

THE WEI-JIN SPIRIT AS EXHIBITED BY WOMEN IN THE *SHISHUO XINYU* 世

說新語 IN THE PRIVATE FAMILY SPACE

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## ABSTRACT

Compared with other Chinese dynasties, the Wei-Jin period witnesses the emergence of a distinctive social fashion referred to by the academic field as the Wei-Jin spirit. Previous scholarly studies about the Wei-Jin spirit tend to neglect women, pay significant attention to elite men, and take political and public interactions as their primary research areas. This thesis instead focuses on the Wei-Jin spirit as exhibited by women in the *Shishuo xinyu* in the private family space, thus making up for the deficiency of previous research on the Wei-Jin spirit. Taking the *Shishuo xinyu* as its key primary source, this thesis analyzes anecdotes about certain women in the *Shishuo xinyu* under the framework of Confucian rituals and ethics and compares those women with contemporary men. The introduction of the thesis introduces the historical value of the *Shishuo xinyu*, discusses the origin and development of the term “the Wei-Jin spirit,” and distills and summarizes the major features of the Wei-Jin spirit. Based on the above work, the main body of the thesis then elaborates on Wei-Jin women’s manifestations of the Wei-Jin spirit, including their resistance to or contempt for Confucian rituals and ethics, their courage to maintain personal interests, their genuine and unrestrained behaviors, their pursuit of personal charisma, their elegant and self-confident manner, et cetera, thus presenting to the reader the Wei-Jin spirit as exhibited by women in the private family space and extending the scope of representative figures of the Wei-Jin spirit. This thesis helps the academic field achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of the Wei-Jin spirit and get a better grasp of the social milieu reflected by the Wei-Jin spirit.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Qingyi Gong is a graduate student in the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University. She previously graduated from Bryn Mawr College with a major in mathematics and a minor in creative writing.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are ample scholarly works on the *Shishuo xinyu* or on studies based on the *Shishuo xinyu*. In these scholarly works, the Wei-Jin spirit as reflected by the *Shishuo xinyu* is an important subject of research.<sup>1</sup> It is common that when studying the Wei-Jin spirit, scholars focus on the ruling class and male literati members of the times but overlook women. In order to point out the flaws of the current state of research, I need to first succinctly introduce what the Wei-Jin spirit is. In short, the Wei-Jin spirit is a term that summarizes the spiritual character and fashion of conduct of people in the Wei-Jin period. It reflects the diverse thoughts, growth of self-awareness, and aesthetic pursuit of personal charisma of people of the times. The concept comes from an examination of the characteristics of people in the Wei-Jin period, but it is no longer applied only on the Wei-Jin people. The Wei-Jin spirit has already become the model style of famous gentlemen extolled and aspired to by Chinese intellectuals and a special symbol in Chinese cultural history. The defect of previous studies of the Wei-Jin spirit lies in the fact that most scholars ignore women in their studies of the Wei-Jin spirit as a term summarizing an entire era. This implies that most scholars have overlooked an important part of the Wei-Jin society, namely,

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<sup>1</sup> The Wei-Jin period refers to two dynasties, the Wei Dynasty 魏 (220 – 265 CE) and the Jin Dynasty 晉 (265 – 420 CE). The Jin Dynasty is further divided into the Western Jin Dynasty 西晉 (265 – 316 CE) and the Eastern Jin Dynasty 東晉 (317 – 420 CE).

the family. Such a defect surely prevents us from having a comprehensive grasp of the Wei-Jin spirit and a holistic understanding of the times. Different from other scholars who focus on political life and public interactions, I focus on the private space of the family and study the Wei-Jin spirit manifested by women in this private space. Through presenting a picture of women possessing the Wei-Jin spirit, the thesis intends to reveal the Wei-Jin spirit in the family context in order to revise people's understanding of the scope of application of the Wei-Jin spirit and to provide the reader with a panoramic view of the zeitgeist of the Wei-Jin times.

The contributions of this thesis lie in the following four aspects: First, my thesis shifts the focus of the study of the Wei-Jin spirit to the family and includes women among the representative figures of the Wei-Jin spirit, thus filling a neglected hole in previous scholars' works. Second, this thesis enables the academic field to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the concept of the Wei-Jin spirit by preventing scholars from associating this special cultural symbol solely with Wei-Jin men and therefore revises people's biased view about the Wei-Jin spirit. Third, this thesis analyzes the living condition of Wei-Jin women as reflected by the *Shishuo xinyu*, which provides some reference for us to study the history of Wei-Jin women. Fourth, this thesis adds to our understandings of the text of the *Shishuo xinyu* in terms of the social groups of the Wei-Jin period the work reflects.

In this paragraph, I will briefly describe the methodologies of my thesis. In terms of the disciplinary orientation of my thesis, my thesis makes historical analysis under the premise of scholars' affirmative consensus on the historical value of the *Shishuo xinyu*. My thesis discusses the features of the Wei-Jin spirit as exhibited by



Wei-Jin women and analyzes the living condition of Wei-Jin women and the related social environment behind anecdotes about women in the *Shishuo xinyu*, thus providing helpful reference for historians who study the history of Wei-Jin women. In the beginning, I will point out the deficiency of previous scholarly studies about the Wei-Jin spirit. Then, I will trace previous scholars' opinions about the features of the Wei-Jin spirit, introduce the origin and development of the concept of the Wei-Jin spirit, distill and summarize scholars' opinions, and, based on the above work, propose the major features of the Wei-Jin spirit. In the main body of my thesis, by primarily studying anecdotes about women in the *Shishuo xinyu*, I will explore the words and deeds of Wei-Jin women with reference to the major features of the Wei-Jin spirit I distill from relevant scholarly works and measure them under the framework of Confucian prescriptions for women. Because Confucianism is the ruling ideology promoted by pre-modern Chinese rulers and the prescriptions stipulated by Confucian rituals and ethics have a legal nature, discussing the behaviors of specific women under the framework of Confucian rituals and ethics can deepen our understanding of the significances or implications of such behaviors.

This thesis takes the *Shishuo xinyu* as the basis for its research. In order to facilitate my discussions, terms such as “Wei-Jin women,” “Wei-Jin men,” “Wei-Jin people,” “the Wei-Jin society” and so on in my thesis all specifically refer to the women, men, people, and social environment during the Wei-Jin period as reflected by the text of the *Shishuo xinyu*.

## **1. The historical value of the *Shishuo xinyu***

As the key primary source for my research, the *Shishuo xinyu* is written by Liu Yiqing 劉義慶 (403 – 444 CE) and his literary staff during the Liu Song Dynasty 劉宋 (420 – 479 CE) in the Southern Dynasties 南朝 period (420 – 589 CE).<sup>2</sup> It mainly records the words and deeds of famous gentlemen, especially those living in the Wei-Jin era, in anecdotal form from the last years of the Eastern Han Dynasty 東漢 (25 – 220 CE) to the Eastern Jin Dynasty. The *Shishuo xinyu* is not only a literary work, but also a work that documents history. The Tang Dynasty 唐 (618 – 907 CE) historian Linghu Defen 令狐德棻 (583 – 666 CE), when compiling the *Jinshu* 晉書 on imperial order, broke away from the tradition of relying upon only veritable records and official histories and incorporated a large amount of materials from the *Shishuo xinyu*, which indicates that as early as the Early Tang, the historical authenticity of the characters and events recorded in the *Shishuo xinyu* had won official approval. Scholars in later times also generally affirm the historical value of the *Shishuo xinyu*. For instance, the literature professor at Beihua University Gao Shuqing 高淑清, the literature professor at Tongji University Liu Qiang 劉強, and the history professor at

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<sup>2</sup> “The Southern Dynasties” is a collective term for four consecutive dynasties in southern China, Song, Qi 齊 (479 – 502 CE), Liang 梁 (502 – 557 CE), and Chen 陳 (557 – 589 CE). Liu Yiqing was a member of the Liu Song imperial clan and inherited the title of the Prince of Linchuan 臨川王. As a writer, he authored the *Shishuo xinyu* and the *Youming lu* 幽明錄.

Shandong Normal University Lu Tongyan 魯統彥 have all published relevant studies on this issue.<sup>3</sup> The affirmative voice of the scholars above regarding the authenticity of the *Shishuo xinyu* is representative among scholars who study the work. Scholars' affirmation of the historical value of the *Shishuo xinyu* is the basis of my study in the thesis. As a work that documents history with a different format from that of official histories, the *Shishuo xinyu* presents to us a picture of Wei-Jin lives and helps us get to know the social life of people of the times. Building upon such records with an authentic quality, this thesis will unearth the charisma of women as recorded in the text.

## 2. The defect of previous scholarly studies about the Wei-Jin spirit

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<sup>3</sup> See Gao Shuqing, "Tang xiu *Jinshu* caixie *Shishuo xinyu* yinyou chutan" 唐修《晉書》采擷《世說新語》因由初探, *Jilin Normal University Journal* 吉林師範學院學報, no. 2 (1995): 53 and 54; Liu Qiang, "Cong *Jinshu* kan Tang dai de *Shishuo xinyu* jieshou" 從《晉書》看唐代的《世說新語》接受, *Journal of Shanghai Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* 上海師範大學學報(哲學社會科學版) 35, no. 2 (March 2006): 72; Lu Tongyan, "Shilun *Shishuo xinyu* de shiliao jiazhi" 試論《世說新語》的史料價值, *Dongyue Tribune* 東嶽論叢 22, no. 1 (January 2001): 128.

Digging into the rich mine of the *Shishuo xinyu* is a long-term interest of the Chinese academia. Research on the *Shishuo xinyu* covers a wide range of issues and topics such as textual punctuation and collation, genre classification, the Wei-Jin spirit, gentry clans,<sup>4</sup> the shaping of characters' images, children's education, food, clothing, architecture, et cetera, spanning many aspects of social life. Among the topics of the numerous studies about the *Shishuo xinyu*, the Wei-Jin spirit is an important one that earns great attention from scholars. However, regarding the topic, the focus of scholars is mainly on adult males in the elite class during the Wei-Jin period. This gender bias exists even in the early stages of research on the Wei-Jin spirit. In his speech "Wei-Jin fengdu ji wenzhang yu yao ji jiu zhi guanxi" 魏晉風度及文章與藥及酒之關係 (1927), the famous Chinese writer Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881 – 1936 CE) enumerates stories from the *Shishuo xinyu* as evidence in his discussion of the Wei-Jin spirit, yet the protagonists in those stories are all men.<sup>5</sup> The characters listed in the renowned Chinese philosopher Zong Baihua 宗白華 (1897 – 1986 CE)'s

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<sup>4</sup> "Shizu 士族, also called *shizu* 世族, are powerful local clans that emerged after the Eastern Han within the class of landowners. They enjoyed political and economic prerogatives" 士族, 也稱世族, 東漢以後在地主階層內部形成的各地豪族, 在政治、經濟各方面享有特權. See *Cihai* 辭海 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1979), s.v. "shizu."

<sup>5</sup> See Lu Xun, "Wei-Jin fengdu ji wenzhang yu yao ji jiu zhi guanxi," in *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 (Lasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe, 1996), 843-854.

article “Lun *Shishuo xinyu* yu Jinren de mei” 論《世說新語》與晉人的美 (1940) are all male too.<sup>6</sup> Another renowned Chinese philosopher Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895 – 1990 CE) writes an article entitled “Lun fengliu” 論風流 (1944) based on his study of *Shishuo xinyu* anecdotes. In the twenty eight anecdotes quoted in his article, we find twenty seven of them contain male protagonists, while only one anecdote features a female protagonist.<sup>7</sup> Later, a small number of scholars start to notice women, but their analyses of women tend to be inadequate. There is not enough recognition of women’s due position in the concept of the Wei-Jin spirit and women are ignored when scholars discuss the pantheon of the representatives of the Wei-Jin spirit.

The negligence of women’s cases in studies about the Wei-Jin spirit continues to the present day. Among articles published in recent years, the literature professor at Hunan Normal University Liao Shuwu 廖述务 and Li Hui 李卉’s article “Cong renga xinli xue kan Wei-Jin fengdu” 從人格心理學看魏晉風度 expresses a viewpoint representative of such negligence: “‘The Wei-Jin spirit’ summarizes the shared characteristics of famous literati groups during the Wei-Jin period such as the famous

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<sup>6</sup> See Zong Baihua, “Lun *Shishuo xinyu* yu Jinren de mei,” in Zong Baihua, *Meixue sanbu* 美學散步 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2018), 208-227. According to the conclusion part of Zong’s article, “Jinren de mei” means exactly the spirit of the Jin Dynasty people as the author understands it.

<sup>7</sup> See Feng Youlan, “Lun fengliu,” in Feng Youlan, *Sansong tang xueshu wenji* 三松堂學術文集 (Beijing: Peking University Press, 1984), 609-617.

gentlemen of the Zhengshi Reign (240 – 249 CE) epitomized by Wang Bi (226 – 249 CE) and He Yan (ca. 195 – 249 CE), the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove epitomized by Ruan Ji (210 – 263 CE) and Ji Kang (ca. 223 – ca. 262 CE), the outstanding people of the middle dynasty epitomized by Wang Yan (256 – 311 CE) and Yue Guang (? – 304 CE), the talented people east of the Yangtze River epitomized by Wang Dao (276 – 339 CE) and Xie An (320 – 385 CE), et cetera. All of these Wei-Jin famous gentlemen are straightforward, unrestrained, lofty, and unworldly, exhibiting the shared characteristics of misty clouds and water vapor, charming manner, and self-appreciation. ‘The Wei-Jin spirit’ can be said to be a substitute term for the shared characteristics of Wei-Jin famous literati” “魏晉風度” 就是對正始名士王弼、何晏，竹林七賢阮籍、嵇康，中朝俊秀王衍、樂廣，江左才俊王導、謝安等魏晉時期高士名人群體共同特質的概括。這些魏晉名士莫不直率任誕、清俊脫俗，流露著煙雲水氣而又風流自賞的共同特質，“魏晉風度” 可以說是魏晉高士名人共同特質的代名詞。<sup>8</sup> I agree with the authors’

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<sup>8</sup> Liao Shuwu and Li Hui, “Cong renye xinli xue kan Wei-Jin fengdu,” *Journal of Luoyang Normal University* 洛陽師範學院學報 37, no. 12 (December 2018): 44.

Zhengshi is a reign title of the Wei Dynasty emperor Cao Fang 曹芳 (232 – 274 CE). Wang Bi and He Yan were both famous philosophers of *xuanxue* 玄學, or metaphysical learning, in the Wei Dynasty. “The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove” refer to seven literati members during the Wei Dynasty, Ruan Ji, Ji Kang, Xiang Xiu 向秀 (ca. 221 – ca. 300 CE), Shan Tao 山濤 (205 – 283 CE), Ruan Xian 阮咸 (234 –

statement about the characteristics of Wei-Jin famous gentlemen, but I do not agree on their view that “‘The Wei-Jin spirit’ can be said to be a substitute term for the shared characteristics of Wei-Jin famous literati,” because this view does not reveal a whole picture of the Wei-Jin era. The eight men listed by the authors are characters in different phases of the Wei-Jin period and all belong to the elite or ruling class; most of them are important court officials. The authors believe that “the Wei-Jin spirit” is just the “shared characteristics” of such male “famous literati,” which is problematic. However, like what the authors have done here, limiting one’s discussions of the Wei-Jin spirit to men and “famous literati” only is actually a fairly common phenomenon among scholarly works.

What causes this phenomenon? There is no scholarly work on this question for my reference. I think the main reason may be that scholars’ views are oriented more towards the politics of the historical period. Objectively speaking, prominent

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305 CE), Wang Rong 王戎 (234 – 305 CE), and Liu Ling 劉伶 (221 – 300 CE), who often gathered under bamboo trees, drank wine, and sang together. Ruan Ji and Ji Kang were both famous poets during the Wei Dynasty. “The middle dynasty” refers to the Western Jin Dynasty, since it is between the Wei Dynasty and the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Wang Yan and Yue Guang were both officials during the Western Jin Dynasty. “The talented people east of the Yangtze River” refer to famous gentlemen in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, since the Eastern Jin’s capital Jiankang 建康, now Nanjing 南京, lay east of the Yangtze River. Wang Dao and Xie An were both famous officials during the Eastern Jin Dynasty and were both fond of the Lao-Zhuang thought.

politicians and men with certain political status during the Wei-Jin period tend to exhibit the Wei-Jin spirit quite saliently, which provides researchers with rich and sufficient evidence or examples to study the Wei-Jin spirit. The second reason is that the subordinate status of women during the period causes scholars who study the Wei-Jin spirit to pay less attention on them. Furthermore, pre-modern and modern Chinese scholars who focus on the Wei-Jin spirit are mostly men themselves. Out of their respect and admiration for famous male literati of the past, scholars may intentionally or unintentionally feel a sense of empathy and identification with those ancient men in their studies of the Wei-Jin spirit and we know that the formulation of the concept of the Wei-Jin spirit was primarily completed by scholars before or during the modern times. Besides, probably people's attention is more easily attracted to prominent politicians and scholars may at times be influenced by partial ideas such as "the higher a person's political status is, the more representative he or she is." These are all possible factors that may cause the phenomenon above.

### **3. The features of the Wei-Jin spirit**

Many pre-modern Chinese scholars in different historical periods had recognized the special air of the Wei-Jin people, yet they did not generalize it with a specific term or discuss it in detail. It is Lu Xun who first started to generalize this special air with the term "Wei-Jin fengdu" 魏晉風度, or the Wei-Jin spirit, and study it carefully. In 1927, Lu Xun made a speech at a summer conference in Guangzhou entitled "Wei-Jin fengdu ji wenzhang yu yao ji jiu zhi guanxi," in which he proposed the term "Wei-Jin



fengdu” for the first time and explained it. Because the concept proposed by Lu Xun corresponds highly to the ideals of “freedom of thought and independent character” 自由思想、獨立精神 advocated by Chinese intellectuals in the Republican era (1912 – 1949 CE), the Chinese intelligentsia quickly identified with and accepted it. After Lu, many scholars such as Feng Youlan and the Chinese aesthetician Li Zehou 李澤厚 (1930 –) all published papers about the Wei-Jin spirit, becoming successors who pushed forward research on the concept. Related scholarly research continues to the present day.

