

Imagined (or Perhaps Not) Late Ming Music and Oral Performing Literature in an Imaginary Late Ming Household: The Production and Consumption of Music and Oral Performing Literature by and in the Ximen Family in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* (Plum in the Golden Vase)

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Ximen Qing's Household as the Best Known Late Ming Household²

With the possible exception of the imperial household, the late Ming household for which we have the most intimate details is that of the family of Ximen Qing in the novel *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話. This novel, for which we first begin to get notices of its circulation in the 1590s, is very long (a reprint of the text of the woodblock edition is 2,926 pages long³ and a recent typeset, annotated, edition is 2,782 pages long⁴). Not only does the novel contain a total of

¹ This paper and its appendices are respectfully dedicated to David Tod Roy, professor emeritus of the University of Chicago, and are meant, in some small way, to celebrate the completion of his translation of the novel in 2013 after decades of work on the project, and to make the wealth of information in it on oral performing literature more readily available to members of CHINOPERL (The Conference on Chinese Oral and Performing Literature) and all those interested in the oral performance traditions of China. I was fortunate to have Professor Roy guide my progress in my long but very pleasant graduate years. Although I perversely decided not to write my dissertation on the *Jin Ping Mei*, the time spent reading and discussing the novel with Professor Roy was surely the most important influence on my scholarly career and something for which I am very grateful. The earliest version of this project was completed for a conference on Late Ming music convened at the University of Michigan by Professor Joseph Lam, May 5-6, 2006, hence the focus on music and the fact that references to secondary scholarship in the present draft do not often mention works from the 21st century. Finally, I expect that for most readers it will be the first appendix that should be of most practical use and interest.

² These section headings have been retained solely for the convenience of the reader. The section headings and the body of the text are at different levels. In WORD versions of this file, one can use the “outline” function under “View” to view nothing but the section headings by selecting “Level 3.”

³ *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話, 5 vols., original preface dated 1618. The edition consulted was the 1963 Daian 大安 (Tokyo) 1963 photo-reprint. In that printing, each volume contains 20 chapters and the modern page counts are as follows: I: 492, II: 536, III: 585, IV: 812, and V: 501, for a total of 2,926 pages. The first English translation of this version of the novel, by David T. Roy, maintains this division of the novel into five volumes of 20 chapters each: *The Plum in the Golden Vase or, Chin P'ing Mei* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993-2013). The page counts for the five volumes are 610, 646, 505, 688, and 420, respectively. The separate titles given to the five volumes of his translation by Professor Roy are “The Gathering,” “The Rivals,” “The Aphrodisiac,” “The Climax,” and “The Dissolution.”

⁴ Bai Weiguo 白維國 and Bu Jian 卜鍵, annot., *Jin Ping Mei cihua jiaozhu* 金瓶梅詞話校注 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1995). This edition has the best annotation available at the time of its appearance, far surpassing that in Tao

100 chapters, when the narrative slows down just before the death of Ximen Qing to where it seems that each and every hour of every day is being accounted for, the chapters basically double in length.⁵ It is the first Chinese novel to focus on the domestic affairs of a single household.

Vernacular vs. Literary Chinese

The bulk of the writing that has come down to us from the late Ming was written in literary Chinese. Although there was nothing that prevents one from writing exhaustively and concretely in literary Chinese, it was generally not done. Descriptions in literary Chinese tend to be more evocative (you fill in the blanks) than specific and direct. That was just the way one was taught to write in literary Chinese. Besides stylistic and aesthetic constraints of this kind, there was also the problem that it was thought that certain subjects (domestic life, for instance), were not appropriate to record in detail in literary Chinese (that would, it was thought, be a waste of perfectly good ink). While there were a number of genres of writing for which it was okay to use literary Chinese, the vast bulk of the vernacular literature of the Ming takes the form of drama, vernacular fiction, or oral performing literature (*shuochang wenxue* 說唱文學). The idea of using vernacular Chinese to describe domestic life at novel length had to wait for the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*. It was not until the 18th century, and Cao Xueqin’s 曹雪芹 *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, a 120-chapter novel centered on the Jia family and strongly influenced by the example of the *Jin Ping Mei*, that a more detailed picture of the domestic life of a single family would be written.

The *Jin Ping Mei* and the *Shuihu zhuan*

Ximen Qing, of course, was not made up by the author of the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*; he, along with a lot of other detail, was borrowed from an earlier novel, the *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳. But whereas he only appears in a couple of chapters in the earlier novel before he is killed, in the later novel he is “retrieved” and gets to die a more spectacular, if prolonged, death, some 70

Muning 陶慕寧, annot., *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 2000), 1506 pp., and is also less expurgated. Bu Jian is not only a scholar of the novel but also the author of numerous works on Ming drama, including one that argues that the author of the novel was the famous playwright, play editor and publisher, and drama critic, Li Kaixian 李開先 (1502-1568). He is also the editor of a recent edition of Li Kaixian’s collected works. Both of the annotated editions of the novel are hard to find in the United States, with print runs of only 3,000 for the earlier and 8,000 for the later one. I have Bu Jian to thank for giving me one of his own personal copies of the edition he helped annotated, while I would not have had access to the Tao Muning edition if a former student of mine, Melinda Pirazzoli, had not lent me hers.

⁵ A comparison of the average length of the chapters in the woodblock edition between chapters 1-10 and 71-80 reveals a ratio of almost exactly 1:2.

chapters later than where he would have otherwise died. Also unlike the earlier versions, in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, interest in his household doesn't end with his death, but continues both within his gates until the installation of his imitator among the household servants, Dai'an, as his adopted son and heir, and outside his gates in the adventures of his former live-in son-in-law, Chen Jingji, and his former maid, Pang Chunmei.

The *Shuihu zhuan* and the Song Dynasty: Is Ximen Qing of the Song or the Ming?

The *Shuihu zhuan*, of course, is set in the Song dynasty (960-1279) and it was long popularly thought that the two most often mentioned candidates for its authorship, Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 and Shi Nai'an 施耐庵, lived not long after the Song and were still loyal to that dynasty.⁶ The *Jin Ping Mei cihua* does not change the general temporal setting of the story, it only extends it forward to the fall of the Northern Song and Emperor Huizong's captivity (1127), while the *Shuihu zhuan* ends with Huizong still on the throne. Is the Ximen Qing of the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, then, a Song or Ming person?

Borrowing the Song to Describe the Ming

If the common conception of the writing of the *Shuihu zhuan* is that the authors were upset at the loss of the Song to the Mongols in 1279 and used the “rehearsal” for that event, the loss of North China to the Jurcheds in 1127, to write about the later event, the equally common conception of the writing of the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* is that the author was borrowing the Song to write about the Ming (*jie Song xie Ming* 借宋寫明).⁷ In fact, it was not until the 17th century and the crop of novels that began to be written about the eunuch dictator Wei Zhongxian 魏忠獻 (?-1627) shortly after the latter's death that novelists started to set their novels in their own times and to directly describe those times (this trend then died out again until nearly the end of the Qing dynasty).

⁶ It is now pretty clear that Shi Nai'an might be just a made-up name and that the novel did not reach the form in which the author of the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* encountered it until not long before he himself started writing his novel.

⁷ Huo Xianjun 霍現俊, “*Jin Ping Mei cihua* zhong keyi pojie chulai de Mingdai lishi renwu” 金瓶梅詞話中可以破解出來的明代歷史人物, *Jinzhou shifan xueyuan xuebao* 錦州師範學院學報 2003.3: 25-28, p. 25, claims that the idea that the novel is really portraying the author's own times is “a fact beyond dispute” (*bu zheng shishi* 不爭事實) “acknowledged by all” (*gongren* 公認).

The *Jin Ping Mei* as a Product of the Late Ming (Minimal Relevance)

Now, the description of the production and consumption of music in the Ximen Qing household in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, provided that it is substantial in itself, should be of interest to those concerned with the question of the role of music in the late Ming merely because it was, even if could only be taken as a Ming description of Song times, a product of the late Ming, an imagining of the Song that clearly occurred in the late Ming. But the clear consensus is that we do not have to settle for that tenuous a connection between the content of the novel and what was going on in the late Ming.

Ming Persons and Events in *Jin Ping Mei*

Ming dynasty persons and events appear in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*. One scholar claims that there are the names of more than eighty historical Ming figures in the novel, as opposed to only about 60 for Song historical figures,⁸ and while I don't know of anyone who agrees with these precise figures, the number, role, and meaning of characters generally accepted as Ming figures has been a recent focus of scholarship.⁹ The established nature of this idea that the novel

⁸ Ibid., p. 25. The author goes on to claim that approximately 200 other Ming historical figures have been written into the novel but do not appear under their own names. It is on the claim that the figures in these two groups were active in the Zhengde (1506-1521) and Jiajing (1522-1566) reigns that the author argues that the novel was written before the Wanli (1573-1619) reign period (ibid.). General reference works on the characters in the novel include Shi Changyu 石昌渝 and Yin Gonghong 尹恭弘, *Jin Ping Mei renwu pu* 金瓶梅人物譜 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji, 1988); Ye Guitong 葉桂桐 and Song Peixian 宋培憲, *Jin Ping Mei renwu zhengzhuan* 金瓶梅人物正傳 (Haikou: Nanhai, 1991); and Lu Ge 魯歌 and Ma Zheng 馬征, *Jin Ping Mei renwu daquan* 金瓶梅人物大全 (Changchun: Jilin wenshi, 1991). The last of these three works contains the names of 856 characters in the novel. These three works do not identify anywhere near the number of Ming historical figures in the novel as Huo Xianjun does. For instance, Ye Guitong and Song Peixian, according to Wu Gan, only identifies 11 characters in the novel as Ming historical figures. See Wu Gan 吳敢, *Ershi shiji Jin Ping Mei yanjiu changbian* 二十世紀金瓶梅研究長編 (Shanghai: Wenhui, 2003), p. 207. Ding Lang 丁朗, *Jin Ping Mei yu Beijing* 金瓶梅與北京 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui, 1996), agrees with the idea that there are 11 such figures in the novel, lists them, and discusses them. See the section entitled “Songdai de gushi li zenma chulaile Mingdai renwu?” 宋代的故事裡怎麼出來了明代人物, pp. 163-69. Lists of different classes or groups of characters as well as an index listing the chapters in which characters appear can be found in Zhu Yixuan 朱一玄, ed., *Jin Ping Mei ziliao huibian* 金瓶梅資料彙編 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue, 1985), pp. 444-86 and 487-555, respectively (the lists include one of “actors and courtesans” [*youling changji* 優伶娼妓], pp. 477-79). Of the encyclopedic dictionaries of the novel that have been published, Huang Lin 黃霖, ed., *Jin Ping Mei da cidian* 金瓶梅大辭典 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 1991), is the best. The section in this work on characters in the novel covers pages 1-148 and includes a subsection on “Actors and Courtesans” (*youling changji* 優伶娼妓), pp. 117-23. Each volume of the Roy translation contains a complete “Cast of Characters” and indexes which include all the appearances of the characters.

⁹ See the mention in the note above of Ding Lang, *Jin Ping Mei yu Beijing*. On pp. 169-79 he discusses the implications he sees in the fact that two young male singers (*xiaoyou* 小優) in the novel (Wang Xiang and Li Ming) share the same names as two Ming imperial relatives. See also Gu Murui 顧目瑞, “*Jin Ping Mei* zhong de san ge Mingdai ren—Tantao *Jin Ping Mei* chengshu niandai yu zuozhe wenti de yige tujing” 金瓶梅中的三個明代人—探討金瓶梅成書年代與作者問題的一個途徑, reprinted in Zhu Yixuan 朱一玄, ed., *Jin Ping Mei gujin yanjiou*

is primarily writing about the situation in the Ming can be seen in that articles are now written refuting the idea (if it were not an established dictum it would not be worth trying to overthrow or modify).¹⁰

The *Jin Ping Mei* as Encyclopedic Source on the Late Ming

Articles written on the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* that are interested in using the novel as a source for some aspect of Ming dynasty culture or society are very popular. A very rough count from a search around the turn of the century turned up more than 50 recent articles whose titles indicate that the articles are interested in mining the novel for what it supposedly says about some aspect of Ming culture. The topics stretch from material culture (textiles, clothing and ornament, shoes, food and drink, furniture, etc.) to religion, economics, and politics. Because of the lack of detailed descriptions in other contemporary sources, articles on material culture are particularly popular, with over 10 dealing with eating, drinking, or banqueting. In tandem with this interest in what the novel can supposedly tell us about specific topics is the claim that the novel as a whole is an encyclopedia of Ming society, a history of the social customs of the latter half of the 16th century, or a huge mirror for the social history of the late Ming.¹¹

The Amount of Musical Description in the Novel

Among the things that are described in the novel, music and musical activities are as prominently featured as the descriptions of things for which the novel is perhaps better known,

jicheng 金瓶梅研究集成, 6 vols. (Yanji: Yanbian daxue, 1999), I, 471-80. Ding Lang, *Jin Ping Mei yu Beijing*, pp. 158-62, discusses Ming events reflected in the novel.

¹⁰ For an example of an article that argues that the Song setting of the novel needs to be taken seriously and that the bulk of the novel is basically in accord with Song dynasty history and culture, see Wang Ji 王基, “*Jin Ping Mei* yu Dongjing Kaifeng—*Jin Ping Mei* shehui jiazhi chutan” 金瓶梅與東京開封—金瓶梅社會價值初探, *Kaifeng daxue xuebao* 開封大學學報 2005.1: 26-32. However, it is also quite easy to find material in the novel that goes against the Song historical record. See Zhou Juntao 周鈞韜, *Jin Ping Mei sucai lai yuan* 金瓶梅素材來源 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 1991), pp. 90-91, 105-111, 163, 190, 245-49, and 318-20 for the discussion of some particular examples. The anonymous commentator on the Chongzhen version of the novel, and Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 after him, tend to see examples of anachronism or internal contradictions in the novel as warnings to the reader not to take the description in the novel at face value, and this approach can also be found in modern scholars influenced by traditional commentary on the novel, such as David Roy or his students, Andrew Plaks and Katherine Carlitz.

¹¹ See the titles of these articles: Chen Dongyou 陳東有, “Mingchao shehui de baike quanshu: Huashuo *Jin Ping Mei zhi er*” 明朝社會的百科全書: 話說金瓶梅之二, *Zhishi chuang* 知識窗 1993.6; Li Shiren 李時人, “*Jin Ping Mei*: Zhongguo shiliu shiji houqi shehui fengsu shi” 金瓶梅中國十六世紀後期社會風俗史, *Wenxue yichan* 文學遺產 1987.5: 103-12; and Shaoyu 韶玉 and Hongda 弘達, “*Jin Ping Mei*—Wan Ming shehui lishi de yi mian jujing” 金瓶梅—晚明社會歷史的一面巨鏡 *Xuchang shizhuan xuebao* 許昌師專學報 1990.2.11-14. Dai Bufan 戴不凡, “*Jin Ping Mei* zhong de xiqu he fangzhi shiliao” 金瓶梅中的戲曲和紡織史料, refers to the novel as a “reference book” (*cankao shu* 參考書) (see the reprint of this article in *Jin Ping Mei gujin yanjiu jicheng*, I, 564).

such as sex. We can also say that when compared to novels of the Ming, one cannot find another in which music plays so central and constant a part.¹² Chen Sihai 陳四海 and Yan Zengshan 閔增山 have said that from the contents of the novel we can say that in the lives of urban commoners (*shimin* 市民) of the mid and late Ming, music was an integral a part as wine.¹³ Other writers have claimed that the degree of the infatuation (*zuixin* 醉心) with oral performing literature (*quyi* 曲藝) of the author of the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* surpasses even that of the 20th century writers Lao She 老舍 and Zhao Shuli 趙樹理.¹⁴ The first appendix to this paper, containing brief narrative records of the sonic and musical descriptions in the novel, took up, in an earlier pre-2014 version, 86 single-spaced pages, was 54,566 words in length, and included 786 items (each item averaging almost 70 words a piece).¹⁵

Cultural Information in the Novel and Attempts to Date It

Some of the interest in China in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* as an historical source for the social and cultural history of the Ming dynasty can be seen as a way to justify interest in and

¹² One can find scholars who claim that the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* has the most of certain kinds of musical description or source material of any traditional Chinese novel (see Gao Linghui 高凌暉, “Shilun xiaoshuo *Jin Ping Mei* zhong sanqu de yunyong” 試論小說金瓶梅中散曲的運用, *Jinzhong shizhuan xuebao* 晉中師專學報 1999.1:40-42, p. 40) or that only one, Chen Sen’s 陳森 *Pinhua baojian* 品花寶鑑, surpasses it (see Sezhai 澀齋, “*Jin Ping Mei cihua* li de xiju ziliao” 金瓶梅詞話裡的戲劇資料, in Zhou Juntao 周鈞韜, ed., *Jin Ping Mei ziliao huibian xubian, 1919-1949* 金瓶梅資料彙編續編, 1919-1949 [Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1991], pp. 132 [originally published in *Juxue yuekan* 劇學學刊 3.9 (1934)]). For a description in English of some of the musical material in this 19th century novel, see Lindy Li Mark, “*Kunqu* and Theatre in the Transvestite Novel, *Pinhua baojian*,” *CHINOPERL Papers* 14 (1986): 37-59. Of the novels of the Republican period known to me, the one with the most musical (again theatrical) description is Pan Jingfu 潘鏡芙 and Chen Moxiang 陳墨香, *Liyuan waish* 梨園外史 (Beijing: Baowen tang shudian, 1989), first published in 1925. Both it and *Pinhua baojian*, unlike the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, are specifically on the theatre and/or actors. A 1915 novel, *Ruci guanchang* 如此官場 (a.k.a., *Ximi zhuan* 戲迷傳) has over 700 play titles worked into its narrative. For a list of the titles, see Zhang Chu 張褚 and Wang Zipeng 王子鵬, “Jiaodian hou ji” 校點後記, in Yu linglong guanzhu 玉玲瓏館主, *Ruci guanchang* 如此官場 (Beijing: Baowen tang shudian, 1989), pp. 299-306.

