daughter. When Lady Wang's former bondservant, Ms. Chao's brother, died, she was infuriated by her daughter's decision to offer only 20 taels of silver for his funeral. She blamed her daughter for not sticking up for her own family when she found out that the maid Hua Hsi-jen (Aroma) had gotten 40 taels of silver for the death of her mother. Ms. Chao said to T'an-ch'un, "I've given the best years of my life to this family–years, and years, and years. I've borne two children for them, you and your brother. And now, after all that, I'm not even to be treated as well as Hsi-jen. What sort of face does that leave me with?

㊷ e.g. CPM, chap. 79.

What sort of face does it leave you with?"㊸ T'an-ch'un explained that her uncle was a home-reared bondservant, while Hsi-jen was a purchased maid. According to the rules set by the Chia ancestors, the latter would gain more monetary support than the former one when someone in their family died. She asserted that she had followed the rules and she would not change her decision for her mother's sake. Ms. Chao felt belittled, but she could not use her maternal status to overrule her daughter since the latter was the household manager.㊹

In ritual and legal texts, a concubine's status within the household was higher than that of her children. In domestic life, the children might imitate the other family members' attitudes toward the concubine and sometimes misbehaved and treated her disrespectfully, the wife's children in particular. Even the concubine's biological children, perhaps ashamed of their mother's inferiority (which greatly impacted their lives), would regard her with anger. T'an-ch'un as an example, despised her mother, an unfavored and inappropriately-behaved concubine. Ambitious and skillful T'an-ch'un was honored with the responsibility of temporary household manager. She upheld the Chia family customs at the price of her mother's pain. She never liked to address Ms. Chao affectionately as "mother," a term she reserved for her legal mother, Ms. Wang.㊺ Ms. Chao's situation shows that a concubine's inferior legal and ritual status to that of the wife could be an obstacle to her relationships with the children within the household.

It must be recalled that the status of a concubine within the household was officially superior to chambermaids, maids, and other household servants. A concubine had legal and ritual authority and power over

---

㊸ HLM, chap. 55; trans. Hawkes, 1973, 3:51.

㊹ HLM, chap. 55.

㊺ Ibid.

a chambermaid, especially if the chambermaid had previously been her personal maid. In such cases, the concubine, more or less, was still the mistress of the chambermaid.㊻ Both the wife and the concubines had official positions in their husband's household and family social networks. A chambermaid, with a much lower status than the concubine who was promoted from maid, could be treated as a de facto concubine without recognition of her very vague domestic position. Originally, she was a maid and was taken by her master as a regular sexual companion without formal ceremony. Her unofficial status within the household was considered to be between those of maidservant and concubine promoted from a maid. Officially, her rank however, was at least the same as that of maid. Still maintaining a maid's dress and hair style, she had to serve her master, his wife, and the other concubines with a maid's demeanor.㊼ No source indicates that she was required to present herself to the wife or the concubines when she became a chambermaid. Unlike the wife and concubines, a chambermaid did not have official benefits, such as personal maids, a private room, or a seat at the family table. Benefits which she could obtain mainly depended on whether or not she was favored by her master or his elders. Nevertheless, she could have better clothes, ornaments, more monthly expenses than the other maids; she often had a certain informal authority over other maids and servants. In some cases, if there were a death in her natal family, they could receive some economic help from her master.㊽

The undeniably higher status of chambermaids among servants was shown in *Hong-lou-meng*. As Pao-yü's senior maid, purchased Hua Hsi-jen was promoted to be his concubine with his mother's support. But, without

---

㊻ cf. HLM, chaps. 106, 110; CPM, chaps. 11, 19.

㊼ LLH, 62:479.

㊽ See an example in HLM, chap. 55.

an official ceremony, she was still a chambermaid. However, her monthly expenses were raised to that of a concubine and her dresses manifested her superior position. This eventually aroused the jealousy of the other maids and servants.㊾ Evidence of her special status among the maids is shown by Nannie Li's story.

Pao-yü's wet nurse, Nannie Li, visited Pao-yü's chamber during his absence. She became very upset that his maids took no notice of her when she stomped into the room. The maids, knowing that she was already pensioned and had no more power over them, intentionally ignored her. Furthermore, Nannie Li was deeply offended when they tried to stop her from drinking a cup of koumiss which Pao-yü had saved for Hsi-jen. Infuriated by the fact that chambermaid Hsi-jen, even during her absence, had power over the other maids, Nannie Li roared with anger:

> "...What's in this covered bowl?" Nannie Li went on [after she berated the maids]. "It's junket, isn't it? Why don't you offer it to me?" She picked up the gift of koumiss and began to drink it." Don't you touch that!" said one of the maids. "He [Pao-yü] was keeping that for Hsi-jen. He will be angry when he gets back and finds out about it. You had better tell him yourself that you took it. We don't want you getting us into trouble!" Nannie Li was angry and embarrassed. "I don't believe it," she said, "I don't believe he would be so wicked as to grudge his old Nannie a bowl of milk. Why, he owes it to me— and not only a bowl of milk, either— much more precious things than that. Do you mean to tell me that Hsi-jen counts for more with him than I do? He ought to stop and ask himself how he grew up to be the big boy he is today. It's my milk he sucked, it came from my own heart's blood—*that's* what he grew up on. And do you mean to tell me that now— if I

㊾ HLM, chaps. 26, 34, 36.

drink one little bowlful of his milk— cow's milk— he is going to be angry with me? Well, I *will* drink it, so there! He can do what he likes about it. And as for that Hsi-jen— I don't know what sort of a wonderful creature you think she is— a little bit of a girl I picked out myself and trained with my own hands!" Defiantly she put the koumiss once more to her lips and downed it to the last gulp...㊿

A chambermaid was usually promoted to the status of concubine; otherwise, she would probably be sent away or married to another man after her master died,(51) or she would be respected as an elder family member by her master's children.(52) However, because of customary impropriety, economic difficulty, or benevolent consideration of her master's family, most chambermaids were not allowed to remain in the household after the death of the master or the decline of the family's fortune, even if they wished to stay; rather, they were sold or married off. The story of Hsi-jen provides a good example. After Pao-yü became a monk, the Chia family's fortune declined and they did not need many maids. Pao-yü's mother sought marriages for the older maids and wanted to keep the younger ones to continue serving the family. She felt that it would be difficult to find a suitable arrangement for Hsi-jen, because of her vague status in the Chia family. Pao-yü's father, a benevolent nobleman, for the sake of charity, forbade any senior maid reaching the age of marriage to continue in the household. Pao-yü's mother, worried that Hsi-jen might commit suicide if she were forced to marry, discussed her future with Aunt Hsüeh (Pao-yü's mother-in-law):

[Aunt Hsüeh said] "She [Hsi-jen] has grown so terribly thin of late. All she ever does is fine for Pao-yü. It's right and proper for

---

㊿ HLM, chaps. 19, trans. Hawkes, 1973, 1:383–384.

(51) HLM, chap. 120; CPM, chap. 91.

(52) LLH, 62:479; WSH, chap. 12.

