

LOVE, HATRED,
AND OTHER PASSIONS

*Questions and Themes on Emotions
in Chinese Civilization*

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MISS EMOTION:

WOMEN, BOOKS AND CULTURE IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY JIANGNAN

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Tracing the Hi/story of Emotions

This study explores the lore of Xiaoqing 小青 (1595-1612), a semi-legendary teenage woman poet, in the context of the late Ming craze for romance and the cult of *qing* 情 (love, feelings, emotion) among the reading public in seventeenth-century Jiangnan. The story of Xiaoqing –literally ‘Young Lady’, a pun on *qing* 情 that may be rendered in English as ‘Miss Emotion’– hovers between history and fiction: it exists in various versions, mainly in three biographies by male authors, but it later also inspired works of drama, fiction and poetry by male and female writers and continued to exercise the Chinese imagination throughout three centuries until the May Fourth Era.

Although some literati denied Xiaoqing’s authenticity, late imperial Chinese readers apotheosized the teenage poetess after her early death and built shrines to her memory both in stone and on paper. By analysing the story of Xiaoqing in the context of literary and historical sources, we investigate how the literati’s vindication of the cult of emotions celebrated female talent, providing insight into the dreams, desires and aspirations of women in that era.

In retracing the hi/story –both *his* story and *her* story– of emotions in seventeenth-century Jiangnan, this paper invites us to rethink the analysis of literary and historical sources, proposing a new reading of Xiaoqing’s story and the late Ming discourse on the cult of emotions. It contributes to an interdisciplinary inquiry into literary narratives and their cultural context that will be of interest to both the modern literary critic and the historian of late imperial China.

Portraits of a woman reader

Let us for a moment suspend disbelief and enter the world of Hangzhou 杭州 in the year 1612. Shortly before her death, a teenage poetess writes the following lines:

Can’t bear to listen to the cold rain [pounding on my] forlorn window-pane,
I light a lamp to browse through *The Peony Pavilion*,
There is someone in this world even more obsessed with emotions than me,
It is not as if the only one who’s broken-hearted is Miss Emotion (Xiaoqing 小青)!¹

A little later, word is going round that the author of this poem, a seventeen-year old girl from Yangzhou 揚州, has died because of reading a book. Her contemporaries attribute her premature demise to an excess of emotion upon reading Tang Xianzu’s 湯顯祖 (1550-1616) drama *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion; first published in 1589) and inscribe her story at the core of the debate about emotions in the late Ming 明 (1368-1644) era.²

We do not know the girl’s surname, only that she was given her husband’s name Feng 馮. Also called Xuanxuan 玄玄, she became famous under her literary name, Xiaoqing. The story of Miss Emotion epitomises the cult of *qing* among late imperial China’s literati in the Jiangnan 江南 or Yangzi delta region that witnessed a commercial boom in the early seventeenth century.

Xiaoqing’s biographies relate the tragic story of a girl from Yangzhou sold as a concubine at the age of fifteen. Her husband, a certain Mr Feng, takes her home to Hangzhou but his jealous principal wife banishes Xiaoqing to Lonely Mountain, an island in West Lake, where she spends her time in isolation, reading, writing, and painting. Occasionally she meets Mme Yang 楊夫人, her confidante, who urges Xiaoqing to leave her husband, but she refuses. Her health declines and shortly before her death she commissions a portrait of herself and consecrates her spirit to her painted image. Feng arrives only after she has died and finds her paintings, poems and a letter to her female friend. His wife burns Xiaoqing’s possessions but one painting and

¹ Jianjian jushi 1981, p. 222.

² For recent research on the concept of *qing* and the cult of emotions, see Kang-i Sun Chang 1991, pp. 9-18; Li Wai-yee 1993, pp. 47-88; Wang 1994, Ko 1994, pp. 68-112; Cass 1999, 15-16; Huang 2001; Epstein 2001.

eleven poems survive: having handed them to servants together with her jewellery before her death, Xiaoqing herself has ensured their transmission to the outside world.