¹³ Chen Sihai 陳四海 and Yan Zengshan 閔增山, “Cong *Jin Ping Mei cihua* kan Mingdai zhong-houqi shimin yinyue de liuxing jiqi xingtai” 從金瓶梅詞話看明代中後期市民音樂的流行及其型態, *Zhongyang yinyue xueyuan xuebao* 中央音樂學院學報 1995.4: 90-95, p. 93. We should, of course, be critical of the rather naive conception of the relationship between social reality and literature involved in this statement.

¹⁴ Ding Lang, *Jing Ping Mei yu Beijing*, p. 229. Ding Lang goes on to claim (p. 237) that the author of the novel could even perform many forms of oral performing literature (*quyi* 曲藝).

¹⁵ See the comparative charts in appendices 2-6. Only two of the 100 chapters did not merit an item. Three chapters have 19 items. The chapter with the most words in its items in the pre-2014 version of appendix one had 1,845 words and is not one of these three with 19 items. For remarks on the scope and procedure for the items in this appendix, see the introductory paragraphs to appendix one.

publications on what has always been a controversial work.¹⁶ As the cultural status of the novel has improved in recent years, and there is more research that is focused on the novel itself, we also see research aimed at using the descriptions of cultural phenomena in the novel to date the novel itself. Thus we end up in a kind of funny situation in which the very same descriptions are being used to fill in the picture of Ming social history at the same time that they are being used as evidence to prove that the author lived at a certain time period in the Ming rather than a different one, and that he lived in a certain part of Ming China,¹⁷ both of which require external corroboration. In other words, the descriptions in the novel that are so prized because they are so rare are then judged against the sketchy archive that made turning to the novel attractive in the first place. It is, no wonder, then, that this approach has not led to any new, widely accepted, theories of the identity of the author or the geographical background of the novel.¹⁸

The Author of the *Jin Ping Mei*

We do not know who the author of the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* was. The only person who claimed to have been acquainted with the author did so only in a preface to the novel, but that preface was written under a pseudonym (Xinxinzi 欣欣子),¹⁹ and in the preface no real details are given about the author, who is only referred to by the preface writer by a pseudonym (Xiaoxiaosheng 笑笑生 of Lanling 蘭陵).²⁰ The most complete summary of scholarship on the novel to date, Wu Gan’s 吳敢 *Ershi shiji Jin Ping Mei yanjiu shi changbian* 二十世紀金瓶梅研

¹⁶ Things have changed, of course. He Lianghao 何良昊, writing in 2003, claims that in the present day if you gave an unexpurgated copy of the novel to someone wanting to read something with some sexual content (*kan dian seqing neirong* 看點色情內容), such a person would reject the novel saying that it was completely unexciting (*yidian bu ciji* 一點不刺激) and not worthy of being called pornography (*huangshu* 黃書). See He Lianghao 何良昊, *Shiqing ernü: Jin Ping Mei yu minsu wenhua* 世情兒女: 金瓶梅與民俗文化 (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin, 2003), p. 85. Wu Gan, *Ershi shiji*, lists 199 books (see pp. 158-257) and 1,949 articles (see pp. 258-369) on the novel that were written in the 20th century. The vast majority (see pp. 193-257 and pp. 294-369) were published since 1990.

¹⁷ Although the article itself has not been available to me, the title of the following article shows that it is focused on these two questions: Xu Wenjun 徐文君, “Ting xi ting ‘yin’—Cong *Jin Ping Mei* zhong de xiqu, sanqu yanchu ziliao kan *Jin Ping Mei* chuanguo de shijian yi qi zuozhe de jiguan.” 聽戲聽音—從金瓶梅中的戲曲,散曲演出資料看金瓶梅創作的時間及其作者的籍貫 *Jin Ping Mei wenhua yanjiu* 金瓶梅文化研究 2 (1999).

¹⁸ For an example of a debate between two authors using the same external sources, see Cai Donyong 蔡敦用, “Sanqu, juqu yu *Jin Pin Mei* chengshu niandai” 散曲劇曲與成書年代, *Shehui kexue jikan* 社會科學季刊 1991.2: 143-45.

¹⁹ For a heavily annotated translation of this preface see Roy, I, 3-5, 455-62 (notes). Roy points out many similarities in approach between this preface and the novel, and argues (1, 455-56, note 1) that Xinxinzi, if not the author himself, was very familiar with the novel. On pp. xxii-xxxiii of the introduction to this volume, Roy also discusses the possibility that the preface writer and the author were really friends.

²⁰ See Roy, I, xxiii-xxiv of the introduction, on the possible significance of this name.

究長編, lists 10 candidates for the authorship of the novel whose proposal has had wide influence (*guang you yingxiang* 廣有影響), 7 that have some evidential basis (*lüe you jikao* 略有稽考), an additional 14 which involve specific named persons (*zhi you xingming* 指有姓名), and another 26 which involve more general identifications (*longtong chengzhi* 籠統稱之), in which the authorial candidate is identified by a pseudonym only,²¹ or as a member of a class of people.²² Of the “top ten” in this list of 57 proposals, six, or more than half, were playwrights (Wang Shizhen 王世貞, Tu Long 屠龍, Li Kaixian 李開先, Xu Wei 徐謂, Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖, and Feng Menglong 馮夢龍). All six of these men, as well as the other four in the “top ten” (Jia Sanjin 賈三進, Wang Zhideng 王稚登, Li Xianfang 李先芳, and Shen Defu 沈德符²³) were very well known and moved in the highest levels of the social elite of the day. The candidates in the last of Wu Gan’s categories of candidates for the author of the novel range in social status from the very top to near the bottom. Among the latter are professional writers of vernacular drama and fiction (*shuhui caizi* 書會才子).

The Collective Authorship Theory

Some scholars have argued that the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* is not the work of one author but the product of collective creation (*jiti chuanguo* 集體創作). The main piece of “evidence” that they point to is precisely the amount of oral performing literature (*shuochang wenxue* 說唱文學—songs, drama, prosimetric and prose narratives, etc.), the bulk of which involves music, copied into the novel, and the unorthodox way that generic conventions from oral performing literature, such as the use of song for speech (*yi qu dai yan* 以曲代言), are employed in the novel. The premise is that prior to the novel there were oral versions of the story that were prosimetric and were performed by professional oral storytellers, and that the novel had been expanded and added to over the years by generations of such storytellers. The presence in the novel of so much description of oral performing literature, and more particularly the novel’s adaptation of

²¹ An example would be Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng 蘭陵笑笑生, Wu Gan, *Ershi shiji*, p. 41, candidate number 33.

²² Wu Gan, *Ershi shiji*, pp. 33-43. Wu Gan’s own proposal is that it would be better to let the question of the identity of the author rest until more evidence becomes available (p. 43).

²³ Shen Defu, while he does not seem to have written a play, did write a lot about drama and popular song. His writings on such subjects were collected by a later writer under the title *Guqu zayan* 顧曲雜言. A convenient reprint can be found in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成, 10 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju, 1959), IV, 193-228.

narrative techniques borrowed from drama and other types of oral performing literature,²⁴ were taken by this school of thought on the novel as vestiges from the story’s previous existence as a work of oral performing literature, or alternatively, as the result of an imperfect job of editing or novelization of the material. The *cihua* 詞話 that appears in the title of the novel was also thought to be proof that the novel belonged to a genre of fiction closely connected to oral performing literature.²⁵ This conception of the novel became very influential in China since it was pushed by some of the scholars most influential, beginning in the early 1980s, in the establishment of the novel as a legitimate subject of study, such as Liu Hui 劉輝 and Xu Shuofang 徐朔方.²⁶

The Theory of the Individual, Genius Author

On the other hand, the most influential scholars of the novel in the West, Andrew Plaks and David Roy (and Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 [1670-1698], author of the most extensive traditional commentary on the novel, before them), conceive of the author as an individualistic creator fully in control of his materials, which he consciously manipulates to achieve certain effects.²⁷ While Plaks was less interested in the various levels of heterogeneity in the novel, using basically a structuralist approach to stress the organic unity of the novel at the same time as he took it as a

²⁴ On these experimental uses, see David Rolston, “Oral Performing Literature in Traditional Chinese Fiction: Nonrealistic Usages in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* and their Influence,” *CHINOPERL Papers* 17 (1994): 1-110, especially “Experimental, Formal Uses,” pp. 27-36.

²⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

²⁶ For a summary of this point of view on the novel, labeled as “Jiti leiji shuo” 集體累積說, see Wu Gan, *Ershi shiji*, pp. 31-33. Wu Gan points out that many of the adherents of this theory also believe that there was a final redactor (*xiedingzhe* 寫定者) of the novel. Some of the earliest writers on the novel as a repository of historical material on drama and music, such as Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 and Feng Yuanjun 馮沅君, who published articles on such topics before 1949, held this idea that the presence of this material in the novel was proof of its origins in oral performance. Feng Yuanjun, for instance, in her “*Jin Ping Mei cihua* zhong de wenxue ziliao” 金瓶梅詞話中的文學資料, said that the “rhymed text put into the mouths of characters” (*daiyanyu de yunyu* 代言語的韻語) in the novel is there to provide material to be sung during oral storytelling (*shuohua* 說話) or, at the very least, represent traces leftover from such a generic practice. Originally published in a collection of her essays (*Guju shuohui* 古劇說彙 [Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1947]), this essay has been reprinted in Zhou Juntao 周鈞韜, ed., *Jin Ping Mei ziliao huibian xubian, 1919-1949* 金瓶梅資料彙編續編, 1919-1949 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1991), pp. 376-406 (see p. 381 for the specific reference). For an example of the persistence of this notion of how the novel was composed, see Ding Lang, *Jin Ping Mei yu Beijing*, chapter 9, in which the claim is made that the encyclopedic nature (*baike quanshu shi* 百科全書式) of the novel would not have been possible without hundreds of years of oral transmission (p. 229), and that the novel itself is a work of oral performing literature that was prepared not for reading but for performance (p. 224).

²⁷ This is not to say that there are not Chinese scholars who also hold this point of view. For a list of them, see Wu Gan, *Ershi shiji*, p. 31. But the longevity and influence of the collective theory of authorship in China and its comparative absence in the west is very striking.

model for the genre of the literati novel that he wanted to establish,²⁸ his one-time teacher David Roy combined a new criticism approach that presumed that a novel worth study would be characterized by the contribution of every detail toward a larger whole at the same time that he mobilized Bakhtin’s concept of the novel as polyphonic as a way to theorize the many voices in the novel that some have understood as being in conflict with each other.²⁹ Later, in reaction to these two “patriarchs” of Western “Jinology,” Philip Ruston presented the novel as essentially nonlinear,³⁰ Shang Wei tried to explain the heterogeneity of the novel as a function of new types of page layouts and reading strategies produced by the late Ming print boom,³¹ and Mingdong Gu embraced the idea that the novel is paradoxical by authorial choice.³² Regardless of how the phenomenon is to be ultimately interpreted, or what we might think about the intentionality behind it, we must always remember the proclivity of the author of the novel to use a “cut and paste” approach that incorporates into the narrative a vast array of heterogeneous textual material.³³

The Date the Novel was Written

Associated with the difficulty in identifying the author(s) of the novel and his or their purpose in writing it, is the lack of certainty concerning when the novel was written. Although we know that the novel seems to have been substantially completed by the time we begin to get mentions of its circulation in manuscript in the 1590s, scholars are divided as to whether it was written in (and reflects) the Jiajing reign period (1522-1566) or the beginning or middle of the Wanli reign period (1573-1619).³⁴

²⁸ See his *Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), chapter two. He also published an article in Chinese to specifically refute the idea that the novel was composed collectively: Pu Andi 浦安迪, “*Jin Ping Mei* fei ‘jiti chuangzuo’” 金瓶梅非集體創作, *Jin Ping Mei yanjiu* 金瓶梅研究 2 (1991): 82-90.

²⁹ See Roy, I, “Introduction,” especially pp. xliii-xlv.

³⁰ Philip Rushton, *The Jin Ping Mei and the Nonlinear Dimensions of the Chinese Novel* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994).

³¹ Shang Wei, “*Jin Ping Mei* and Late Ming Print Culture,” in Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu, eds., *Writing and Materiality in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 187-238.

³² Gu Mingdong, “Paradox of Vision and Poetics of Paradox: Ideology and Form in the *Jin Ping Mei*,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 37.2 (1999): 175-203.

³³ Convenient resources to begin to get a handle on this aspect of the novel are Patrick Hanan’s “Sources of the *Chin P’ing Mei*,” *Asia Major*, n.s., 10.1 (1963): 23-67; Zhou Juntao, *Sucui*; and the notes to David Roy’s translation of the novel. We must also keep in mind that for the author of the novel, his message was always more important than any concern for the kind of “realism” stressed in 19th century European fiction, for instance. Even song titles can be used ironically in the novel (see Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, pp. 129-30).

³⁴ For a brief summary, see Wu Gan, *Ershi shiji*, pp. 28-30.

Geographical Models: Dialect

Uncertainty about the identity of the author has also meant uncertainty about what part of China the author grew up in and what part of China was most influential on the creation of the description of the geographical setting of the novel. From the beginning, writers on the novel have been quick to identify the use of different kinds of regional dialect in parts of the novel and to use that as evidence about either the author’s native place or place of residence later in life. But most of this kind of argument has been rather unscientific and unconvincing.

Geographical Models: Qinghe and Linqing

While it is true that the novel clearly says that Ximen Qing is a native of a place called Qinghe in Shandong, there are a number of things that make it hard to take this idea at face value. Readers of the *Shuihu zhuan* will notice that Ximen Qing’s house has been moved from Yanggu to Qinghe. David Roy has argued that this was for the symbolic meanings of Qinghe, which he thinks are exploited in the novel.³⁵ Others will notice problems with the geography of Qinghe as presented in the novel (for instance, in the novel the distance from Qinghe to Linqing is presented as being very short, when in actuality they were 200 *li* distant from each other³⁶). Others have problems with the novel’s description of Qinghe itself. One scholar has argued that there is no way a small district town such as Qinghe could have such large temples or such extensive licensed quarters.³⁷ Perhaps this is one of the things that has made Linqing, a much larger city located on the Grand Canal, attractive to some as the real historical model for the Qinghe of the novel.³⁸

Geographical Models: Beijing and Nowhere

Scholars have also pointed out that mentions of a Jiaofang 教坊 or Imperial Music Office in Qinghe is impossible, since in the Ming there were only two places which had such offices: Nanjing, the main capital for the first several reigns of the dynasty and subsidiary capital

³⁵ Roy I, “Introduction,” pp. xxxv-vi.