> a wife to exhibit loyalty to her husband, even when he is a true husband to her no longer. And a chamber-wife may do the same if she wishes. But Hsi-jen was never formally declared Pao-yü's chamber-wife, even though in fact we know that she was."
>
> "Yes, I was thinking about this only a short while ago," said Lady Wang. "I was waiting for a chance to talk it over with you in private. If we simply dismiss her from service, I'm afraid she won't want to go, and may even try to take her own life. We could keep her on, but I am afraid Sir Cheng [Pao-yü's father] would not approve. It is a tricky problem."[53]

Thinking that Sir Cheng would hardly want Hsi-jen to remain single and make a show of faithfulness to Pao-yü, Aunt Hsüeh and Lady Wang decided to get in touch with Hsi-jen's family and have them arrange a decent marriage for her. In the meantime, Lady Wang prepared a generous marriage gift for Hsi-jen after all the years she had worked for the Chia family.

Being a minor mistress of the household, a concubine's authority over her personal maids was especially strong. As a result of conflicts with those above her in the hierarchy, she often needed an outlet for her anger and depression. Many fictional accounts describe the various ways some concubines vented their anger against their maids. In *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan, p'ing-t'ou ch'i,* T'ung Chi-chieh, showed her power and authority over the maid, Hsiao Chen-chu, by often beating her without reason, reducing her food and clothing allowances, and forcing her to overwork with bare feet in the very cold winter. Hsiao Chen-chu was eventually tortured to death by Chi-chieh.[54] Another notorious example of abuse

---

[53] HLM, chap. 120; trans. Hawkes, 1973, 5:364–365. For the consistence of the paper, Hawkes's Pinyin romanization has been changed to Wade-Giles romanization.

[54] HSYYC, chaps. 76, 79, 80.

is from *Chin-p'ing-mei*. Whenever frustrated, P'an Chin-lien, a purchased concubine, ordered her least favorite maid, Ch'iu-chü, to kneel down and then thrashed her mercilessly while scolding her incessantly. Also, she had a habit of using her long and sharp nails to scratch her maid's face.㊺

Maids, at the bottom of the female domestic hierarchy, were strongly motivated to become concubines in order to achieve a better life style and a higher social standing. Many fictional sources had scenarios in which maids, hiding their ambition under their beauty and humility, actively pursued their goals and used concubinage as a ladder for their advancement. Fictional sources may dramatize the stories, however, to express another side of the story. The ambitious maid Wei Kuei-hsiang in *T'ien-yü-hua* presents such a case. Kuei-hsiang wanted to be the concubine of her young master, the handsome and successful imperial inspector, Tso Wei-ming. She refused the marriage that her elderly mistress (Wei-ming's mother) had arranged with a male servant in the same household. Kuei-hsiang had fallen in love with Wei-ming and impudently cherished an ambition to become his concubine. With cunning and skillful flattery, Kuei-hsiang won the favor of the elderly mistress who hoped that Kuei-hsiang could become her son's concubine and serve her for the rest of her life. But Wei-ming had no interest in Kuei-hsiang at all. On the contrary, he was disgusted by her ugliness and her arrogant ambition, and was very angry at his mother for urging him to take Kuei-hsiang as his concubine.

Undaunted, Kuei-hsiang, with the help of Wei-ming's mother, used every possible means to become his concubine. They devised a scheme to make him very drunk, so that, half asleep, he would make love to her, mistaking her for his wife. Wei-ming's wife had been ordered by the mother to sleep in a sideroom, while Kuei-hsiang took her place in the master's bedchamber. The next morning, Kuei-hsiang came out of the

㊺ CPM, chaps. 30, 58.

master's bedchamber in high spirits. To the other maids she trumpeted how affectionately Wei-ming had caressed her the previous night. She, posing as a concubine, acted arrogantly before the other maids; moreover, she marched to the sideroom and called the wife "sister." The wife was terribly distressed. Wei-ming punished Kuei-hsiang for her disrespectful behavior, and administering a number of beatings. Though frustrated, Kuei-hsiang did not give up. She persuaded the elderly mistress to give her another chance. The night before Wei-ming was to depart for Hangchow, Kuei-hsiang stole into the master's bedchamber where Wei-ming lay in a drunken stupor. Again the wife had been ordered by her mother-in-law to sleep in the sideroom. To Kuei-hsiang's astonishment, Wei-ming's eyes were wide open when she got in the bed. She got a big slap on her cheek, fell off the bed, and bumped her head against the dressing table, shattering the mirror into pieces. Wei-ming called in the maids and ordered them to whip Kuei-hsiang with a leather strap. Kuei-hsiang however, refused any other marriage arrangement, and was sent back to her natal family after the elderly mistress died.[56]

## Women in Social Settings

Most Ming and early Ch'ing women participated in certain activities within the social networks of their husbands' families. Since they were family members, their presence was usually required at family or lineage social gatherings, such as relatives' funerals or at a banquet.[57] A woman's status would generally be defined by her position within the household and the status of her husband's and current family's social standing.

---

[56] THY, chap. 8.

[57] e.g., LLH, chap. 18:140, 47:363; CPM, chap. 42.

In other words, a concubine's social status was officially inferior to her husband's wife and was in relation to her ranking among the concubines in the family. Marriage, purchase, or promotion largely decided her initial domestic status, and thus determined her social status in the public sphere. Regardless of what her actual informal power or position in the family might eventually become, the initial status differentiation as determined by ritual, law, and custom continued to be observed in the public realm. The concubine who tried to break these rules might arouse serious criticism in the family's social networks.

The following example from *Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan* portrays a purchased concubine who was excluded by a relative because she acted as if she were the husband's wife on an official social occasion. After the wife died, the favored concubine Chen-ko, a former singer and prostitute, went to offer condolences to the K'ung family, relatives of her husband. Chen-ko arrived at the K'ung's house, wearing a very nice dress, sitting in a big fancy sedan chair, and being followed by three maids. The principal mistress of the K'ung family was very cold to her. She complained to Chen-ko:

> When the servant reported that the principal mistress of Mr. Ch'ao arrived, I wondered when he had married a second wife. Have you been raised to be his wife? I was surprised to see you come in. I thought Mr. Ch'ao would have married a principal mistress from a respectable family, so our relatives could get together more often.[58]

While they were talking, the daughter-in-law and the principal mistress of the Hsiao family came in. Mr. Hsiao was of the lower gentry. His wife and his daughter-in-law both wore less fancy clothes and had fewer maids than Chen-ko, but they were intimately greeted by the principal mistress

---

[58] HSYYC, chap. 11.

of the K'ung family.