A reading of a story so rich with literary resonance raises the issues of the heroine's historicity, the process of literary creation and the cult of emotions surrounding her. The story of Xiaoqing has been the subject of much scholarly research in East and West but the present paper proposes a new angle of analysis by using a cultural approach focusing on the interaction of history and fiction.³

The many versions of Xiaoqing's story derive from three early seventeenth-century classical language biographies which all "have some claim to being original", as modern historian Ellen Widmer has shown.⁴ As all three versions are attributed to men, Xiaoqing appears before us only through the filter of her male biographers' gaze.

The first and earliest biography was composed between 1612 and 1624. The identity of the author hiding behind the pen-name Jianjian jushi 淺淺居士 (Tiny Recluse) remains obscure but modern scholars conjecture he might be either Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) or Zhou Zhibiao 周之標, another publisher from Suzhou.⁵ The second and third versions by Zhi Ruzeng 支如增 and the playwright Zhu Jingfan 朱京藩 were published in the 1620s.⁶ The flood of later renderings of Xiaoqing's story in literature, poetry and drama, both classical and vernacular, from the seventeenth to the twentieth century by male and female authors testifies to its appeal and enduring popularity.⁷

Gossip, rumours or lies? The question of authenticity

Did Xiaoqing really exist? Is she merely a literary creation? Philological scholarship from the seventeenth century until modern times within China and outside has not been able to answer these questions,

³ For previous research on Xiaoqing, see Widmer 1992; Ko 1994, pp. 92, 97.

⁴ Widmer 1992, p. 114.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-9. On Feng Menglong, see Hanan 1981, pp. 75-119.

⁶ Zheng Yuanxun 鄭元勳 1630, pp. 165-9; Zhu Jingfan 朱京藩 1629; cf. Yagisawa Hajime 八木沢元 1961, pp. 67-71. Zhi Ruzeng also wrote the preface for Zhou Zhibiao's anthology *Nüzhong qī caizi lanke er ji* 女中七才子蘭咳集; see Hu Wenkai 胡文楷 1985, pp. 845-6.

⁷ Cf. Pan Guangdan 潘光旦 1990.

concluding only that much of Xiaoqing's appeal derives from the way her portrayals blur the boundaries of fiction and history.⁸

Collections of female biographies, both fact and fiction, flourished in the late Ming. Traditional Chinese writers moreover enjoyed composing factual-sounding biographies about fictitious people.⁹ Some writers present Xiaoqing as a historical personage, while others portray her as the emblem of the woman reader.¹⁰ Let us consider the following arguments about Xiaoqing's historicity that have been splitting scholars into two camps since the seventeenth century.

A small literary corpus of poems entitled *Fenyu cao* 焚餘草 (Manuscripts Saved from Burning) is attributed to Xiaoqing and seems to lend authority to the claims of her historicity.¹¹ Modern historians have drawn attention to the fact that the doubts about Xiaoqing's authenticity could have had sexist motives. As Dorothy Ko notes, "The suspicion that behind every published woman lurked a male ghost writer was quite common in the print culture of Jiangnan."¹² The figure of the female writer arouses unease and anxiety in a male-dominated society.

Another argument in favour of Xiaoqing's historicity rests on the alleged restoration of her grave in the nineteenth century. In 1824 the scholar-official Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1775-1845) from Hangzhou claimed to have found and repaired a grave in his hometown that he identified as Xiaoqing's, providing the pilgrim—and also the modern historian—with a stone to touch, a monument to testify to her historicity.¹³ Chen Wenshu's act has the effect of bringing Xiaoqing from the realm of legends into history and lending her visibility.¹⁴ But an artefact it remains, and modern scholarship has drawn attention to the act of repairing tombs as an expression of Ming loyalism.¹⁵

⁸ See Widmer 1992, p. 131; Epstein 2001, p. 101; on narratives of *qing* challenging the boundaries of fiction and history, see also Li Wai-ye 1993, pp. 47-50.

⁹ Cf. Hanan 1981, p. 95; Ōtsuka Hidetaka 大塚秀高 1989, p. 105; Widmer 1992, p. 130.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Zheng Yuanxun 1630; Zhu Jingfan 1629.

¹¹ Hu Wenkai 1985, pp. 176-7.

¹² Ko 1994, p. 96.

¹³ See Widmer 1992, pp. 141-3.

¹⁴ Chen's daughter-in-law Wang Duan 汪端 (1793-1839) addresses Xiaoqing in a poem direct as a historical personage; see Wang Duan 1814, pp. 4.6a-b.