In his speech made in 1927, based on the *Shishuo xinyu* records, Lu Xun described the features of the Wei-Jin spirit. In a nutshell, he expressed three points: First, the Wei-Jin spirit advocates flexibility or freedom at will, while opposing rigidity and stubbornness. Second, the Wei-Jin spirit resists Confucian rituals and ethics, that is, it accepts or even appreciates people’s activities that disobey Confucian rituals and ethics.<sup>9</sup> Third, the Wei-Jin spirit encourages people to return to an idyllic style of life and to restore a peaceful and tranquil state of mind. I think Lu’s points sum up three salient characteristics of the Wei-Jin people. These three characteristics are interrelated and the first leads the other two. When explaining the term *tongtuo* 通脫, or flexibility, Lu states: “*Tongtuo* is freedom at will. As the promotion of *tongtuo*

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<sup>9</sup> *Lijiao* 禮教, or rituals and ethics, refers to “ritual rules and moral standards devised for the maintenance of its hierarchical system and clan relations by the ancient society” 古代社會為鞏固其等級制度和宗法關係而制定的禮法條規和道德標準. See *Cihai*, s.v. “*lijiao*.”

influenced the literary world, there emerged a large amount of essays in which the writers wrote down freely what they thought. Also, after people's thoughts became more flexible, stubbornness was abolished. As a result, people were able to fully tolerate heterodox and foreign ideologies. Therefore, ideologies beyond Confucianism were brought into China in a steady stream” 通脫即隨便之意。此種提倡影響到文壇，便產生多量想說甚麼便說甚麼的文章。更因思想通脫之後，廢除固執，遂能充分容納異端和外來的思想，故孔教以外的思想源源引入。<sup>10</sup> In what follows, Lu Xun mainly talks about the influence of *tongtuo* on the essays during the Wei-Jin period, but he does not further tackle the question of why Wei-Jin people's thoughts are *tongtuo*, or flexible. Moreover, regarding the reflections of *tongtuo*, I contend that we need to add another aspect, that is, its reflection in Wei-Jin people's behaviors.

The fundamental reason why the Wei-Jin people revered *tongtuo* and were able to achieve *tongtuo* is that by the Wei-Jin times, the oppressive machine of Confucian rituals and ethics, which had controlled people's minds for hundreds of years, was broken and lacked repair, even though it did not completely fall apart. This situation enabled people to steer their behaviors and pursue the life they wanted according to their own wishes and moods. Pre-modern sources contain ample documents about the dilapidated state of Confucian rituals and ethics during this historical period. To give but one example, the “preface to the biographies of Confucian masters” 儒宗傳序 in *A Concise History of Wei* 魏略 records: “All things under Heaven had fallen apart. ...

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<sup>10</sup> See Lu, “Wei-Jin fengdu ji wenzhang yu yao ji jiu zhi guanxi,” in *Lu Xun quanji*, 844.

Law and order had already declined; the destruction of Confucianism was especially serious” 天下分崩……網紀既衰，儒學尤甚。<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, “ideologies beyond Confucianism were brought into China in a steady stream.” Under such circumstances, restrictions on people’s thoughts gradually loosened and the conditions for the Wei-Jin people to achieve *tongtuo* matured.

*Tongtuo* as reflected in behaviors means doing things according to one’s true nature or own wishes and moods or doing whatever one wants without caring about other people’s attitudes. There are many anecdotes in the *Shishuo xinyu* that display this kind of *tongtuo* behaviors. As an example, the section “Rendan” 任誕 in the *Shishuo xinyu* records: “Wang Ziyou lived in Shanyin.<sup>12</sup> At night, there was a big snowfall. He woke up from sleep, opened the door, and ordered to be served wine. ... He suddenly thought of Dai Andao, who lived in Shan at that time.<sup>13</sup> Immediately, he set off for Dai’s home by boat during the night. It took him the whole night to arrive at his destination, yet when he arrived at Dai’s door, he did not go ahead but returned.

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<sup>11</sup> *Weilüe*, or *A Concise History of Wei*, is a book written by the Wei Dynasty official Yu Huan 魚豢 (?-? CE) and records the history of the Wei Dynasty. The book is now lost, but part of its content can be found in Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (372-451 CE)’s notes to the *Sanguo zhi* 三國志.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Ziyou is Wang Huizhi 王徽之 (338 – 386 CE), the fifth son of the famous Eastern Jin calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303 – 361 CE).

<sup>13</sup> Dai Andao, or Dai Kui 戴逵 (326 – 396 CE), was an Eastern Jin painter.

Someone asked him the reason. Wang said: ‘I originally went in high spirits. Now my high spirits have been exhausted, so I return. Why must I see Dai?’” 王子猷居山陰，夜大雪，眠覺，開室，命酌酒……忽憶戴安道。時戴在剡，即便夜乘小船就之。經宿方至，造門不前而返。人問其故，王曰：「吾本乘興而行，興盡而返，何必見戴？」<sup>14</sup> That Wang Ziyou took a boat to Dai’s home on a snowy night but returned without seeing Dai clearly reflects the impulsiveness and carefreeness of Wei-Jin famous gentlemen. Different from Wang Ziyou, another representative of the Wei-Jin spirit, Ruan Ji, exhibits his carefreeness through resisting Confucian rituals and ethics. An anecdote in the section “Rendan” of the *Shishuo xinyu* records: “Ruan Ji’s sister-in-law once returned to her natal family. Ruan Ji went to meet her and saw her off. Someone derided him [because he violated the Confucian rule that “an adult man and his sister-in-law should not greet each other” 嫂叔不通問].<sup>15</sup> Ji said: ‘Are rituals ever devised for us?’” 阮籍嫂嘗還家，籍見與別。或譏之，籍曰：「禮豈為我輩設也？」<sup>16</sup> Another manifestation of doing things according to one’s true nature is what Lu Xun calls restoring peace of mind in an idyllic style of life. A famous representative is Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (ca. 365 – 427 CE), an Eastern Jin

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<sup>14</sup> See Yu Jiayi 余嘉錫, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* 世說新語箋疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015), 838.

<sup>15</sup> About the rule, see Zhang Shuguo 張樹國, ed., *Liji* 禮記 (Qingdao: Qingdao chubanshe, 2009), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 805.

poet who resigned his official post as the magistrate of Pengze 彭澤 County and returned to his hometown in 405 CE to live a life of “tending weeds after getting up in the morning and returning with a hoe over my shoulder in moonlight” 晨興理荒穢，帶月荷鋤歸 in the countryside.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from Lu Xun’s speech, another significant article about the features of the Wei-Jin spirit is Feng Youlan’s “Lun fengliu.” Feng’s article extends the analysis of the Wei-Jin spirit in the following aspects.

First, it notices Wei-Jin people’s magnanimous air of staying unperturbed in the face of sudden changes and Wei-Jin people’s admiration for it. To illustrate this magnanimous air, here is an example from the section “Yaliang” 雅量 of the *Shishuo xinyu*: “Xiahou Taichu once leant on a pillar to write something.<sup>18</sup> At that time, a heavy rain fell down and the thunder shattered the pillar on which he was leaning. His clothes were charred, but his facial expression remained unchanged. His writing was also as before” 夏侯太初嘗倚柱作書。時大雨，霹靂破所倚柱，衣服焦然，神色

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<sup>17</sup> The lines quoted are in the third poem of Tao Yuanming’s series of poems entitled “Returning to my countryside home” 歸園田居. See Wu Xiaoru 吳小如 et al., *Han Wei liuchao shi jianshang cidian* 漢魏六朝詩鑒賞辭典 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2002), 527.

<sup>18</sup> Xiahou Taichu is Xiahou Xuan 夏侯玄 (209-254 CE), an official and man of letters in the Wei Dynasty. He was one of the founders of the Wei-Jin metaphysical learning.

無變，書亦如故。<sup>19</sup> The section “Yaliang” contains forty two entries; almost all of them highlight the characters’ calmness and magnanimity when facing major life events that trigger pleasure, anger, sorrow, or joy. This magnanimous air is also an important feature of the Wei-Jin spirit.

Second, Feng pays attention to the keen insights of Wei-Jin famous gentlemen into the Lao-Zhuang thought. Feng points out the prevalence of the Lao-Zhuang thought during the Wei-Jin period and the period’s diverse intellectual environment. During the Wei-Jin period, Confucianism was no longer the absolute ruler of people’s minds and the diversity of thought constitutes one of the features of the Wei-Jin spirit. The *Shishuo xinyu* retains a large amount of records about the Wei-Jin people participating in philosophical debates and therefore Paul Rouzer “prefer[s] to see it as a guide to literati ideology.”<sup>20</sup>

The third contribution that Feng Youlan makes to extend the analysis of the Wei-Jin spirit is his perception of the aesthetic propensity of the Wei-Jin people. That is, the Wei-Jin people aesthetically pursued a kind of elegant and self-confident spirit and manner. The *Shishuo xinyu* contains many relevant records about such aesthetic pursuits. For instance, Wang Ziyou met Huan Ziyue on the road.<sup>21</sup> At that time, Wang

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<sup>19</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 384-385.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 86.

<sup>21</sup> Huan Ziyue is Huan Yi 桓伊 (? – ca. 391 CE), a general in the Eastern Jin Dynasty.

He was good at playing music and the *Jinshu* praises him as “the number one

did not hold any position, while Huan was already a high official. Moreover, they did not know each other. Wang sent word to Huan: “I have heard you are good at playing the flute. Please play it for me” 聞君善吹笛，試為我一奏。<sup>22</sup> Huan immediately got off his carriage. “[Huan] played three tunes for Wang. After he finished the tunes, he then got on his carriage and left. The guest [Huan] and the host [Wang] did not exchange a single word” 為作三調。弄畢，便上車去。客主不交一言。<sup>23</sup> The meeting between Wang Ziyong and Huan Ziyue is completely for the art of music. The two men finished their conversation in the music itself, which rendered words superfluous. The anecdote reflects exactly their elegance and self-confidence.

Finally, let us pay attention to what Feng calls the “deep emotions” of Wei-Jin famous gentlemen. Here, Feng Youlan stresses that Wei-Jin famous gentlemen contemplate life as they wander about mountains and waters in the natural world. Feng’s statements are a further elaboration of Lu Xun’s point that the Wei-Jin people seek “to return to an idyllic style of life and to restore a peaceful and tranquil state of mind” by pointing out that when wandering about mountains and waters, Wei-Jin famous gentlemen tend to project their inner worlds onto the external scenery. For instance, the landscape poems and essays composed by Wei-Jin famous gentlemen

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[musician] east of the Yangtze River” 江左第一。See “Huan Yi zhuan” 桓伊傳 in the *Jinshu* in vol. 2 of *Ershi wu shi quanshu* 二十五史全書 (Huhehaote: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 1998), 453.

<sup>22</sup> See Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 839-840.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

such as the great writer Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385 – 433 CE) are all concrete expressions of their spiritual worlds.

By the early 1960s, the Wei-Jin spirit has already become a widely accepted concept. The *Zhongguo wenxue shi* 中國文學史 published in 1963 and compiled by the literary historian at Peking University You Guoen 遊國恩 (1899 – 1978 CE) and other scholars is one of the most popular literature textbooks in Chinese colleges and the book introduces students to the Wei-Jin spirit as an academic term.<sup>24</sup>

As a continuing effort to construct the concept of the Wei-Jin spirit, the Chinese aesthetician Li Zehou elaborates the nature of the Wei-Jin spirit as “the awakening of humans” 人的覺醒.<sup>25</sup> Li Zehou devotes an entire chapter entitled “Wei-Jin fengdu” in his monograph on aesthetics written in 1979, *The Path of Beauty*, to talking about the Wei-Jin spirit, in which he writes: “The awakening of humans is man’s rediscovery, contemplation, grasp, and pursuit of his life, significance, and fate under the condition of questioning and rejecting existing traditional standards, beliefs, and values. This is a new attitude and point of view” 人的覺醒，即在懷疑和否定舊有傳統標準和信仰價值的條件下，人對自己生命、意義、命運的重新發現、思索、把握和追求。

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<sup>24</sup> See You Guoen et al., *Zhongguo wenxue shi* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1963), 352-354.

<sup>25</sup> See Li Zehou, “Wei-Jin fengdu” 魏晉風度, in Li Zehou, *Mei de licheng* 美的歷程 (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2010), 157-166.



這是一種新的態度和觀點。<sup>26</sup> The importance of Li Zehou's discussion about the Wei-Jin spirit in the chapter lies in the fact that he classifies all the characteristics of Wei-Jin people's thoughts and behaviors he analyzes under the theme of "the awakening of humans." Li's proposal of "the awakening of humans" pushes our understanding of the Wei-Jin spirit to a higher level, as we can see that Wei-Jin people's carefree behaviors of resisting Confucian rituals and ethics and returning to an idyllic style of life mentioned by Lu Xun and their aesthetic propensity to pursue personal charisma noticed by Feng Youlan all derive from this "awakening of humans."

Research conducted by other contemporary scholars about the Wei-Jin spirit basically inherits the results of previous scholarly studies. Based on this foundation, contemporary scholars explore the Wei-Jin spirit more in depth by doing case studies on certain representatives of the Wei-Jin spirit, studying the Wei-Jin spirit with different points of focus, and so forth. Yet in terms of summarizing the features of the Wei-Jin spirit, there is no additional innovation. A society is a complex and colorful entity. As a term that reflects the spiritual pursuit, ideal character, and model manner of people of an entire era, the Wei-Jin spirit also has manifold features. After tracing and reviewing previous scholars' research findings on the Wei-Jin spirit earlier in this section, I contend the features of the Wei-Jin spirit should mainly include the following five aspects.

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<sup>26</sup> Li, *Mei de licheng*, 161-162.

First, the Wei-Jin spirit connotes the diversity of thought. Second, the Wei-Jin spirit connotes the behaviors of following one's true nature in an unrestrained way, resisting Confucian rituals and ethics, satisfying personal desires, and pursuing the liberation of one's personality as well as the acceptance and promotion of such behaviors. Third, the Wei-Jin spirit connotes the aesthetic pursuit of an elegant and self-confident spirit and manner as well as personal charisma. Fourth, the Wei-Jin spirit connotes the magnanimous air of staying unperturbed in the face of sudden changes and reacting as usual in unexpected affairs. Fifth, the Wei-Jin spirit connotes the admiration for the natural world and the expression of one's feelings through mountains and waters.

The five aspects above are the main features or manifestations of the Wei-Jin spirit. Throughout China's dynastic history, such features were pervasive during the Wei-Jin period. From the level of the royal clan, high officials, and aristocrats to that of common literati, ordinary people, and monks, they became a social fashion. The Nanjing Museum preserves a set of painted tomb bricks dating back to the Six Dynasties 六朝 (222 – 589 CE), whose content is the “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove.”<sup>27</sup> The “Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove” are exemplars of the Wei-Jin spirit who fight against Confucian rituals and ethics and exhibit their personalities overtly. The fact that people in the Six Dynasties painted contemporaries' images on

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<sup>27</sup> The Six Dynasties refer to six regimes in southern China, which are the Eastern Wu 東吳 (222 – 280 CE), the Eastern Jin, Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen.

tomb bricks demonstrates that the Wei-Jin spirit was already a highly admired social fashion during the period.

Why did the Wei-Jin spirit emerge during the Wei-Jin period and why did it become a social fashion? There are many academic works for our reference.<sup>28</sup>

Generally speaking, the main reasons include: the frequent regime changes and long years of wars made Wei-Jin rulers unable to establish a unified system of thought control in their states; following the loss of status of Confucianism as the dominant ideology, there emerged relative open-mindedness; the Cao Wei regime (213-265 CE) established an influential new standard for selecting officials, which emphasizes talent or ability and downplays Confucian morals; the blending of ethnic groups during the Wei-Jin period caused the fusion of different ideas, views, and cultures, thereby influencing people's behaviors and habits. It is mainly because of the above reasons

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<sup>28</sup> For instance, see Liu Juan 劉娟, "Qian xi Wei-Jin fengdu de shehui lishi tiaojian" 淺析魏晉風度的社會歷史條件, *Journal of Jingtangshan Normal College* 井岡山師範學院學報 25, no. 12 (December 2004): 18-19; Tan Li 譚立, "Lun 'Wei-Jin fengdu' xingcheng zhi dute huanjing he geti yinsu" 論“魏晉風度”形成之獨特環境和個體因素, *Journal of Liaoning Technical University (Social Science Edition)* 遼寧工程技術大學學報（社會科學版） 10, no. 4 (July 2008): 402-404; Bai Cuiqin 白翠琴, "Lun Wei-Jin nanbei chao minzu ronghe dui Hanzu fazhan de yingxiang" 論魏晉南北朝民族融合對漢族發展的影響, *Ethno-national Studies* 民族研究, no. 3 (1990): 47-56.

that the Wei-Jin society was relatively open and tolerant and the Wei-Jin spirit was able to take shape during the period.