Chen-ko was so embarrassed and angry that her face "looked like a garden in March, changing from red to blue, to green to purple."[59] She could not bear to stay any longer and decided to leave as soon as possible. Mrs. Hsiao said that someone should see her off, but the principal mistress of the K'ung family claimed that she was unable to do this because she had visitors. She ordered an old maid servant to see her off, and continued talking with Mrs. Hsiao. She criticized Mr. Ch'ao for being frivolous because he allowed Chen-ko to be the house manager and to socialize with relatives:

> "Why did she come out? I did not know how to greet a relative's favorite concubine. There is no suitable social etiquette to greet her. The position of a concubine like her is ambiguous, neither high nor low. I will scold the servant who told me that 'the principal mistress of the Ch'ao is coming.'" The principal mistress of the Hsiao family replied, "How could the servant know, since Chen-ko came in such a big sedan chair?"[60]

The principal mistress of the K'ung family may have disliked Chen-ko for personal reasons. Like most wives, Mrs. K'ung probably disapproved of the promotion of a former prostitute. A woman from a respectable family in the Ming and early Ch'ing societies looked down upon entertaining women because, according to the strict standards of female chastity in those eras, she considered the latter's virtue to have been tarnished. Mrs. K'ung may well have viewed such women as threats to her wifely position and to the dignity and order of her household. Thus she was unhappy that the authority of the wife of Ch'ao Yüan had been usurped by a concubine like Chen-ko with her inferior background and unsuitable arrogance. More

---

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

significantly, Mrs. K'ung may have resented the fact that Chen-ko did not respect the protocol for differentiation of social roles between wives and concubines. In attending important social events, it was expected that this protocol be rigorously observed. Thus, at the K'ung funeral, the family could be angered when the Ch'ao family sent a concubine instead of the wife. Chen-ko's case demonstrates that a concubine's status within her household clearly had an impact on her status in the social setting of her husband's family. In both spheres, she was inferior to the wife of her husband. Although a favored concubine could replace or supplant the wife within the household, it was less likely for her to take over the latter's social roles as defined by ritual, law, and custom.

The status differentiation at social events between the wife and the concubines of the same household was especially emphasized in upper-class families. In *Hong-lou-meng*, the wife of the aristocratic family committed herself to attending social events on a full-time basis, a frequent obligation since the family was well connected.[61] The level of the concubines' participation in these events depended on their relative importance: the more important the event, the lower the profile of the concubines. In all circumstances, the roles of the concubines were always distinctly inferior to the role of the wife. Similarly, in *Lin-lan-hsiang*, during the funeral of a family relative, the order for paying respects, the positions where the wife and the concubines stood, and the other protocols, were all in accordance with their domestic ranking.[62] Additionally, at social banquets, the wife and the concubines were expected to dress in keeping with their domestic statuses. The wife and the senior concubines were expected to dress more richly than the junior concubines.[63]

---

[61] HLM, chap. 54.

[62] e.g., LLH, chap. 7 & HLM, chap. 110.

[63] CPM, chaps. 40 & 41.

A concubine's social status was lower than that of the wife from the same household, however, it was not necessarily lower than that of a wife from a different household. The social status of women from different households, although not defined with differentiation in law, did exist in practice. Their class positions became consolidated and actualized through their relationships with the men (fathers, husbands, sons) and the (natal and marital) families they were associated. In the female hierarchical spectrum, a "noblewoman" (*ming-fu*), whether wife or concubine, who was awarded with an honorific title because of her husband or son's political achievement, was accorded with the highest rank in female social settings.

Honorific titles were usually awarded to a woman who was the consort or the mother of an official with high rank or special merits to the state. Socially, the Ming honorific system was not designed to stimulate or to recognize a woman's personal achievement as an individual. Consistent with many other facets of patriarchal societies, a noblewoman's social standing was derivative from the societal success of her husband or son(s). A woman could not apply for an honorific title for herself. The application had to be made by her husband, or son(s), or the state. In this award system, the success of a son or a husband was always considered as a credit to his mother or his consorts. Therefore, a single woman, unmarried or divorced, could not become a "noblewoman." Marriage, concubinage, or mothering a son were the customary vehicles for a woman to enter into the ennobled rank. Widowed "noblewomen" who did not remarry retained their status however.

An official ranked 7b and above could apply for a title for his virtuous legal mother, or biological mother, or even foster mother.[64]

---

[64] HMCS, 1(1):29b–30b. The Ming government provided nine numbered official ranks from 1 down to 9, each divided into two grades, namely upper (*cheng*) and lower (*ts'ung*). Such rank indicators are rendered 7a (rank 7, upper class), 7b

But, a concubine who was the biological mother of an official could not normally receive a title until after the wife died. If the wife died before her legal son could apply for an honorific title, the biological mother naturally won the title. If the wife died after she had gained a title, the biological mother could only have another title with the special approval of the Board of Rites or even the emperor under the condition that she raised her biological son in a meritorious way. This special rule would be followed when the wife was alive and even if the wife already had a title. A son also could apply for an honorific title for his foster mother who was his father's concubine following the same guidelines. An official above rank 5b could apply for a honorific title for his virtuous wife, but only for his first and second wives. A wife who was married afterwards could not get this honor. The second wife could only gain a honorific title after the first wife was dead or divorced. A concubine could not have an honorific title unless she was promoted to the status of wife, and that was very difficult in Ming and early Ch'ing times, especially in the upper levels of society.[65] Although in the honorific system, status differentiation prejudicially emphasized the eligibility of wife and legal mother as award candidates, a concubine who greatly helped her husband's career or raised a successful son might still attain a honorific title from a special imperial

---

(rank 7, lower class), and the like. See a detailed discussion in Hucker, 1985:4–5

[65] According to the strong status-ethic basis in Confucian law, the punishment for a man's demoting his principal wife to be concubine was 100 blows, and 90 blows for his promoting a concubine to be the wife. As for his remarrying a wife when his principal wife was still alive, the penalty was 90 blows (TMLCCFL, 6:9a-10a; TCLLHTHT, 9:1a). Many cases provide evidence that the law strictly distinguished the difference in status between wife and concubine, and punished those who attempted to transcend the limits entailed in the social order. For instance, Ni Yüan-lu (1593–1644), a grand secretary under Ssu-tsung (r. 1627–1644), was stripped of his official position for the heinous crime of reporting his concubine as his wife (MS, 265:5a-5b; SCYC, 6:11–12).

decree.

Several concubines, biological and foster mothers, were credited with self- sacrificing commitment to motherhood. Numerous epitaph articles were written with reverence by elite officials in memory of their mother's nurturing and teaching of moral lessons. Some successful sons applied for honorific titles for their mothers. In *Pi-chou chai sheng-yü (Remaining Talks in A Humble Studio)*, the late Ming scholar Shen Te-fu (1578–1642) reported such an instance:

Ku Ting-ch'en (1473–1540), a Right Attendant Gentleman (*yu shih-lang*) in the reign of Hsiao-tsung (1487–1505), was the son of a cooking maid in his father's late age. He was neglected and looked down upon by the family because his mother was not favored. Being a chambermaid, Ting-ch'en's mother had been badly treated by the shrew wife, even though she bore a son for the family. When Ting-ch'en came back to visit his biological mother after he was successful in the imperial examination, he could not pay his respect to her in the main house, because the wife did not allow her, a maid, to be present in the main house. He was finally able to see his biological mother there after the family relatives implored the wife to relent. Seeing his biological mother wearing shabby clothes with bare feet and disheveled hair made Ting-ch'en very sad. He reported to the emperor and asked to pay filialty to his biological mother. Since his legal mother was still alive, the honorific title would be officially given to her; therefore, with the support of an imperial decree, Ting-ch'en's biological mother was specially honored by the court for giving birth to a good official.[66]

By being instrumental to her husband's achievement, a concubine could gain an honorific title. The following special case, which was recorded in Shen Te-fu's another writing, *Wan-li yeh-ho pien*, occurred

---

[66] PCCSY, pt. I:21.