³⁶ Zhou Jingzhu 周靖竹, *Jin Ping Mei zuozhe dui wo shuo* 金瓶梅作者對我說 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 2003), p. 202.

³⁷ Sezhai, “*Jin Ping Mei cihua li de xiju ziliao*,” pp. 131-32 (originally published in 1934).

³⁸ There have been quite a number of articles and at least one book on this subject. The book is entitled *Linqing yu Jin Ping Mei* 臨清與金瓶梅 and was published in 1992 by the Linqing association for the study of the novel. For a description and table of contents of the book, see Wu Gan, *Ershi shiji*, p. 214. At the international conference on the novel held in Zaozhuang, Shandong, in 1992, we were told that a restaurant specializing in the kinds of meals described in the novel had been opened in modern Linqing.

thereafter, and Beijing.³⁹ The late Wu Xiaoling 吳曉鈴, who seems to have never published a complete report on his reseaches into the matter, was nonetheless a very influential advocate of the idea that the novel was written about and reflects Ming dynasty Beijing.⁴⁰ Consequently, one can find articles and book chapters arguing that the descriptions in the novel of customs associated with music are basically accurate with respect to those customs as followed in Beijing at the time.⁴¹ But at least one scholar has pointed out that the novel is, after all, a work of fiction and not of geography, and the real model for Ximen Qing’s estate is also fictional, and cannot be found anywhere in China.⁴²

Fiction as a Source

Fiction is not usually the first source that one goes to find out about historical practices, because fiction is, after all, fiction. If there has always been a problem with “fictional” practices in traditional historiography (the recording of the speeches of men who supposedly died alone, for instance), surely that problem is even more severe in real works of fiction? What can fiction give us that more standard historical sources cannot?

Craig Clunas on Using Fiction

One of the corroborative sources of Craig Clunas’ very influential *Superfluous Things* is the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, which he described as “the most useful work, almost a crash-course in Ming civilization. . . . Despite being ostensibly set in the twelfth century, this anonymous masterpiece is generally held to reflect social conditions and attitudes in the decade immediately preceding its probable first publication in 1617.”⁴³ Even though Clunas begins his discussion of

³⁹ See, for instance Sezhai, “*Jin Ping Mei cihua li de xiju ziliao*,” pp. 131-32, and Tao Muning 陶慕寧, “Ming jiaofang yanjiu kao” 明教坊研究考, *Nankai xuebao* 南開學報 1999.6: 106-109.

⁴⁰ Roy, I, “Introduction,” pp., xxxv-xxxvi, categorically states that the “real model underlying the description of the locale in which the events of the novel take place is neither Yanggu or Qinghe, nor any of the other sites in Shandong Province that have been proposed, but the city of Beijing. . .” (Romanization changed for consistency) and cites Wu’s 1989 article of the subject, which was published in Taiwan. Later articles, and at least one book (Ding Lang, *Beijing yu Jin Ping Mei*), have appeared upholding this basic idea.

⁴¹ For example, see Chen Zhao 陳詔, “*Jin Ping Mei de sangzang lisu fanyingle nage diqu de tedian?*” 金瓶梅的喪葬禮俗反應了那個地區的特點, in Liu Hui 劉輝 and Yang Yang 楊揚, ed., *Jin Ping Mei zhi mi* 金瓶梅之謎 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian, 1989), pp. 260-68 (especially p. 266).

⁴² Zhou Jingzhu, *Jin Ping Mei zuozhe dui wo shuo*, p. 202. Incidentally, the author of this book believes that Tu Long is the author of the novel. The book is set up as an interview between the author and Tu Long.

⁴³ Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 38. Clunas’ 1617 date surely comes from the fact that the date of the Xinxinzi preface covers dates stretching from December 28, 1617 to January 25, 1618. There is debate over whether the edition in which this preface appears is the first edition or not. See Roy, I, “Introduction,” p. xx and the accompanying endnote. In an earlier work, Clunas wrote about the *Jin Ping Mei* this way: “The immense

fictional sources with the words “Deliberately sparing use has also been made of Ming imaginative literature, in the form of the prose fiction. . . ,” he makes an exception for the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* and cites it with some frequency.⁴⁴ In a separate book on Chinese furniture, when justifying his use of fictional sources he said that “Imaginative literature is frequently more informative [than standard sources], and three works in particular [the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳, and *Honglou meng*] give a rich and rounded picture of life in the mansions of the wealthy (if not always the tasteful).”⁴⁵ To Clunas, the fact that the novel does not appear to him to be purposefully giving us information about the Ming is what makes the information in it especially useful: “The anonymous author of the *Jin Ping Mei* did not intend to supply us with information about furniture, and so what is said is valuable for its unscreened and unconscious nature, giving more of an insight into the life of the period.”⁴⁶ In *Superfluous Things*, Clunas also saw analogies between the novel and the cultural guidebooks of the late Ming, the focus of his study (one of these supplies the title of his book): “the novel, too, is a consumer luxury of the late Ming which, like the guides to elegant living, mirrors as well as embodies the social patterns in which it circulated and was enjoyed.”⁴⁷

sweep of its narrative, . . . and the vast cast of characters . . . , are vehicles to introduce a truly astonishing body of knowledge about life in late imperial China. Manners, jokes, drama, popular religion are only a few of the topics on which it contains rich, but relatively untapped resources for the historian.” See Craig Clunas, “The Novel *Jin Ping Mei* as a Source for the Study of Ming Furniture,” *Orientalism* 23.1 (January 1992): 60-68, p. 60. In this article and in his *Chinese Furniture* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1988), Clunas also uses illustrations from the Chongzhen edition of the *Jin Ping Mei* as historical sources, as does Curtis Evarts, “Furniture in the Novel *Jin Ping Mei*: A Comparison of 17th and 18th Century Illustrations,” *Journal of the Classical Chinese Furniture Society* 3.4 (Winter 1993): 21-45. The 17th century illustrations that the title of that article refers to is the set of woodblock illustrations in the Chongzhen edition, while the 18th century set refers to a set of paintings based on them. Reproductions of both can be found in Wei Ziyun 魏子雲, ed., *Jin Ping Mei yanjiu ziliao huibian* 金瓶梅研究資料彙編, Vol. 1 (Taipei: Tianyi, 1987), pp. 115-216. Evarts also published an article entitled “Furniture in the Novel *Jin Ping Mei*,” *Asian Culture Quarterly* 22.3 (Fall 1994): 21-35. Wei-hua Zhang, “Music in Ming Daily Life; As Portrayed in the Narrative *Jin Ping Mei*,” *Asian Music* 23.2 (Spring/Summer 1992): 105-34, also uses both sets of illustrations as evidence. Xu Dajun 徐大軍, “*Jin Ping Mei cihua* zhong youguan *Xixiang ji* zaju ziliao xilun” 金瓶梅詞話中有關西廂記雜劇資料析論, *Zhongguo dianji yu wenhua* 中國典籍與文化 2003.3: 51-56, p. 55, claims that although there are plenty of records concerning the *Xixiang ji* in the Ming written by literati, none of those records give much of an idea of the place of the play in daily life. Dai Bufan, “*Jin Ping Mei* zhong de xiqu he fangzhi shiliao,” p. 560, claims that this novel contains the only description of the performance of the once popular Haiyan 海鹽 style of Southern drama performance.

⁴⁴ See Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, p. 213 (references to the novel listed in the index).

⁴⁵ Craig Clunas, *Chinese Furniture* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1988), p. 13. In his *Superfluous Things*, Ximen Qing is more often than not invoked as a negative example of “bought culture” rather than the “learned or intuited culture” (my terms, not Clunas’) of the cultural guides at the heart of his book.

⁴⁶ Clunas, “The Novel *Jin Ping Mei* as a Source for the Study of Ming Furniture,” p. 61.

⁴⁷ Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, p. 39.

Is the Description in the *Jin Ping Mei* “Realistic”?

Clunas is also careful to caution against some of the problems of using the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* as a source for information on late Ming cultural history. He says that although it “contains a wealth of ‘realistic’ social detail, . . . it has to be used with caution as a source of ‘facts’ about the Ming period, due allowance being made for comic exaggeration, authorial irony, and other distorting rhetorical devices.”⁴⁸ Elsewhere I have written on the “nonrealistic” uses of oral performing literature in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*.⁴⁹ Although the qualifier “nonrealistic” was used in preference to “unrealistic” because the emphasis was on levels of meaning that went beyond or in different directions than realistic depiction and was not meant to imply a basic antagonism to realism as might be the case with the qualifier “unrealistic,” there is no doubt that when there was a conflict between realism and satire, or between realism and allegory, the author felt perfectly free to choose the second options of these two pairs.⁵⁰

Chinese Scholars and Realism I

Chinese scholars, on the other hand, in their efforts to rehabilitate the novel and make it a respectable subject of study, have insistently described it as a work of realism (*xieshi zhuyi* 寫實主義). We find quotations such as the following: “Any work of literature is a mirror [*jingzi* 鏡子] of the times, a truthful [*zhenshi* 真實] reflection [*fanying* 反應] of social life. All of the description of drama [*xiqu* 戲曲] in the novel [the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*] is the same, in all cases it is an honest [*zhongshi* 忠實] record [*jilu* 記錄] of the dramatic activities of a particular historical period.”⁵¹ The seemingly overindulgent descriptions of sexual and other entertainment activities in the novel can be recouped by saying that they are reflective of what was going on in the world at the time of the writing of the novel.⁵² The one article in English on the general topic of music

⁴⁸ Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, p. 131.

⁴⁹ Rolston, “Oral Performing Literature.”

⁵⁰ See, for instance, *ibid.*, pp. 23-24 and 35-36. An instance in which it seems the content of the novel departs from what we know from more historical sources for the late Ming is the novel’s inclusion of *yuanben* 院本 or farces in the theatrical programs described in the novel, when sources such as Shen Defu’s 沈德符 *Wanli yehuo bian* 萬曆野獲編 claim that *yuanben* were no longer performed. See Sezhai, “*Jin Ping Mei cihua li de xiju ziliao*,” p. 132. On realism and the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, see also Katherine Carlitz, *The Rhetoric of the Chin p’ing mei* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 70-71 and 87-89.

⁵¹ Liu Hui 劉輝, “Lun xiaoshuo shi ji huode xiqu shi” 論小說史即活的戲曲史, in his *Xiaoshuo xiqu lunji* 小說戲曲論集 (Taipei: Guanya, 1992), pp. 78-108 (see p. 78 for the quote).

⁵² See, for instance, the very influential article by the historian of the Ming, Wu Han 吳晗, “*Jin Ping Mei de zhuzuo shidai jiqi shehui beijing*” 金瓶梅的著作時代及其社會背景, reprinted in Zhou Juntao, ed. *Jin Ping Mei ziliao*

in the novel, Wei-hua Zhang’s “Music in Ming Daily Life, As Portrayed in the Narrative *Jin Ping Mei*,” remains largely within this understanding of the relationship between the novel and the social reality of the days of its composition.⁵³

Chinese Scholars and Realism II: Recent Sophistication

Thankfully, with the opening up of China to the rest of the world that has accompanied the Reforms, scholars in China have begun to move away from the once dominant and hegemonic simplistic and crude conceptions of how literature reflects the society that produced it. For example, in his preface to a recent edition of the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, Ning Zongyi 寧宗一 has said: “. . . although it is not necessarily the case that we can obtain all that much verifiable [*keyi kaozheng de* 可以考證的] historical reality [*lishi shishi* 歷史事實] from the world of the *Jin Ping Mei*, still, the colorful portrait [*tujing* 圖景] of society and the rich and varied images drawn of the characters that are laid out in the *Jin Ping Mei* are indeed an aid to our understanding of certain basic [*benzhi* 本質] aspects of the social life of those times, they have uses [*zuoyong* 作用] that cannot not be replaced by the typical work of history or economics, and they especially have uses [*zuoyong* 作用] for the history of the culture and customs of the people [*minzu wenhua fengsu shi* 民族文化風俗史] so strongly advocated by Balzac and often forgotten by so many historians.”⁵⁴

Standard Sources on Late Ming Music

Although it is becoming more and more common for collections of source material on genres related to Chinese music to include or even focus on creative literature,⁵⁵ there is a heavy

xubian, pp. 94-129 (see especially p. 94), originally published in the inaugural issue of *Wenxue jikan* 文學季刊, 1934. This question of the historical value of the novel has been so important to the groups of scholars studying the novel in China that a number of historians of the Ming were invited to the 1991 national conference on the novel. According to a report on the conference, the historians believed that the novel “truthfully [*zhenshide* 真實的] reflects [*fanying* 反應] the appearance [*mianmao* 面貌] of late feudal society in China” (see Wu Gan, *Ershi shiji*, p. 131).

⁵³ Wei-hua Zhang, “Music in Ming Daily Life, As Portrayed in the Narrative *Jin Ping Mei*,” *Asian Music* 23.2 (Spring/Summer 1992): 105-34. A quotation representative of this can be found on p. 118: “Detailed description of musical performances [in the novel] provide knowledge about the repertoire and performance practices of the time and clarify the differences and instrumentations used for northern and southern styles of performance.”

⁵⁴ Ning Zongyi 寧宗一, “Qianyan” 前言, in Tao Muning, ed., *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, p. 4.

⁵⁵ An older example is Zhao Shanlin 趙山林, ed., *Lidai yongju shige xuanzhu* 歷代詠劇詩歌選注 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian, 1988). Xiao Xinghua 蕭興華, *Zhongguo yinyue shi* 中國音樂史 (Taipei: Wenjin, 1994), pp. 310-11, quotes *Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記.

reliance in works on the history of Chinese music on the analysis of musical samples and on traditional Chinese historical reference works. For example, Liang Zaiping’s 梁在平 collection of materials for Chinese music history, *Zhongguo gudai yinyue shiliao jiyao* 中國古代音樂史料輯要,⁵⁶ is basically a collection of excerpts from traditional encyclopedia. Because of the way those works were compiled and arranged, they emphasize material objects (musical instruments, for instance) rather than the processes and social contexts of music production and consumption.⁵⁷

Sources on Late Ming Music: Records of Visits by Foreigners

Descriptions of late Ming music making by westerners who traveled to China have a certain appeal because their descriptions are typically part of an attempt to describe how Chinese society as a whole works. These foreign visitors to China tended to be interested in almost everything they saw.⁵⁸ They left behind records of banquets they attended, many of which featured musical entertainment.⁵⁹ Their status as missionaries themselves or their close

⁵⁶ Liang Zaiping 梁在平, ed., *Zhongguo gudai yinyue shiliao jiyao* 中國古代音樂史料輯要 (Taipei: Xueyi, 1971).

⁵⁷ See Joseph S. C. Lam, “Chinese Music Historiography: From Yang Yinliu’s *A Draft History of Ancient Chinese Music* to Confucian Classics,” *ACMR Reports* 8.2 (Fall 1995): 1-45. Yang Yinliu does not cite the *Jin Ping Mei* in the section on Ming music. See Yang Yinliu 楊蔭瀏, *Zhongguo gudai yinyue shigao* 中國古代音樂史稿 (Beijing: Renmin yinyue, 1981), pp. 745-1017. The novel also does not appear in his list of reference works (pp. 1027-37; however, the following Ming works of fiction are listed: *Da Tang Qinwang cihua* 大唐秦王詞話本, *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說, *Jingben Tongsu xiaoshuo* 京本通俗小說, *Jingshi tongyan* 警世通言, *Qingping shantang huaben* 清平山堂話本, *Shuihu zhuan*, *Xihu erji* 西湖二集, and *Xihu youlanzhi yu* 西湖遊覽志餘; among Qing works of fiction, *Lao Can youji* is listed but *Honglou meng* is not). On Ming musical sources, also see Lam’s “Ming Music and Music History,” *Ming Studies* 38 (Fall 1997): 21-62. In this last work he does not mention fictional sources, but he has made use of the *Jin Ping Mei* in his other writings. See, for instance, his “The Presence and Absence of Female Musicians and Music in China,” in Dorothy Ko et al., eds., *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 97-120.