## WOMEN: THE WEI-JIN SPIRIT IN THE FAMILY

By now, the reader has had a general idea of the concept of the Wei-Jin spirit and a general understanding of the Wei-Jin spirit as exhibited by Wei-Jin elite men in their social interactions. Then, what did women of the times look like? Let us start our exploration with comments made by people of the times on contemporary women from a Confucian standpoint. The Jin Dynasty scholar Ge Hong 葛洪 (283 – 343 CE) criticizes women of his times in the chapter “Jimiu” 疾謬 of his *Baopu zi* 抱樸子: “However, in today’s customs, women ... do not weave hemp, but wander in markets. They cast family chores aside and devote themselves to building social connections. Moreover, they accompany each other to visit their relatives. On their way, they hold torches under the stars and proceed unceasingly. They bring a lot of attendants, who fill the streets in a splendid manner. Their female and male servants mix together like people in a market and find ways to tell obscene jokes. Such behaviors are indeed detestable and abominable” 而今俗，婦女 ..... 不績其麻，市也婆婆。舍中饋之事，修周旋之好。更相從詣之適親戚，承星舉火，不已於行，多將侍從，暉暉盈路，婢使吏卒，錯雜如市，尋道褻謔，可憎可惡。<sup>29</sup> Ge Hong’s description enables us to see the free living conditions of Wei-Jin women, but Ge himself considers such living conditions as “detestable and abominable.” The Jin Dynasty historian Gan Bao 干寶 (? – 336 CE) also criticizes women during the Jin Dynasty in

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<sup>29</sup> Ge Hong, *Baopu zi* in vol. 63 of *Siku quanshu huiyao* 四庫全書薈要 (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1997), 403.

his “Jinji zonglun” 晉紀總論.<sup>30</sup> “Women during the Jin Dynasty ... marry before their proper age and allow sentiments to guide their action. Therefore, none of them treat the faults of wantonness and dissipation as a shame, nor do they curb the evil feeling of jealousy. ... Their fathers and brothers do not punish them. No person under Heaven criticizes them” 其婦女 ..... 先時而婚，任情而動，故皆不恥淫逸之過，不拘妒忌之惡。 ..... 父兄弗之罪也，天下莫之非也。<sup>31</sup> The two passages above by Ge and Gan reveal at least three things: First, they show that women’s pursuit of personal desires unfettered by Confucian rituals and ethics was an actual social situation during the Wei-Jin period. Second, they demonstrate that the behaviors of women described by the authors belonged to new social fashions and were widely accepted and recognized. It is worth noting that “no person under Heaven criticizes” those new social fashions exhibited by women. Third, the two passages display that there already existed voices against such new social fashions during the Wei-Jin times. The rulers still upheld Confucianism as an orthodox ideology and defenders of Confucianism as well as official histories expressed a negative attitude towards the characteristics of the Wei-Jin spirit that violated Confucian rituals and ethics exhibited by women. As for how the behaviors of women criticized by Ge Hong and Gan Bao

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<sup>30</sup> Gan Bao compiled the *Jinji* 晉紀 by imperial order during the reign of Emperor Yuan of Jin 晉元帝 (r. 318 – 323 CE). The work is now lost, but Gan Bao’s introduction to the *Jinji*, “*Jinji zonglun*,” is extant.

<sup>31</sup> See Xiao Tong 蕭統, ed., *Wen xuan* 文選 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 693.

violated rules about women in Confucian rituals and ethics, the question will be answered in the rest of my thesis.

What is criticized by Ge Hong, Gan Bao, and like-minded scholars is exactly where the charisma of Wei-Jin women lies. Although we rarely see Wei-Jin women on the political stage during that period, the Wei-Jin spirit was not away from them. Indeed, they saliently displayed the Wei-Jin spirit in the private family space.

In subsequent discussions, I will classify women into groups according to their familial roles and discuss women as wives, mothers, daughters, and maidservants, respectively.

### **1. Wives who take Confucian rituals and ethics lightly and challenge the authority of their husbands**

The section “Xianyuan” 賢媛 in the *Shishuo xinyu* records the following anecdote in which a woman expresses contempt for her husband: “After the wife of Wang Ningzhi nee Xie went to the house of the Wang clan, she expressed much contempt for Ningzhi.<sup>32</sup> When she returned to the house of the Xie clan, she was extremely unhappy. The Grand Mentor consoled her and tried to soothe her unhappiness:<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Wang Ningzhi (334 – 399 CE) was an official and calligrapher in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. He is a son of Wang Xizhi and the husband of Xie Daoyun 謝道韞 (? – ? CE).

<sup>33</sup> “The Grand Mentor” refers to Xie An, who is an uncle of Xie Daoyun.

‘Wanglang is a son of Yishao.’<sup>34</sup> Moreover, his character and talents are not bad. Why do you hate him like that?’ She replied: ‘Within our clan, I have uncles such as Ada and Zhonglang.’<sup>35</sup> Among my cousins, nephews, and brothers, there are Feng, Hu, E, and Mo.’<sup>36</sup> I did not expect that between the Heaven and the Earth there exists a Wanglang.’” 王凝之謝夫人既往王氏，大薄凝之。既還謝家，意大不說。太傅慰釋之曰：「王郎，逸少之子，人材亦不惡，汝何以恨乃爾？」答曰：「一門叔父，則有阿大、中郎。群從兄弟，則有封、胡、遏、末。不意天壤之中，乃有王郎。」<sup>37</sup> By giving her uncle such a reply, Xie Daoyun implied that the Xie clan had many talented people, including herself. Because of this, she could rightfully despise

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<sup>34</sup> Yishao is the courtesy name of Wang Xizhi.

<sup>35</sup> Ada possibly refers to Xie Shang 謝尚 (308-357 CE), a great general in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Zhonglang possibly refers to Xie Wan 謝萬 (320-361 CE), an Eastern Jin official who had served as the Assistant Commander to the General of the Pacification Army.

<sup>36</sup> Feng, Hu, E, and Mo are the pet names of Xie Shao 謝韶, Xie Lang 謝朗, Xie Xuan 謝玄, and Xie Yan 謝琰, respectively. Xie Shao (344-379 CE) had served as the Commander of Chariots and Cavalry. Xie Lang (338-361 CE) had served as the Governor of Dongyang. Xie Xuan (343-388 CE) was an important general in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Xie Yan (352-400 CE) was also a general in the Eastern Jin Dynasty.

<sup>37</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 768-769.



her lackluster husband Wang Ningzhi. Her comment on her husband demonstrates that she treats herself as the superior one, an attitude that exhibits exactly one of the features of the Wei-Jin spirit. Regarding this point, we will discuss it together with the following anecdote that portrays a woman who confronts her husband directly in her pursuit of her own dignity and the equality between husband and wife. The section “Xianyuan” in the *Shishuo xinyu* records: “Wang Gongyuan married the daughter of Zhuge Dan.<sup>38</sup> When they entered the nuptial chamber and just started talking with each other, Wang told his wife: ‘My bride’s looks are base and vulgar. She is in no way like Gongxiu [the bride’s father]!’ His wife said: ‘You, a true man, are unable to imitate Yanyun [the bridegroom’s father],<sup>39</sup> yet you have ordered your wife to keep pace with an outstanding figure’” 王公淵娶諸葛誕女。入室，言語始交，王謂婦曰：「新婦神色卑下，殊不似公休！」婦曰：「大丈夫不能仿佛彥雲，而令婦人比蹤英傑」。<sup>40</sup> Confronting the criticism of her husband on her, the daughter of Zhuge Dan did not show any sign of submissiveness. Instead, she retorted tooth for tooth by directly mentioning her father-in-law’s courtesy name and comparing her father-in-law with her husband.

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<sup>38</sup> Wang Gongyuan is Wang Guang 王廣 (? – 251 CE), a philosopher in the Wei Dynasty and a son of the Defender-in-Chief, Wang Ling 王淩 (172 – 251 CE). Zhuge Dan (? – 258 CE), whose courtesy name is Gongxiu, had served as the General-in-Chief to Conquer the East in the Wei Dynasty.

<sup>39</sup> Yanyun is the courtesy name of Wang Ling.

<sup>40</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 747.

In the two anecdotes above, the first one shows Xie Daoyun's sense of superiority and the second one allows us to appreciate the prompt reaction of the daughter of Zhuge Dan. Both anecdotes are also about minor family conflicts. However, viewed from a more in-depth perspective, the behaviors of the two women in the anecdotes essentially despise or challenge Confucian rituals and ethics. To better understand the severity of Xie Daoyun and the daughter of Zhuge Dan's challenges to their husbands' authority and the Wei-Jin spirit the two women exhibit, we need to get to know Confucian regulations of women's status, which state the clear and strict principles of *sangang* 三綱 and *sancong* 三從.

The word *sangang*, which literally means "three bonds," comes from Dong Zhongshu's *Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋繁露, in which he stipulates that the ruler guides the ministers, the father guides the son, and the husband guides the wife and asserts that the "three bonds" are sanctioned by the Heaven.<sup>41</sup> *Sancong*, or "three obediences," comes from the Zixia 子夏 commentary on the chapter entitled "Mourning attire" 喪服 in the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* 儀禮<sup>42</sup>: "Women are obligated to uphold three obediences and should not act

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<sup>41</sup> See Dong Zhongshu, *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 in vol. 51 of *Siku quanshu huiyao*, 400.

<sup>42</sup> The *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* mainly records ritual practices of "literati-officials" 士大夫 on various occasions such as weddings and capping ceremonies during the Zhou Dynasty 周 (ca. 11th cent. – 221 BC).

independently. Therefore, when unmarried, they should obey their father. After marriage, they should obey their husband. After their husband dies, they should obey their son” 婦人有三從之義，無專用之道。故未嫁從父，既嫁從夫，夫死從子。<sup>43</sup> There is a similar passage from the chapter “Special animals for suburban sacrifices” 郊特牲 in the *Book of Rites*: “The man leads and the woman follows. From here the relationship between husband and wife starts. Women are people who follow others. In their youth, they follow their father and brother. After marriage, they follow their husband. After their husband dies, they follow their son. The word ‘husband’ means a supporter. It denotes a person who leads others by his wisdom” 男帥女，女從男，夫婦之義由此始也。婦人，從人者也；幼從父兄，嫁從夫，夫死從子。夫也者，夫也；夫也者，以知帥人者也。<sup>44</sup> The rules prescribed for women in the *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* and the *Book of Rites* above are consistent with each other. Both classics stress that unmarried women have to comply with the instruction and will of their father and should not object to the guidance of their elders. Moreover, after getting married, women should obey their husband and comply with their husband’s will. If unfortunately their husband passes away earlier than them, then women should stick to their duties and listen to the arrangement made by their son.

Confucianism emphasizes that men are noble and women are lowly. The rules above enable one to see that under the authoritarian shadow of Confucian rituals and ethics, women’s dignity and interests were greatly impaired. According to such rules,

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<sup>43</sup> *Yili* 儀禮 in vol. 16 of *Siku quanshu huiyao*, 376.

<sup>44</sup> Zhang, ed., *Liji*, 118.

no matter how lackluster her husband was, Xie Daoyun as a wife would still have a lower status than his and thus have no right to make comments on him. Likewise, according to such rules, facing her husband's criticism, the daughter of Zhuge Dan should have complied with her husband's will and had no right to retort. However, the two anecdotes above disclose to us the following information: First, during the Wei-Jin period, the authority of the husband stipulated by Confucian rules was not absolutely effective, nor was it inviolable. Even though it is her wedding night, the daughter of Zhuge Dan still directly criticizes her husband and maintains her dignity. And Xie Daoyun's contempt for her husband despises her husband's authority even more severely. Second, the idea of equality between men and women had already emerged in the minds of certain Wei-Jin women. Without the idea of equality, the daughter of Zhuge Dan might not have dared to retort upon her husband in such a blunt way. In the behaviors of both Xie Daoyun and the daughter of Zhuge Dan, we cannot discern the thought that men are noble and women are lowly.

Although the *Shishuo xinyu* contains a relatively small number of anecdotes similar to the ones above about women challenging the authority of their husbands, the small number of anecdotes can still provide historians with a window from which they can perceive the status of Wei-Jin women in the family. In some Wei-Jin families, the principles of *sangang* and *sancong* did not exist and the Confucian stipulations that suppress women basically lost their restrictive power. Regarding the decline of Confucian rituals and ethics during the Wei-Jin period, the vivid descriptions of Gan Bao in his "Jinji zonglun" can serve as supporting evidence: "Rituals, laws, penalties, and politics were all severely destroyed by this time. It is

like building a house but then removing the mortises and tenons, storing up water but then bursting the dam, and gathering fire but then withdrawing the firewood” 禮法刑政，於此大壞，如室斯構而去其鑿契，如水斯積而決其隄防，如火斯畜而離其薪燎也。<sup>45</sup> As a side note, the act of directly calling one’s father by his name between the daughter of Zhuge Dan and Wang Gongyuan also violates Confucian rituals and ethics.

The anecdote about the daughter of Zhuge Dan is also cited by the Rice University professor Nanxiu Qian when she analyzes different standards for evaluating women by authors in different dynasties. Qian compares the *Shishuo xinyu* with the *Lienü zhuan* 列女傳 by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77 – 6 BC) and points out that the standard for evaluating women underwent changes from the *Lienü zhuan* to the *Shishuo xinyu*.<sup>46</sup> In her monograph *Spirit and Self in Medieval China*, Qian believes the authors of the *Shishuo xinyu* and the *Lienü zhuan* “differ from each other primarily in their attitudes toward women’s intelligence.”<sup>47</sup> “In the *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, Liu Hsiang quotes from the *Book of Songs* [the lines about the tyrant Xia Jie 夏桀 (? – ? BC) and his wife Mo Hsi 妹喜 (? – ? BC)] to condemn intelligent women ... He concludes that Mo Hsi’s problem, as with any intelligent woman, lies in her

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<sup>45</sup> See Xiao, ed., *Wen xuan*, 693.

<sup>46</sup> The *Lienü zhuan* is a Western Han 西漢 (206 BC – 24 CE) work that collects stories about women. It extols or criticizes the women depicted from a Confucian perspective.

<sup>47</sup> Nanxiu Qian, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China: The Shih-shuo hsin-yü and Its Legacy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 143.

possession of ‘a woman’s body but a man’s mind,’ which enables her to transcend the gender difference, to assume men’s features, and to cause endless trouble.”<sup>48</sup> Qian further states: “Contrary to Liu Hsiang, the *Shih-shuo* author expects a woman to have a man’s mind, as exemplified in Wang Kuang’s [i.e., Wang Gongyuan’s] wedding-night demand, that his bride carry on her father’s mental strength, emulating him both in spirit and in facial expression (*shen-se*). The bride’s tit-for-tat rebuttal to the groom, demonstrating that she is every bit her father’s daughter—intelligent, eloquent, and courageous—obviously satisfies the author so that he includes this episode in the chapter ‘Worthy Beauties.’”<sup>49</sup> Liu Xiang lived in the Han Dynasty, while Liu Yiqing lived during the Jin and Liu Song Dynasties. The comparative analysis of Qian about the two works enables us to see the huge contrast between the standards for evaluating women by authors of two different periods. This contrast between the evaluation standards, viewed from a historical perspective, could be regarded as a refraction of the different living environments of Han Dynasty women and Wei-Jin women.

Just as Liu Yiqing appreciates the above-mentioned women’s behaviors of challenging the authority of their husbands, he includes many more anecdotes about men despising powerful figures in the *Shishuo xinyu*. For instance, the powerful Wei Dynasty official Zhong Hui 鐘會 (225-264 CE) once went to visit Ji Kang with several other famous gentlemen. Although he had heard of Ji’s name, he did not know Ji personally. When Zhong and his companions arrived at Ji’s house, Ji was just

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

forging iron under a tree. Ji appeared not to have seen them and kept on raising his hammer. After a long period of time, Ji still did not say a word to them. Disappointed, Zhong and his companions left.<sup>50</sup> The anecdote does not explicitly tell us why Ji Kang refused to talk to Zhong Hui. Since there is only the detail that the two men did not know each other before, it is hard to guess the exact reason for Ji Kang to do so. Nevertheless, the anecdote clearly shows that Ji Kang did not bend to secular power. Instead, he chose to be himself. Facing the powerful figure Zhong Hui, Ji Kang was not a sycophant at all; his behaviors unequivocally expressed a contemptuous attitude towards Zhong. Such contempt essentially reflects Ji's challenge to the authority. Compared with Ji's behaviors, Xie Daoyun and the daughter of Zhuge Dan's challenges to their husbands share basically the same spirit of despising and fighting against the authority.

## **2. Wives who resist Confucian rituals and ethics and challenge the marriage system**

Wei-Jin women's characteristic of daring to resist Confucian rituals and ethics and pursue equality and dignity is also reflected in their challenge to the marriage system. Pre-modern Chinese marriage system was monogamy with one wife and multiple concubines, that is, it allowed a husband to have one formal wife and several other informal spouses. Wives and concubines had different statuses within a family; the status of wives was higher than that of concubines. This system was implemented

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<sup>50</sup> See Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 846.

in the upper classes. The chapter “Hunyi” 昏義 in the *Book of Rites* writes: “In ancient times, a king’s empress supervised six back palaces, which had three primary consorts, nine secondary consorts, twenty seven hereditary consorts, and eighty one ordinary consorts” 古者天子，后立六宮，三夫人、九嬪、二十七世婦、八十一御妻。<sup>51</sup> Men with different official positions and titles could have different numbers of informal spouses. The Confucian classic *Baihu tongyi* 白虎通義 defends the rationality of this marriage system by stating the following words in its chapter “Jiaqu” 嫁娶:<sup>52</sup> “Why do ministers and senior officials have one wife and two concubines? It is because [the ruler] respects talents and considers the descendants of those talents as important” 卿、大夫，一妻二妾者何？尊賢重繼嗣也。<sup>53</sup> According to those rules, if a man had enough economic capability, then he could marry multiple women. However, during the Wei-Jin times, women did not silently bear such a marriage system but fought against this system, which was unreasonable in their eyes. Take the wife of the Eastern Jin counselor-in-chief Wang Dao for example.

Liu Xiaobiao 劉孝標 (463-521 CE) cites from the *Records of Jealous Women* 妒婦記 in his notes to the sixth entry of the chapter “Qingdi” 輕詆 in the *Shishuo xinyu*:

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<sup>51</sup> Zhang, ed., *Liji*, 293.

<sup>52</sup> *Baihu tongyi* is a work written by the Eastern Han historian Ban Gu 班固 (32 – 92 CE). It summarizes the content of the important philosophical debates held at the Baihu guan 白虎觀 in Luoyang in 79 CE.

<sup>53</sup> See Ban Gu, *Baihu tongyi* in vol. 53 of *Siku quanshu huiyao*, 282.