in the Hsüan-te reign (1426–35). Yang Shih-ch'i (1365–1444) enjoyed a successful career as Hanlin academician, Attendant Gentleman (*shih-lang*) of the Board of Rites, and Secretarial Court Gentleman (*shang-shu*) of the Board of Military. He did not remarry after his first wife died, but depended on his chambermaid Ms. Kuo, as his household manager. She was humble and diligent in managing the household and taking care of the wife's children. Shih-ch'i could therefore concentrate on his career as a successful premier without worrying about his family. When the time came for the "noblewomen" to enter the Inner Palace to see the empress dowager, Shih-ch'i did not have a wife who could go. The empress dowager heard about Ms. Kuo's virtue and ordered her to come, moreover, gave her the title of honorific woman along with luxurious dresses and ornaments. The empress dowager was impressed by Ms. Kuo's virtue and Shih-ch'i's morality, and she wanted to reward Shih-ch'i's meritorious service to the emperor. She stressed that this case was unique and a special grant would not occur again for such an instance. Afterwards, Ms. Kuo became Yang's wife and bore him a son, who grew up to be a high ranking official.[67]

A "noblewoman" was normally respected and admired by the people in her town, especially when she wore the formal dress and was invited to enter the Inner Palace to see the imperial women, and brought back special presents.[68] The identifying mark of an honorific title was a special

---

[67] WLYHP, 13:336.

[68] According to Ming court rules, all of the "noblewomen,"whose husbands or sons were civil officials ranked above 3b, were required to present themselves in the Inner Palace for an audience with the empress dowager and the empress during the New Year's Festival and imperial birthday parties. When they were brought before those superior imperial women, they first would bow four times, and then, after having received the ceremonial gift, they would knock their head on the floor (*k'ou-t'ou*) once before leaving. These "noblewomen" would practice these manners in the houses of the imperial princes beforehand. When they entered the

belt and formal dress bestowed by the empress dowager or the empress. It was one of the highest honors a Ming and Ch'ing woman could receive which enhanced the social standing of a wife or a concubine with certain public influences. She would have her own biography in her husband's genealogy and a special position in her community's activities. The state gave her monthly financial support, a sedan chair commemorating her honorific rank to use when she went out in public.[69] Moreover, she would not stand a public trial by the local authorities even if she were accused of committing a crime; instead, she would be tried according to an imperial decree.[70] All "noblewomen's" honorific titles were sorted into hierarchical ranks according to the stations of the men through whom they gained titles.[71] The higher the political position to which a man rose, the higher the honorific rank and the related benefits his wife (or concubine, or mother) would obtain. Therefore, the distinctions of "noblewoman," including the decoration on her formal dress and special belt, the amount of her monthly stipend, and the size of her sedan chair, all corresponded

---

Inner Palace, each was allowed to bring one companion, either her daughter or her daughter-in-law, who could also receive a special gift from the imperial women, if the imperial women were pleased with them. All of these "noblewomen" and all of the wives of the military officials above rank 3b were also ordered to be present in the Inner Palace for the mourning ceremonies of the imperial women (WLYHP, 23:588). On all ceremonial occasions, when the emperor was feasting the court, the empress and the dowagers were hostesses of a feast in the Palace of Female Tranquillity (*k'un-ning kung*) in the Inner Palace, at which the wives of chief ministers and high officials were the guests (MS, chap. 53; see HMCS; CMMYL, 11:1a–1b).

[69] CMMYL, 11:1a; see an example in HSYYC, chap. 9.

[70] TMLCCFL, 1:23b, 24a, 25a–25b; TCLLHTHT, 3:1a–3a.

[71] Honorific titles were ranks without official posts. The titles for women were ranked as follows: *fu-jen* (honorific lady), *shu-jen* (virtuous lady), *kung-jen* (obedient lady), *i-jen* (elegant lady), *ju-jen* (gentle lady), *te-jen* (righteous lady), *an-jen* (peaceful lady).

directly to her husband or son's official positions.

Even though a concubine could not obtain the highest status in the female hierarchical spectrum, still, she could obtain a relatively higher social status in female social settings in accordance with her husband and his family's social status and influence. Accordingly, a concubine's social status, although inferior to that of her husband's wife of the same household, was not necessarily inferior to those of the wives from different households. In social symbolic order, a concubine's social status could be superior to that of a wife from a lesser household. A woman's social status would rise or decline when her natal or marital family's social status changed or social influence declined.

An example in *Chin-p'ing-mei* shows that the social status of a concubine could become higher than that of the widowed wife in her former household, if the respective status of their families changed. P'ang Ch'un-mei originally was the chambermaid of a wealthy merchant, Hsi-men Ch'ing. Her status, within and outside the Hsi-men household, was secondary to his wife's, Wu Yüeh-niang. After Hsi-men Ch'ing died, with luck and her personal attributes, the wife sold Ch'un-mei as concubine to a military official. Because of Ch'un-mei's beauty, excellent artistic skills, and the social manners she had learned in the Hsi-men household, the official was delighted with her from the first. She was entrusted with the responsibility of household manager and obtained his whole-hearted love after she bore him a son. Her domestic status advanced from that of (Hsi-men's) chambermaid to favorite concubine. Her social status also improved when she was purchased as a concubine in a powerful military official family.

On the other hand, the fortune of Wu Yüeh-niang started to wane after the death of her husband. Although Hsi-men Ch'ing had been a rich merchant and had connections with powerful officials, he did not

come from an upper class prominent family. Without the protection and support of a prestigious family, the widow's social status declined, even though society still respected her as long as her husband was remembered. Therefore, Yüeh-niang was much more humble toward Ch'un-mei on the third anniversary of Hsi-men Ch'ing's death. Before the anniversary, Ch'un-mei sent a present to Yüeh-niang and received a letter of thanks. In this letter, Yüeh-niang showed Ch'un-mei the same respect she would show to someone of her own status. "With sincere gratitude I acknowledge the receipt of your generous present... The kindness which you have shown me far exceeds my worthiness. I should think myself happy if my heart-felt hopes were fulfilled, and your lofty palanquin of state deigned to stop at my humble threshold... Greeting you in due respect, Hsi-men's widow, Ms. Wu."⑫

Inasmuch as wealth largely identified class, in social settings the appearance of a family's members reflected on its social rank. It was fashionable for wealthy and powerful families to compete with each other with regard to the number of concubines and the amount of jewelry with which each concubine adorned herself, since both were symbols of a family's social status.⑬ Therefore, as a representative of her husband and his family, Ch'un-mei arrived at the Hsi-men household wearing a valuable dress, shining ornaments, and having her beautiful face decorated with expensive cosmetics. Her big sedan chair followed by several maids was the symbol of her comparatively higher social status. She properly offered gifts to all the servants with whom she had worked before and was greeted with envy.⑭

On social occasions, even a chambermaid was expected to appear with

---

⑫ CPM, chap. 96; trans. Waley, 1940:794.

⑬ Clunas, 1991:117–118.