⁵⁸ Contrary to the privileging once given to foreign descriptions of China in the writing of Chinese history in the west, not much seems to have been made of these accounts in writing in English on Chinese music. An exception is the work of Lam Ching Hua. See for example, that writer’s “Musical Contact Between China and Europe in the Sixteenth Century,” *Chinese Culture* 39.3 (September 1998): 21-35.

⁵⁹ Martin de Rada, writing in 1575-1576, in his “Relation of the Things of China which is Properly Called Taybin,” has a separate section entitled “Of their manner of eating and their banquets” (pp. 287-90) and gives a fairly complete description of a banquet, beginning with the processional music that greets his party’s arrival, the music that strikes up after they are seated and that was “played continuously for as long as the banquet lasted.” See the translation included in Charles Ralph Boxer, ed., *Southern China in the 16th Century; being the Narrative of Galeote Pereira, Fr. Gaspar da Cruz, O. P., & Fr. Martin de Rada, O. E. S. A. (1550-1575)* (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1967), pp. 289-90. In Fernão Mendes Pinto’s narrative of his voyages, he has a section entitled “Chinese Banqueting Houses,” which describes such establishments in Beijing. He says “There are other buildings in the compound reserved for concerts where full orchestras perform. . . .” See Fernão Mendes Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, Rebecca D. Catz, ed. and tr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), chapter 106, p. 216. He also speaks of banquets that go on for 10 days and cost 20,000 taels of silver (p. 214) and “banquet books” used in

identification with the missionary enterprise in general often led them to describe the religious activities of monks and daoists, which included music.⁶⁰ Although some of them have a good eye for detail, they tend to try to assimilate what they saw through things with which they were familiar with from home (musical instruments, for instance are described in terms of their similarity to western instruments),⁶¹ and their general incompetence in spoken or written Chinese prevented them from understanding what they were seeing in any real depth.⁶² Another distorting influence was the fact that some of the musical performances that they witnessed might not have occurred in the way that they did except for their unusual presence, and they were not in any position to say in what ways the performances they saw might have been specially crafted for their consumption.⁶³

The Description of Music in the Novel: Famous Examples in Chinese Literature

The most famous examples of the performance of music in Chinese literature are probably Bai Juyi's 白居易 “Pipa xing” 琵琶行 and Liu E's 劉鶚 description of the “Lihua dagu” 梨花大鼓 performance in Chapter 2 of his *Lao Can youji* 老殘遊記. Both make heavy use of onomatopoeics (especially the latter) and the idea that the absence of sound surpasses sound (*wusheng sheng you sheng* 無聲勝有聲).⁶⁴ This accords with Susanne Langer's stress on the

these establishments that can be as long as three chapters and list the dishes available and their prices, among other things (p. 215).

⁶⁰ For example, Martin de Rada, writing in 1575-1576, describes how wandering begging monks would get up at dawn to chant their “matins” and “while they sang they played on a great bell and on a drum with its little bells. . . .” Boxer, ed., *Southern China in the 16th Century*, p. 309.

⁶¹ For example, see Gaspar da Cruz in *ibid.*, pp. 144-45.

⁶² Martin de Rada describes the play performed at the banquet mentioned above and his relation to it this way: “Other persons in the middle of the hall acted a play, and what we saw were elegant representations of old stories and works, whose plot was explained to us beforehand, so that although we did not understand the words we well understood what was happening” (*ibid.*, 289-90). However, from his account, it is not possible to decide whether one play (he uses the singular) or selections from several plays (“representations of old stories and works”) was performed. The editor cites an account of the same banquet by a different western participant and claims that based on that account “it is evident that this was a play based” on the *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (*ibid.*, note 2). De Rada was only in China for two months (in Fujian) in 1575. Gaspar da Cruz mentions plays that go on for as much as three nights (*ibid.*, p. 144).

⁶³ For instance, Gaspar da Cruz describes how players would sometimes “go to the carracks [ships] to play, that the Portugals may give them money” (Boxer, *South China*, p. 144). Da Cruz reached Canton in 1556 and only stayed a few months in China. His account was printed in 1569-1570 and first translated into English in 1625. In his writings on his stay there is a separate section entitled “Of some feasts that the Chinese do make and of their music and burials” (*ibid.*, pp. 143-48).

⁶⁴ See Wang Haibei 王海北, “Wenxue zuopin de yinyue miaoxie jiqiao tanwei” 文學作品的音樂描寫技巧探微, *Chongqing gongxueyuan xuebao* 重慶工學院學報 2005.7: 129-31. Music is also very important in the chapters set on Taohua Mountain in *Lao Can youji*. The last of the fragmentary continuations, *Lao Can youji waibian* 老殘遊記外編, begins with onomatopoeic description of the sound of the narrator's musical accompaniment. The description

incommensurability of music and language.⁶⁵ Both draw attention more to the sound of the performance, as opposed to the text that is sung, and to the instrumental accompaniment over the voice, treating voice more as a musical instrument than as a medium for conveying verbal meaning.

The Description of Music in the Novel: Musical Instruments in the Novel

There is at least the mention of the playing of 18 different kinds of musical instruments in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*.⁶⁶ The purchase by Ximen Qing, at the instigation of Ying Bojue and others, of a set of bronze drums and gongs for the substantial amount of 30 taels of silver (45.586-87), and their subsequent deployment to impress guests (they make a very satisfying amount of noise), is recounted with perhaps the most care.⁶⁷

The Description of Music in the Novel: Musical Genres I: Two Ends of a Spectrum: The *Pipa* vs. the *Qin*-Zither

Although not as closely associated with the common people as the *huqin* 胡琴 became in the late Qing, the *pipa* 琵琶, the musical instrument that occurs most often and prominently in the novel, is associated strongly in the novel with popular music, and particularly with sing-song girls.⁶⁸ On the other hand, a musical genre associated with young male singers and actors, southern-style songs (*nanqu* 南曲), dramatic and otherwise, makes use of no melodic instruments at all, and is performed only with percussion, often in the form of the singer keeping time by clapping his hands. Both styles of music are popular, but we can also say that they are

of the performance in Chapter 2 of the novel is quoted in Yang Yinliu, *Zhongguo gudai yinyue shigao*, pp. 835-37 and Xiao Xinghua, *Zhongguo yinyue shi* (Taipei: Wenjin, 1994), pp. 310-11. In both Liu E and Bai Juyi, musical description concentrates on instrumental music and not the content of any lyrics that are sung (in contradistinction to the practice in *Jin Ping Mei cihua*).

⁶⁵ See Alex Aronson, *Music and the Novel: A Study in 20th Century Fiction* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1980), p. 22.

⁶⁶ Chen Sihai and Yan Zengshan, “Cong *Jin Ping Mei cihua* kan Mingdai zhong-houqi shimin yinyue de liuxing ji qi xingtai,” *Zhongyang yinyue xueyuan xuebao* 1995.4: 90-95, p. 94. Feng Yuanjun, “Wenxue shiliao,” p. 405, lists only 15 instruments. According to her, no more than four or six are used together at any one time. She says that the *pipa* is the sole instrument described 14 times and the *zheng* 箏 7 times. On the following page she notes that there are eight instances in which performers clap their hands to keep time (she thinks these are examples of using the hands to replace the clappers, *yi shou dai ban* 以手代板).

⁶⁷ Eunuch He is also described as having a set of bronze drums and gongs (71.1017-21).

⁶⁸ This instrument is mentioned 95 times in the items in the pre-2014 version of the first appendix to this paper. On the connections between the *huqin* and commoners, and the fact that the *pipa* is probably the instrument most commonly depicted in the late Qing illustrations that he surveyed, see Colin Huehns, “Musical Instruments of the *Huqin* Family in the Late 19th Century Illustrated Periodical *Dianshi zhai*,” *Journal of Asian History* 36.1 (2002): 74-98 (see p. 76 on the *pipa* in particular).

very portable, and that the sound produced in their performance carries fairly well (although perhaps not as well as the purely instrumental processional music).⁶⁹

At the opposite end of the scale is *qin*-zither (*qin* 琴) music, strongly associated with the highest levels of elite literati culture,⁷⁰ and supposedly performed as part of a regime of self-cultivation or in the company of a small number of like-minded friends in very intimate settings. As famous literati descriptions of music often speak of the absence of sound, we get literal descriptions of soundless performances of the *qin*-zither.⁷¹

As we might expect, Ximen Qing can neither play the *qin*-zither nor is he shown in the presence of the performance of one.⁷² The only mentions of the playing of the instrument occur in poems quoted by the narrator at the beginning of chapters (29.363, 69.981, and 71.1016), the middle of them (78.1189), or in songs that are sung (44.576-77 and 61.838). Two of these mentions (61.838 and 69.981) refer to romantic uses of the instrument, by Zhang Junrui 張君瑞 in the *Xixiang ji* 西廂記, and the seduction of Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君 by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如, respectively. Zhuo Wenjun and Sima Xiangru are also mentioned in a passage of parallel prose in which the instrument of seduction is the related *se*-zither (*se* 瑟; e.g., 37.483-84).

Ximen Qing does end up having *qin*-zithers in his study in its various reincarnations (31.394, 36.479, 52.689, and 67.935), but the descriptions are so sparse that it is even impossible to tell whether he has more than one. In three of these four instances, the same stereotypical language is used to describe it/them: *xiaosa* 瀟灑 (refined and elegant).⁷³ His *qin*-zither(s) might as well be stringless, it/they are never played. It/they are just items of the interior decoration.

⁶⁹ Processional music is used, for instance, to “drum” up commercial attention at the opening of Ximen Qing’s new silk shop (chapter 60) and Chen Jingji’s reopening of a tavern (chapter 98), as well as for the arrival of important guests. See Liang Jinzhi 梁今知, “*Jin Ping Mei suojian wan Ming shizhen yinyue huodong*” 金瓶梅所見晚明市鎮音樂活動, *Xuzhou shifan daxue xuebao* 徐州師範大學學報 1994.2: 69-70, p. 70.

⁷⁰ Yue Sheng 樂聲, *Zhongguo yueqi bowuguan* 中國樂器博物館 (Beijing: Shishi, 2005), devotes the first 15 pages and almost 50 illustrations to the *qin*-zither. The next most pictured instrument, the *zheng*, has only 24 illustrations. Only a couple of other instruments have as many as ten illustrations.

⁷¹ See Kenneth J. DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China* (Ann Arbor, MI: The Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1982), p. 144 and elsewhere on “stringless” (*wuxian* 無線) *qin*-zithers.

⁷² Even Jia Baoyu, the protagonist of the *Honglou meng* and a much more cultured and privileged person than Ximen Qing, is described as not being able to recognize *qin*-zither tablature and is mocked for talking about watching the playing of the instrument rather than listening to it and otherwise not being a true knower of the tone (*zhiyin* 知音; see chapters 86-87 of that novel).

⁷³ The same phrase is used to describe the interior decorating (which also includes at least one *qin*-zither) when Ximen Qing goes to visit Madam Lin (69.986), whom he commits adultery with. When Ximen Qing visits Zheng

Items associated with the *qin*-zither are also mentioned in the novel. These include tables to put *qin*-zithers on (see 34.433 and 36.479 [no *qin*-zither in sight here]), a kind of shoes given to Ximen Qing as a present on one occasion (77.1168) and seen on the feet of a ruffian, Yang Dalang, on another (96.1145 [not the same pair]) and, perhaps unexpectedly, Ximen Qing’s penis during an act of fellatio (74.1087).⁷⁴

Craig Clunas, in his *Superfluous Things*, pp. 105-106, quotes a source (Wang Qi 王錡, *Yupu zaji* 寓圃雜記) which he thinks “gives a good general picture of what a ‘collection’ worth boasting about might be expected to contain at that date [end of the 15th century]. . . .” The collection described in the source includes “several [named] antique *qin* zithers. . . .”⁷⁵ In the section in Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, on the names of craftsmen associated with craft items, Zhang Jixiu’s *qin*-zither making and Fan Kunbai’s “making of three stringed guitars” are the only example of musical instrument makers (pp. 61-62), but they represent 2 of the 8 craftsmen listed. The record of the goods confiscated after Yan Song’s 嚴嵩 death also discussed by Clunas includes “antique and modern *qin* zithers” (p. 47).

As already mentioned, Clunas believes that there is a lot of irony in the descriptions of Ximen Qing’s lifestyle, as depicted in the novel. Clunas’ attention is more drawn to the way paintings are hung (on *all four walls*) in Ximen Qing’s study rather than to his musical tastes or ownership of *qin*-zithers. For instance, Clunas says, “A great deal of irony in the novel *Golden Lotus* [i.e., *Jin Ping Mei*] seems likely to stem from the wanton flouting of these criteria of taste [as set forth in the *Zhangwu zhi* and similar guides to cultured life] by this rich but unspeakably vulgar hero [Ximen Qing]. His wealth enables him to purchase, for example, famous paintings, but he then hangs them in sets of four on all the walls of his ‘study,’ a thing especially criticized by Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 [author of *Zhangwu zhi* 長物志 (Record of Superfluous Things)].”⁷⁶

Aiyue, we can be sure that she has more than one *qin*-zither because they are said to be found on both sides of the room (59.806-809; she also has a couplet hanging up that mentions the *se*-zither).

⁷⁴ On a more refined note, the harmony thought to exist between the *qin*- and *se*-zithers appears in a ritual document read at Li Ping’er’s funeral (63.893).

⁷⁵ The Chinese text from which Clunas derives the name of his book, Wen Zhenheng’s 文震亨 *Zhangwu zhi* 長物志, has a section on special rooms for playing/displaying *qin*-zithers (*qinshi* 琴室), on *qin*-zithers themselves, and tables to put them on (*qintai* 琴台). See the illustrated edition of this work, Hai Jun 海軍 and Yian Jun 田君, eds., *Zhangwu zhi tushuo* 長物志圖說 (Jinan: Shandong huabao, 2004), pp. 21, 356-57, and 358, respectively. Ximen Qing’s emissaries to the capital to bribe Cai Jing notice that Cai Jing’s son has a room prominently labeled as his *qinshi* 琴室 (18.215).

⁷⁶ Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, p. 72.

Elsewhere in the same book, Clunas comments on the effect of reading the descriptions of Ximen Qing’s study as seen by Ying Bojue: “The whole passage is heavily ironic, as the reader is already aware that Ximen Qing is more or less unable to read—he is certainly never seen with a book in his hand” (p. 62).

Ximen Qing is more or less successfully (at least within his own “crowd”) buying culture and putting it on display in his house. He is exemplary of the threat that raw money would be able to buy “cultural capital” that seems to have prompted the increased production of guides to the cultured lifestyle such as *Zhangwu zhi*.⁷⁷ As Clunas has pointed out, although these guides seem to have been produced in an effort to distance real “culture” from “money,”⁷⁸ and conspicuous consumption of the ordinary kind, their printing and circulation could be an aid to precisely those crass nouveau-riche bastards excoriated in their prefaces.⁷⁹ Ximen Qing, however, doesn’t, as we know, seem to do much reading (or even looking at pictures in books, besides pornographic albums), so Ximen Qing himself does not seem to be contributing to the escalation of the late Ming “culture wars” in this way. He gets advice on culture from Ying Bojue in particular, and with such an advisor, are the results any surprise?

The Description of Music in the Novel: Genres of Music II

Almost all of the popular genres of music that one can think of as existing in the late Ming seem to be reflected in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua*, even if their elite counterparts (*qin*-zither music, for instance), are not. Song is the most important genre. To some readers’ discomfort,

⁷⁷ Note that during this time period, a literatus such as Zhang Dai 張岱 could say that though he was but a mere civilian, he at one time, before the fall of the Ming, “was able to rival dukes and marquises in his lifestyle. . . .” See the epitaph that he wrote for himself as translated in Yang Ye, *Vignettes from the Late Ming: A Hsiao-p’in Anthology* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), p. 99. This was an age in which there were various sumptuary laws but in which it had become all but impossible to enforce them except in the case of the most egregious flaunting of them. See Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, pp. 152-53, where he discusses, among other things, imperial infractions of the sumptuary laws. For a look at the *Jin Ping Mei* that stresses the contradictions in Ming official policy on culture as evidenced in such things as the sumptuary laws and their infractions and lack of enforcement, see Sophie Volpp, “The Gift of a Python Robe: The Circulation of Objects in *Jin Ping Mei*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 65.1 (2005): 133-58.