“The wife of the counselor-in-chief [Wang Dao] nee Cao was extremely jealous by nature. She forbade the counselor-in-chief to have concubines-in-waiting. Even the inferior attendants and maidservants around the counselor-in-chief were inspected by her. Sometimes there were people who looked beautiful [around Wang Dao] and she would invariably reprimand them” 丞相曹夫人性甚忌，禁制丞相，不得有侍御，乃至左右小人，亦被檢簡，時有妍妙，皆加誚責。<sup>54</sup> As a figure who had a lofty position second only to the emperor, Wang Dao was still subject to his wife’s restrictions. Similarly, the *Shishuo xinyu* records that the wife of Xie An nee Liu, the wife of Huan Wen 桓溫 (312 – 373 CE) nee Sima, the wife of Sun Xiu 孫秀 (? – ca. 301 CE) nee Kuai, et cetera, all demanded that their husbands be devoted to themselves alone and not take concubines, even though their husbands were important officials and had great political power.<sup>55</sup> Among those women, the wife of Xie An even restricted Xie An from watching maidservants’ performances by elegantly admonishing her husband that watching such performances “may harm your great virtue” 恐傷盛德。<sup>56</sup> Those Wei-Jin wives seemed to forget the Confucian prescriptions for the marriage system. They restricted their husbands out of their own nature and safeguarded their husbands’ exclusive devotion to them. From their

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<sup>54</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 914.

<sup>55</sup> Huan Wen was a famous general in the Eastern Jin Dynasty. Sun Xiu was an official in the Western Jin Dynasty.

<sup>56</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 767.

behaviors, we see the Lao-Zhuang idea of “following one’s own nature,” which opposes any social system that oppresses the human nature.

Regarding Wei-Jin wives’ challenge to the existing marriage system, not only does the *Shishuo xinyu* provide relevant records, but the above-mentioned book *Records of Jealous Women*, which emerged in the Song Dynasty during the Southern Dynasties period, is also supporting evidence for this phenomenon. The *Records of Jealous Women* is a book that exclusively documents stories about Wei-Jin women who oppose their husbands for marrying several spouses or having affairs with other women. In other words, it is a book that documents stories about Wei-Jin women who require their husbands to be loyal to themselves. The book is now lost, but regarding the book, we can look at the statements by the following two scholars.<sup>57</sup> The professor at Hunan Normal University Zhang Zhaokai 張兆凱 observes: “The phenomenon of jealous women has existed since antiquity. However, during the Wei-Jin and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420 – 589 CE), the trend of jealous women was particularly pronounced. Emperor Ming of Song during the Southern Dynasties had once ordered a close courtier Yu Tongzhi to write a book entitled *Records of Jealous Women*. The book is now lost, but according to the *Yiwen leiju*,<sup>58</sup> its content is mainly

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<sup>57</sup> Limited excerpts of the *Records of Jealous Women* are contained in certain notes to pre-modern Chinese books. For instance, the story about Wang Dao and his wife from the *Records of Jealous Women* mentioned above comes from the notes by the Southern Dynasties scholar Liu Xiaobiao to the *Shishuo xinyu*.

<sup>58</sup> *Yiwen leiju* is a Tang Dynasty reference book compiled by Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢

about affairs since the Wei-Jin times” 妒婦現象自古有之，而魏晉南北朝時期，妒婦之風特甚。南朝宋明帝時，曾令近臣虞通之撰《妒婦記》一書。其書已佚，然據《藝文類聚》載，其內容多為魏晉以來之事。<sup>59</sup> The literature professor at Taiwan Feng Chia University Liang Huangyi 梁煌儀 elaborates more on the *Records of Jealous Women*: “The *Records of Jealous Women* explores the high status of men and the low status of women in the traditional society and problems related to marriage, courtship, and the right to speak resulting from such gender inequality. ... However, the jealousy that the *Records of Jealous Women* refers to is apparently the demand of modern men and women for concentrated devotion between lovers and marital partners. Therefore, although [the women in the *Records of Jealous Women*] earn the name of jealousy, they are actually virtuous” 《妒記》探究傳統社會男尊女卑，性別不平等中兩性婚戀與話語權問題。..... 然《妒記》所述之妒，儼然現代男女要求婚戀專一，名雖妒而實賢。<sup>60</sup> Liang examines the purpose of the work’s composition in detail: “The biography of the empress of King Xiaowu Wenmu in the ‘Biographies of empresses and consorts,’ which is *juan* forty one of the *Songshu*, records: ‘... All of the princesses during the Song Dynasty were extremely jealous and

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(557 – 641 CE), Linghu Defen, and other scholars.

<sup>59</sup> Zhang Zhaokai, “Wei-Jin nanbei chao de dufu zhi feng” 魏晉南北朝的妒婦之風, *Chinese Literature and History* 文史知識, no. 10 (1993): 114-118.

<sup>60</sup> Liang Huangyi, “Yu Tongzhi *Du ji* yinyi yu xingbie fansi” 虞通之《妒記》引義與性別反思, *Masterpieces Review*, no. 3 (2013): 18.

Taizong often disliked their jealousy. The wife of Yuan Tao, the magistrate of Hushu, was sentenced to death because of jealousy, so [Taizong] ordered his close courtier Yu Tongzhi to write the *Records of Jealous Women*.’ ... Taizong probably considered that the social atmosphere of jealousy spread too widely in his times that he ordered Yu Tongzhi to write a book to cultivate people morally. Yu’s book is based on actual characters and events, but it adds color to those raw materials and borrows the biographical writing style of official histories to narrate stories about jealous women in the Jin Dynasty; its words are concise devoid of verbosity” 《宋書·后妃傳·孝武文穆王皇后傳》卷 41： ..... 宋世諸主，莫不嚴妒，太宗每疾之。湖熟令袁愔妻以妒忌賜死，使近臣虞通之撰《妒婦記》。 ..... 蓋太宗鑒於當世妒風廣衍，命虞通之作書教化。虞書藉真人實事而潤色敷彩，采正史記傳方式陳述晉世妒婦故事，要言不煩。<sup>61</sup> That an emperor personally ordered a courtier to compile stories about jealous women in a previous dynasty into a book is unprecedented in pre-modern China. This unprecedented incident in itself reflects that the characteristics of following the human nature, resisting Confucian rituals and ethics, and maintaining the exclusive devotion between husband and wife of Wei-Jin women in their fight against the unreasonable marriage system were quite salient and universal in the Wei-Jin times.

It is worth the attention of historians that throughout the dynastic history of China, apart from the Wei-Jin period, women in no other dynasty exhibit general resistance to the marriage system of their own times and the society in no other

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 19.

dynasty shows a generally acceptive attitude towards such resistant behaviors, just as Gan Bao points out: “No person under Heaven [during the Wei-Jin period] criticizes them [such women].”<sup>62</sup> At least, no historical material or scholarly work suggests facts otherwise. We cannot simply see the many anecdotes about “jealous women” in the *Shishuo xinyu* as merely anecdotes about emotional conflicts between husband and wife. The significance of those anecdotes lies in the fact that they exactly reflect the awakening of Wei-Jin women. The romantic emotion between a man and a woman naturally has an exclusive nature. However, throughout the several thousand years of China’s dynastic history, men have occupied a dominant position and rulers have always upheld the marriage system of “one wife and multiple concubines” and laid down various relevant rules to indoctrinate women, which have achieved marked effects. In the Wei-Jin times, the ruling ideology and its related rules loosened up a bit. In this situation, the Wei-Jin period witnessed an eruption of the conflict between the marriage system and the human nature. This should well explain why “jealous women” frequently appeared during the Wei-Jin period. In fact, the phrase “jealous women” itself exhibits the discourse hegemony of patriarchy. Looking back at the social fashion displayed by Wei-Jin women more than a thousand years ago, we see that it is consistent with the standard of gender equality recognized by modern civilizations. Just as Liang Huangyi puts it, “although [the women] earn the name of jealousy, they are actually virtuous.”

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<sup>62</sup> See Note 38.

### 3. Wives who are genuine, unrestrained, and with strong personalities

The *Shishuo xinyu* also provides us with records about Wei-Jin women pursuing the liberation of their personalities. Only when we analyze those records under the background of Confucian regulations of women's behaviors can we achieve a deeper understanding of them. Earlier in the thesis, I have already introduced the Confucian regulations of women's status, *sangang* and *sancong*. In addition, Confucianism also has regulations of women's behaviors called *side* 四德, or "four virtues."

The "four virtues" come from the chapter entitled "Offices of the Heaven" 天官冢宰 in the *Rites of Zhou* when the work discusses the "nine concubines" 九嬪: "The nine concubines enforce regulations related to women's learning in order to educate the nine secondary concubines on womanly virtue, womanly speech, womanly appearance, and womanly works" 九嬪掌婦學之法，以教九御：婦德、婦言、婦容、婦功.<sup>63</sup> The chapter "The meaning of the marriage ceremony" 昏義 in the *Book of Rites* also mentions: "Therefore, in ancient times, three months before the wedding day of a woman ... she would be taught womanly virtue, womanly speech, womanly appearance, and womanly works" 是以古者婦人先嫁三月 ..... 教以婦德、婦言、

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<sup>63</sup> The nine concubines were part of the Zhou king's back palace. Their status was lower than that of the empress, but higher than that of many more ordinary consorts. See *Zhouli* 周禮 in vol. 14 of *Siku quanshu huiyao*, 145.

婦容、婦功。<sup>64</sup> The Eastern Han Confucian scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127 – 200 CE) explains the “four virtues” in his notes to the *Book of Rites* as follows: “Womanly virtue means faithfulness and compliance. Womanly speech refers to tactful rhetoric of women. Womanly appearance refers to a woman’s meek and agreeable looks. Womanly works include spinning silk and weaving hemp” 婦德，貞順也；婦言，辭令也；婦容，婉婉也；婦功，絲麻也。<sup>65</sup> Those four virtues are the code of behavior that Confucianism requires of women. Elaborating on the four virtues in her famous work “Nüjie” 女誡, the Han Dynasty historian and writer Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 45 – ca. 117 CE) declares that “the four virtues are the major merits of a woman and every woman needs to possess them” 此四者，女人之大德，而不可乏之者也。<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Zhang, ed., *Liji*, 293.

<sup>65</sup> See Zheng Xuan’s notes to the *Liji* in vol. 18 of *Siku quanshu huiyao*, 576.

<sup>66</sup> The relevant passage in the section “Womanly conduct” 婦行 from the “Nüjie” reads: “There are four aspects of womanly conduct. The first is called womanly virtue. The second is called womanly speech. The third is called womanly appearance. The fourth is called womanly works. Regarding womanly virtue, a woman does not need to be super talented or brilliant. Regarding womanly speech, a woman does not need to have a sharp tongue and keen rhetoric. Regarding womanly appearance, a woman does not need to have beautiful looks. Regarding womanly works, a woman does not need to surpass others in her exquisite skill. Being undisturbed, leisurely, faithful, and tranquil, preserving her chastity and keeping things in order, guarding her actions with a sense of shame, and following proper manners either in movement or in rest: those

Such Confucian regulations at first glance may seem to have some worthy points. For instance, the rules about womanly appearance require women to keep themselves tidy. However, we should recognize that all the four virtues in fact serve the needs of a patriarchal society. Even womanly appearance is judged by the male gaze and women cannot decide on their own on this matter. Another example is womanly speech,

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are called womanly virtue. Choose words before speaking. Never utter bad words. Wait for the right moment to speak. Speak in a way that does not annoy people. Those are called womanly speech. Wash away dust and filth. Wear fresh and clean clothes and accessories. Take a bath at appropriate times. Keep the body free from dirt and disgrace. Those are called womanly appearance. Concentrate on spinning and weaving. Love no play nor banter. Prepare wine and food neatly to treat the guests. Those are called womanly works. The four aspects are the major merits of a woman and every woman needs to possess them. Though carrying them out is quite easy, the important point lies in whether one cherishes them in one's heart” 女有四行：一曰婦德，二曰婦言，三曰婦容，四曰婦功。夫云婦德，不必才明絕異也；婦言，不必辯口利辭也；婦容，不必顏色美麗也；婦功，不必工巧過人也。清閒貞靜，守節整齊，行己有恥，動靜有法，是謂婦德。擇辭而說，不道惡語，時然後言，不厭於人，是謂婦言。盥浣塵穢，服飾鮮潔，沐浴以時，身不垢辱，是謂婦容。專心紡績，不好戲笑，潔齊酒食，以奉賓客，是謂婦功。此四者，女人之大德，而不可乏之者也。然為之甚易，唯在存心耳。 See “Ban Zhao zhuan” 班昭傳 in Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 in vol. 1 of *Ershi wu shi quanshu*, 342.



which asks women not to be good at defending and instead requires them to choose proper and inoffensive words after observing other people's facial expressions. Therefore, *side* is a code of behavior in accord with the status of women determined by *sangang* and *sancong* and restricts women further. However, the Wei-Jin wives in the *Shishuo xinyu* do not suppress their emotions or behave gingerly as the code requires. For instance, the section "Paitiao" 排調, or "Taunting and teasing," in the *Shishuo xinyu* contains the following story: "Wang Hun and his wife nee Zhong were sitting together and they saw Wuzi passing through the courtyard.<sup>67</sup> Hun happily told his wife: 'Bearing such a son is enough to satisfy one's wish.' His wife laughed and said: 'If your newly-wed wife could marry the Administrator, then the son born of me would surely surpass him'<sup>68</sup> 王渾與婦鍾氏共坐，見武子從庭過，渾欣然謂婦曰：「生兒如此，足慰人意。」婦笑曰：「若使新婦得配參軍，生兒故可不啻如此」.<sup>69</sup> With only a few pithy comments, the genuine and unrestrained image of Wang Hun's wife is vividly portrayed. According to the Confucian standard of "guarding one's actions with a sense of shame" for womanly virtue and the Confucian

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<sup>67</sup> Wang Hun (223 – 297 CE) was an official during the Wei Dynasty and the Western Jin Dynasty and had served as one of the Three Dukes, the Minister of Education, at court. "Wuzi" refers to Wang Ji 王濟 (? – ? CE), a son of Wang Hun.

<sup>68</sup> "The Administrator" refers to the younger brother of Wang Hun, Wang Lun 王淪 (? – ? CE), who had served as an administrator under Sima Zhao 司馬昭 (211-265 CE).

<sup>69</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 869.

standard of “choosing words before speaking” for womanly speech, such joking comments between husband and wife would never have been allowed. As another example, the section “Huoni” 惑溺 in the *Shishuo xinyu* records that “the wife of Wang Rong often used the word *qing*, or the loved one, to call Wang Rong” 王安豐婦常卿安豐.<sup>70</sup> Although Wang Rong reminded his wife that addressing him in this way was disrespectful to him from the perspective of Confucian rituals, his wife insisted that the word *qing* expressed her affection for him. Wang Rong “therefore always allowed his wife to do so” 遂恒聽之.<sup>71</sup> The wife of Wang Hun and the wife of Wang Rong were both unconfined by the four virtues and none of them behaved gingerly. Instead, they expressed themselves forthrightly. Despite their wives’ forthrightness, Wang Hun and Wang Rong both exhibited an understanding and acceptive attitude towards it.

The words of the two wives above of course display the personalities of those women. What is important, they also indicate that during the Wei-Jin period, Confucian regulations of women’s behaviors were not followed strictly or taken seriously. Given that *side* were regulations of behaviors promoted by the rulers, people of the upper-class society should have been model followers of them. However, as upper-class women, the wife of Wang Hun and the wife of Wang Rong expressed themselves forthrightly, unconfined by the “womanly virtue” and the “womanly speech.” Were their behaviors, which broke loose from the confinement of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 1015. Anfeng 安豐 is the title of Wang Rong.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

*side*, representative of their times to a certain extent? The answer should be affirmative, since following one's true nature in an unrestrained way is a feature of the Wei-Jin spirit and thus a social fashion of the Wei-Jin times. The following anecdote about Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226 CE) can reinforce our understanding of this point.

The section “Shangshi” 傷逝 in the *Shishuo xinyu* records: “Wang Zhongxuan (177 – 217 CE) loved the donkey's bray. After he died, Emperor Wen [of Wei] went to his funeral. The emperor looked at his retinue and said to them: ‘Wang loved the donkey's bray. Each of you can make a braying sound to bid farewell to Wang.’ The guests who attended the funeral all made the donkey's bray” 王仲宣好驢鳴。既葬，文帝臨其喪，顧語同遊曰：「王好驢鳴，可各作一聲以送之。」赴客皆一作驢鳴。<sup>72</sup>

Given Wang's status as the top writer among the “Seven Masters of Jian'an” 建安七子, his love of the donkey's bray may seem unexpected, but it reflects his forthright and sincere character and leaves a deep impression on the reader. As a son of the then King of Wei Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220 CE), Cao Pi was the heir apparent at that time, yet he led all his retinue to imitate the donkey's bray. Such an act reflects not only the genuine personality of the would-be emperor of the Wei Dynasty, but also his disregard for Confucian rituals and ethics. Confucianism emphasizes that one should be discreet in one's speech and focus on self-cultivation and proposes doctrines such as “cultivating oneself to make all the people feel peaceful and happy”

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 701.

修己以安百姓 and “unifying people’s conducts by rituals so that people can acquire a sense of shame and become good” 齊之以禮，有恥且格。<sup>73</sup> As a person with such a high status, Cao Pi must have known those doctrines fairly well, yet he still allowed his mood to guide his behaviors. Just like Cao Pi’s act, the wife of Wang Hun’s seemingly “offensive” words and the wife of Wang Rong’s “improper” address to her husband are also expressions that break away from the restriction of Confucian rituals and ethics. We see in those Wei-Jin women and men the spirit of maintaining a free, genuine, and unrestrained state.