⑭ CPM, chaps. 87, 88, 89, 96.

proper attire, and to act according to her status within the household and the family's social status. If she did not, she would stain the family's honor. For example, in *Hung-lou-meng*, when chambermaid Hua Hsi-jen, though only an unofficial concubine of the young master, Chia Pao-yü, visited her natal family, the elder of the Chia family wanted her to dress well, sit in a big carriage followed by a certain number of maids and servants, and offer some gifts to her relatives in order to properly represent her own status in the Chia family and the aristocratic high official family's social status.[75]

Participation on social occasions provided a concubine or a chambermaid an opportunity to appear in her best clothes and thus to identify her social status. For instance, in *Chin-p'ing-mei*, being the concubine of the wealthy merchant Hsi-men Ch'ing, P'an Chin-lien especially enjoyed showing off her valuable dresses and ornaments in public and thereby winning the envy of the poorer women. At the Lantern Show, Master Hsi-men's beautiful wife and concubines relaxed on a balcony. The concubine Chin-lien:

> ...turning up the long sleeves of her white silk coat so that her delicate onion-shoot fingers were visible, adorned with six golden rings in the form of stirrups, she leaned far out over the balcony railing and amused herself by spitting out the husks of the melon seeds which she was constantly nibbling onto the head of the crowd below...[The crowd of people below] soon began to take notice of the beauties at the window! They stood stock-still, and blocked the thoroughfare, lifting curious glances to the balcony, and voicing admiration and wondering conjectures.[76]

Chin-lien's flirtatious behavior reflects a common desire of human

---

[75] HLM, chap. 19.

[76] CPM, chap. 15; trans. Waley, 1940:189.

beings–flaunting their "superiority" by showing off food, clothing and housing, thus frustrating the people of lesser means. Chin-lien also gained her confidence from spending her monthly stipend according to her status as a minor consort. She occasionally visited temples and offered donations, and especially liked to buy snacks from the vendors on the street in front of servants and neighbors. Moreover, her economic potential granted her an influential position in her natal family. Her relationship with her mother improved. Although Chin-lien was still very impatient with her ignorant mother, in order to show her better conditions, she regularly invited her mother to the household of Hsi-men, celebrated her birthday, and gave her presents. Her mother asked for Chin-lien's opinions on family affairs since occasionally Chin-lien had become her economic benefactor, and since Hsi-men Ch'ing had a particular influence in the community.

At social events, a concubine who had previously been a maid or an entertaining woman, or who was from a lower social class, might feel inferior to the daughters from upper-class families. Nevertheless, with respect to ritual, law, and custom, the social statuses of concubines and chambermaids were officially higher than those of maids and entertaining women. Single women, such as entertaining women who were supported neither by their natal nor their marital families, were condemned to the bottom of the society as the "mean" (*chien*) people in Ming and Ch'ing laws. Officials who married wives from such backgrounds were likely to be punished.[77] Yet officials were usually not punished for taking concubines

---

[77] The punishment for a civil official who broke this law was 60 blows, for a military official, it was loss of title. The woman would be sent back to her family and not returned to her profession. The marriage presents would be forfeited to the government (TMLCCFL, 6:30a–32b, 33a–37a). In early Ch'ing law, the punishment for a civil and a military official for this crime was the same as 60 blows (TCLLHTHT, 9:25a–26a, 36a–36b). The ritual opposition and judicial penalties for breaking these codes when marrying a wife were two degrees more

from similar backgrounds; however, Ming judicial cases show that this law was occasionally enforced.[78] The social status of maids, defined as servant class, was superior only to that of entertaining women in the female hierarchical spectrum.

For an entertaining woman, then, since being married as wife in an upper class family was almost impossible, becoming a concubine was one way to increase social status. However, unsuccessful case stories demonstrate the difficulties which courtesans, the most sophisticated entertaining women, encountered when they tried to change their social status by entering into an upper class scholar official family as concubines. The most famous tragedy is the true story of Tu Shih-niang which took place in the Wan-li period (1572–1620). In Feng Meng-lung's *Chin-shih t'ung-yen (Warning Stories for Society)*, the story became well-known under the title of "The Courtesan's Jewel Box":

> Tu Wei, Shih-niang [the tenth girl in the brothel], from an unknown home town probably in North China, became a popular courtesan in Peking. To the young men of the capital, the extraordinarily beautiful Tu Wei exemplified an intellectual companion of diverse and outstanding artistic talents. Having a high opinion of her beauty and talent, Tu Wei was not willing to marry an insignificant fellow; to her it was like a phoenix uniting with a raven. She chose to become the concubine of Li Chia, a young elite from an upper-class family of officials from Chekiang. After their wedding ceremony, Li Chia took Tu Wei to his home. As they proceeded home, Li Chia struggled with the shame of his failure in the capital examination, and his wasting most of his money in the courtesan

---

severe than those for taking concubines in the Ming Code, but the punishment for both cases were the same in the early Ch'ing law.

[78] WLYHP, 19:479, 22:567.

quarter. His love for Tu Wei and her happiness at being married were not enough to alleviate his mental anguish. His father, a high ranking official, was strict and would not tolerate having a concubine daughter-in-law from a brothel. In Li Chia's heart, he was also ashamed of Tu Wei's social background. He was a weak and pragmatic young man who considered his official career to be more important than true love. Understanding Li Chia's weakness, the merchant Sun Fu, who had always admired Tu Wei but had never won her friendly treatment, volunteered to settle Li Chia's difficult affairs by purchasing Tu Wei as his concubine. Despite their wedding ceremony, Li Chia broke his vow of love and sold her off to the merchant. With hatred and deep sadness, Tu Wei cast away all the jewels with which she had planned to please Li's family and gain a position in his upper-class world. Realizing that she had no way to change her social status, she threw herself into the Grand Canal and drowned. Her last words were, "What is the Heavenly reason? What are human feelings? I can't overcome my fate in this society."⑲

To conclude this discussion, I offer the following story: Wang Ao (1384–1467) acquired the *chin-shih* degree in the Yüng-le period (1402–1424), and enjoyed a successful official career both in the local areas and at the court during the reigns of Hsüen-te, Cheng-t'ung (1435–1449), Ching-t'ai (1450–1456), and T'ien-sun (1457–1464). After several promotions, he became high ranking Censor-in-Chief (*tu-yü-shih*) and then the minister of the Board of Personnel. Moreover, Wang Ao was summoned by Ying-tsung to be an imperial advisor and the emperor called him "Mr." instead of his name, because of his virtue and merit to the state. Before the elderly Wang Ao became the minister of the Board of Personnel, his

⑲ Ts'ai, 1985a:388.

wife secretly took a concubine for him without telling him. But Wang Ao, a righteous man who condemned concubinage as corruption, refused to accept his wife's gift and sent the young woman away. The woman, however, considered herself to be Wang Ao's concubine and refused to remarry. She survived by selling her embroidered works and through the limited economic support from her natal family. Several years later, when Wang Ao was promoted to minister of the Board of Personnel, the concubine was also proud of herself and said that it was ridiculous for a concubine of a court official to remarry. When Wang Ao died at the age of 84, the concubine mourned him according to the rites required of a minor consort. Wang Ao's son was so impressed by her virtue that he asked her to move into the household and supported her until she died.[80]

According to sociological theory of exchange, social behavior is an exchange of goods—material and non-material—such as symbols of approval or prestige. A general rule in exchange is maintaining the balance between cost and reward. The cost and the value of what a person gives and of what he gets vary with the quantity of what he gives and gets. The more valuable the activities that a person gets, the more valuable those that he must give.[81] This story in *Chen-chu ch'uan* by the late Ming writer Hu Shih provides a sparkling example of the theory of exchange.