¹⁵ Chen Wenshu 1968, p. 2226; on Chen, see Hummel 1974, pp. 103-4.

The first scholar to doubt Xiaoqing's authenticity was the scholar-official Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664).¹⁶ In 1652 Qian, together with his concubine, the courtesan Liu Rushi 柳如是 (1618-64), published works by women poets and decoded Xiaoqing's name as a pun on the character for *qing* —making the figure of 'Miss Emotion' just 'too good to be true'.¹⁷ Liu Rushi criticised Xiaoqing's poetry and identified the real author as a male scholar with connections to the publishing industry.

Literary detective work trying to identify Xiaoqing and the people around her has had to make sense of gossip, rumours and lies.¹⁸ So far it has proven impossible to unravel the maze of claims, allegations, cover-ups, counterattacks, and denials.¹⁹ The search for Xiaoqing's husband Mr Feng has merely led to his identification as Feng Zixu 馮子虛, or 'Mr Fictitious'.²⁰

While it is hard to find the 'truth' behind the rumours and lies,²¹ they do nonetheless provide access to the historical discourse, the popular imagination and the minds of late Ming readers. Xiaoqing epitomised larger trends that the seventeenth-century audience could easily recognise and identify with. Xiaoqing appeared as real enough in the imagination of some female readers —as did the literary heroine Du Liniang 杜麗娘. Women addressed them in their poetry, wrote to them, worshipped them, built shrines and sacrificed to them.²²

The question that we need to ask is not so much: what did really happen, but rather: how did people perceive those events? How and why did they write about them? The crux of the matter does not lie in the historical facts and the factual evidence but in the historical discourse about them. Data and hard facts can support our task but are often limited in what they can tell us about the non-tangible aspects of history such as dreams, fears, nightmares, desires, love, hope, expecta-

¹⁶ On Qian, see Hummel 1974, pp. 148-50.

¹⁷ Widmer 1992, p. 130.

¹⁸ Yagisawa 1961; Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 1980.

¹⁹ Cf. Ko 1994, pp. 96-9; Widmer 1992, p. 129.

²⁰ Pan Guangdan 1990, p. 70.

²¹ On rumours and lies in literary criticism, see Gallagher and Greenblatt 2000.

²² See, for example, the seventeenth-century poetesses Wu Qi 吳淇 (see Zou Siyi 鄒斯漪 1655, 17a-18b) and Qian Yi 錢宜 (see Mao Xiaotong 毛效同 1986, 1a-2a); cf. Widmer 1992, 133-5; Zeitlin 1994, pp. 168-70; Ko 1994, p. 83; Santangelo 1999, p. 174.

tions and emotions. They more often than not fail to give us access to the history of the mind, popular imagination and emotions.

For our present purposes it does not really matter whether Xiaoqing really lived or not. What matters is to find out how seventeenth-century minds perceived her, to discover what she meant to them and how they discussed her. Our task, then, is to analyse the contemporary discourse —the gossip, rumours and lies— and retrace the perceptions within. If people perceived such events as real, then they were real enough to them: they influenced their thoughts, lives and art —and perhaps changed the course of history. The cultural discourse provides us with rich information on such matters.

Sweet words of seduction: the cult of qing and the discourse on emotions

Why exactly did Xiaoqing manage to seduce late imperial Chinese minds? What were the elements in seventeenth-century Jiangnan culture that led to the creation and celebration of her story? How did gossip, rumours and lies circulate, what were the negotiations that traded dreams of desire, the deals that exchanged stories about emotions?

The notion of *qing* was nothing new but it acquired the intensity to form a new ideology only in late imperial times.²³ Ming writers elevated *qing* to the status of a system of ethics to rival the ancient schools of thought. Feng Menglong referred to the morality of *qing* as *qingjiao* 情教, 'doctrine of emotions', an analogy with the doctrines of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.²⁴ Feng announced in the style of a Buddhist *gatha* a manifesto for establishing the doctrine of emotions as a universal religion, fusing Confucian morality and Buddhist terminology.²⁵

It was in Han 漢 (206 BC-220 AD) times that *qing* began to refer to a person's desires.²⁶ Being associated with selfish desires, attachment to this world, and an emotion not conducive to the quest for immortality, the concept had negative connotations in Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist thought while traditional Chinese literary theory valorised it.²⁷

²³ For definitions of *qing*, see Wong Siu-kit 1969, pp. 328-33.