#### **4. Mothers who possess the magnanimous air of staying unperturbed in the face of sudden changes and reacting as usual in unexpected affairs**

Some scholars who study the Wei-Jin spirit tend to praise the unperturbed air of Wei-Jin men in the face of sudden changes or imminent danger. For example, Liu Kaihua 劉開驊, professor at the Nanjing Political College, states: “They [Wei-Jin famous gentlemen] have a magnanimous and unperturbed air. We can see the admiration for such a magnanimous air by Wei-Jin famous gentlemen in the section ‘Yaliang’ in the *Shishuo xinyu*: When Ji Kang was about to be executed in the East Market, his countenance did not change a bit. He asked for a zither and played the tune of *Guangling san*. Then, he calmly met his death. Xie An heard of the big victory

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<sup>73</sup> Regarding the two doctrines, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Lunyu yizhu* 論語譯註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 157 and 12.

at the Fei River, but he still faced the chessboard and played chess as before.<sup>74</sup> His facial expressions and behaviors were the same as usual. Someone threw a food container at Wang Yan in the face, but Wang did not say a single word. After washing his face, Wang sat together with another person in a carriage and left. ... Wei-Jin famous gentlemen have strong character, extraordinary steadiness, and profound self-cultivation, which make them remain unchanged in the face of danger, unsurprised after being insulted, and unexcited when hearing happy news. They exhibit an air that surpasses that of others” 他們雅量弘度, 鎮靜自若。魏晉名士崇尚恢宏的度量, 在《世說新語》“雅量”一門, 我們可以看到: 嵇康臨刑東市, 神氣不變, 索琴彈奏《廣陵散》, 從容赴死; 謝安聞淝水大捷, 依舊向局弈棋, 意色舉止不異於常; 王衍遭人食盒砸面, 都無一言, 洗畢與人共載而去; ..... 魏晉名士具有堅毅的品格、非凡的定力、深厚的修養, 使得他們臨危不變, 受辱不驚, 聞喜不欣, 表現出超人的氣度。<sup>75</sup> Nanxiu Qian, instead, thinks that “In protecting their families and coping with chaotic times, women often surpassed their men in courage, wisdom, composure,

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<sup>74</sup> “The big victory at the Fei River” refers to a military victory achieved by the Eastern Jin armies in a major war against the Former Qin 前秦 (351 – 394 CE) regime at the Fei River in 383 CE.

<sup>75</sup> Liu Kaihua, “Wei-Jin fengdu: Zhongguo wenhua shi shang de dute jingguan” 魏晉風度: 中國文化史上的獨特景觀, *Journal of Nanjing Political College* 南京政治學院學報 19, no. 4 (2003): 79.

and judgment.”<sup>76</sup> She takes the wife of Xu Yun 許允 (? – 254 CE) nee Ruan as an example:<sup>77</sup> “Throughout their marriage, she advised Hsü [Xu] wisely in dealing with political complications,<sup>78</sup> but when she realized that her husband could not avoid a

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<sup>76</sup> Qian, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China*, 145.

<sup>77</sup> Xu Yun was a Wei Dynasty official.

<sup>78</sup> For example, the section “Xianyuan” in the *Shishuo xinyu* records: “While Xu Yun was serving as the Director of the Ministry of Personnel, he promoted many of his fellow townsmen. Emperor Ming of Wei sent the Brave as Tigers guards to arrest him. The wife of Xu followed him out of their house and counseled him: “A wise ruler can only be won over by principles. It is difficult to move him by emotion.” After Yun arrived at the emperor’s place, the emperor queried him. Yun answered: “‘Promote those whom you know.’ My fellow townsmen are the people whom I know. Your Majesty can check whether they are competent for their positions or not. If they are not competent, then I will bear any punishment.” After the emperor checked the competence of those officials, (he found that) the positions were all filled with the right people. Therefore, he released Xu Yun. The clothes of Yun were worn-out, and the emperor bestowed new clothes upon him by imperial edict. At first, when Yun got arrested, the whole family wailed and cried. Yun’s newly-wed wife nee Ruan behaved as usual and said: “Don’t worry. After a short while, he will be back.” She cooked millet porridge and waited for him. Before long, Yun arrived home” 許允為吏部郎，多用其鄉里，魏明帝遣虎賁收之。其婦出誡允曰：「明主可以理奪，難以情求。」既至，帝覈問之。允對曰：「『舉爾所知。』臣之鄉人，臣所知也。陛

tragic ending, she calmly accepted reality and carefully sheltered her two sons during the crisis. All the while her ‘spirit and facial expression remained unchanged’ (*shen-se pu pien*), indicating the kind of mental strength usually associated only with gentlemen, such as the Seven Worthies [i.e., the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove].”<sup>79</sup> Even though Qian does not explicitly use the term “the Wei-Jin spirit,” the statements by Qian connect the “mental strength” of the wife of Xu Yun with that of the Seven Worthies, who are representatives of the Wei-Jin spirit. Essentially, Qian implies that Wei-Jin women shared the same kind of spirit with Wei-Jin men. Furthermore, I agree with Qian’s viewpoint that Wei-Jin women “often surpassed their men in courage, wisdom, composure, and judgment” and I think the Wei-Jin spirit exhibited by women is on a par with that exhibited by men. Regarding how the wife of Xu Yun wisely and calmly “sheltered her two sons during the crisis” following her husband’s execution due to political struggles, here is a relevant entry from the *Shishuo xinyu*:

許允為晉景王所誅，門生走入告其婦。婦正在機中，神色不變，曰：「蚤知爾耳！」門人欲藏其兒，婦曰：「無豫諸兒事。」後徙居墓所，景王遣鍾會看之，若才流及父，當收。兒以咨母。母曰：「汝等雖佳，才具不多

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下檢校為稱職與不？若不稱職，臣受其罪。」既檢校，皆官得其人，於是乃釋。

允衣服敗壞，詔賜新衣。初，允被收，舉家號哭。阮新婦自若云：「勿憂，尋還。」作粟粥待，頃之允至。 See Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 743. The saying

“promote those whom you know” comes from the chapter “Zilu” 子路 in the *Analects*.

<sup>79</sup> Qian, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China*, 145.

，率胸懷與語，便無所憂。不須極哀，會止便止。又可少問朝事。」兒從之。會反以狀對，卒免。<sup>80</sup>

Xu Yun was killed by King Jing of Jin.<sup>81</sup> Xu's disciples ran into Xu's house to tell his wife. His wife was then working on a loom. With an unchanged countenance, she said: "I knew that a long time ago." Xu's disciples wanted to hide his sons, but his wife said: "My husband's death has nothing to do with my sons." Later, when the family moved near Xu's tomb, King Jing ordered Zhong Hui to go there and observe Xu's sons, asking Zhong to arrest any son whose talent was comparable with Xu's. Xu's sons sought advice from their mother. She said: "Although you all have certain nice qualities, none of you possess much talent. If you open your hearts and say whatever you want, then there will be nothing to worry about. Furthermore, you do not need to appear extremely sad. When Hui stops crying, you may stop too. You can also inquire a little bit about court affairs." Her sons followed her advice. Zhong went back to describe the behaviors of Xu's sons. Eventually, their lives were spared.

In the anecdote above, the wife of Xu Yun was undeterred and behaved calmly in the face of dangerous situations. Hearing the grave news that her husband was killed, she did not fall into a panic, but remained composed. Strong-minded, she even accurately assessed the situation of her sons and gave them correct advice, which helped them get away from danger. In the *Shishuo xinyu*, the mother of Wang Jing 王經 (? – 260 CE) also has this spiritual power of composure and wisdom.<sup>82</sup>

The section "Xianyuan" in the *Shishuo xinyu* records the following anecdote:

王經少貧苦，仕至二千石，母語之曰：「汝本寒家子，仕至二千石，此可以止乎！」經不能用。為尚書，助魏，不忠於晉，被收。涕泣辭母曰：「不從母

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<sup>80</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 744.

<sup>81</sup> "King Jing of Jin" is the posthumous title of Sima Shi 司馬師 (208-255 CE), a general in the Wei Dynasty.

<sup>82</sup> Wang Jing was a Wei Dynasty official who had served as the Metropolitan Commandant and the Imperial Secretary.



敕，以至今日！」母都無憾容，語之曰：「為子則孝，為臣則忠。有孝有忠，何負吾邪？」<sup>83</sup>

Wang Jing was poor and lived a hard life in his youth. When he attained the rank of 2000 bushels, his mother told him: “You were originally the son of a poor family. Now that you have attained the rank of 2000 bushels, this is enough for you to stop [procuring higher ranks]!” Jing was unable to follow her advice.

While he was serving as an Imperial Secretary, he supported the Wei Dynasty and was disloyal to the Jin. As a result, he got arrested. He cried and bid farewell to his mother: “Because I did not follow your advice, I come to today’s end!” His mother did not appear sad at all but told him: “As a son, one should be filial. As an official, one should be loyal. You have both filial piety [as a son] and loyalty [as an official].<sup>84</sup> Why do you think that you have disappointed me?”

There is a more detailed description of the magnanimous and unperturbed air of the mother of Wang Jing as she faced her imminent execution in the *Han-Jin chunqiu* 漢晉春秋: “Later, [Sima Zhao] put Wang Jing and his mother to death. When Wang

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<sup>83</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 747-748.

<sup>84</sup> Wang Jing served the Wei Dynasty Emperor Cao Mao 曹髦 (241 – 260 CE), whose power was usurped by Sima Zhao, a founder of the Jin regime. Cao Mao deeply resented Sima Zhao, so he secretly summoned three courtiers, including Wang Jing, to discuss a plan for attacking Sima Zhao. Wang Jing thought the plan could not succeed and thus advised the Emperor not to carry it out. However, the Emperor did not listen to him. Later, the other two courtiers attempted to disclose the plan to Sima Zhao together with Wang Jing, but Wang Jing refused to follow them. After hearing the plan, Sima Zhao ordered his subordinates to arrest Wang Jing and kill him and his mother. Sima Zhao said: “Wang Jing has integrity and is not loyal to me. Therefore, I kill him” 經正直，不忠於我，故誅之. See Liu Xiaobiao’s notes to the tenth entry of the section “Xianyuan” in Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 748.

Jing was about to be executed, he cried and bid farewell to his mother. Her countenance unchanged, she laughed and told him: ‘Everybody will die, ... , but I fear I do not die in the right place. Dying together for this affair, what regrets do we have?’” 後殺經，並及其母。將死，垂泣謝母。母顏色不變，笑而謂曰：「人誰不死，……恐不得其所也。以此并命，何恨之有？」<sup>85</sup>

In the view of the mother of Wang Jing, her son did everything he needed to do for the ruler as well as for herself, so he was not guilty. Even though he was executed, that was the result of a right choice. Therefore, he should die without any regret. In this anecdote, the reader can easily appreciate the lofty character and the unperturbed air in the face of danger of the mother of Wang Jing. In terms of the charisma she displayed as she confronted her death, among the Wei-Jin famous gentlemen recorded in the *Shishuo xinyu*, only Ji Kang and Pei Kai 裴楷 (237 – 291 CE) can be compared with her.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> See Liu Xiaobiao’s notes to the tenth entry of the section “Xianyuan” in *Ibid*.

<sup>86</sup> Pei Kai, with the courtesy name of Shuze, was an important official in the Western Jin Dynasty. The section “Yaliang” in the *Shishuo xinyu* records: “Pei Shuze was arrested, but his countenance did not change a bit and he behaved as usual. He asked for paper and brush to write a letter. After he finished the letter, many people attempted to save him and thus he was pardoned. Later, he obtained a position whose ceremonial benefits were comparable to those of the Three Dukes” 裴叔則被收，神氣無變，舉止自若。求紙筆作書。書成，救者多，乃得免。後位儀同三司。 See Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 387.

From the anecdotes above, we can see that Wei-Jin women also saliently manifest the feature of the Wei-Jin spirit of staying unperturbed in the face of sudden changes with a magnanimous air. In fact, we should further recognize in such anecdotes Wei-Jin upper-class women's pursuit of noble character and personal charisma. Regarding the unperturbed appearance of Xu Yun's wife and Wang Jing's mother in the face of sudden changes, we cannot simply understand it as the two women's natural reaction. Facing the situation that her husband had been killed and her sons were in great danger, it was impossible for the wife of Xu Yun not to feel sad or nervous. Facing the situation that she and her son were about to be executed, it was impossible for the mother of Wang Jing not to be fearful. However, both women exhibited great spiritual strength. Even when they confronted the issue of death, they maintained the dignity of life, which demonstrates their noble character and personal charisma.

##### **5. Daughters who are unrestrained by Confucian rituals and ethics and strive for the autonomy to select marital partners on their own**

The term "autonomy" in this subsection only refers to women's act of choosing their marital partners by themselves. Before introducing the Wei-Jin daughters who strive for the autonomy to select marital partners on their own, let us first look at the marriage procedure specified by Confucianism and learn about the passive situation of pre-modern Chinese women in this procedure. That will help us understand how the

Wei-Jin daughters in the following anecdotes violate the Confucian rules for women and how they despise and fight against Confucian rituals and ethics.

The *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial* specifies six steps for the betrothal and marriage of a man and a woman, i.e., “sending initial gifts” 納采, “asking the name and birth date of the fiancée” 問名, “consulting ancestors about the auspiciousness of the marriage” 納吉, “sending betrothal gifts” 納徵, “setting the wedding date” 請期, and “welcoming the bride” 親迎.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the chapter “Quli shang” 曲禮上 in the *Book of Rites* states: “Unless a man and a woman have a matchmaker, they should not know each other’s names” 男女非有行媒，不相知名。<sup>88</sup>

In the six steps above, the daughter as a direct participant assumes a passive role. Her parents decide whom she should be married to and the entire marriage procedure is also carried out by the parents on both sides. In the design of the six steps, there is no consideration for giving the man and the woman the opportunity to contact and spend time with each other before their marriage. A man and a woman can only meet in the last step “welcoming the bride.” Usually, before deciding on the marriage, a man and a woman do not even know each other’s names, except in some special cases—for instance, the families of the man and the woman have already kept in touch because they are relatives themselves.

We can see the lack of autonomy of women in their marriages during dynasties that upheld the Confucian ideology from the following entry in the Qing Dynasty 清

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<sup>87</sup> *Yili* in vol. 16 of *Siku quanshu huiyao*, 35-42.

<sup>88</sup> Zhang, ed., *Liji*, 6.

(1644 – 1911 CE) writer Yue Jun 樂鈞 (1766 – 1814 CE)'s *biji* work, the *Ershi lu* 耳食錄. Here is a synopsis of the entry: One day in the winter of the Jichou 己丑 year (1709 CE) of the Kangxi 康熙 Reign, snow was falling in the Chongren 崇仁 County in Jiangxi 江西 and it was white everywhere. On a road in the countryside, two lines of people, both of whom were sending a bride to her bridegroom's family, met and proceeded together—as a traditional custom, the bride's family has to carry the bride by a sedan chair as well as the bride's dowry to the bridegroom's family and different families prepare different dowries, among which the common kinds are dressing tables, boxes, chairs, clothes, wardrobes, et cetera. The two sedan chairs in which the two brides sat had similar color decorations and their tops were both covered by snow. On their way, the two lines of people both stopped to rest in a pavilion at a fork in the road. Afterwards, snow fell more heavily and it was near dusk. Therefore, the two lines of people hurriedly lifted up the sedan chairs and the brides' dowries respectively and went separate ways. The surname of one bride was Wang, and that of the other bride was Wu. After the bride with the surname Wang arrived at the bridegroom's family and completed the necessary ceremonies, she went to the bedroom with the bridegroom and discovered the dowry placed in the room was rather simple and crude and was not the things her parents had prepared for her. Then, she asked the bridegroom his surname and found out that his surname was not that of the fiancé her family had previously decided. The bridegroom asked her: "Isn't your surname Wu?" Hearing that, the bride recalled when her people rested in the pavilion, she sat in the sedan chair and vaguely heard people outside say the surname of the

bride in the other sedan chair was Wu. Only then did she realize that when they left the pavilion, her sedan-chair bearers made a mistake and carried the wrong sedan chair in a hurry. The bride with the surname Wu also discovered the mistake that very night, but since she saw the bridegroom's family was fairly rich, she did not tell the bridegroom the truth. When the situation was reported to the natal family of the bride with the surname Wang and the family of the bridegroom of the other bride, the parents in those families thought the wedding ceremonies had all been completed and could not be reversed. Therefore, they left the mistake uncorrected.

In the entry above, the brides and the bridegrooms are all passive figures. A bride and a bridegroom do not meet each other beforehand. When they walk in the bedroom, they still merely know each other's names. They cannot discern the mistake of the sedan chair bearers from the aspect of persons. Instead, the mistake can only be discerned by the bride from the aspect of objects—the dowry made in her natal family. Even after the mistake occurs, the final decisions regarding the marriages are made by the parents of the brides and the bridegrooms. The brides and the bridegrooms simply carry out their parents' decisions.

The above entry recorded by Yue Jun shows that until the last Chinese dynasty, the Qing Dynasty, people still followed the six steps of the marriage procedure. However, the *Shishuo xinyu* presents to us the agency of Wei-Jin women. The *Shishuo xinyu* contains a story about the daughter of Jia Chong 賈充 (217 – 282 CE) as follows:<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Jia Chong was an important Western Jin official.

韓壽美姿容，賈充辟以為掾。充每聚會，賈女於青璵中看，見壽，說之。恒懷存想，發於吟詠。後婢往壽家，具述如此，並言女光麗。壽聞之心動，遂請婢潛修音問。及期往宿。壽躡捷絕人，踰牆而入，家中莫知。自是充覺女盛自拂拭，說暢有異於常。後會諸吏，聞壽有奇香之氣，是外國所貢，一著人，則歷月不歇。充計武帝唯賜己及陳騫，餘家無此香，疑壽與女通，而垣牆重密，門閣急峻，何由得爾？乃託言有盜，令人修牆。使反曰：「其餘無異，唯東北角如有人跡。而牆高，非人所踰。」充乃取女左右婢考問，即以狀對。充秘之，以女妻壽。<sup>90</sup>

Han Shou had a fair manner and good looks.<sup>91</sup> Jia Chong recruited him as a clerk. Whenever Chong held parties, his daughter would look through a cyan, latticed window. She saw Shou and fell in love with him. She always thought of him and expressed her feelings in singing and chanting. Later, her maid went to Shou's house, told him all about this, and said the lady was glamorously beautiful. Shou was moved when hearing this, so, he asked the maid to secretly send a message from him to her. On the pre-arranged day of the meeting, he went to stay at her house. Shou's agility surpassed that of all men and he entered the house by climbing over a wall, with nobody in Chong's family ever noticing him. From then on, Chong discovered that his daughter decorated herself excessively and was extremely happy, which was not her normal state. Later, when Chong gathered his sub-official functionaries, he discerned on Shou's body the scent of a peculiar kind of incense, which came from foreign countries as a tribute. If the scent attaches to the body of a person, then it will not disperse for months. Chong reckoned that Emperor Wu only rewarded him and Chen Qian with this incense and no other family had it.<sup>92</sup> So, he suspected that Shou and his daughter secretly kept in touch with each other. However, the walls were numerous and thick and the doors were tight and tall. How could Shou come in? [With this question in mind,] Chong then made up the excuse that a thief had broken into the house and asked somebody to repair the walls. The messenger returned and said: "Everything else is normal, except that there seem to be some human traces at the northeastern corner. But the walls are too tall to be climbed over by any human being." Chong then summoned the maidservants around his daughter and interrogated them. They at once told him about the actual situation. Chong kept this as a secret and married his daughter to Shou.