The great cost to Wang Ao's concubine was the acceptance of a meager economic situation and a lonely emotional life. Whereas, the valuable prestige she received from maintaining fidelity to Wang Ao was non-material, essentially a good name. In Ming times, it was a highly valued virtue for a woman to remain loyal to the man she was engaged to, and to maintain lifelong chastity for him after he died. The cult of female chastity became such a powerful fashion in the seventeenth

---

[80] CCC, 5:5 in PCHSTK, 4/6:3478.

[81] Homans, 1958:599.

century that the concubine who was engaged by Wang Ao's wife through formal ceremony considered herself to be in a lifelong relationship with Wang Ao. Even though she was rejected by Wang Ao, she maintained a symbolic relationship with the Wang family. By her not remarrying, records memorialized her as a role model for the society. In the Chinese sense, especially in the Ming cultural context, that prestige was the most valuable non-material reward a woman could obtain.

The concubine's virtue, which certainly increased the social reputation of the Wang family, impressed Wang Ao's son. However, by declaring herself Wang Ao's chaste concubine, she also discharged great social pressure on the Wang family. Perhaps Wang Ao's son, if he refused to take care of such a virtuous woman, could not afford the criticism. So the concubine was welcomed to join the Wang family, and was treated as Wang Ao's concubine accordingly. It was certainly a fact that Wang Ao's concubine might suffer inferior status and the risks of a miserable domestic life. Still, the material prestige which Wang Ao's concubine could enjoy included better living conditions, a relatively higher status than the servants, the potential of an improved domestic situation, and an even greater status (as well as the chance of gaining honor and becoming an influential public figure through the private and governmental award systems) if she became the foster mother of Wang Ao's son or grandson. Such prestige did benefit her and her natal family through concubinage in an upper-class family.

The story is not just an example of a chaste woman in the Ming period. There is a strong indication that the other acknowledged prestige that Wang Ao's concubine might have gained is the honorary social status assigned to a concubine belonging to an upper-class scholar-official family. The concubine's social status had already improved when she was chosen by Wang Ao's wife. The concubine herself, and even the people around her,

respected her for her having been a concubine of an upper-class scholar-official family. If Wang Ao's concubine did remarry, either voluntarily or by being forced to by her natal family, it was improbable that she would become a member of such a respectable family as the Wangs.

Due to the fact that status differentiation determined the superiority of the wife and the inferiority of the concubines within the same household, Ming and early Ch'ing literature often reports that the concubines often suffered miserable lives under the oppression of the wife. As a result, many respectable families refused to allow their daughters to become concubines. Some genealogies even considered it shameful to give a daughter to be a concubine. On the other side of coin, evidence has demonstrated that although a woman from a poorer, lower class family had almost no chance to become a wife in an upper-class family, becoming a concubine could improve her life style, her social standing, or both. Because the rich and powerful families were the major group to acquire concubines, concubinage benefitted women and even their natal families in terms of economic prestige and increased social status. A wife from a family of the lower social classes, although having the highest ritual and legal domestic standing in her husband's household, had a lower social standing than a concubine from an upper-class family. Sociologist Gary Becker, in his study on human behavior, points out that polygamy is encouraged when men or women differ greatly in wealth, ability, or other attributes.[82] In these circumstances, concubinage provided women the opportunity to share men's power and prestige, potential upward mobility for the woman herself and her natal family was a real incentive toward becoming a concubine.

---

[82] Becker, 1976:21.

# Glossary

*an-jen* 安人
Ms. Chao 趙氏
Ch'ao Yüan 晁源
Chekiang 浙江
Chen-ko 珍哥
*cheng* 正
*cheng-shih* 正室
Cheng-t'ung 正統
Cheng-te 正德
*ch'i* 妻
*ch'i-ch'u* 七出
Chia Cheng 賈政
Chia-ching 嘉靖
*chia-mu* 嫁母
*ch'ieh* 妾
*chien* 賤
Ch'ien Ch'ien-i 錢謙益
*chien-t'iao* 兼祧
Chin-ling 金陵
*chin-shih* 進士
*ch'ing-ch'i* 請期
Ching-t'ai 景泰
*ch'in-ying* 親迎
Ch'iu-chü 秋菊
*chu-mu* 主母
*ch'u-mu* 出母
Feng Yün-ch'iang 馮雲強
*fu-jen* 夫人
*fu-shih* 副室
Hangchow 杭州
Hsi-men Ch'ing 西門慶
*hsia-shou* 下首
Hsia Yen 夏言
Ms. Hsiao 蕭氏
Hsiao Chen-chu 小珍珠
Hsiao-ch'ing 小青
Hsiao-tsung 孝宗
Hsü Chih-ho 徐志和
Hsüan Ai-niang 宣愛娘
Hsüeh Su-chieh 薛素姐
Hsüen-te 宣德
*hu-chüeh* 戶絕
Hua Hsi-jen 花襲人
*i-chüeh* 義絕
*i-hün* 議婚
*i-jen* 宜人
*i-niang* 姨娘
Jen Hsiang-erh 任香兒
*ju-jen* 孺人
*ju-mu* 乳母

Keng Lang 耿朗
Kiangsu 江蘇
*k'o-t'ou* 叩頭
Ku Ting-ch'en 顧鼎臣
Ms. Kuo 郭氏
*k'un-ning kung* 坤寧宮
Ms. K'ung 孔氏
*kung-jen* 恭人
Ms. Li 李氏
Li Chia 李甲
Li Chiao-erh 李嬌兒
Li P'ing-erh 李瓶兒
*liang-chia* 良家
*liang-t'ou tso-ta* 兩頭坐大
Liang Wu-ti 梁武帝
Lin Yün-p'ing 林雲屏
Liu Chi 劉伋
Ms. Lo 羅氏
Meng Yü-lou 孟玉樓
*ming-fu* 命婦
*ming-mei cheng-ch'ü* 明媒正娶
*nai-nai* 奶奶
*na-chi* 納吉
*na-cheng* 納徵
*na-pi* 納幣
*na-ts'ai* 納采
Ni Yüan-lu 倪元魯
P'an Chin-lien 潘金蓮
P'ang Ch'un-mei 龐春梅
P'ing Ts'ai-yün 平彩雲
*p'ing-t'ou-ch'i* 平頭妻
*san-pu-ch'ü* 三不去
*shang-shou* 上首
*shang-shu* 尚書
Shantung 山東
*sheng-mu* 生母
*shih-lang* 士郎
Shih-tsung 世宗
*shu-jen* 淑人
*shu-mu* 庶母
*shou-fang* 收房
*shou-fu* 首輔
Ssu-tsung 思宗
Sun Hsüeh-o 孫雪娥
Sun Fu 孫富
T'an-ch'un 探春
*t'an-tz'u* 彈詞
Ms. T'ang 童氏
*te-jen* 德人
Ti Hsi-ch'en 狄希陳
T'ien Ch'un-wan 田春畹
T'ien-shun 天順
*ts'e-shih* 側室
Tso Wei-ming 左維明
*ts'ung* 從
Tu Wei (Shih-niang) 杜媺（十娘）
*tu-yü-shih* 都御史
T'ung Chi-chieh 童寄姐

*tz'u-mu* 慈母
Ms. Wang 王氏
Wang Hsi-feng 王熙鳳
Wang Ao 王翱
Wan-li 萬曆
Wei Kuei-hsiang 魏桂香
*wen-ming* 問名
Wu-hsi 吳錫
Wu Yüeh-niang 吳月娘
Yangchow 楊州
Yang Shih-ch'i 楊士奇
Yen Chi 燕姬
Yen Meng-ch'ing 燕夢卿
*ying* 媵
Ying-tsung 英宗
*yu shih-lang* 右侍郎
Yün-kuan 雲觀
Yüng-le 永樂

## Works–Cited

Becker, Gary S.
1976 *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior.* Chicago: University of Chicago.