²⁴ Feng Menglong 1984, 1.

²⁵ See discussions by Mowry 1983, 13; Cass 1999, pp. 15-16.

²⁶ Graham 1967, pp. 259-60.

²⁷ Cf. Wong Siu-kit 1969, pp. 150-61; Epstein 2001, pp. 61-9.

Here we need to analyse the discourse on *qing* and discover its dynamics, focusing on the following questions: Who propagated it? Why does the discourse depict how women kill themselves for the sake of emotions, die because of reading books? How did the discourse influence people's actions and vice versa?

Following Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472-1529) re-interpretation of Neo-Confucianism in the mid Ming, his disciple Wang Gen 王艮 (1483-1541) founded the radical Taizhou 泰州 school of thought. Together with the Gong'an 公安 school of literary criticism, the Taizhou school played a decisive role in further defining the concept of *qing*, bringing it into prominence and providing the intellectual roots for its cult.²⁸ Wang Gen's disciple Yan Jun 顏鈞 (fl. early sixteenth century), a prominent member of the Taizhou school, was the first to lecture widely on *qing*.²⁹ Yan Jun, his disciple Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515-88), and the iconoclastic philosopher Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602) all interpreted the notion of 'innate knowledge' (*liangzhi* 良知) – a central concept in Wang Yangming's thought – as including *qing*.³⁰

Luo Rufang's disciple, the playwright Tang Xianzu celebrated *qing* in his drama *The Peony Pavilion*.³¹ Its publication in 1589 propelled *qing* to cult status. Tang Xianzu extolled the heroine Du Liniang's commitment to *qing* in his preface: "Who among all the girls in this world ever embodied emotions (*youqing* 有情) like Liniang?"³²

Tang Xianzu's friend Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610), the founder of the Gong'an school of literary criticism, emphasised the function of *qing* in literature.³³ The thought of Li Zhi also influenced Feng Menglong in the belief that *qing* between man and woman is the most powerful of human emotions.³⁴ According to Feng, "Those who embody emotions (*youqing*) and those who do not (*wuqing* 無情) are worlds apart."³⁵

²⁸ On Wang Yangming's philosophy and the Taizhou school, see Shimada Kenji 島田虔次 1949; de Bary 1970. On Wang Gen, see Goodrich and Fang 1976, pp. 1382-5. On the Gong'an school, see Chou Chih-p'ing 1988. On the discourse, see also Wai-ye Li 1995; Hsiung Ping-chen and Lu Miaw-fen 1999.

²⁹ Huang Zongxi, 32:1.

³⁰ Cf. Hanan 1981, p. 79; on Li Zhi and Luo Rufang, see Goodrich and Fang 1976, pp. 807-18, 975-8.

³¹ On *Mudanting*, see Hsia 1970; Birch 1980; Zeitlin 1994; Lu 2001.

³² Tang Xianzu 1962, 2:1093.

³³ Yuan Hongdao, n.d., pp. iii-iv; see also Wang 1994, p. 24.

³⁴ Cf. Mowry 1983, p. 6.

³⁵ Feng Menglong 1984, p. 1.

By 1631 Feng had compiled his history of emotions, *Qingshi* 情史, a collection of over 800 stories about *qing*, including the story of Xiaoqing.³⁶ He claimed: "Things in this world are like loose coins; emotions (*qing*) are the cord that strings them together."³⁷ Feng's monetary metaphor hints at the negotiations and exchanges taking place in the discourse on emotions.

Neither Du Liniang nor Xiaoqing appear as the first protagonists to embody emotions. Their stories derive from Tang 唐 (618-907), Song 宋 (960-1279) and Yuan 元 (1264-1368) dynasty sources while some basic motifs stem from pre-Tang tales.³⁸ But what makes the late Ming heroines different from their earlier versions? What is new in the era of Xiaoqing?