⁷⁸ Clunas points out that Ximen Qing seems to overpay for many items. For instance, he points out that the price he pays for a lacquered screen (50 taels of silver) far surpasses the most valuable piece of furniture in the inventory of items confiscated from Yan Song’s estate (a lacquered bed valued at eight taels) and the amount Ximen Qing pays for the posthumous portraits of Li Ping’er (10 taels) is so high perhaps “to underline the inappropriate extravagance of Ximen Qing’s grief, expressed through lavish funerary display and reckless spending” (p. 131).

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Shen Chunze’s 沈春澤 preface to *Zhangwu zhi*, *Zhangwu zhi tushuo*, p. 1 (partially translated in Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, p. 74). “Crass nouveau-riche bastards,” however, is my terminology, not his.

including the editors of the Chongzhen version of the novel, who cut most of this out, characters in the novel are wont to break into song, as if they were in a music-drama.⁸⁰

When Ximen Qing’s poorer friends are discussing the kind of entertainment they need to provide when they host people, the minimal requirement seems to have either sing-song girls, young male singers, or a female balladeer. The songs can be very simple, or they can be elaborate song-suites incorporating more than 10 separate songs. It is generally thought by characters in the novel (and scholars) that the song-suites were more complicated and artistic than the short ditties.⁸¹

Sometimes the songs were originally written for theatrical works. Both northern and southern styles of singing are mentioned, with the former predominating. The former is accompanied by string instruments, while the latter does not use melodic instruments in its accompaniment.⁸²

Performers of prosimetric narratives, such as the Daoist *daoqing* 道情 and the Buddhist *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scrolls), use the same kinds of tunes as the pure singers do, but also include prose interludes. Dramatic performances range, in order of complexity and length, from variety acts (*baixi* 百戲, *zashua* 雜耍), to farces (*xiaole yuanben* 笑樂院本), to northern drama (*zaju* 雜劇),⁸³ to early, rustic southern drama (*nanxi* 南戲, *xiwen* 戲文), to elaborate and extended, literati-produced and literati-oriented *chuanqi* 傳奇 dramas.⁸⁴ The descriptions of the performances of the plays are often too vague to determine whether there was still a priority put on performing plays complete, rather than the practice of basically only performing extracted highlights (*zhezi xi* 折子戲), as became the predominant performance practice not long after the novel was written.

⁸⁰ See Rolston, “Oral Performing Literature,” especially pp. 11-13, 27-36, and 46-52.

⁸¹ See, for instance, He Lianghao, *Shiqing ernü*, who claims (p. 84) that only unlicensed prostitutes sing ditties (*xiaoqu* 小曲) in the novel.

⁸² The bamboo horizontal flute (*dizi* 笛子), which becomes so important in Kunqu 崑曲 drama, does not play an important part in the novel.

⁸³ There is debate over whether the depiction of the performance of *zaju* in the novel is anachronistic, but that assumes that the author intended to describe a particular time period, which is also a matter of debate.

⁸⁴ The novel is by no means careful in its use of the names of dramatic genres, as was also the case even in manuals for playwrights of the period, such as the theater chapters in Li Yu’s 李漁 *Xianqing ouji* 閑情偶寄.

The Description of Music in the Novel: The Quality of the Description

Although the sheer number of mentions of the playing of music in the novel can't help but be striking, in none of the descriptions of the playing of music is there any real attention to how music is performed. The main thing seems to be to point out the existence of the music, to show it as a commodity bought and deployed by Ximen Qing and others for social purposes, rather than try to recreate the music for the reader on the page.

The most detailed images of the making of music in the novel typically come when the narrator is describing the beginning of a performance, and particularly the beginning of the singing of a song or song-suite. For instance, at an “after-party” one night after the main guests have gone, and Ximen Qing and Ying Bojue are still being waited on by some of the performers who performed for the main guests, Ying Bojue gets two singing girls to sing a song-suite. We are first told the musical instruments the two of them will play (a *pipa* 琵琶 and a *zheng* 箏). Then we are told that they lightly spread their jade fingers (*qingshu yuzhi* 輕舒玉指), put their instruments on [their laps of] silk clothes (*kuankua jiaoxiao* 款跨鮫綃), opened their red lips (*qi zhuchun* 啟朱唇), revealed their white teeth (*lou haochi* 露皓齒), sang (*ge* 歌) with beautiful resonance (*meiyun* 美韻), let forth their sweet sound (*fang jiaosheng* 放嬌聲), and sang (*chang* 唱) a song-suite (*tao* 套) in the musical mode of “Yuediao” 越調 and to the tune of “Dou anchun” 鬪鶴鶉 (58.792).⁸⁵ There are at least six phrases here that describe the sing-song girls' preparation for and making of music, but only stereotyped language is used,⁸⁶ and in terms of concrete information about this particular performance, very little of any real concrete feeling of the performance is conveyed by the way it is described in the novel.

The Description of Music in the Novel: Oral vs. Written Sources

Although some early writers on the novel, such as C. T. Hsia, stressed the idea that the author of the novel, as he worked all of the performance material into his novel, was relying on

⁸⁵ Bai Weiguo and Bu Jian, annot., *Jin Ping Mei cihua jiaozhu*, note 64 for this chapter, identifies the source of the song-suite as the *Xixiang ji*, something that would supposedly be known to the ideal readers of the novel.

⁸⁶ Besides this instance, the phrase *qingshu yuzhi* or its variant, *qingshu yuxun* 輕舒玉筍 (lightly spread their jade bamboo [fingers]), occurs on p. 6.73 (the very first description of anyone singing for anyone else), 27.345, 45.590, and 74.1103.

oral memory,⁸⁷ it has become more and more clear that the author used a cut and paste method in which he incorporated written texts into his novel. A careful look at the longer incorporations of selections of drama or song into the novel show that the conventions of printed examples of these texts, with their stage directions and other apparatus designed primarily for readers (as opposed to performers), have been copied right into the novel,⁸⁸ and there has often been little or no effort made to present the performances from the point of view of members of their audiences in the novel.⁸⁹

The Description of Music in the Novel: Onomatopoeia

It is not that the novel is completely uninterested in the description of sound in language. Onomatopoeic syllables are used,⁹⁰ they are just not used with the amount of skill or intensity that one sees in Liu E’s novel, for instance, and they often appear in textual passages that can be shown to have been copied into the novel or, when proof is lacking, still seem likely to have been copied into the novel from other sources, knowing the general *modus operandus* of the author of the novel.

The Description of Music in the Novel: Frequency/Density

Even though a reader of the novel soon gets the idea that some kind of musical entertainment was part of any social gathering in the society described in the novel,⁹¹ and that the author has taken each and every possible opportunity to include the mention of music in his narrative, this is not actually the truth. Careful inspection shows that there are some occasions in the novel, ritual or social, at which music would be almost necessarily present, but are described without mention of any musical activity.⁹²

⁸⁷ C. T. Hsia, *The Classic Chinese Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 169. It is still common to find scholars speaking of the author as besotted with popular performance genres or able to perform them himself (see above).

⁸⁸ See David Rolston, “Oral Performing Literature,” especially pp. 30-31.

⁸⁹ This is not to say that the author has not often carefully adapted the texts he copies into his novel. Plenty of evidence of this can be found in Zhou Juntao, *Jin Ping Mei sucai lai yuan* and Cai Donyong 蔡敦用, *Jin Ping Mei cihua juqu pintan 金瓶梅詞話劇曲品探* (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi, 1989), particularly pp. 95-363, in which the songs and rhymed material that appear in the novel are compared to extant texts of the same material from other sources. See also the endnotes to Roy’s translation.

⁹⁰ Although admittedly not exhaustive, the first appendix (pre-2014 version) records at least 22 examples of onomatopoeic description of sound.

⁹¹ Ying Bojue, for one, when he asks Shutong to sing for him, says that in his life, he has never drunk unaccompanied wine (*yajiu* 啞酒; 35.463).

⁹² Searching for the words “no mention of music” in the first appendix (pre-2014 version) leads to 14 instances where music is to be expected but is not mentioned.

The Description of Music in the Novel: Musical Metaphors for Sex

Music appears in the novel not only in descriptions of its performance, but also in metaphors. For instance, it is hard to imagine a day when the first thing that comes to one’s mind when this novel is mentioned is not sex. Two musical metaphors for sexual activity, playing the vertical flute (*pinxiao* 品簫) for fellatio, and “Houting hua” 後庭花 (the name of a tune title, “Flowers in the Rear Courtyard”) for anal sex, figure prominently in the novel.⁹³

Ximen Qing and his Household: Ximen Qing

According to the novel, Ximen Qing is the “decadent scion of a family of considerable wealth” (*poluo hu caizhu* 破落戶財主).⁹⁴ His father, Ximen Da, seems to have been both a landlord and a traveling merchant.⁹⁵ At the beginning of the novel, Ximen Qing makes money from his raw medicine shop (*shengyao pu* 生藥鋪) and such activities as loansharking and selling his influence with the local magistrate. He eventually opens more shops and sends his employees and servants to do business in Yangzhou and elsewhere. He engages in the lucrative and monopolistic salt trade (getting preferential treatment through his connections), and he has plans to become an imperial purveyor of luxury items to the throne before that plan is brought to nothing by his death. By chapter 30 he has obtained the post of Assistant Judicial Commissioner through his connections with powerful men at court. Just as he purchased office himself, he continues to sell influence to friends and acquaintances until he dies. He combines three different careers and statuses: merchant, local boss, and official.⁹⁶ Throughout the novel, he continually expands his land holdings. His family compound is greatly enlarged by chapter 20 with his purchase of the next door compound formerly belonging to Hua Zixu. The family gravesite is rather extensive and is refurbished during the course of the novel. He ends up owning other properties in Qinghe. In the inventory of his property and financial resources that he makes on his deathbed, he says that he owns three houses or residential estates, part of one silk shop and all of another, a thread shop, a pawn shop, the original medicine shop (which he once boasted about as being the biggest in the area), and a fair amount of goods in transit.⁹⁷ If we add up what

⁹³ *Pinxiao* and its variants occur 14 times in the first appendix (pre-2014 version). “Houting hua” as a way to describe anal sex occurs 3 times (surely an undercounting).

⁹⁴ Roy I, 53; Renmin 2.28.

⁹⁵ See Lu Ge and Ma Zheng, *Jin Ping Mei renwu daquan*, p. 48. Ximen Da travelled to Yangzhou on business at least once.

⁹⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁹⁷ Renmin 79.1233.

Ximen Qing thinks all these items are worth, we come up with a figure of about seventy thousand taels of silver. Although he has many of the skills that a dandy needs to seduce women, one of his lifelong pursuits, and has the kind of social understanding of popular music that allows him to make acceptable requests for performance at banquets and other venues, he is not said to be skilled at any musical instrument, and is only shown singing in two non-realistic situations⁹⁸ in which the arias that he sings substitute for dialogue (*yi qu dai yan* 以曲代言) as happens commonly in traditional Chinese *xiqu* 戲曲 (music-drama).⁹⁹

As someone who throws his weight around socially even before he becomes an official, and as someone who gains his official post and promotions through his social connections, Ximen Qing does a lot of hosting in his residence. As his life becomes more complex and his activities more numerous, his social calendar gets more and more daunting. In the last year of his life, it seems that he is going from one banquet to another. He says that he spends 1,000 taels of silver on just one banquet (49.641-42). Other officials begin to borrow his residence to host others (they provide some funds for the banquets but Ximen Qing has to pick up a lot of the costs himself). Somehow, he keeps up this pace until he begins to complain of lack of energy and his legs hurting and tells his servants to tell visitors that he is not home (78.1197-98).

Ximen Qing and his Household: Ximen Qing’s Wives

Ximen Qing has a total of eight wives. The first is dead when the narrative opens.¹⁰⁰ Another, an unlicensed prostitute, Zhuo Diu’er, dies not long after marrying him and is only mentioned briefly in conversation.¹⁰¹ The new main wife, Wu Yueniang, is already married to Ximen Qing when the reader first meets him.¹⁰² She is not personally very musical, engaging only in the chanting of scripture and prayers and in the consumption of Buddhist songs (*Fo qu’er* 佛曲兒) and the Buddhist oral narrative genre of “precious scrolls” (*baojuan* 寶卷), which almost always include some form of singing or chanting. The only times that she sings is one aria

⁹⁸ Even when he participates in drinking games that ordinarily require singing, he opts for non-musical substitutes such as telling jokes instead of singing.

⁹⁹ He sings one aria in the Li Family Brothel, Lichun yuan 麗春院 (20.257) and one on his deathbed (79.1233).

¹⁰⁰ Lu Ge and Ma Zheng, *Jin Ping Mei renwu daquan*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 53-57.

that she sings in response to one that Ximen Qing sings on his deathbed (79.1233) and another at his grave (89.1346-47).¹⁰³

The second wife is a former prostitute/sing-song girl, Li Jiao'er, who returns briefly to that profession on the death of Ximen Qing (before long she marries Ximen Qing's rival, Zhang Erguan).¹⁰⁴ Although she is a former prostitute, despite that fact and the fact that all of the prostitutes who stay prostitutes that Ximen Qing has relationships with are shown singing in the novel, Li Jiao'er is never shown taking part in any musical performance.

The third wife, Meng Yulou, can play the *yueqin* 樂琴 (this is one of the accomplishments that the matchmaker lists that particularly gets Ximen Qing's attention, 7.76), but she only does so once in the novel (27.343-47).¹⁰⁵ She does sing a song at the graves of Ximen Qing (89.1346-47) and of Pan Jinlian (89.1353-54).

The fourth wife is Sun Xue'e, who was a maid in the household before she was promoted to concubine and remains in a liminal state between maid and concubine up until a little after Ximen Qing's death. At that time she is sold out of the household into prostitution, where she is taught to sing (94.1422).¹⁰⁶

The fifth wife is the all important Pan Jinlian.¹⁰⁷ She starts out life as a *fangli jie'er* 房裡姐兒 or young woman bought to wait on the male head of a family who is trained to sing and play a musical instrument. She has this status first in the household of Imperial Commissioner Wang and then in that of Zhang Dahu. She is married off to the unattractive Wu Zhi and we never hear of her performing for him, but she is shown privately playing the *pipa* and singing popular songs to relieve her feelings of being put upon (8.93-94). She also turns to her *pipa* and popular songs after she marries Ximen Qing and he neglects her in favor of Li Ping'er (38.500-504). In her early dalliance with Ximen Qing, he requests her to sing a song for him, just as if she was a sing-song girl (6.73), one in a long string of incidents in which she is treated as analogous to a sing-song girl. She is the person in the household who knows the most about music, albeit her knowledge is restricted to popular music and more specifically to the repertoire of the sing-song girl.

¹⁰³ Although the last song seems to be quoted by the narrator, it is in her voice.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 57-60.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 79-84.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 107-12.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 2-9.

The sixth and last wife is Li Ping'er.¹⁰⁸ She is never described as being able to perform on any musical instrument. One time, and one time only, she is made to perform, and that is at the demand of Pan Jinlian. She is made to keep the time with the clapper (*ban* 板) while Meng Yulou plays the *yueqin* and Pan Jinlian plays the *pipa* (27.345). Li Ping'er does sing three times in the novel, once on the death of her son, Guan'ge (59.819), and twice on seeing his toy drum (*bolang gu* 博郎鼓/博浪鼓; 59.823-24).

There is a great disparity between the economic resources of the different wives and their ability to patronize professional performers. Wu Yueniang, as the main wife, has access to the resources of the household and it is her room where Ximen Qing's windfalls (such as the property smuggled into the household by Chen Jingji and Li Ping'er) tend to end up. She is a regular patron of nuns who come into the household to recite (*xuan* 宣) precious scrolls (*baojuan*) and sing Buddhist songs (*Fo qu'er*). There is, however, the idea that she can not really enjoy such performances at her leisure if Ximen Qing is in the house (see, for example, 51.681-83). Although the impression is given that the number of such performances pick up after Ximen Qing's death, when Wu Yueniang is in charge of the household, there are actually fewer detailed descriptions of performances then and they tend to be mentioned only when they involve other plot concerns (for instance, we are told that Ximen Dajie's going to hear a performance at night allows Chen Jingji to have the chance to have an assignation with Pan Jinlian, 82.1264). Although *baojuan* are basically Buddhist propaganda, the nuns know their business well enough to include plot elements of interest to their audience. For instance, before Wu Yueniang gets pregnant, Nun Wang tells her a story about a woman being rewarded for her piety with a son (chapter 39). In fact, it is one of the nuns, Nun Xue, who later provides Wu Yueniang with a drug that supposedly helps her get pregnant.