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<sup>90</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 1014.

<sup>91</sup> Han Shou (? – 300 CE) was an official in the Western Jin Dynasty. He had served as the Governor of Henan.

<sup>92</sup> Chen Qian (201 – 281 CE) had served as the Defender-in-Chief in the Western Jin Dynasty.

The story above of course recounts a rendezvous, but, in essence, it is a story that displays the courage of Jia Chong's daughter to pursue love and marital autonomy. In this story, the active pursuit of love by Jia Chong's daughter and her acquiescence to her maid's role as a secret messenger to Han Shou are typical behaviors that show contempt for Confucian rituals and ethics. In the incident involving Han Shou and Jia Chong's daughter, the maidservants of Chong's daughter showed a supportive attitude and the family of Jia Chong were also tolerant towards the outcome. Those phenomena reflect a social environment that advocates flexibility. In particular, Chong's daughter dared to take the bold stance of acting on her own without consulting her family members. This behavior demonstrates her strong personality and courage to shake off the fetters of Confucian rituals and ethics.

Moreover, some daughters in the Wei-Jin times dared to reject the fiancé their parents had selected for them and instead chose their marital partner on their own. The biography of Wang Jun 王濬 (206 – 286 CE) in the *Jinshu* recounts the following story:<sup>93</sup> “The Regional Inspector Xu Miao from Yanguo had a daughter who was talented and gentle.<sup>94</sup> Her parents selected a husband for her, yet she did not marry him. Miao then summoned his subordinates to a big party and let his daughter watch them from an inner room. His daughter pointed at Jun and told her mother [she was fond of him]. Miao accordingly married his daughter to Jun” 刺史燕國徐邈有女才淑

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<sup>93</sup> Wang Jun was a famous general in the Western Jin Dynasty.

<sup>94</sup> Xu Miao (171 – 249 CE) was an important official in the Wei Dynasty.



，擇夫未嫁。邈乃大會佐吏，令女於內觀之。女指濬告母，邈遂妻之。<sup>95</sup> The story does not indicate the specific reasons for why “the parents of Xu Miao’s daughter selected a husband for her, yet she did not marry him,” or tell us any detail about that, but what can be affirmed is that the daughter of Xu Miao was dissatisfied with the fiancé her parents had decided for her. In the process, she probably even fought against her parents’ will. What is important, Xu Miao and his wife respected their daughter’s wish and took measures to encourage her to select a husband on her own.

In the two stories above from the *Shishuo xinyu* and the *Jinshu* respectively, the daughters are both active figures. Their acts both show their resistance to Confucian rituals and ethics, which restrict human nature, and display their pursuit of personal interests. The two families of the daughters also understand and accept their behaviors. The proposal of “breaking loose from the fetters of the Confucian ethical code and following one’s true nature” advocated by the Wei-Jin people is exhibited by the two daughters as well as their family members. The two daughters and their families thus reflect the social atmosphere of the Wei-Jin times. Hence comes Gan Bao’s criticism on women of the times: “Those women ... marry before their proper age and allow sentiments to guide their action. Therefore, none of them treat the faults of wantonness and dissipation as a shame ... Their fathers and brothers do not punish them. No person under Heaven criticizes them.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> See “Wang Jun zhuan” 王濬傳 in the *Jinshu* in vol. 2 of *Ershi wu shi quanshu*, 258.

<sup>96</sup> See Note 117.

## 6. Maidservants who are elegant and self-confident

Elegance and self-confidence as well as people's mutual appreciation for this kind of spirit and manner are one of the features of the Wei-Jin spirit. This feature not only reflects the personal charisma of the Wei-Jin people in front of others, but also demonstrates their sense of self-worth. The section "Wenxue" 文學 in the *Shishuo xinyu* records a story about maidservants using lines from poems to converse with each other: "The male and female servants in Zheng Xuan's household all read books. Zheng Xuan once commanded a maidservant, but she did not follow his will. So, Zheng Xuan was going to beat her. She was just offering an explanation herself when Xuan became angry and ordered someone to drag her into mud. After a short while, another maidservant came and asked her: 'Why are you in mud?' She answered: 'I went to him to express something, but met his fury'" 鄭玄家奴婢皆讀書。嘗使一婢，不稱旨，將撻之。方自陳說，玄怒，使人曳著泥中。須臾，復有一婢來，問曰：「胡為乎泥中？」答曰：「薄言往愬，逢彼之怒」.<sup>97</sup> In the anecdote above, both maidservants quote directly from the oldest collection of Chinese poetry, the *Book of Songs* 詩經, in their dialog. "Why are you in mud" comes from the poem entitled "Shiwei" 式微 in the chapter "Beifeng" 邶風 of the *Book of Songs*. The original lines read: "If not for the nurture of the king's body, why am I in mud" 微君

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<sup>97</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 212.

之躬，胡為乎泥中。<sup>98</sup> The quotation “I went to him to express something, but met his fury” comes from the poem entitled “Baizhou” 柏舟 in the chapter “Beifeng” of the *Book of Songs*.<sup>99</sup> One maidservant receives punishment from her master, yet she does not lose temper. In the dialog between her and another maidservant, both women effortlessly use lines from ancient poems that fit the situation closely and naturally. Their words and deeds not only exhibit their exceptional self-cultivation, but also show their elegant and self-confident personal charisma.

The story above provides us with a good case for us to examine the condition of Wei-Jin women’s education. If they were not familiar with the *Book of Songs*, then the two maidservants would be impossible to effortlessly use lines from the collection, especially in such an accidental event. This story indicates that Wei-Jin upper-class people did not treat all lower-class women in their households as purely “laboring machines.” Some upper-class people encouraged lower-class women to acquire literacy and cultivate themselves and even intentionally arranged for them to do so. Regarding women’s education in the family, the education of lower-class women was not entirely ignored. Needless to say, most Wei-Jin upper-class women received a good education. Earlier in the thesis, we see that the wife of Xu Yun could make right judgments on her husband’s and her sons’ situations, which indirectly reflects the good education she had received. The *Shishuo xinyu* also records an anecdote about

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<sup>98</sup> See Ye Chunlin 葉春林, ed., *Shijing* 詩經 (Wuhan: Chongwen shuju, 2007), 25.

<sup>99</sup> See *Ibid.*, 17.

Xie Daoyun possessing extraordinary poetic talent.<sup>100</sup> In the anecdote, the artistic level of Xie Daoyun's poem surpasses that of the poem of her cousin, who enjoys great literary fame.

In terms of the major features of the Wei-Jin spirit we have summarized previously, the *Shishuo xinyu* does not record stories about Wei-Jin women who revere the Nature or pursue the idyllic lifestyle of wandering among mountains and waters. This should have something to do with the social division in imperial China, which restricts the range of activities of women. Regarding the social division of men and women, the Tuan 象 commentary attached to the hexagram "Jiaren" 家人, or "Family members," in the Confucian classic the *Book of Changes* stipulates: "As for members of a family, a woman's proper place is inside the family, while a man's proper place is outside it. Women and men both maintain their proper places; this is a great principle of Heaven and Earth" 家人，女正位乎内，男正位乎外，男女正，天地之大義也。<sup>101</sup> That is to say, the roles of women in a society are limited to the family and men are in charge of political and public interactions. This was the fundamental division of men and women's roles in the traditional Chinese society. Under such a background, the range of activities of women was not as broad as that of men. This may be why the stories in the *Shishuo xinyu* describing characters who wander among mountains and waters contain exclusively male figures.

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<sup>100</sup> See Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 143.

<sup>101</sup> Ji Chang 姬昌 et. al., *Quanben Zhouyi* 全本周易 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2006), 208.

The discussions above about Wei-Jin women all revolve around the situation of women in elite families. The *Shishuo xinyu* contains few records of women in families of the lower social classes. However, those limited sources can still provide us with some information about the living state of those women. For instance, an entry in the section “Rongzhi” 容止 of the *Shishuo xinyu* allows us to see the casual and unrestrained lifestyle of women from common families, who similarly follow their own nature, indulge in emotions, and do things at will: “Pan Yue had a superb physical appearance and elegant looks.<sup>102</sup> When he was young, he once carried a catapult and walked on a street of Luoyang. There was no woman coming across him who did not hold hands and encircle him together” 潘岳妙有姿容，好神情。少時挾彈出洛陽道，婦人遇者，莫不連手共縈之。<sup>103</sup> This is a street scene in which women dare to surround a handsome man when they see him and appreciate his handsomeness freely. Their behaviors violate the Confucian moral standard for women. A variety of Confucian classics contain restrictive regulations on the interactions between men and women. Apart from the stipulation in *Mencius* 孟子 that “men and women should not be intimate when giving or receiving items” 男女授受不親, the *Book of Rites* and the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 also state stipulations that set restraints on such interactions, even if the interactions are between male and female relatives.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Pan Yue (247 – 300 CE) was a great writer and poet in the Western Jin Dynasty.

<sup>103</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 673.

<sup>104</sup> See Mengzi 孟子, *Mencius*, trans. Wan Lihua 萬麗華 and Lan Xu 藍旭 (Beijing:

The *Book of Rites* states: “For aunts, sisters, and daughters who have married but return to visit their natal family, their brothers should not sit with them on the same mat, nor should their brothers eat with them from the same dish” 姑、姊妹、女子子，已嫁而反，兄弟弗與同席而坐，弗與同器而食。<sup>105</sup> The *Zuo zhuan* states: “Women should not step outside the door when seeing off or welcoming [guests]. When they meet their brothers [who come to visit them], they should not step over the threshold” 婦人送迎不出門，見兄弟不逾闕。<sup>106</sup> According to those rules, women should keep a distance from their own brothers in their interactions. Given that, the behaviors of women who surround a stranger man on a street in the *Shishuo xinyu* entry above apparently cross the line way too far. The women’s characteristics of following their own nature and indulging in emotions also apparently violate the Confucian rule of “guarding one’s actions with a sense of shame and following proper manners either in movement or in rest” for “womanly virtue.” Their behaviors are just like what is criticized by the Jin Dynasty writer Ge Hong regarding the women of his times at the beginning of this section and are deemed by him to be “detestable and abominable.” However, from my point of view, their behaviors actually reflect that they possess features of the Wei-Jin spirit.

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Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 161. The *Zuo zhuan* written by Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 (ca. 502 – ca. 422 BC) during the Spring and Autumn period (770 – 476 BC) is a commentary work on the Confucian classic *Chunqiu* 春秋.

<sup>105</sup> Zhang, ed., *Liji*, 6.

<sup>106</sup> Jiang Jicheng 蔣冀騁, ed., *Zuo zhuan* (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1988), 71.

Of course, the women recorded by the *Shishuo xinyu* do not all boldly resist Confucian rituals and ethics or pursue personal interests and the liberation of their individuality. There is also a woman who strictly or even doggedly obeys Confucian rituals and ethics. The section “Xianyuan” in the *Shishuo xinyu* records: “Chi Jiabin was dead.<sup>107</sup> The brothers of Chi’s wife wanted to take her back to her natal family. All the time she was unwilling to return. She said: ‘Even though I can no longer live in the same room with Chi while alive, can’t I share the same tomb with him after I die’” 鄰嘉賓喪，婦兄弟欲迎妹還，終不肯歸。曰：「生縱不得與鄰郎同室，死寧不同穴」。<sup>108</sup> This story reflects the obstinate adherence of Chi’s wife to the following rules. The chapter entitled “Jiao tesheng” 郊特牲 in the *Book of Rites* stipulates: “Faithfulness is a womanly virtue. Once married to a man, a woman should not change her husband throughout her life. Therefore, when her husband dies, a woman should not remarry” 信，婦德也。一與之齊，終身不改，故夫死不嫁。<sup>109</sup> Stipulations of this kind that restrict women and disregard the human nature appear in many other classics as well. For instance, the “Nüjie” states: “A husband has reasons to remarry. A wife has no excuse to marry a second time. Therefore, it is said that the husband is the Heaven” 夫有再娶之義，婦無二適之文，故曰夫者天也。<sup>110</sup> The Confucian thought above advocates that if a woman’s husband dies, then the younger

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<sup>107</sup> Chi Jiabin is Chi Chao 鄰超 (336 – 378 CE), an Eastern Jin official.

<sup>108</sup> Yu, *Shishuo xinyu jianshu*, 771.

<sup>109</sup> Zhang, ed., *Liji*, 118.

<sup>110</sup> See “Ban Zhao zhuan” in Fan, *Hou Han shu* in vol. 1 of *Ershi wu shi quanshu*, 342.

she is and the longer she maintains her widow status, the more virtuous she should be deemed and the more strongly she should be promoted. When such a woman dies, the local government tends to build a stone memorial called the “arch of chastity” 貞節牌坊 for her in order to honor the long period of time she has spent as a widow and the services she has offered to her husband’s family and to encourage people to model themselves on her. The long history of imperial China leaves behind such stone arches in many Chinese places. Those stone arches are usually built at conspicuous locations in a residential area or on the main roads. Each cold stone arch symbolizes the desolate and forlorn life of a once lively woman. Standing in front of such stone arches and looking back at the Wei-Jin period, researchers may find “the awakening of human beings” pervasively displayed by most Wei-Jin women in the *Shishuo xinyu* to be particularly worth noting.



## CONCLUSION

This thesis points out the neglect of women in scholars' studies of the Wei-Jin spirit, which is a long-existing problem in the academic field. To make up for this deficiency, this thesis focuses on the Wei-Jin spirit as reflected by Wei-Jin women and attempts to present the reader with a relatively comprehensive picture of the Wei-Jin spirit in the family context.

This thesis takes the *Shishuo xinyu* as the basis for its research because of the historical value of the work. In imperial China, as a customary practice, the compilation of the official history of each dynasty was typically organized by the government of a later dynasty. Such official records are surely important reference materials for us to study Chinese history. However, there are also individual works by some scholars that record historical materials of their own times or of previous dynasties apart from official histories. Although the style of such individual works is different from that of official histories, such works also have historical value and the *Shishuo xinyu* belongs to this kind of works. The author of the *Shishuo xinyu*, Liu Yiqing, lived in the Jin Dynasty before the age of seventeen and lived forty-one years. The facts indicate that the completion date of the *Shishuo xinyu* was shortly after the end of the Jin Dynasty. Moreover, Liu Yiqing was a member of the Liu Song royal family and inherited the title of the Prince of Linchuan, which probably gave him advantageous access to relevant materials in the compilation process. Regarding the characteristic of the *Shishuo xinyu* of recording actual people and events in history, Chinese scholars from the pre-modern era to the contemporary period all hold an

affirmative view. Considering the above factors, my thesis takes the *Shishuo xinyu* as the basis for its research.

In the main body of my thesis, I classify women into groups according to their familial roles and discuss the Wei-Jin spirit as reflected by each group of women. In order to avoid repetitive argumentation and quotations that express similar ideas, if one group of women exhibits a certain characteristic of the Wei-Jin spirit and some other groups of women also exhibit it, then I do not mention the same characteristic again when I talk about the other groups of women (for instance, since I discuss the elegance and self-confidence of the maidservants, I do not repetitively mention the elegance and self-confidence of the wives). Through my discussions in this section, the reader can perceive in a relatively comprehensive way the characteristics of the times as reflected by Wei-Jin women, who take the family as the center of their activities. Those women collectively constitute a picture of the Wei-Jin spirit in the family. This picture is in essence equivalent to that of the Wei-Jin spirit manifested in the political and public life of men described previously by scholars; both pictures reflect the shared character and conduct of the Wei-Jin people. For instance, the daughter of Zhuge Dan challenges the Confucian rules of “men are noble and women are lowly,” “the husband is the Heaven of the wife,” and “women should be subservient,” while Ruan Ji challenges the Confucian rules that restrict the interactions between men and women. Although the rules they challenge are different, their spirit of resisting Confucian rituals and ethics is the same. As another example, the maidservants in Zheng Xuan’s family quote lines from ancient poems in their conversation while Wang Ziyou asks the influential figure Huan Ziyue to play the flute

for him but does not talk with Huan; the women and men in the two anecdotes all show the same kind of elegance, self-confidence, and sense of self-worth. Therefore, on the stage of the Wei-Jin spirit, the status of women as leading roles should not be ignored. My thesis discusses the features of the Wei-Jin spirit as exhibited by women in the private family space and strives to analyze the significances or implications behind anecdotes about women in the hope of helping historians perceive the living condition of Wei-Jin women and the related social environment.

By shifting the angle of research on the Wei-Jin spirit in my thesis, I hope to achieve three effects. First, I hope to extend the scope of representative figures of the Wei-Jin spirit. My thesis holds that the features of the Wei-Jin spirit possessed by Wei-Jin women are not only numerous but also quite salient and that Wei-Jin women are an essential group of representatives of the Wei-Jin spirit. Second, I hope to present the reader with a relatively comprehensive picture of the Wei-Jin spirit in the family context, which will help the reader achieve a better grasp of the society of the Wei-Jin period. Third, I hope that this thesis will draw more attention of the academic field to the Wei-Jin spirit in the family. In addition to the three effects above, I also hope this thesis can improve our understanding of the text of the *Shishuo xinyu*.