Like Xiaoqing's mother, an itinerant "teacher of the inner chambers", women in late Ming times became involved in the world of letters as teachers, readers, writers and editors on a larger scale than ever before.³⁹ They emerged as both consumers and producers of the literature on emotions. By creating a new ideal of womanhood merging talent, beauty and emotions, imperial China's male-dominated society explained and rationalised the phenomenon of educated women.⁴⁰ The publisher of Xiaoqing's first biography *Qinhuai yuke* 秦淮寓客 (fl. 1573-1620) praised Jiangnan's beauties thus: "All the ladies here are lovely, cheerful, full of emotions, romantic and good at poetry."⁴¹ By the very act of celebrating the lady of letters, however, the literati could also keep her under control.

Women in turn responded both in literature and in life to the discourse on Du Liniang, Xiaoqing and the new female ideal.⁴² We can retrace the flow of social energy from literature to history as Du Liniang inspires imitations and recreations in other literary works and also among her historical audience. Ye Xiaoluan 葉小鸞 (1616-32), a teenage poetess from Wujiang 吳江, for example, dedicated three po-

³⁶ Feng Menglong 1984, pp. 423-8; on Feng and the publishing industry, see Ōki Yasushi 大木康 1991.

³⁷ Feng Menglong 1984, p. 1.

³⁸ Cf. C. T. Hsia 1970, p. 273; Wang 1994, 15-17; Carlitz 1994; Idema 1999.

³⁹ See Widmer 1989; Ko 1994; Widmer and Chang 1997.

⁴⁰ On female ideals, see Ko 1994, 143-76; on the position of women, see Ebrey 1993.

⁴¹ *Qinhuai yuke* 1985, p. iii.

⁴² Cf. Chang 1991, p. 11.

ems to Du Linian's picture in her copy of *The Peony Pavilion*.⁴³ Xiaoluan, too, died in her teenage years and her persona posthumously became merged with the lore of Xiaoqing.⁴⁴ Xiaoqing came to symbolise the new woman reader. The story of the reading poetess in turn stimulated its female audience to read, compose, collect and transmit women's poetry.⁴⁵

Male readers found the mixture of beauty and talent that engenders tragedy compelling. Men continued to write about such heroines. Feng Menglong's *Qingshi* relates the tragic death of another talented teenager, the Suzhou courtesan Feng Aisheng 馮愛生.⁴⁶ A friend of Tang Xianzu's recorded the tale of Yu Erniang 俞二娘 from Suzhou 蘇州, another passionate reader of and commentator on *The Peony Pavilion* who was also doomed to an early death.⁴⁷ Tang Xianzu, too, composed poems lamenting Yu Erniang's fate and she inspired a drama and later stories by other male and female writers.⁴⁸

The new discourse on emotions defined for its era the notions of culture, sophistication and gentility.⁴⁹ The phenomenon of Miss Emotion gave expression to cultural aspirations, dreams and desires. It symbolised the learned woman's literary achievements while providing her with an opportunity to display her talent. The cult of emotions in turn gave men—the disenfranchised literati of seventeenth-century China—the opportunity to re-assert their elite status and to reinvent themselves as the custodians of the Confucian cultural heritage.⁵⁰

The cult of clever women

Another element in the discourse on emotions in late Ming China was the search for spirituality and salvation.⁵¹ Neo-Confucianism exerted a powerful influence on the literati and their families with its syncretis-

⁴³ Ye Xiaoluan 1935, p. 13.

⁴⁴ See Ko 1994, p. 100.

⁴⁵ Examples include the Banana Garden poetry club (*Jiaoyuan shishe* 蕉園詩社) and the poetess Shang Jinglan 商景蘭 (1605-ca. 1676) who edited and published the poetry of Zhang Chayun 張樑雲 after her early death, as she was deeply moved by Zhang's emotions; see Berg (forthcoming); Shang Jinglan 1835, p. 289; cf. Ko 1992, pp. 30-1.

⁴⁶ Feng Menglong n.d., 13:34b-35b; trans. in Mowry 1983, pp. 101-4.

⁴⁷ Jiao 1957, pp. 37-8; cf. Xu Fuming 1987, pp. 213-4.

⁴⁸ Xu Yejun 徐野君 1625, 14ab; Zhu Jingfan 1629, 9ab, 11a.

⁴⁹ On gentility, see Berg and Starr (forthcoming).