The other genre of musical entertainment that is specifically gendered female, both in terms of audience and performers, is female balladry, the performers of which in the novel are all blind. These performers (called variously *nü xian'er* 女先兒, *nü'er* 女兒, *chang jie'er* 唱姐兒, *changnü'er* 唱女兒, *changde laopo* 唱的老婆 in the novel) have pretty free access to the women's quarters, are often asked to stay over night, and are known for the number of households they perform (*zou* 走; literally walk/run) in.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 128-35.

When Wu Yueniang hosts important female guests (*tangke* 堂客) at home, the same kind of performers as Ximen Qing hires to perform for his male guests (*guanke* 官客) are hired to perform for them, although the scale of the performances done just for women tends to be smaller than those for men. We thus have the rather odd situation of sing-song girls and young male singers performing for women who are usually sequestered from such people, although we should note that unlike the performances by the nuns, which take place in the women’s private quarters, the hosting of important female guests tends to take place in the more formal and public parts of the household.

It sometimes happens that both male and female guests are entertained in the Ximen Qing household on the same day, but the locations where this takes place in the household tend to be separate from each other, with the women being entertained in the inner quarters. There tends to be an exception when it comes to performances that ostensibly are put on for religious purposes, such as the performance of the play *Yuhuan ji* 玉環記 and the puppet plays after Li Ping’er’s death (63.894-96 and 65.913), at which the women sit near the coffin but behind curtains. Mixed sex audiences occur when the family goes to the family gravesites at the Qingming Festival (see 48.628-29 for the largest scale visit during Ximen Qing’s life, and 90.1356-57 for an excursion by the women of the family after his death at which Meng Yulou meets her future husband).

Sometimes the women in the family host each other. Sometimes the hosting duties are taken in rotation, sometimes a particular wife has to host the others because she lost a game she was playing with the others. Meng Yulou, Pan Jinlian, and Li Ping’er are the most active in these affairs, but Pan Jinlian does not have the money the other two have and constantly complains about that. The parties that the women give for each other tend more to feature the eating of special food and not professional entertainers (unless such are already in the household). While one gets the impression that Pan Jinlian would be perfectly willing to spend any resources that she had on bringing in entertainers, Li Ping’er, who does have money, is reluctant to throw her money around in such a fashion. On one occasion, because she is so worried about her baby and offending others, she doesn’t want her adopted daughter, the sing-song girl Wu Yin’er, to sing for her in her room (44.481).

Ximen Qing and his Household: The Next Generation

When the novel begins, Ximen Qing has only one daughter, who never gets a real name and is only referred to as Dajie 大姐 (“First Daughter”).¹⁰⁹ She is not shown producing music in the novel. She is married to Chen Jingji,¹¹⁰ but before too long, they both return to live in the Ximen household. He is able to compose songs both orally and in writing. The first time that he is shown singing for an audience, Pan Jinlian forces him to sing before she will return some keys of his. He sings songs composed largely of the names of fruits, flowers, and types of currency. He says he could sing a hundred such (33.423-26). After Ximen Qing’s death in Chapter 79, much of the narrative is focused on him, beginning with his affair with Pan Jinlian, which involves a lot of singing and passing notes which take the form of written songs, and eventually gets him kicked out of the household; to his becoming a nightwatchman; to his eventually becoming the manager of a large tavern/brothel. He is involved in a number of “non-realistic” uses of oral performing literature.¹¹¹ He doesn’t marry as many wives as Ximen Qing, but he does marry one sing-song girl (Feng Jinbao).¹¹² A part-time prostitute that he takes up with, Han Aijie, is talented enough at singing and playing the *yueqin* that she can, after he dies, support herself on the road as she searches for her mother (100.1496-98).

For all his wives and the amount of seed he spills, Ximen Qing has only two sons. One, Guan’ge, dies young, and the other, Xiaoge, is taken away by a monk. Guan’ge is mostly scared by music, especially percussive music. Although the fact that he immediately takes to a sing-song girl is interpreted as a sign that he will be a ladies’ man like his father (43.566-67), he dies in infancy. As shortlived as he is, he does get betrothed before he dies, to the daughter of a neighboring family with imperial connections, the Qiaos.¹¹³ We end up knowing even less about Xiaoge’s musical tastes, since he is born the day of Ximen Qing’s death. After giving away Ximen’s last surviving heir, Wu Yueniang adopts a household servant, Dai’an (whom she has married to one of the maids, Xiaoyu), gives him the Ximen surname, and makes him the heir of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 49-53.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

¹¹¹ Some think that the higher proportion of formal borrowings from oral performing literature in the last 21 chapters is proof that they are from a separate manuscript, one more connected to oral performance than the rest of the novel. See, for instance, Sun Meng 孫萌, “Lun *Jin Ping Mei cihua* zhong ‘yi chang dai yan’ xianxiang zai hou ershi yi hui zhong de ju zeng” 論金瓶梅詞話中以唱代言現象在後二十一回中的遞增, *Taiyuan jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 太原教育學院學報 2004.1: 62-65.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 458-60.

¹¹³ See Zhu Yixuan 朱一玄, “*Jin Ping Mei cihua renwu biao*” 金瓶梅詞話人物表, in Zhu Yixuan, ed., *Jin Ping Mei ziliao huibian*, p. 452.

the family. Prior to this, Dai’an had shown how good he was at imitating the ways of his master (they have an affair with the same woman and when Dai’an has a chance he goes to an unlicensed brothel to make the girls there sing for him, 50.661-62).

Ximen Qing has two adopted daughters, although it is perhaps more accurate to say that it is two of his wives who have adopted daughters. Both of these “daughters” are sing-song girls. Wu Yueniang accepts Li Guijie’s request to become her adopted daughter, and Wu Yin’er, imitating her colleague’s example, becomes the adopted daughter of Li Ping’er. Li Guijie decides to become an adopted daughter of the family when Ximen Qing becomes an official and she knows that that will keep him from coming to the brothel much to spend money on her (32.408-409).¹¹⁴ Their simultaneous status as sing-song girls and “daughters” complicates their interactions with the household. Ximen Qing ignores the fact that to have sex with Li Guijie is a form of incest. Wu Yueniang remains oblivious to the impropriety of a woman of good family having close relations with a prostitute, despite the fact that she is aware enough of the social distinctions to nix the idea of escorting Wu Yin’er home (46.607-608). In one scene, Wu Yueniang is surrounded by sing-song girls in her apartment and they are talking about the more sexual aspects of their trade using professional slang and Wu Yueniang doesn’t have a clue what they are talking about (32.409-11). Neither of these adopted daughters maintains relations with the Ximen household past the death of Ximen Qing.

Ximen Qing and his Household: The Maids and Female Servants

Most of Ximen Qing’s wives have two maids, the exception being Sun Xue’e, who only has one. Ximen Dajie has one maid, so the grand total is 12.¹¹⁵ Among Pan Jinlian’s two maids, of course, is the important character of Pang Chunmei. After Ximen Qing’s rise in status because of his increased wealth (from his marriages to Meng Yulou and Li Ping’er), he hires a young male singer (*xiaoyou* 小優), Li Guijie’s uncle, Li Ming, to teach Pang Chunmei and three of the other maids to pluck and sing (*tanchang* 彈唱; 20.254). They get good enough to perform for family and guests. After Ximen Qing’s death, Pang Chunmei is sold off and becomes the concubine of Zhou Xiu, a highly placed military officer, who because he noticed how she could play her instrument and sing when he had attended banquets at the Ximen house is willing to pay

¹¹⁴ On Ming prohibitions against officials patronizing sing-song girls and actors, see He Lianghao, *Shiqing ernü*, p. 97.

¹¹⁵ Zhu Yixuan, “*Jin Ping Mei cihua* renwu biao,” pp. 454-55.

as much for her as he does (86.1308). After she is elevated to the status of main wife, she constantly has two maids/concubines trained to play music in her room, although they formally belong to Zhou Xiu, who has sexual relations with them (94.1415, 95.1430). Finally, there is a promise that Miao Qing will send a very talented female singer named Chuyun to come serve Ximen Qing, but the latter dies first.

There are also married female servants and nurses in the Ximen household, some of whom have affairs with Ximen Qing, and one of whom, Song Huilian, comes close to marrying him. But none of them have strong connections to music.

While the maids and female servants are not the prime audience for any form of musical entertainment in the household, they sometimes get to attend performances that their mistresses attend. When the play *Yuhuan ji* is performed as part of the funeral services for Li Ping'er, the women watch behind curtains from one side of the hall and the maids from similar but much more crowded circumstances on the other side. Some of the maids turn out to be not very sophisticated theatrical consumers. When Xiaoyu notices that a fellow maid, Yuxiao, shares the same name as the female protagonist of the play, a courtesan, she jokingly says to her co-maid that a patron has come for her and pushes her so hard that she ends up outside the curtain, in sight of the male spectators (63.894-96).

Theoretically, the maids could attend the performances of *baojuan*, but interest among the maids for them does not seem to be high. Wu Yueniang is also not very welcoming. When one of the women who does rough work in the household (not a body servant) expresses interest in hearing a performance, Wu Yueniang scoffs at the idea (39.522).

Ximen Qing and his Household: Male Servants and Employees

As is the case with the older female students, there are quite a few male (married and unmarried) servants attached to the Ximen household, but only a few have connections with music. Ximen Qing at two different times has a page name Qintong 琴童 (*qin-zither boy*). The first of these is brought into his household along with Meng Yulou and after the fact that he is having an affair with Pan Jinlian comes out, is summarily dismissed. The second Qintong gets that name when Ximen apparently decides he needs to have a set of pages named after the four arts (*qin* 琴 [*qin-zither playing*], *qi* 棋 [chess], *shu* 書 [calligraphy], and *hua* 畫 [painting]; 31.393). Neither Qintong is ever reported to have come anywhere near a real *qin-zither*. Shutong,

on the other hand, can read and write, but more importantly, he can sing southern songs (*nanqu*) and act in southern style plays, which he does before Ximen Qing’s guests. He is also handsome enough for Ximen Qing to make him his catamite and perform, at Ximen Qing’s bidding, the same service for visiting officials interested in boys (*nanfeng* 南風).

In a part of the novel (chapters 53-57) that is almost certainly not as the author wrote it,¹¹⁶ two unnamed boy singers (*getong* 歌童) are given to Ximen Qing by a Squire Miao. Despite the fact that they were trained by Miao in Yangzhou, they sing in a northern style (*xiansuo* 弦索). Despite the fact that everyone, including Ximen Qing, likes the way they look and sing, and the narrator tells us that their training cost 1,000 taels of silver, Ximen Qing decides there is no place for them in his household and sends them off to the capital as presents for his influential friends there (56.755). But in the first chapter after the disputed ones, it suddenly turns out that the Ximen household has a new male servant, Chunhong, who can sing southern tunes (*nanqu*) good enough to have him perform for guests (58.792). It appears that the two unnamed singers from Yangzhou were made up by whoever filled in the missing chapters without taking enough care to be sure that there wouldn’t be any contradictions between his work and the later chapters (it seems certain that Chunhong was one of the singers who, according to a surviving chapter title, were supposed to have been sent to Ximen Qing).

Ximen Qing employs a variety of men to help him run his various businesses. Some seem to live in the Ximen family compound. Of the foremen who work for Ximen Qing, only Ben Dichuan is specifically mentioned as being talented in music (in the midst of a list of his less reputable past activities; 16.195-96), but we never see him play any of the three instruments he is supposed to be good at.

Ximen Qing and his Household: Private Music (*Jiayue*)

The late Ming was a time in which it became very popular for the elite to keep troupes of musicians (*jiayue* 家樂). The capabilities and sizes of these troupes could range from only a few performers to troupes with tens of performers (Cai Jing is said to have a troupe of 24 women who sing and dance at all of his meals, 55.743) and from simple instrumental music to chamber

¹¹⁶ In the earliest notice on the publication of the novel, in Shen Defu’s *Wanli yehuo bian*, chapters 53-57 are said to have been filled in by someone else. The passage is available in Zhu Yixuan, ed., *Jin Ping Mei ziliao huibian*, p. 85. Patrick Hanan, in his “The Text of the *Chin P’ing Mei*,” *Asia Major*, n.s., 9 (1962): 1-57, pp. 11-39, takes the reader through some of the anomalies in these chapters. Just with regard to how musical matters are treated, there are a number of differences between these five chapters and the rest of the novel (see appendix one).

performances of dramatic arias without acting (*qingchang* 清唱) to full-scale mountings of lengthy music-dramas.¹¹⁷ While the Jia family in the *Honglou meng* in the past had a troupe of family actors and buy and train a new one composed of young female actors for the visit of the imperial concubine, Ximen Qing only goes to the trouble and expense to have four of his maids trained to pluck and sing (*tanchang*). Even after the four maids have been trained, the narrative only describes them performing a rather small number of times. The narrator’s explanation is that by keeping a troupe of female performers, Ximen Qing is flaunting his power (22.284). Although there is a fair amount of musical talent among Ximen Qing’s wives, the number of times that we see them perform for audiences is also quite small. Although Pan Jinlian will play and sing for herself (and perhaps to be overheard, as in Chapter 38), the vast majority of the music that the reader hears of them playing is played at the request of Ximen Qing. While it is proper for his concubines to play for him, Ximen Qing cannot have them perform for guests (it is a big deal for Li Ping’er to even show herself to Ximen Qing’s sworn brothers after the wedding). Of the family “musicians,” it is the two young male singers, Shutong and Chunhong, who perform the most in the household, performing both for members of the household and for guests.

Of the musical members of the Ximen household, only Shutong and Chunhong can perform southern style songs, which are uniquely performed without melodic accompaniment and with the singer typically keeping time by clapping his hands (*paishou* 拍手/排手). In Ximen Qing’s neighborhood (Shandong, or Beijing, according to some scholars), this is a rare accomplishment that Ximen Qing is generally proud enough to show off.

The repertoire of the songs sung by the members of the household are almost uniformly love songs of the most popular type.¹¹⁸ Often the personas in the songs are clearly sing-song girls or prostitutes singing about their lives as entertainers.¹¹⁹ The exceptional songs that are not love songs are few in number, and include the songs that the anomalous young male singers (*getong*)

¹¹⁷ On the latter, see Zhang Faying 張發穎, *Zhongguo jiyue xiban* 中國家樂戲班 (Beijing: Xueyuan, 2002) and Grant Guangren Shen, *Elite Theatre in Ming China, 1368-1644* (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹¹⁸ On the circulation of popular songs in the late Ming, see Kathryn A. Lowry, *The Tapestry of Popular Songs in 16th- and 17th- Century China: Reading, Imitation, and Desire* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

¹¹⁹ For an essay in English on straightforward and ironic uses of the songs sung by members of the household that came out after my *CHINOPERL Papers* article, see David T. Roy, “The Uses of Songs as a Means of Self-Expression and Self-Characterization in the *Chin P’ing Mei*,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 20 (December 1998): 101-26. For earlier essays, please consult p. 15 note 52 of my *CHINOPERL Papers* article on nonrealistic usages.

from Yangzhou sing (55.752-53) and those sung by Shutong on the first visit of An Chen and Cai Yun (chapter 36; they are fresh from passing the highest civil service examinations).

When it comes to entertaining important guests, Ximen Qing always hires at least some professional entertainers from outside the household. In the late Ming, if someone had family musicians who were unique in some way, their owners would show them off to guests and people would come from afar to hear them. It is hard to believe that Ximen Qing’s troupe of four musical maids is really able to achieve a high degree of skill in the rather short period of their tutelage. After mentions of only three performances (chapters 21, 24, and 30), when they appear at banquets after that it is to offer wine to the guests and not to perform. Ximen Qing tends to favor a different type of conspicuous consumption than flaunting his own troupe (he would have to invest more resources than he does to produce something really worth flaunting): hiring a variety of professional entertainers to come to his house to perform for his guests (and family members).