Scholars have always held that the *Shishuo xinyu* is a work that reflects the words and deeds of Wei-Jin famous gentlemen, who are mostly famous men in history such as ministers at court or local officials. My thesis instead focuses on anecdotes about women in the *Shishuo xinyu* and reveals the spiritual world and personal values of women or so-called “small characters” who have mostly not left behind their full

names, thus making the reader realize that the *Shishuo xinyu* is also an important work that reflects the character and conduct of Wei-Jin women.

APPENDIX: Western Studies about the *Shishuo xinyu*, about the Representations of Women in Chinese Historical and Literary Writing, and about Wei-Jin Political, Social, and Cultural Contexts

**Western Studies about the *Shishuo xinyu***

Despite its literary and historical significance, the *Shishuo xinyu* draws the attention of Western scholars relatively lately. Translations of the text appeared in languages such as Japanese (1964), French (1974), and English (1976) in the twentieth century, but to the present day, Richard B. Mather's translation of the *Shishuo xinyu* entitled *Shih-shuo hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* first published in 1976 and later updated in 2002 is still the only full-text English translation we have ever had. Similarly, English-language studies of the *Shishuo xinyu* are relatively scarce. This trend is partly indicated by Nanxiu Qian's bibliography to her monograph on the *Shishuo xinyu* entitled *Spirit and Self in Medieval China: The Shih-shuo hsin-yü and Its Legacy* published in 2001—of the seventy-one reference books and articles Qian lists as “Special Studies on the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*,” only six are written in English, four by Qian herself, and the others are written by either Chinese or Japanese scholars. Nevertheless, Mather's introduction to his translated work lucidly states several research questions regarding the *Shishuo xinyu* to which he proposes his tentative answers and we may start from here to look at how Western scholars study the text. In his introduction, Mather first raises the question of whether the world depicted in the *Shishuo xinyu* is a real or imaginary one, that is, he is

concerned with the degree of reality represented by the text's anecdotal content. To answer the question, Mather does not hesitate to point out that certain details in the *Shishuo xinyu* can indeed be verified and he mentions the accuracy of a record on Mars' activity as an example. However, Mather qualifies his judgment on the reality of the text by noting that the *Shishuo xinyu* author does not actually intend to write history. Here, Mather supports to a certain extent the opinion expressed by the bibliographic treatises in the three official histories, *Sui shu* 隋書, *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書, and *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書, which list the *Shishuo xinyu* under the category of *xiaoshuo* 小說, or "minor tales," among "fictionalized biographies," "source books for advisers to the throne," "jokebooks for court jesters," and "general enliveners of conversation."<sup>111</sup> Mather gives one reason for the categorization of the text as such by acknowledging that the *Shishuo xinyu* shares at least one characteristic with the other texts in the category, that is, the *Shishuo xinyu* provides "enjoyable reading" and aims to entertain the reader.<sup>112</sup> In this sense, the collection is similar to later novels such as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in containing entertaining anecdotes about historical figures, anecdotes that Mather shows are often drawn from the legends built around those historical figures. Therefore, Mather concludes that the *Shishuo xinyu* "was, at least in part, a fictionalization rather than sober history."<sup>113</sup> The second

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<sup>111</sup> See Richard B. Mather, introduction to *Shih-shuo hsin-yü: A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), xiv.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

question Mather tackles is whether the *Shishuo xinyu* depicts the whole world or only a part of the world of the historical period it covers. Mather seems to give us a direct answer to the question as he observes that characters in the *Shishuo xinyu* are mostly within the elite circle and that even though lower-class characters do appear occasionally, they are included primarily to support the portrayal of those social elites. Therefore, Mather claims that the *Shishuo xinyu* does not depict the whole world of the historical period it covers. The third question Mather raises is how objective the *Shishuo xinyu* author is. To answer the question, Mather first reviews the existing factions of the roughly two hundred years between the end of the Later Han Dynasty and the Eastern Jin Dynasty and divides those factions into two basic groups: the upholders of naturalness, who advocate Daoist values and reclusion, and the upholders of conformity, who advocate Confucian morals and active public service. Through studying the textual evidence in the *Shishuo xinyu* itself, Mather finds that the *Shishuo xinyu* anecdotes seem to favor the upholders of naturalness. With this discovery, Mather challenges the traditional attribution of the authorship of the *Shishuo xinyu* to the conformist Liu Yiqing and sides with scholars such as Lu Xun and Kawakatsu Yoshio in their opinion that the *Shishuo xinyu* is compiled by someone on Liu's staff who sympathizes with the naturalists. Furthermore, Mather's study of the *Shishuo xinyu* seems to focus heavily on its usefulness as a source for exploring the intellectual history of the Wei-Jin times. For instance, to illustrate the opposite stances of the adamant conformist Zhong Hui, who writes the "Siben lun" 四本論 to aid the selection of officials, and the famous naturalist Ji Kang, who refuses to serve at court, Mather cites a story from the *Shishuo xinyu* involving the two figures: after Zhong

Hui writes the “Siben lun,” he goes to see Ji Kang and wants to discuss it with Ji Kang. However, he does not dare to show his article in Ji’s presence. Only after he steps outside Ji’s door does he dare to hurl the article back inside the door. Exploring the role of Buddhism in Wei-Jin intellectual debates, Mather cites a few entries from the fourth section of the *Shishuo xinyu* that reveal certain Buddhist themes in pure conversations. In terms of the influence of Daoism on the world of the *Shishuo xinyu*, Mather finds textual clues such as the thirty-ninth entry in the first section of the *Shishuo xinyu*, which records the Eastern Jin Dynasty calligrapher Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344 – 386 CE)’s deathbed confession as a Daoist ritual. Lastly, Mather briefly examines the title changes and history of editions of the *Shishuo xinyu* in his introduction.

The aforementioned monograph by Nanxiu Qian focuses on the categorization of the *Shishuo xinyu* as “a taxonomy of human nature” and the narrative art of the *Shishuo xinyu*.<sup>114</sup> In Part One, Qian demonstrates that the core of the *Shishuo xinyu* lies in character appraisal, a practice that originated in the Later Han period for the selection of officials and later developed into a philosophical and aesthetic discourse on human nature in the Wei-Jin times. Part Two talks about the narrative art of the *Shishuo xinyu*, particularly considering how the thirty-six categories in the *Shishuo xinyu* try to present a wide variety of human types, or personality types, in order to reflect the extreme complexity of human nature. Part Three considers the influence of

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<sup>114</sup> Nanxiu Qian, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China: The Shih-shuo hsin-yü and Its Legacy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 9.



the *Shishuo xinyu* on Chinese and even world literature, as Qian notices that many imitative works emerged in China and Japan in later centuries based on the original model of the *Shishuo xinyu*. In particular, Qian thinks that the *Shishuo xinyu* actually generates an independent literary genre, which she names as the *Shishuo ti* 世說體, and that all later imitations of the *Shishuo xinyu* belong to this specific genre.

One of the earliest articles about the *Shishuo xinyu* that appear in English-language academic journals is V. T. Yang's essay "About *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*" published in the *Journal of Oriental Studies* in 1955. In the article, Yang first talks about the authorship of the text. It is worth noting that unlike Mather, Yang does not seem to doubt the traditional attribution of the text's authorship to Liu Yiqing. His acceptance of this traditional view can be seen in the fact that he only introduces Liu Yiqing's personal and family backgrounds and says nothing about the members on Liu's staff. Next, Yang discusses three versions of the title of the book: *Shishuo xinshu* 世說新書, *Shishuo* 世說, and *Shishuo xinyu*. While the two versions *Shishuo xinshu* and *Shishuo* both appeared fairly early and are preserved in Tang Dynasty primary sources, the third version came into existence relatively late. Yang observes that in early Song Dynasty 宋 (960 – 1279 CE) works such as the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, the three versions are used in a mixed manner. However, after the mid-Song period, the third version became the most popular title and is still the standard one today. Yang furthermore introduces the different editions of the *Shishuo xinyu*. It is recorded that the original edition had eight volumes and later the Liang Dynasty scholar Liu Xiaobiao added commentaries to it and thus expanded it to ten volumes.

In the Song Dynasty, Dong Fen 董夔 (? – ? CE) produced another edition based on an earlier abridged edition by Yan Shu 晏殊 (991 – 1055 CE). Dong’s edition has three volumes. Besides, there are also two other Song editions and two Ming editions. As for the historical value of the *Shishuo xinyu*, Yang writes: “As the original sayings by the people of the Chin [Jin] Dynasty had in most cases been tampered with by the official historians of the early T’ang period, subsequent generations are particularly indebted to Liu Yi-ch’ing since he preserved them in his book as they originally were. For the author lived in a period right after that of the Eastern Chin [Jin] and was, moreover, himself an aristocrat. The anecdotes he thus recorded might well have been heard personally from the elders of his class, and should therefore be true to the original. As a social history of the upper classes of the time, with regard to their cultural tastes, their family pride, and their way of life, this book is extremely valuable.”<sup>115</sup> Moreover, Yang points out the great literary style of the *Shishuo xinyu* and the importance of Liu Xiaobiao’s commentaries to researchers. He also translates three anecdotes from the *Shishuo xinyu* as typical examples of the book’s content.

In more recent times, several other articles emerge and focus on different aspects of the *Shishuo xinyu*. For example, Robert Joe Cutter’s article “*Shishuo xinyu* and the death of Cao Zhang” uses the *Shishuo xinyu* as a source to investigate a historical incident. Jack W. Chen’s article “On hearing the donkey’s bray: friendship, ritual, and social convention in medieval China” examines two anecdotes in the

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<sup>115</sup> V. T. Yang, “About *Shih-shuo hsin-yü*,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 2, no. 2 (1955): 313.

*Shishuo xinyu* about the donkey's bray and explores how the donkey's bray is related to friendship, ritual, and other issues in the medieval Chinese society.

## **Western Studies about the Representations of Women in Chinese Historical and Literary Writing**

English-language scholarship on pre-modern Chinese women saw an increase in the 1990s just as Western academia directed significant attention to gender issues and theories. Scholars in various fields have studied the representations of women in both historical and literary writing of China. On the history side, several notable monographs and a number of articles are published in recent years. For instance, Bret Hinsch's *Women in Early Imperial China* published in 2011 provides us with an overview of Chinese women in the early imperial period. Structured topically, it contains chapters on "kinship," "wealth and work," "law," "government," "learning," "ritual," and "cosmology." Hinsch mainly examines "the social roles women assumed during the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC – 220 CE)" by looking at women's roles in different aspects of the society.<sup>116</sup> The introductory part of the monograph contains a survey of major scholarly approaches for treating this subject, which is extremely informative. The first approach of studying early imperial Chinese women with the

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<sup>116</sup> Bret Hinsch, *Women in Early Imperial China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 2.

model of “ancient matriarchy” is discredited by Hinsch as baseless and outdated.<sup>117</sup>

He similarly criticizes the second approach of inferring women’s condition in ancient times through reading materials in late imperial China as “ahistorical.”<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, Hinsch sees the third approach of “focusing on the Confucian classics as the source of primary clues for understanding early women” as a partial methodology because he thinks “the classics present views of women held by very small groups of elite male scholars.”<sup>119</sup> Lastly, while Hinsch admits the benefits of the approach of “comparing female and male identity,” he also warns us that “the search for a single ‘status’ or ‘position’ of women in early Chinese society” is at best an illusionary endeavor.<sup>120</sup> Instead of the four approaches mentioned above, Hinsch proposes an alternative approach, which he uses in his monograph. This approach recognizes the importance of the concept of “role-playing” in the study of early imperial Chinese women. According to him, “individuals in society are akin to actors in a play” and “a [traditional] woman was a successful social actor,” who assumed specific roles deemed appropriate by the society and culture in which she lived.<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, Robin R. Wang emphasizes the social roles traditional Chinese women played as mother, wife, and daughter in the sourcebook she compiles entitled *Images*

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<sup>117</sup> See *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

*of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty*. The 2003 publication contains a variety of Chinese writings about women, including rare archaeological materials such as Shang Dynasty 商 (ca. 16th cent. – ca. 11th cent. BC) oracle bone inscriptions.

Apart from the two scholars mentioned above, Patricia Buckley Ebrey is one of the foremost specialists in the history of pre-modern Chinese women and family, having studied and written extensively on the subject over time, although she primarily focuses on the Song Dynasty. One of the earlier attempts she makes to explore the subject is her article “Women, Marriage, and the Family in Chinese History” contained in the book *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization* edited by Paul S. Ropp and published in 1990. In this article, Ebrey problematizes the perspectives of some earlier Western scholars who study traditional Chinese women, marriage, and family. While Western scholars in the past tend to emphasize “exotic customs” such as concubinage and footbinding in pre-modern China, Ebrey shows that more recent studies reveal more similarities between China and the West and that characteristics previously deemed unique to Chinese society are actually common in other parts of the world. Moreover, Ebrey defines three aspects on which traditional Chinese family structure is founded: patrilineality, which is manifested by ancestor worship and patrilineal surnames, filial piety, and patriarchy, which is demonstrated by the control of family property by fathers as family heads. Ebrey also talks about changes in the family structure due to social, economic, and political factors and various subtopics about pre-modern Chinese women such as lineages, dowry, and widow chastity in her article. Ebrey continues

exploring women in the family context in her 2003 monograph *Women and the Family in Chinese History*. This publication is divided into nine chapters, combining both case studies and discussions of general patterns and trends. About half of the chapters focus on Song-related topics. For example, Chapter One examines “Sima Guang and Song Neo-Confucian views on women” and Chapter Six discusses “cremation in Song China.” There are also chapters that concern important historical shifts such as changes in Chinese “marriage finance.”

Other academic works that directly explore the representations of women in Chinese historical writings include Sherry J. Mou’s *Gentlemen’s Prescriptions for Women’s Lives: A Thousand Years of Biographies of Chinese Women*, Lisa Raphals’ *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China*, Robin R. Wang’s “Virtue 德 (*de*), Talent 才 (*cai*), and Beauty 色 (*se*): Authoring a Full-fledged Womanhood in the *Lienüzhuan* 列女傳 (Biographies of Women),” Ping Yao’s “Women in Portraits: An Overview of Epitaphs from Early and Medieval China,” and Lee Jen-der 李貞德’s “The Life of Women in the Six Dynasties.” Mou’s work traces the *lienü zhuan* tradition, initiated by the Western Han scholar Liu Xiang, throughout China’s medieval history, examining the “Biographies of Women” in nearly all official histories from the Han to the Tang Dynasty. Mou observes that most of those biographies were written by men. However, these male-authored texts in turn influenced traditional Chinese women’s thought and behavior. Using mostly Warring States (475 – 221 BC) and Han Dynasty materials, Raphals discusses problems such as the dating, authorship, and editions of the *Lienü zhuan* and reveals the early

influences on Liu Xiang's work. In her article, Wang studies the construction of womanhood in Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan*. One major insight to be gained from Wang's article is the essential equality of men and women in achieving Confucian virtues, which are not based on gendered assumptions. Yao's article notes the importance of epitaph materials to gender history and related fields. Although relatively few extant epitaphs were written for women, Yao observes that both men's and women's epitaphs contain ample information about women's lives and shed light on issues such as family, marriage, and gender relations in traditional China. Through close readings of those epitaph materials, Yao also considers the limitations of such writings. Similarly, Lee Jen-der uses over two hundred epitaphs of ancient Chinese women to study the living condition of women in the Six Dynasties.

On the literary side, Paul Rouzer's *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* published in 2001 is an important work on the representations of women in Chinese literary writings such as the *Book of Songs*, Han rhapsodies, and the Six Dynasties poetry collection *New Songs from a Jade Terrace*. Rouzer proposes that scholars need to recognize that the women in those predominantly male-authored literary works are inevitably portrayed from a male perspective, that is, the real female voice itself often remains silent in those writings, and that those literary works are not typically written for private reading but are frequently displayed in a public that primarily consists of male audiences. For instance, Warring States orators habitually quoted poems from the *Book of Songs* in public to persuade kings and Six Dynasties literati members participated in poetry contests to vie for power and prestige. Therefore, Rouzer advocates that we adopt a

“homosocial” approach to study the representations of women in Chinese literary works. By “homosocial,” Rouzer means the socio-political interactions among males, to employ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s usage of the term. In the first part of the first chapter, Rouzer applies this approach to the reading of a concrete Chinese text, the poem “Quince” in the *Book of Songs*. Noting that the meaning of the poem is ambiguous for the poem does not indicate any subject or object, Rouzer examines three possible readings proposed by pre-modern and modern scholars. The first reading reads the poem as a description of the male-female courtship and Rouzer terms it as the heterosexual reading. By contrast, the other two readings are homosocial in nature: the second reading relates the poem with a political incident between the ruler of the state Wei and Duke Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (? – 643 BC), while the third reading treats the poem as a demonstration of reciprocal friendship. In the second part of the chapter, Rouzer considers the question of the expression of desire in Chinese literature. Rouzer suggests that certain Western models may be helpful for us to explore the issue, including Michel Foucault and Alan Bray’s theory on sodomy in early modern Europe. Rouzer argues that although many Western theories do not directly deal with Chinese literature, they can explain phenomena in Chinese literature as well. For example, Rouzer explains the rare appearance of homosexual desire in Chinese texts “in Foucauldian terms” that “such a sexuality stands *outside* an accepted code of representation, there was no social reason for writing about it.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 31. Rouzer



Furthermore, through reading Chinese primary sources, especially Confucian classics, Rouzer observes that desire is often incorporated as part of the marriage system in pre-modern China. In the second chapter, Rouzer examines several early rhapsodies such as the *Gaotang fu* 高唐賦 and the *Shennü fu* 神女賦, which all contain a goddess, a court poet, and his ruler as characters, to illustrate that the author's ability to manipulate language to persuade the fictional ruler in his rhapsody puts him into a position that involves complex power relations with the actual ruler.