⁵⁰ Cf. Huang 1998, pp. 153ff.

⁵¹ Cf. Berg 1999.

tic approach and interest in enlightenment, epiphany and mysticism.⁵² The discourse on Xiaoqing and the cult of clever women also relates to the veneration of chaste widowhood.⁵³

Late Ming literati depicted how the mystic Tanyangzi 曇陽子 (1558-80) from Taicang 太倉 (Suzhou) died young and attained immortality.⁵⁴ In their eyes Tanyangzi, a self-declared widow, became a cult figure.⁵⁵ Seventeenth-century readers of *The Peony Pavilion* debated hotly whether Tanyangzi had provided the inspiration for Du Linian.⁵⁶ In their imagination, then, Tanyangzi appears as an antecedent to the phenomenon of Miss Emotion.

All we know about Tanyangzi, however, derives from yet another narrative: her biography by the literary giant Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-90) who counted himself among her disciples.⁵⁷ So far modern scholars have read this text as a factual historical source,⁵⁸ but it also acquires significance on another level within its contemporary cultural discourse and the network of negotiations and exchanges in which it is embedded.

Wang Shizhen disapproved of the teachings of the Taizhou school and in particular of Yan Jun, the illiterate man famous for his lectures on emotions.⁵⁹ Nonetheless Wang Shizhen, too, appreciated *The Peony Pavilion* and extolled the value of emotions.⁶⁰ The story of Tanyangzi, like that of Xiaoqing, owes much to late Ming (male) literati rhetoric. Although modern scholarship has verified Tanyangzi as a historical personage,⁶¹ her story takes on a life of its own as Wang Shizhen shapes his material into a literary bestseller. He moreover composed the text as a favour to his friend, the late girl's father Wang Xijue 王錫爵 (1534-1611).⁶²

⁵² On late Ming syncretism, see Vitiello 2000a, pp. 208-10.

⁵³ See T'ien Ju-kang 1988.

⁵⁴ Wang Shizhen 1970, pp. 78.1a-31a; Fan Shouji 范守己 1590, pp. 18a-19a. On Tanyangzi, see Goodrich and Fang 1976, pp. 1425-7; Miura Shūichi 三浦秀一 1992, pp. 511-64.

⁵⁵ See Berg 2005; Waltner 1987; *idem* 1991, *idem* 1992.

⁵⁶ See Jiao Xun 焦循 1957, pp. 35-6; see the discussion attached to the "Huanhunji fulu 還魂記附錄" (Three Wives Commentary on *The Peony Pavilion*), in Tang Xianzu 1694, 1:1a-2a.

⁵⁷ On Wang Shizhen, see Goodrich and Fang 1976, pp. 1399-1405.

⁵⁸ See Wang Shizhen 1970.

⁵⁹ See de Bary 1970, p. 178.

⁶⁰ Wang Shizhen 1959, 4:30; Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 1986, p. 883.

⁶¹ Waltner 1987.

⁶² On Wang Xijue, see Goodrich and Fang 1976, pp. 1376-9.

Trading emotions: books and business

Why exactly did emotions feature so prominently in the cultural discourse of seventeenth-century China – was it an emotional age? Or did people only at that time get the chance to express themselves in public? The following factors all played a part in creating Miss Emotion.

Silver dollars from Japan and Peru flooded China during the worldwide economic boom of the seventeenth century, fanning the late Ming economy and ushering in the 'Silver Age'.⁶³ Most bullion would first arrive in the port cities and economic centres of China, in particular the prosperous Jiangnan area where it helped fuel not only business enterprises but also cultural activities and religious events.⁶⁴ A *nouveau riche* élite began to prosper, trying to gain entry into literati circles and emulating literati culture. According to contemporary observers, the Lord of Silver reigned supreme.⁶⁵ Would-be members of the elite aspired to ideals associated with the genteel femininity and cultural sophistication of Miss Emotion.

The growth of prosperous market towns and cities also increased the market for books, generating an expanding reading audience. The publishing industry began to flourish in the late Ming.⁶⁶ More wealth meant more books to publish and buy. Books became available in increasing numbers and began to circulate more widely. New technological developments in printing and publishing facilitated the production and distribution of books.⁶⁷ Private and commercial publishing enterprises catered to the tastes of urban readers and the needs of the rising merchant class.⁶⁸

The literacy rate rose in seventeenth-century urban society and in particular among merchants and women – Wang Yangming's 'new sages'.⁶⁹ These new members of the reading audience also featured as major protagonists in literary narratives.⁷⁰ Stories and other publications about and for merchants and women became popular.