Facilitators of Musical Entertainment: Ying Bojue and Company (*Bangxian*)

Ximen Qing is a member of a group of ten sworn brothers who get together regularly (in the beginning of the novel, at least) for entertainment and social bonding. The members take turns hosting their fellow members, and the sessions take place in the host’s house, if the host has money (as is the case with Ximen Qing and Hua Zixu), or in temples or other locations, if they don’t. Sometimes the poorer members pool money in order to host the more wealthy members. There is a wide disparity in social status and access to economic resources among them.

The members who are not independently wealthy generally make their livings by sucking up to wealthy persons but more particularly by earning “romantic money” (*fengliu qian* 風流錢; 11.128) and other perks by facilitating the spending of money by wealthy persons in the licensed quarters, helping those with money to enjoy their leisure (*bangxian* 幫閑), whether the wealthy persons are members of the brotherhood or not. *Bangxian* is used specifically to describe the two most important of these licensed quarter brokers, Ying Bojue (80.1251) and Xie Xida (10.118), while the related term, *bangpiao* 幫嫖 (whoring helper), is used to describe Ying Bojue in both

of his initial introductions (10.118 and 11.128),¹²⁰ and *bangchen* 幫襯, referring to the proper way to treat members of the licensed quarter, is used by Ying Bojue himself, when he is arguing for better treatment for a young male singer, Li Ming, from Ximen Qing (46.594-95). The job of these brokers is to bring trade and business to the sing-song girls and the best of them, such as Ying Bojue, are able to support themselves fairly well by only doing this kind of work, in addition to facilitating business deals with their patrons. The idea of earning “summoning sing-song girl” fees is joked about by some of Ximen Qing’s wives¹²¹ and Ying Bojue at one point tells a pair of sing-song girls asked by Ximen Qing to bring two more with them next time and that they should exact “recommendation fees” (*tiqan* 提錢) from the two other girls (32.406).

Although Ying Bojue betrays Ximen Qing as soon as the latter’s corpse is cold, while Ximen Qing is alive, Ying Bojue is the one single male that Ximen Qing spends the most time with. Ying Bojue is so at home in Ximen Qing’s house that he thinks nothing of walking into the inner quarters.

While Ying Bojue generally declines to sing in the drinking games (*jiuling* 酒令), there is one instance in which he does sing an aria that he inserts within one being sung by Li Guijie (52.694-98). He is not said to be capable of playing any instrument. In the first of Xie Xida’s introductions, it is said that he can play the *pipa* well (10.118),¹²² but we never see him playing this or any instrument in the novel.

Equations of Members of the Ximen Household and Professional Entertainers

Ying Bojue is so closely associated with professional performers that the idea of him becoming registered as one comes up (58.791). On the other hand, Ximen Qing’s concubines and mistresses are often compared to prostitutes and sing-song girls. For instance, once when Ximen Qing comes home and sees Pan Jinlian and Meng Yulou sitting together, he says they look just like a pair of courtesans (*fentou* 粉頭) worth over one hundred taels of silver. Pan Jinlian is not flattered, saying that if he wants a real prostitute, he’ll find one in the inner quarters (she means her enemy, Li Jiao’er; 11.122). While it is unusual for Meng Yulou to be so compared to a

¹²⁰ For some reason, the members of the brotherhood of ten (*shi xiongdi* 十兄弟) are introduced twice, with only minor differences between the descriptions.

¹²¹ For instance, Ximen Qing gives Chunmei a flower to summon Meng Yulou to come play for him and Pan Jinlian jokes that she should also earn a flower as well for her part in “summoning the sing-song girl” (*jiao changde* 叫唱的; 27.343).

¹²² No mention of this occurs in the second introduction (11.128).

prostitute, such references with regard to Pan Jinlian, both explicit and implicit, are legion and refer to many aspects of her personality. Among the wives, her training as a *fangli jie'er* most resembles that of a sing-song girl, the only real difference being that she was trained to satisfy the musical and other interests of her master, while sing-song girls had to be able to satisfy a wider and less constant public. Among Ximen Qing's other non-professional women, Li Ping'er is compared to a prostitute because his excuse for being out when he was actually going to visit her was to say that he was going to the licensed quarter (see, for instance, 13.161-62). The most important of the mistresses that Ximen Qing keeps and never marries, Wang Liu'er, is also structurally equated to a prostitute when she has to hang out downstairs with the sing-song girls at a party at Ximen Qing's Lion Street residence and the latter are mystified by her presence (42.550-52) and by having Ximen Qing wear eyeshades of the same kind he wears on visits to the licensed quarters when he goes to visit her (37.488-89). Unlike Pan Jinlian, however, neither Li Ping'er nor Wang Liu'er ever sing for Ximen Qing.

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Licensed Professionals (*Yuehu*) and Licensed Quarters (*Goulan*)

In the Ming dynasty, professional entertainers of both sexes were supposed to be licensed and regulated and to belong to families that engaged in that trade over generations (*yuehu* 樂戶). They were treated differently from ordinary people by the law, were supposed to wear special clothing, and to live in special licensed quarters, and could not easily change their registration as professional entertainers.¹²³ The licensed quarters are referred to in the novel by a great variety of terms of either a general nature (*yuan* 院, *limiande* 裡面的, *libian* 裡邊, *Zhangtai* 章台, *nan wazi* 南瓦子, *sanwa liangxiang* 三瓦兩巷, *bensi sanyuan* 本司三院, and *goulan* 勾欄¹²⁴) or with reference to particular establishments in the quarter¹²⁵ (e.g., Lichun yuan 麗春院).¹²⁶ The women entertain guests in their brothels, go to sing in taverns (*gongchang* 供唱), or are hired to

¹²³ See, for instance, He Lianghao, *Shiqing ernü*, p. 96.

¹²⁴ The last term is actually written *goulan* 勾欄 in the novel. Liang Jinzhi, “*Jin Ping Mei suojian wan Ming shizhen yinyue*,” p. 70, estimates that the novel mentions 16 families of entertainers and a total of 50-60 individual musicians (*yueren* 樂人). Tian Bing'e 田秉鏢, *Jin Ping Mei yu Zhongguo wenhua* 金瓶梅與中國文化 (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi, 1992), p. 193, estimates that when it come to sing-song girls (*ji* 妓) alone, the novel describes (*xie* 寫) more than 60.

¹²⁵ From the terms used and the geography, it would appear that there was more than one licensed quarter in Qinghe.

¹²⁶ There are 85 mentions of “licensed quarter(s)” in appendix one (pre-2014 version).

come wait on patrons and their guests at private residences.¹²⁷ When they are not singing they are usually urging guests to drink. There were also unlicensed brothels and prostitutes (*wozi* 窩子/窠子, *siwozi* 私窩子, *wo'er* 窠兒, *chaowo* 巢窩, *fangzi* 坊子, *yinming changji* 隱名娼妓). Especially with the registered entertainers, it is common to find out that individual performers have siblings, male and female, who are also professional entertainers.

Licensed professional entertainers could be summoned by officials to perform for them (*guanshen* 官身) and had no choice but to obey such summons. Although he becomes an official, Ximen Qing himself does not make that much use of this privilege, but when his residence is borrowed to host visiting officials, the entertainers are, for the most part, performing under such official summons.

As noted above, Qinghe unexpectedly has a branch of the Imperial Music Office (*jiaofang si*). Many of the more important and formal musical entertainments in the Ximen Qing household make use of entertainers and their managers (*lingguan* 伶官, *paiguan* 排官, *paishen zhang* 牌色長; Jiaozhu note 35 emends to 排色長) from the *jiaofang si*.¹²⁸

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Lack of Public Entertainment and Theaters

If the novel were set in a large city in the Song, Yuan, or Qing dynasty (especially the last half of this last dynasty), we would expect that there might be establishments in the licensed quarters that mount plays, and that Ximen Qing, pleasure-loving fellow that he is, would patronize them, and perhaps hold parties there. This does not happen in the novel. There is absolutely no mention of the public performance of plays, whether at permanent designated theaters, stages at temples, or improvised outdoor theaters. Public entertainment, open to anyone who can pay the price of admission or of the free kind sponsored by wealthy members of the community or by subscription, is almost nonexistent in the novel¹²⁹ (an exception would be the variety performances held at the Qingming Festival at a tavern, and in particular the variety performance, on horse back, of Li Gui, 90.1356-57). There are very vague mentions of public performances during New Year's and the Lantern Festival that typically occur in passages of parallel prose or poetry, but these almost always lack any real detail. We know that when it

¹²⁷ The descriptions of sing-song girl activity in Linqing includes taverns with more than 100 rooms where itinerant sing-song girls pay rent and entertain patrons (see, for instance, 93.1409-10).

¹²⁸ *Jiaofang* or *jiaofang si* occurs 11 times in appendix one (pre-2014 version).

¹²⁹ Sezhai, “Xiju shiliao,” p. 134, claims that you find the same lack of records of public theaters in Ming dynasty *biji* 筆記 writings.

comes to Ming theater, scholarly focus has always been on the kind of innovations that occurred in the private troupes. Less well known, despite the work of Tanaka Issei and others, is what went on in the countryside and in the lower levels of urban life. Sezhai 澀齋 thinks that with it so cheap to hire a troupe to come and perform in your house that there was no need to go to a theater.¹³⁰ In any case, we should keep in mind that after Ximen Qing becomes an official, there would be the same problem with him going to a theater as there is with him going to the licensed quarters.

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Sing-Song Girls (*Changde*)

The vast bulk of the musical activity depicted in the novel concerns the songs sung by sing-song girls.¹³¹ They are referred to by a great variety of terms, but the most common is “singers” (*changde* 唱的).¹³² As opposed to later practice, *chang* here is “sing” instead of the character with the female radical used for prostitutes in general.¹³³ Although Ximen Qing is shown having physical sex with a number of the sing-song girls (Li Guijie and Zheng Aiyue most prominently), to make a number of trips to the licensed quarter (this drops off from spending half a month with Li Guijie when he deflowers her to furtive visits to Zheng Aiyue after he has become an official), and to retain the sexual favors (*bao* 包) of Li Guijie on a monthly basis, even after he hardly ever goes to see her, and promise to do so in the case of Zheng Aiyue, most of the sing-song girls come to his house to sing (although he does once have sex with Li Guijie in his household and is caught in the act by his sworn brother, Ying Bojue; 52.698-99).

As we have seen, Li Guijie and Wu Yin'er become Ximen Qing's adopted daughters. They often stay over in the household for several days at a time. Sometimes there is only a vague notice that the sing-song girls plucked and sang (*tanchang*), but most of the time some

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 135.

¹³¹ On women musicians in traditional China, see Joseph S. C. Lam, “The Presence and Absence of Female Musicians and Music in China,” and Cynthia P. Wong and Su Zheng's essays on women and music in Robert Provine, ed., *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 7: East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 401-404 and 405-410, respectively.

¹³² This term appears 87 times in appendix one (pre-2014 version).

¹³³ *Chang* with the female radical appears 22 times in appendix one (pre-2014 version), but never together with *de* 的. The majority of the occurrences are in the last 10 chapters.

information is given about the songs sung, and the author is quite ready to give over a substantial proportion of the novel to full presentations of the texts of the songs that are sung.¹³⁴

Ximen Qing prefers to have four sing-song girls to come entertain as a unit at his banquets. Sometimes they sing together, sometimes they rotate between singing and serving wine (*dijiu* 遞酒, *fengjiu* 奉酒, *quanjiu* 勸酒, *zhenjiu* 斟酒) to the guests. The Qinghe sing-song girls all know each other and love to gossip about each other.

Whereas there were literary genres in the late Ming, including popular songs, that featured prostitutes with hearts of gold, the sing-song girls in the novel have “hearts of gold” only in that they are portrayed as always putting money first. There is often pointed ironic contrast between the “romantic” popular images that the sing-song girls often try to project and their true personas. One of Ying Bojue’s jobs is precisely to deflate their images, which is surely why many of them will refuse to come and perform at venues where he is present, even though they are rarely successful in avoiding him. The image of the patron of the sing-song girls has also suffered a severe “de-romanticization” in the novel. Whereas in earlier literature, as often as not, the patron was a brilliant scholar (*caizi* 才子) on the way up, and the sing-girl was a beautiful woman (*jiaren* 佳人) whom one could only describe as an “accidental prostitute,”¹³⁵ in the *Jin Ping Mei* you have the semi-literate Ximen Qing as patron and thoroughly professional women such as Li Guijie on the other side of the equation. There is only one sequence in the novel in which the patron of a sing-song girl writes poetry for her (49.646-48, Cai Yun’s visit to Ximen Qing’s house and his dalliance with Dong Jiao’er there).¹³⁶

¹³⁴ The later Chongzhen edition of the novel cuts down the bulk of this material by doing such things as only quoting the first song in a song-suite rather than giving the entire suite.

¹³⁵ Someone sold into prostitution by others or who took that course in order to raise money to fulfil her filial duties.

¹³⁶ For comparisons of the differences between conventional depictions of scholars and courtesans and how they are treated in the *Jin Ping Mei*, see, for instance, Jin Xiaoxia 金曉霞, “Shilun ‘jinü ticai’ zai *Jin Ping Mei* zhong de zhuanbian” 試論妓女題材在金瓶梅中的轉變, *Gansu jiaoyu xueyuan xuebao* 甘肅教育學院學報 2001.2: 93-95; and an article by the editor of the Renmin edition of the novel: Tao Muning 陶慕寧, “Zhongguo gudian xiaoshuo zhong ‘jinshi yu jinü’ de muti zhi lanshang jiqi liubian” 中國文學中進士與妓女的母題之濫觴及其轉變, *Huaqiao daxue xuebao* 華僑大學學報 1999.1: 90-98. The same author has also written a book on this general subject, *Jin Ping Mei zhong de qinglou yu jinü* 瓶梅中的青樓與妓女 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu, 1993). For a comparison of the portrait of sing-song girls in the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* and the more romantic treatment of them in a novel influenced by the *Honglou meng*, *Qinglou meng* 青樓夢, see Tian Bing’e, *Jin Ping Mei yu Zhongguo wenhua*, p. 221.

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Young Male Singers (*Xiaoyou*)

In terms of the musical content of the novel, the next most important class of performers after the sing-song girls is the young male singers (*xiaoyou* 小優).¹³⁷ As with the sing-song girls, it is most common for Ximen Qing to hire four to come perform at once, and as is the case with the sing-song girls, they often serve wine when they are not singing. Most prominent among them is Li Ming, who is not only called to sing the most often of all and often asked by Ximen Qing to organize the summoning of other *xiaoyou* to come and perform, but also entrusted with teaching the four household maids until he tries to flirt with Pang Chunmei and loses that job.¹³⁸

Although one common explanation for the rise in importance of *xiaoyou* in the Ming is that it was in response to official restrictions on the interaction between officials and female prostitutes and that the provision of sexual services was part of their trade, Ximen Qing, who otherwise shows no aversion to homosexual sex, as long as he is the penetrator, does not have sex with any of the numerous *xiaoyou* in the novel. This is not the case with Shutong, whom Ximen Qing penetrates fairly regularly, but no matter how much Shutong shares with the *xiaoyou* in terms of talent, he is not a registered entertainer.¹³⁹ Of the singers in the novel, it is the young male singers, including the *xiaoyou*, the *getong* (from Yangzhou), Chunhong, and Shutong, who are considered the best singers of all. Li Ming is considered the most versatile instrumentalist (he teaches the four maids four different musical instruments). Besides teaching the maids in Ximen Qing’s household, he is also invited to come look at the private musicians of Eunuch Director Liu (21.267-68).

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Variety Act Performers (*Baixi, Zashua*)

As Ximen Qing rises in status, the variety of types of performers that he brings into his house increases, as does the complexity of the performances. Variety acts (*baixi, zashua*)¹⁴⁰ become a set feature of the longer programs, typically taking their place after the processional instrumental music and songs and before the plays. The performers are most often summoned from the imperial music office (*jiaofang*). Very little detail is given of the actual performances themselves and it is generally impossible to tell if music was involved in any individual part of

¹³⁷ In appendix one (pre-2014 version), there are 58 mentions of the term *xiaoyou* or its diminutive, *xiaoyou'er* 小優兒.