Chao Feng-chieh 趙鳳喈
1973, 1977 Chung-kuo fu-nü tsai fa-lü shang chih ti-wei(Women Status in Chinese Law) 中國婦女在法律上之地位. Taipei: Shih-ho 食貨 Publishing Co.

Ch'en, Toyoko Yoshida
1974 "Women in Confucian Society: A Study of Three T'an-tz'u Narratives." Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University Press.

Ch'en Yin-k'o 陳寅恪
1980 Liu Ju-shih pie-chuan (Biography of Liu Ju-shih) 柳如是別傳. Shanghai 上海: Shanghai ku-chi 古籍 Publishing Co.

Ch'ü Tung-tsu
1961 *Law and Society in Traditional China.* Paris: Mouton and Co.

Chu Yen-ching 朱燕靜
1978 "Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan yen-chiu (Study on *Marriage of Ill Omen*)." M. A. thesis. National Taiwan University 醒世姻緣傳研究.

Clunas, Craig

1991 *Treatise on Superfluous Things.* University of Illinois Press and Polity Press. Hawkes, David trans.

1973 *The Story of the Stone.* By Ts'ao Hsüeh- ch'in. New York: Penguin Group.

Homans, George

1958 "Social Behavior as Exchange." In *American Journal of Sociology.* (63/6): 597–606.

Hsieh, Bao-Hua

1993 "The Acquisition of Concubines in China, 14th–17th Centuries." In *Research on Women in Modern Chinese History*, pp. 125–200. Taipei: Academia Sinica, Institution of Modern History.

Hu Shih 胡適

1986 Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan k'ao-cheng (A Study on *Marriage of Ill Omen*) 醒世姻緣傳考證. Taipei: Yüan-liu 遠流 Publishing Co.

Hucker, Charles

1985 *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Liu Chieh-p'ing 劉階平

1953 "Hsing-shin yin-yüan chuan tso-che Hsi-chou Sheng k'ao (A Study on Hsi-chou Sheng, the author of *Marriage of Ill Omen*) 醒世姻緣傳作者西周生考." In HCSYHSYY.

McDermott, Joseph P.

1992 "Family Financial Plans of the Southern Sung." In *Asian Major*, pp. 15–52.

McMahon, Keith

1995 *Misers, Shrews and Polygamists: Sexuality and Male-Female Relations in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Fiction.* N. C.: Duke University Press.

Niida Noboru 仁井田陞

1952 "Chugoku shufu no chii to kagi no ken." 中国主妇の地位と鍵の权 In *chugoku no noson kazoku* 中国の農村家族. Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku Toyo bunka

kenkyojo, pp. 243–310.

1962 "Sodai no kasanho ni okeru joshi no chii." 宋代の家産法における女子の地位 In *Chugoku hoseishi kenkya dorei nodo ho kazoku sonraku ho* 中国法制史研究奴隷農奴法家族村落法. Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppan kai, pp. 365–92.

Plaks, Andrew H., ed.

1977 *Chinese Narrative Critical and Theoretical Essays.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Shiga Shuzo 滋賀秀三

1971 *Chugoku kazokuho no genri* 中国家族法の原理, ed. edn. Tokyo: Shobunsha.

Shih Ch'i-yün 施綺雲

1956 "Kuan-yü wu-kuo chin-tai fa-chih shih shang te ch'ieh chih yen-chiu (A Study on Concubinage in Chinese Law in the Premodern Period)" 關於吾國近代法制上的妾之研究. She-hui k'o-hsueh lun-ts'ung 社會科學論叢, No. 7.

T'an Cheng-pi 譚正璧 ed.

1936 Chung-kuo nü-hsing wen-hsüeh shih (History of Chinese Women Literature) 中國女性文學史. Shanghai 上海: Kuang-ming 光明 Publishing Co.

Tai Yen-hui.

1978 "Divorce in Traditional Chinese Law." In *Chinese Family Law in Historical Perspctive.* Ed. David Buxbaum. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Thatcher, Melvin

1991 "Marriage of the Ruling Elite in the Spring and Autumn Period." In *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society.* Eds. Rubie Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ts'ai Kuo-liang 蔡國梁

1985a Ming-ch'ing hsiao-shuo t'an-yu (A Deep view of Ming-Ch'ing Fiction) 明清小說探幽. Chekiang 浙江： Wen-i 文藝 Publishing Co.

1985b "'Chin-p'ing-mei' jen-wu san-t'i (Nice Topics of Figures in Gold-Vase-Plum). 金瓶梅人物三題." Ming-Ch'ing Hsiao-shuo yen-chiu 明清小說研究. 3: 199–215.

Yü Chih-yüan 于植元

1984 "'Lin-lan-hsiang' lun (A Study on Forest-Orchid-Fragrance) 林蘭香論." Ming-ch'ing hsiao-shuo lun-ts'ung 明清小說論叢. 1:190–213

Waley, Authur trans.

1940 *Chin P'ing Mei: The Adventurous History of Hsi Men and His Six Wives.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Wang Su-ts'un 王素存

1970 "Hsing-shih yin-yüan tso-che Hsi-chou Sheng k'ao (Study on Hsi-chou Sheng, the author of *Marriage of Ill Omen*) 醒世姻緣作者西周生考." In HCSYHSYY.

Widmer, Ellen

1989 "The Epistolary World of Female Talent in the Seventeenth Century China." *Late Imperial China* 10(2):1–43.

Wu. Yenna

1988 "The Inversion of Marital Hierarchy: Shrew Wives and Henpecked Husbands in Seventeenth-Century Chinese Literature." *The Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48(2):363–382.

1995 *The Chinese Virago: A Literary Theme.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## Collection

CCC

Chen-chu Ch'uan 真珠船. By Hu Shih 胡侍 (Ming) in PCHSTK 4/6.

CCILNKSFC

Chia-ching i-lai nei-ko shou-fu chuan 嘉靖以來內閣首輔傳. By Wang Shih-chen 王世貞 (1526–1590). Rpt. In MCSLHP 1/1.

CMCC

Ch'uan-ming ch'uan-ch'i 全明傳奇. Ed. by Lin Yu-shih 林侑時. Taipei: T'ien-i 天一 Publishing Co., 1985.