⁶³ Cf. Atwell 1982, p. 83.

⁶⁴ On the monetary economy, see von Glahn 1996.

⁶⁵ Cf. von Glahn 1991; Brook 1999.

⁶⁶ See Ōki Yasushi 1991.

⁶⁷ Cf. Brook 1998, p. xxi.

⁶⁸ On publishers, see also Widmer 1996; Ōki Yasushi 2000.

⁶⁹ Wang Yangming was the first to endow merchants and women with the potential for sagehood; see de Bary 1970. On Confucianism and gender, see Chenyang Li 2000.

⁷⁰ See, e.g., Shen Defu 1959, 23:601.

The obsession with Xiaoqing coincides with women emerging as readers, writers and consumers of fiction. As Ellen Widmer has observed, women became popular topics as they were reading and writing about themselves.⁷¹ Publications by women writers also came into fashion. The era associated with Xiaoqing's alleged death in 1612 coincided with a minor boom in publishing women's poetry.⁷² One late Ming observer noted:

In recent times people in Jiangsu and Zhejiang value poetry written by ladies as if it were the sound of jade. The ladies from the inner chambers can enjoy even greater fame than men.⁷³

Biographies of legendary women and illustrations of famous beauties became bestsellers in Ming and Qing times.⁷⁴ The literati – and those who aspired to elite status – perceived artistic representations of women as hallmarks of gentility and cultural sophistication.⁷⁵

Just as the literati gained fame by catering to the demand for stories about emotions, so publishers fuelled the cult of emotions in the interest of business, promoting books that promised success. Dorothy Ko holds that the cult of emotions was created by the publishing industry's magnifying the impact of *The Peony Pavilion*.⁷⁶ The works on Xiaoqing may well have been intended for a female readership as well as her male admirers.⁷⁷

Jiangnan publishers supplied what the market demanded, producing anything from handbooks on literati taste and leisure pursuits, textbooks for the civil service examinations, travel guides for merchants, historical works and fictional narratives to erotic literature.⁷⁸

These developments coincided with the frustration of literati in political life and their search for new leadership as they grappled with changing ideals, anxieties and desires at the end of Ming rule.⁷⁹ The literati perceived corruption to be rampant at all levels of the admini-

⁷¹ Widmer 1992, p. 125.

⁷² Cf. Hu Wenkai 1985, pp. 142, 165, 168, 179; Widmer 1992, p. 125; Ko 1994, pp. 138, 232.

⁷³ Wang Siren 王思任 1987, p. 79.

⁷⁴ Mann 2000, pp. 838–9.

⁷⁵ Cf. Clunas 1997, pp. 33, 91; Hegel 1998, pp. 168, 172ff; Wu Hung 1996, pp. 95, 104, 121–2, 245.

⁷⁶ Ko 1994, p. 72.

⁷⁷ Cf. Widmer 1992, p. 125.

⁷⁸ Cf. Atwell 1975; Brook 1981; Vitiello 2000b, Volpp 2001.

⁷⁹ See Berg 2002.

stration, including both the bureaucracy and the court. The image of Xiaoqing was to become a symbol of Ming loyalism after the fall of the dynasty.⁸⁰ She triumphed at precisely the time when the Donglin 東林 Party tried—and failed—to save the nation.⁸¹

To sum up, our reading has shown how political agendas, monetary motives and business interests converge in the story of Miss Emotion. The fusion of talent and tragedy both fascinated and perturbed late imperial Chinese writers, male and female. The discourse on women, books and emotions enthralled the literati and also the women readers of late imperial Jiangnan. The analysis of the literary text within its cultural discourse shows how Miss Emotion became a metaphor for the literati and their *fin de siècle* mood while also responding to the demands of a new market and a new female readership.

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⁸⁰ Cf. Widmer 1992.

⁸¹ On the Donglin Party, see Busch 1949-55; Ono Kazuko 1985.

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