¹³⁸ His name comes up 95 times in appendix one (pre-2014 version), not far behind 108 for Li Guijie.

¹³⁹ He was originally a yamen usher (31.392-93).

¹⁴⁰ The two terms occur a total of 24 times in appendix one (pre-2014 version).

these performances. An exception to this is Li Gui’s performance outdoors, near a tavern, on horseback, at the Qingming Festival (90.1356-57), which involves the recitation (*nian* 念) of his self-introduction and the flourishing of weapons (and probably some acting). Music is described in this passage, but the exact relationship between it and the performance, if any, is not clear.

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Puppeteers

Although puppetry is culturally important enough to be used as a metaphor five times,¹⁴¹ only three performances are described in any detail in the novel.¹⁴² All three of those take place during funerals (59.821-22, Guan’ge; 65.912, Li Ping’er; and 80.1244-45, Ximen Qing). At least two of these are staged so that the women in the family can watch as well, and it is probable that this was the case for the third also. Since the plays performed by the puppets on these occasions have a lot of supernatural content, perhaps it was thought that puppets are particularly good for treating such topics. As for whom the puppeteers were, in only one instance is a “troupe” (*yiqi*) mentioned. How many puppeteers were needed for the performances, and whether instrumental music or singing were part of the performances, is not made clear, although we have every reason to suspect that music and singing was a feature of the performances.

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Actors

The first mention of actors in the novel comes in a description of a party held at Judicial Commissioner Xia’s house that Ximen Qing attends (19.226) at which the actors almost outnumber the guests (4:5). The first time Ximen Qing has actors come perform at his house is not long after he first becomes an official and a farce (*xiaole yuanben*) about Wang Bo is performed (31.401-403). The performers all come from the Imperial Music Office (*jiaofang si*) and the entire text of the farce is given. Only three actors (*wai* 外, *fumo* 副末, and *jing* 淨) take part in the acting, and no singing or music of any kind seems to be involved, even though there was instrumental music played before the manager (*paiguan*) of the Imperial Music Office offers up to the guests a booklet in red paper (*hongzhi shouben* 紅紙手本) presumably listing the items the troupe was prepared to perform. No details are given about how the decision to perform this particular farce was made. It is the only example in the novel of the inclusion of the complete text for a dramatic performance.

¹⁴¹ 35.470, 48.632, 71.1022, 76.1157-58, and 92.1394. See appendix one for contexts.

¹⁴² A fourth (42.556-57) is really nothing more than a mention in a description of New Year’s activities.

The next time Ximen Qing includes theatre on the program when he hosts guests he summons a troupe of Suzhou actors (*Suzhou zidi* 蘇州子弟) that he saw perform at District Magistrate Li's (36.476).¹⁴³ The honored guests are An Chen and Cai Yun, who have just passed the highest civil servant examination, and perhaps more importantly, Cai Yun is the adopted son of Ximen Qing's patron, the prime minister, Cai Jing. Only four members of the troupe are listed (who perform, respectively, lead and secondary female and male parts),¹⁴⁴ but they are given full names (they are all male), which is the only time that this happens in the novel in the case of actors. They are joined by Shutong, who dresses as a woman and plays a female part. Besides performing scenes from a didactic *chuanqi* play, *Xiangnang ji* 香囊記, they also sing arias (*qingchang* 清唱)¹⁴⁵ without acting them out. No mention is made of an orchestra or of the keeping of time.

The present day scholarly consensus seems to be that the style of singing of the Suzhou actors mentioned in the novel is basically the same as Kunshanqiang 崑山腔 (a.k.a., Kunqu 崑曲 or Kunju 崑劇),¹⁴⁶ which originated in Kunshan and quickly became centered in nearby Suzhou, becoming a national theater form in the late Ming. Unfortunately, when three of the actors reappear later in the novel (this is the last time they appear by name), they are said to be Haiyan 海鹽 style actors (74.1809). Other scholars have claimed that Kunshanqiang does not appear in the novel at all and that this is one reason to argue that the novel was finished earlier in the Ming, before Kunshanqiang became popular.¹⁴⁷ Whether the first performance by these named actors is in the Kunshan or Haiyan style, both are southern styles, and An Chen, a southerner and a devotee of southern style music-drama and song, likes the performances very much.

The majority of the other dramatic performances at Ximen Qing's house are in the Haiyan style, and this is especially true when the guests are high status. The most extended performance is of the *chuanqi* play *Yuhuan ji*, which takes place over two days and involves a greater percentage of description of what happens on stage than is the case for any play besides

¹⁴³ We learn that they live outside the southern gate of the city. None of the licensed quarters seem to be located at that precise spot.

¹⁴⁴ The majority of the plays in the southern tradition are love plays, and many scenes involve only the lovers and/or the lovers and their maids/pages.

¹⁴⁵ This term, *qingchang*, is not used in the novel.

¹⁴⁶ See for instance, Huang Lin, ed., *Jin Ping Mei da cidian*, p. 749.

¹⁴⁷ See Xu Fuming 徐扶明, “*Jin Ping Mei yu Mingdai xiju*” 金瓶梅與明代戲劇, *Xiju yishu* 戲劇藝術 1987.2: 34-42, p. 36.

the *yuanben* about Wang Bo (63.894-64.907). Although some scenes are skipped on the first day, in order to get to more exciting (*renao* 熱鬧) parts, and a different play is performed on the second day at the request of the two eunuch directors, Ximen Qing is persistent in his attempts to see the bulk of the play (it has 34 scenes), which is only finished long after the initial main guest (Cai Xiu) has long left. This is the only example in the novel of playgoers (Ximen Qing and his friends in this instance) seeing even this much of one of the typically long *chuanqi* plays.

The Haiyan actors are brought in to perform for officials of higher status than Ximen Qing (i.e., An Chen and Cai Yun in chapter 36; Song Qiaonian in chapter 49, and Hou Meng in chapter 76). In all but the first of these hostings, other officials are borrowing Ximen Qing’s house and the initiating officials are the ones who ask for or approve the choice of having the Haiyan actors perform.¹⁴⁸ When Ximen Qing hosts the powerful eunuch Defender in Chief Huang Jingchen at Song Qiaonian’s request, the actors come from the Imperial Music Office (*jiaofang si*; 65.921-2). The descriptions of the Haiyan performances in the novel are prized because even though this was a quite influential style of theater, it soon lost favor,¹⁴⁹ and the descriptions of it that are in the novel are said to be the only descriptions of performances in this style that have been preserved.¹⁵⁰

When Ximen Qing is hosting the wives of colleagues and relatives at his house, he borrows the private troupe of the Wangs, who are related to the imperial clan (they are referred to as Wang *huangqinjia* 王皇親家). The troupe consists of 20 young men (*xiaosi* 小廝). They perform once for a party at which the wife of Ximen Qing’s superior attends (42.547-48), once for the women of the Qiao family (one of whom, Fifth Madam Qiao, is related to the imperial clan; 43.571-72), and once for a party that includes the wife of his new colleague, He Yongshou,

¹⁴⁸ In one instance, a messenger from An Chen tells Ximen Qing to definitely hire Haiyan actors and not to select local ones (72.1056).

¹⁴⁹ For an example of a contemporary comment on how Haiyan and other types of singing supposedly made you want to go to sleep, see Zhu Chongzhi 朱崇志, *Zhongguo gudai xiqu xuanben yanjiu* 中國古代戲曲選本研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2004), p. 79.

¹⁵⁰ See Dai Bufan, “*Jin Ping Mei zhong de xiqu he fangzhi shiliao*,” p. 560. One article cites the novel as evidence that the actors named in the novel were famous historical actors and the plays the novel says they performed were representative plays of the Haiyan performance style. See Bu Yuqin 步玉琴, “Shilun ‘Haiyan wenshu’ jiqi yu ‘Haiyan qiang’ de guanxi” 試論海鹽文書及其與海鹽腔的關係 *Zhongguo yinyue* 中國音樂 2003.2: 60-62, 64, p. 60. This author also thinks that the Chongzhen edition illustration of the performance in chapter 63 is a source for the costumes worn by Haiyan actors (*ibid.*, p. 62). Also according to this article, Haiyan style uses the same kind of offstage choral singing (*bangqiang* 幫腔; p. 62) that can still be heard in certain kinds of Sichuan opera.

whom Ximen Qing lusts after (78.1111-12). The troupe also provides processional instrumental music (42.547-48).

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Female and Male Ballad Singers

There are in the novel two blind female ballad singers (called variously *nü xian'er*, *nü'er*, *chang jie'er*, *changnü'er*, *changde laopo* in the novel), Yu Dajie, who has been patronized by the women in the household for some time, and Shen Erjie, recommended to Ximen Qing by Wang Liu'er. The patronization of blind female balladeers by elite families in the late Ming was both popular and controversial.¹⁵¹

The first time we learn of Yu Dajie, she is brought in to entertain the wives during the New Year's holidays. Wu Yueniang thinks it would be better to have her come and sing than for them to gamble for entertainment instead (23.287-88). Yu Dajie plucks and sings (*tanchang*), just like the sing-song girls. Thereafter she is often described as being in the house, singing for the wives' birthdays and staying over for days at a time.

Wang Liu'er succeeds in getting Ximen Qing to invite Shen Erjie to come and perform first for himself and Ying Bojue, and then for the womenfolk in his family. When Ximen Qing and Wu Yueniang are both out of the house, Pang Chunmei demands that Shen Erjie come and perform for her and is refused. A big fracas breaks out in which Chunmei curses Shen Erjie with great relish (she is probably also indirectly cursing Shen Erjie's patron and Pan Jinlian's rival, Wang Liu'er; 75.114-16). When Wu Yueniang learns about this incident she is upset because she notes that a woman balladeer (*nü'er*) makes her way through thousands and tens of thousands of houses and if the story gets noised abroad how could that be good? (75.1125).

The only male balladeers who appear in the novel are a pair of performers of *daoqing*, a Daoist prosimetric genre. These two men are brought by Eunuch Directors Liu and Xue when they come to attend a function at Ximen Qing's house (64.902-906). Only the eunuchs seem to like their performance.

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Nuns

The only nuns who are described in any detail in the novel are the ones who come to the Ximen household to entertain Wu Yueniang and the other wives. Although they do not play any

¹⁵¹ See Joseph S. C. Lam, “The Absence and Presence of Female Musicians,” p. 108. He cites the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* as illustration of the popularity of this practice.

melodic instruments, they do play percussion and many of their performances involve singing. They often stay over, sleeping together with the wives. Most important among them are Nun Wang and Nun Xue, who eventually begin to quarrel when they suspect that the “spoils” each is obtaining through their access to Wu Yueniang and the others are not being fairly shared. Nun Xue in particular has a checkered past, having once been sentenced to return to lay life by none other than Ximen Qing for her role in helping two young lovers have an assignation in her temple. Ximen Qing, however, is not successful in either persuading Wu Yueniang from patronizing her or in keeping her out of the household.

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Teachers and Learning

As we have seen, Li Ming is paid for teaching Ximen Qing’s four maids to sing and play stringed instruments. For that he gets fed “three teas and six meals” (*sancha liufan* 三茶六飯) every day and a monthly salary of five taels of silver. In comparison, a maid could be bought for the same amount of silver that he gets every month.¹⁵² We don’t get a very good idea of exactly how Li Ming goes about his job of teaching them. The same can be said about the process whereby any of the other performers in the novel learned their craft. Some detail is given about the training of Sun Xue’e to earn money as a sing-song girl, but the emphasis is mainly on the brutality of the method employed, which leaves her whole body black and blue (94.1422). We are told that 1,000 taels was spent on the training of the two young male singers (*getong*) that Squire Miao sends to Ximen Qing, but we don’t know what that money was spent on.

The actors and performers from the Imperial Music Office travel with a number of officials who seem to be in charge of maintaining order among them and perhaps also have instructional duties. The family troupes of the Imperial-Relatives-Wangs and of He Yongshou’s uncle, Eunuch He, both have two instructors/masters (*shifan* 師範) who presumably have instructional duties, even if we don’t see them engaged in such (43.572 and 71.1017-21).

Although not enough detail is given to argue with much conviction about this, it seems that the teaching of music that occurs in the novel takes place orally and without the aid of songtexts or musical notation. The only person whose knowledge of music is directly connected to texts in the entire novel is Pan Jinlian. Dame Wang says that Pan Jinlian knows to a great

¹⁵² See Cai Guoliang 蔡國梁, “Ma he yatou de jiage” 馬和丫頭的價格, in his *Jin Ping Mei kaozheng yu yanjiu* 金瓶梅考證與研究 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin, 1984), p. 260.

extent (*zhiquanle duoshao* 知全了多少) the written form (*ziyang* 字樣) of poetry (*shici* 詩詞) and the songs of the various songwriters (*baijia qu'er* 百家曲兒; 3.41). Pan Jinlian and Chen Jingji also write letters in the form of *ci* 詞 and *qu* 曲 poetry.

Providers of Musical Entertainment: Fees and Tips

The *Jin Ping Mei cihua* is a work that is obsessed with money and what things cost. After services are rendered, the novel is likely to record how much money was given to the person who rendered them. We can go through the novel and make a list of the money awarded (*shangqian* 賞錢) to performers.¹⁵³ The money Ximen Qing gives to sing-song girls and young male singers after they have finished performing for the day tends to average around three mace of silver (*sanqian yinzi* 三錢銀子) a person, while acting troupes are given one or two taels of silver. Guests are free to also give tips to the performers, and some do (Eunuchs Liu and Xue are particularly generous or ostentatious, depending on your point of view). It is not clear, however, if a certain amount of money is given in advance, or how to take into account that some of the performances are undertaken as an official duty (*guanshen*, e.g., 66.926). None of the performers are shown to be making the kind of money that would be necessary to buy themselves out of their professions, as happens rather often and rather unrealistically in popular literature of the period.

As one might expect, the sing-song girls are tipped more when they also offer sexual services. When Ximen Qing decides to deflower Li Guijie he begins by giving her five taels of silver just to sing a song (11.131). When he decides to go have sex with Zheng Aiyue, he first sends Dai'an to take her two taels of silver and a set of clothes (59.806-809). When Cai Yun spends the night with Dong Jiao'er at Ximen Qing's, he gives her one tael of silver the next day. She shows the money to Ximen Qing, who explains that civil officials don't have much money and gives her another five mace of silver (49.469).

Conclusion: Consumption

The largest scale musical performances that are put on in the Ximen Qing household are arranged for when he is hosting guests, either on his own initiative or when his house is

¹⁵³ For a list with some exemplary examples, see Cai Guoliang, “Gese shangqian” 各色賞錢, *ibid.*, pp. 259-60.

borrowed for this purpose. But the novel also portrays musical performances as an important part of the celebration of birthdays and holidays, births and weddings, funerals, naming rituals, and other religious rituals, as well as ordinary life.

In the novel, it is not the case that a lot of attention tends to be paid to the musical performances by their audiences; if anything, the opposite is more the case. Sometimes the music is nothing more than “wallpaper,” just oral interior decorating on the order of displaying *qin*-zithers that no one will ever play.

On the other hand, characters in the novel who are very conversant with popular song, such as Pan Jinlian, make use of the performance of songs as opportunities to send messages to others and interpret songs performed or picked by others in a similar fashion.¹⁵⁴ Characters insufficiently alive to the connotations of the performance of particular musical pieces, and of the general rule that the content of the pieces should be in accord with the circumstances in which they will be performed, are ridiculed.¹⁵⁵ Presumably, reading the novel would help a contemporary reader become a better consumer of musical entertainment, but it is also possible that the author was deeply unhappy with the popular culture of his day and he would have considered such a result a serious misreading of his novel.

¹⁵⁴ See Rolston, “Oral Performing Literature,” especially the section entitled “Content-Oriented, Non-Experimental Uses,” pp. 18-26.

¹⁵⁵ The clearest example of this are the two eunuchs, Liu and Xue, whose choices for items to be performed at a banquet at Ximen Qing’s house are rejected a total of three times (31.403).