CMMYL

Ch'un-ming meng-yü lu 春明夢餘錄. By Sun Ch'eng-tse 孫承澤 (1592–1676). Hong Kong: Lung-men 龍門 Book Co. 1965.

CPM (THTICS)

T'ien-hsia ti-i ch'i-shu 天下第一奇書 (chu-p'o-pen "Chin-p'ing mei" 竹坡本金瓶梅). Noted by Chang Chu-p'o 張竹坡 (Ch'ing). Hong Kong: Hui-wen-ko 匯文閣 Bookstore, 1975.

CLTC

Chia-li ta-ch'eng 家禮大成. By Lü Tzu-chen 呂子振 (early Ch'ing). Taipei: Hsi-pei 西北 Publishing Co., 1975.

CSLL

Ch'ing-shih lei-lüeh 情史類略. By Feng Meng-lung 馮夢龍 (1574–1645). 1631 edition. Rpt Changsha: 長沙 Yüeh-lu 岳麓 Bookstore, 1986.

CTLT

Chu-tzu li-ts'uan 朱子禮纂. By Li Kuang-ti 李光地 (Ch'ing). In SKCSCP.

HCNFLYC

Hsiao-ch'ing niang feng-liu-yüan chi 小青娘風流院記. By Chu Chin-fan 朱京藩 (Ming). In CMCC.

HCSYHSYY

Hsi-chou Sheng yü hsing-shih yin-yüan 西周生與醒世姻緣. Ed by Taipei: T'ien-i 天一 Publishing Co., 1982

HLM

Hung-lou meng 紅樓夢. By Ts'ao Hsüeh-chin 曹雪芹 (1715?–63). Rpt Beijing Jemming 人民 Publisher, 1982.

HMCS

Huang-ming chih-shu 皇明制書. Ed. Chang Lu 張鹵 (Ming). Taipei: Ch'eng-wen 成文 Publisher, 1969. 6 vols.

HLTC (HLTCEV extra version)

Hsing-li ta-ch'üan 性理大全. By Ch'iu Chün 丘濬 (1420–1495). In SKCS.

HSYYC

Hsing-shih yin-yüan chuan 醒世姻緣傳. By Hsi-chou Sheng 西周生. Wan-li 萬曆 edition. Rpt. Taipei: Shih-chieh 世界 Books Co. 1962.

IL

I-li 儀禮. In SSCCS.

ILCCCT

I-li cheng-chu chü-to 儀禮鄭注句讀. By Chang Erh-ch'i 張爾岐 (Ch'ing). SKCSCP ed.

LC

Li-chi 禮記. In SSCCS.

LLH

Lin-lan-hsiang 林蘭香. By Sui-yüan hsia-shih 隨緣下士. 1651 edition. Rpt. Shen-yang 瀋陽： ch'un-feng wen-i 春風文藝 Publishing Co., 1985.

LTKC

Liao-tu keng chi 療妒羹記. By Wu Ping 吳炳 (d. 1560). Rpt. In CMCC

MCSPHSTK

Ming-ch'ing shan-pen hsiao-shuo ts'ung-k'an 明清善本小說叢刊. In Kuo-li Cheng-chih ta-hsüeh ku-tien hsiao-shuo yen-chiu chung-hsin 國立政治大學古典小說研究中心. Ed. by Taipei: T'ien-i 天一 Publishing Co., 1985.

MCSLHP

Ming-ch'ing shih-liao hui-pien 明清史料彙編. Ed. by Shen Yün-lung 沈雲龍. Taipei: Wen-hai 文海 Publishing Co., 1967.

MS

Ming-shih 明史. Ed. by Chang T'ing-yü 張廷玉 (1672–1775). Ch'ing edition. Taipei: Ting-wen 鼎文 Publishing Co., 1982.

NJC

Nü-jen ching 女人經. Unknown author. Kuang-hsü 光緒 (1875–1908) edition. Rpt. Taipei: Ta-li 大立 Publisher, 1982.

PCCSY

Pi-chou chai sheng-yü 敝帚齋剩語. By Shen Te-fu 沈德符 (1578–1642). In PCHSTK 6/7.

PCHSTK

Pi-chi hsiao-shuo ta-kuan 筆記小說大觀. Ed. by Taipei: Hsin-hsing 新興 Book Co., 1976.

PHT

Pai-hu t'ung 白虎通. By Pan Ku 班固 (32–92 B.C.). In TSCC.

SCYC

San-ch'ao yeh-chi 三朝野紀. Ed. by Li Hsün-chih 李遜之 (fl.1671). In MCSLHP 3/1–2.

SKCSCP

Ssu-k'u ch'uan-shu chen-pen 四庫全書珍本. Ed. by Taipei: Shang-wu 商務 Publishing Co., 1974–1982

SM

Shih-ming 釋名. By Liu Hsi 劉熙(Han). In SPTK.

SPTK

Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an 四部叢刊. Ed. by Shanghai 上海： Shang-wu 商務 Publishing Co., 1937.

SSCCS

Shih-san ching chu-shu 十三經注疏. Taipei: I-wen 藝文 Bookstore. Rpt. of 1812 reprint of Sung edition.

SWCT

Shuo-wen chieh-tzu 說文解字. By Hsü Shen 許愼 (d. 120 B.C.).

TCCS

Tso-chuan chu-shih 左傳注釋. By Kao Pen-han 高本漢. Rpt. Taipei: Chung-hua ts'ung-shu p'ien-shen 中華叢書編審, 1972.

TCLLHTHT

Ta-ch'ing lü-li hui-t'ung hsin-ts'uan 大清律例會通新纂. Ed. by Yao Yü-hsiang 姚雨薌. 1872 edition. Rpt. Taipei: Wen-hai 文海 Bookstore, 1964.

TMLCCFL

Ta-ming lü chi-chieh fu-li 大明律集解附例. 1610 edition. Rpt. Taipei: Hsueh-sheng 學生 Bookstore, 1970.

TSCC

Ts'ung-shu chi-ch'eng 叢書集成. Ed. by Shanghai 上海: Shang-wu 商務 Publishing Co., 1937.

TWL

Tsui-wei lu 罪惟錄. By Cha Chi-tso 查繼佐 (1601-1676). In PCHSTK 45/1–4.

TYH

T'ien-yü-hua 天雨花. By T'ao Chen-huai 陶貞懷 (Ming-Ch'ing). 1651 edition. Rpt. Shanghai 上海: Ku-chi 古籍Publishing Co., 1984.

WKCLHT

Wen-kung chia-li hui-t'ung 文公家禮會通. By T'ang To 湯鐸. 1450 edition.

WLYHP, WLYHPPI

Wan-li yeh-ho pien 萬曆野獲編, Wan-li yeh-ho pien pu-i 萬曆野獲編補遺. By Shen Te-fu 沈德符 (1578–1642). Rpt. In PCHSTK 15/6.

WTSL

Wu-tsung shih-lu 武宗實錄 (1505–1521). Rpt. Taipei: Academia Sinica, Institute of History, 1965.

YWTT

Yüeh-wei ts'ao-t'ang pi-chi 閱微草堂筆記. By Chi Hsiao-lan 紀曉嵐 (1724–1805). Shanghai 上海: Ku-chi 古籍 Publishing Co., 1980. Chi yün (紀昀，字：曉嵐).