The third chapter entitled "The Competitive Community" in Rouzer's book is particularly worth our attention since it deals with the Wei-Jin literati society and draws many examples from the *Shishuo xinyu*. Rouzer declares that he will "make a detour from gender and discuss the new factors in the cultural construction of the literati in the third and fourth centuries, their representation in texts, and the evolution of the competitive mentality that produced the tensions of social poetry composition" in the chapter.<sup>123</sup> Rouzer starts by looking at the Mao commentary on the *Book of Songs*, arguing that it helps form a literary language in later times, which emphasizes allusions to history and classics. This language was exclusive to the literati class for only this class could receive enough education and training to understand history and classics. Next, Rouzer analyzes the first "Seven Sorrows" poem by Wang Can 王粲 (177 – 217 CE) and shows Wang's mastery of this language and his affirmation of his literati identity through his use of the shared literary tropes of his day and his allusions

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himself italicizes the word "outside."

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 74.

to the *Book of Songs*. Considering that competition figures prominently in Wei-Jin literati culture and that there is a relative lack of materials about the Wei-Jin period, Rouzer turns to the *Shishuo xinyu* for clues about such competition. Literati members compete to solidify their privilege and elite status by means of maintaining family pride as well as striving for intellectual achievements. For example, Rouzer mentions anecdotes from the *Shishuo xinyu* to show that great families often forge marriage ties with each other and despise the marriage proposals made by “parvenus or military men.”<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, Rouzer thinks the pure conversations depicted in the *Shishuo xinyu* are a social game that determines literati’s self-worth. Although the focus of the chapter is not on women per se, Rouzer still mentions women in passing and argues that women tend to serve as evaluators of the male community, thus contributing to the competitive literati culture as well. What is important, Rouzer treats the *Shishuo xinyu* as a valuable source of elite attitudes during the Eastern Jin period, given that many texts relevant to the subject are now lost. Judging the historical value of the *Shishuo xinyu*, Rouzer notes that “this group [the group of writers on Liu Yiqing’s staff who compiled the *Shishuo xinyu*] idealized the literati culture of the fourth century to a great extent.”<sup>125</sup> Therefore, Rouzer suggests that we cannot trust the text as a completely accurate description of the fourth-century Chinese elite society. However, while discrediting the absolute historical authenticity of anecdotes in the

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<sup>124</sup> See *Ibid.*, 90-91.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

*Shishuo xinyu*, Rouzer nevertheless agrees that the attitudes reflected by those anecdotes have “deeper roots.”<sup>126</sup>

Other academic works concerning the representations of women in Chinese literary writings include the *Presence and Presentation: Women in the Chinese Literati Tradition* edited by Sherry J. Mou and Anne M. Birrell’s “The Dusty Mirror: Courtly Portraits of Woman in Southern Dynasties Love Poetry.” Mou’s book assembles eight conference papers by seven scholars presented at the annual International Congress on Medieval Studies, covering distinct topics about medieval Chinese women such as the *heqin* 和親 policy, transformations of the Mulian story, concubinage, and Tang Dynasty urban entertainers. Despite the diversity of topics, Mou notes that the themes of family and women’s bodies stand out in all those academic articles. In her article, Birrell argues that Southern Dynasties love poetry follows many conventions in terms of its topic, theme, structure, and style. Those conventions were largely developed under royal patrons such as the Liang emperor, Xiao Gang 蕭綱 (503 – 551 CE). Birrell shows that when writing a love poem, Southern Dynasties court poets usually pick as their subject a palatial woman confined in her boudoir passionately longing for a male lover who never returns. Indeed, the majority of love poems in the anthology *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* portray women as stereotypical characters overwhelmed by their frustrated love. It is Birrell’s opinion that there is a sense of morbidity in Southern Dynasties poetic descriptions of

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

women as pessimistic, obsessive, and languid figures, who have no control over their own fates nor ability to resolve their emotional conflicts.

Some scholars utilize both literary and historical writings to study individual women in Chinese history. One scholar who offers us some early case studies of Chinese women is Lily Xiao Hong Lee. Her anthology of articles, *The Virtue of Yin: Studies on Chinese Women*, published in 1994, collects five case studies on individual Chinese women or special groups of Chinese women in various time periods, including Ban Zhao, Xie Daoyun, early Buddhist nuns in medieval China, female participants of the Long March (1934 – 1936 CE), and Helen Quach (1940 – 2013 CE). The first three articles focus on the pre-modern era, while the last two focus on the modern or contemporary times. The anthology's purpose is to fill a gap in the construction of Chinese history, where so much attention has been devoted to men and so little is known about specific women's lives. The overall approach that Lee adopts seems to be this: for every woman in her anthology, Lee particularly considers the family and social milieu the woman lives in so as to better comprehend the woman's thoughts, behaviors, and achievements. When studying the famous Han Dynasty female scholar and historian Ban Zhao, Lee specifically notes the elite status of her family as one of the most prominent households in the Later Han. Her brother Ban Gu was a renowned court historian who compiled the *Han shu* 漢書 and she too got a solid education comparable to that of her brother in a great scholarly family. The social milieu of her times was characterized by the official promotion of Confucianism as the orthodox ideology. In such milieu, Ban Zhao wrote her seminal work on women's education, the "Nüjie." Lee compares the statements about women

in the “Nüjie” with those in other Chinese primary sources such as Liu Xiang’s *Lienii zhuan* and the *Shiji* 史記 to show us that the rules for women in the “Nüjie” are “more severe and more specific” and exert greater control over “women’s ideology, speech, behavior, movement, divorce, and remarriage.”<sup>127</sup> For instance, while earlier Confucian and Daoist texts advocate a balance between *yin* and *yang*, symbolizing an equal relationship between men and women, Ban Zhao stipulates that women should be lowlier and weaker than men and be submissive to them. While the *Book of Songs* and the *Analects* record free meetings of women and men, Ban Zhao’s work forbids such behaviors. Lee shows that Ban Zhao’s prescriptions often contradict her own image as a well-educated woman who actively pursues scholarship, writing, and teaching. Therefore, the “Nüjie” expresses an ideal social order rather than reflecting the reality of Ban’s own times. In this light, Lee sides with Jack Dull, who proposes Ban Zhao’s real motive of writing the work is to establish a comprehensive set of Confucian rites for women in a cultural effort to revive propriety in the society.

In her study of the famous woman Xie Daoyun, Lee refers to Xie as “a woman *mingshi*.”<sup>128</sup> By definition, Lee claims that a *mingshi* 名士 is a person “born into an elite family, inclined towards the Daoist belief in the untrammelled and reclusive way of life, and actually living according to this belief, as well as being well versed in

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<sup>127</sup> Lily Xiao Hong Lee, *The Virtue of Yin: Studies on Chinese Women* (Canberra: Wild Peony, 1994), 13-21.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

literature and philosophy.”<sup>129</sup> Then, what makes Xie Daoyun an almost singular woman *mingshi* in Chinese history? Similar to her treatment of Ban Zhao, Lee answers the question by analyzing the family and social milieus in which Xie Daoyun lived. In terms of the social environment of Xie’s day, wars broke out often and there was less ideological control over people by Confucianism. The introduction of Buddhism and the flourishing of Daoism also facilitated ideas such as equality and naturalness. The migration of people enabled women to have greater independence and freer movement outside their own households. And the development of a clan system gave elite women an opportunity to receive an excellent education. Lee argues that the family milieu in which Xie Daoyun lived also played a significant role in encouraging her literary and aesthetic pursuits and fostering her intellectual abilities. In Xie Daoyun’s youth, she often spent time with her uncle, Xie An, and the family tradition of Confucian and Daoist studies influenced her greatly. To illustrate such influences and discuss Xie’s personality, Lee examines Xie’s extant prose and poetry as well as other sources for telltale clues. For instance, Lee points out that Xie’s essay “In praise of the *Analects*” shows her mastery of Confucian classics. Moreover, Lee attributes Xie’s magnanimous air and calmness in the face of danger to her acceptance of the Daoist ideas “disregarding personal glory and humiliation” and “equating life with death” respectively.<sup>130</sup> Lee’s discussion of Buddhist nuns in medieval China contributes to our understanding of a special group of women outside the traditional

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 45.

family context and the mainstream Confucian culture. Treating “the appearance of Chinese nuns as a social phenomenon,” Lee explores the questions of what kind of women became nuns, why they did so, and what impact they had on the medieval Chinese society.<sup>131</sup> The questions are answered through studying the thirteen nuns included in the first chapter of the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳, a sixth-century collection of biographies of famous Chinese nuns written by Baochang 寶唱 (ca. 466 – ca. 518 CE). Lee finds that most of the thirteen nuns came from “families of the official class” or “at least middle-class backgrounds.”<sup>132</sup> Motives for women to become nuns, as Lee suggests, include enthusiasm for Buddhism, a desire to escape from an unhappy marriage, et cetera. With respect to those nuns’ social impact, Lee notices their abilities and interests in various fields, including politics, scholarship, preaching, convent management, and charity work. In the fourth article, Lee traces the lives of the fifty-eight women who participated in the Long March of the Red Army and surveys their family backgrounds, educational levels, and positions acquired after 1949 using information from books such as Harrison Salisbury’s *The Long March: the Untold Story* and Guo Chen 郭晨’s *Jinguo liezhuan* 巾幗列傳. Lee notices that although many women have made a great contribution to early Communist movements, their fates are still closely bound with those of their husbands and few of them have a say in important policy-making after 1949. In the last article, Lee introduces Helen Quach, a West-educated Chinese symphony conductor, and

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 50.

highlights Quach's contributions to orchestras in East and Southeast Asia based on her interviews with Quach and other sources. The article also exhibits the difficulties Quach faces as an Asian working in the field of Western music and as a woman in a male-dominated field.

### **Western Studies about Wei-Jin Political, Social, and Cultural Contexts**

Richard B. Mather makes some early efforts to study the literati in the early medieval China. One of his articles, "The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness during the Six Dynasties," though published five decades ago in 1969-70, is still an excellent work on literati thought. In the article, Mather is intrigued by the question of how Chinese literati made choices between the activist way of going into public service and the quietist way of retiring from worldly affairs in a period of two hundred years roughly from 200 CE to 400 CE. Mather approaches the question by pointing out that literati had "three typical responses to the problem—conformity, protest, and compromise" and that literati's choices often changed with concrete situations.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, Mather divides the period into segments and explores literati's "responses to the problem" in roughly chronological order from the Zhengshi era of the Wei Dynasty, to the Western Jin Dynasty, to the Eastern Jin Dynasty, and

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<sup>133</sup> See Richard B. Mather, "The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness during the Six Dynasties," *History of Religions* 9, no. 2/3 (November 1969 – February 1970): 161.



finally to the beginning of the Liu Song Dynasty. In each segment, Mather looks at particular literati figures as representative examples. In the Wei Dynasty, the new regime championed flexibility in devising policies and employing talents to suit the immediate circumstances. A new morality in accordance with the regime's flexible outlook was developed by He Yan and Wang Bi, who both upheld that one should follow naturalness. When the Western Jin succeeded the Wei, however, the upholders of this morality such as the famous "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" were in conflict with the Jin Dynasty's de facto founder Sima Zhao and Zhong Hui, who upheld the Teaching of Names. While the Teaching of Names encouraged office holding and active public service, the morality of naturalness often resulted in reclusive behaviors and nonconformity to social rites. The conflict was clearly manifested in Ji Kang's execution by Sima Zhao because Ji Kang shunned public service for the Sima faction. Mather notes that after Ji Kang's tragic death, Western Jin literati generally tried to compromise between the option of holding office and that of seeking retirement. Literati members such as Shan Tao reconciled the morality of naturalness and the Teaching of Names by treating both office holding and retirement as natural life changes. However, the conflict between the two moralities continued as the civil war of the eight princes caused many literati officials to neglect their public duties so as to avoid potential danger and those literati officials were in turn criticized by their activist opponents such as Yue Guang. Mather observes that in the Eastern Jin, new theories were developed by literati such as Sun Chuo 孫綽 (320 – 377 CE) and Yuan Hong 袁宏 (328 – 376 CE) to solve the dilemma between holding office and living in reclusion, especially after Buddhism was introduced into China. Finally,

Mather examines two literati figures, Xie Lingyun and Tao Yuanming, at the beginning of the Liu Song Dynasty and shows that their contrasting choices between office and retirement led to their different fates.

Mather's interest in early medieval Chinese literati is inherited by later scholars. Published in 1994, Charles Holcombe's monograph *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati Thought and Society at the Beginning of the Southern Dynasties* mainly deals with the subject of the literati class in the Southern Dynasties, primarily the Eastern Jin Dynasty, during the fourth-century China and explores the political, social, economic, and cultural environments of the times. Holcombe acknowledges that Western scholarship on early medieval China is relatively scarce, but he argues it is important to study this period because the period witnesses some of the greatest cultural achievements in Chinese art, literature, philosophies, and religions and a rare north-south division in China's otherwise long history as a unified empire. Furthermore, the period "provides a way of testing certain theories about the universality of patterns of historical development."<sup>134</sup> Specifically, Holcombe seems to consider the viability of comparing the fourth-century Chinese literati class with the feudal lords in medieval Europe.

Holcombe divides the main body of his monograph into several chapters; each chapter deals with a specific aspect, either political, socioeconomic, or cultural, that facilitates the formation of the literati class in the south in the fourth-century China. In

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<sup>134</sup> Charles Holcombe, *In the Shadow of the Han: Literati Thought and Society at the Beginning of the Southern Dynasties* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 6.

the second chapter, Holcombe analyzes the political causes for the emergence of the new “literati class.” After the fall of the Later Han Dynasty, the old Qin-Han political system collapsed and imperial power became greatly decentralized. Although the Wei Dynasty and the Western Jin Dynasty both ruled China’s north after the fall of the Han, the north was eventually lost to foreign invaders, forcing a large number of northern literati to flee to Jiangnan 江南, or south of the Yangtze River 揚子江, where they helped establish the new Eastern Jin regime. As a result of the political turmoil and the court’s initial weak presence in the south, Holcombe observes that the Eastern Jin had to rely on émigré ministers as well as old families in the south to control the region and to quell potential rebellions. Those literati officials and their families later dominated the court and evolved into “a hybrid bureaucratic-aristocracy,” to use Holcombe’s words, that often rivaled the imperial power of the emperor.<sup>135</sup> In the third chapter, Holcombe lists important socioeconomic factors that enabled the fourth-century southern literati to gain relative independence from the imperial authority. Holcombe shows us that literati could often establish effective leadership in local communities by sharing wealth with poorer people in their lineage or village and in turn acquire positions at the central court. Furthermore, due to the economic trend of privatization, Holcombe points out that many fourth-century literati owned great private estates, where they employed dependent laborers who were not directly subject to state taxes. The fourth chapter mainly describes how the Nine Ranks selection system consolidated the exclusive access of the literati class to office

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<sup>135</sup> See *Ibid.*, 66 and *passim*.

because the arbiters in the system basically came from great families themselves. In the fifth chapter, Holcombe discusses the literati culture in the fourth-century China, but rejects the materialists' approach "to interpret thought directly as a projection of material conditions."<sup>136</sup> He instead proposes to examine the literati culture from the angle of the history of ideas. Along this line of research, he traces the development of the metaphysical learning, a popular intellectual trend that influenced literati behavior in the fourth century, by studying various primary sources before and during China's medieval ages. In the sixth chapter, taking the Buddhist monk Zhi Daolin 支道林 (314 – 366 CE) as a representative of his age, Holcombe shows how cultural brilliance gave a person the privilege to be accepted into the literati circle and how cultural brilliance ensured the literati's legitimacy to rule in an ideological system that encouraged cultural achievements and believed that self-cultivation could result in good governance.

Finally, Holcombe offers a brief account of the restoration of the centralized imperial power and the consequent demise of the literati class at the end of the sixth century in the epilogue of his monograph.

Although Holcombe does not explicitly mention the Wei-Jin spirit throughout his monograph, his work does address certain factors that caused the Wei-Jin spirit to emerge such as the frequent regime changes and the spread of the foreign religion Buddhism in China.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 87.

David G. Johnson's *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy*, published in 1977, focuses on the literati class as well, but from a different perspective. In the monograph, Johnson examines the social hierarchy of medieval China. The purpose of his study is to challenge some scholars' view that medieval Chinese great clans, from where almost all highest officials at court came between the Wei Dynasty and the Tang Dynasty, formed a hereditary aristocracy. Johnson explores the nature of those clans by looking at how contemporaries in medieval China viewed the hierarchy of their society. He finds evidence in certain documents such as Han Xianzong 韓顯宗 (466 – 499 CE)'s memorial to the Northern Wei 北魏 (386 – 534 CE) emperor on social segregation in the capital city Luoyang and observes that contemporaries generally divided the society into three classes: *shi* 士, *shu* 庶, or commoners, and *jianmin* 賤民, or people below commoners. Johnson leaves *shi* untranslated because he thinks there is no English equivalent for the term. Johnson proceeds to ask how objectively *shi* was defined and whether there were clear criteria for a person to be included in the *shi* class. Although "there was no distinction made [between *shi* and commoners] in the law codes," Johnson finds there were household registers that listed the offices and titles of officials and their ancestors.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, high-status families were sometimes criticized for marrying daughters into lower families. However, *shi* is still a very vague term to refer to the ruling class of medieval China, since it has no definite documentary basis. By contrast, Johnson discovers there indeed existed a

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<sup>137</sup> David G. Johnson, *The Medieval Chinese Oligarchy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), 8.

clearly defined group in medieval China that formed the ruling class. The group basically consisted of several hundred eminent clans recorded in state-sponsored compendia of genealogies.

The group gained power thanks to the selection system in medieval China. By examining the selection system, the Nine Ranks system, in the medieval period, Johnson argues that a link among family, office, and status was clearly established. In the Nine Ranks system, powerful local families controlled the selection process and the selection of officials gradually became dependent upon judgments of each candidate's family standing.

Comparing the great clans in medieval China with European aristocrats, Johnson concludes that the medieval Chinese ruling class "was not an aristocracy, for high social status was not heritable in medieval China."<sup>138</sup> Instead, Johnson thinks those clans essentially formed an oligarchy. His monograph allows us to see the composition of the elite class in the medieval Chinese society and sheds light on the role of great families in creating and propagating the mainstream culture of the medieval times, especially the Wei-Jin period.

Aat Vervoorn's monograph *Men of the Cliffs and Caves: The Development of the Chinese Eremitic Tradition to the End of the Han Dynasty*, published in 1990, is concerned with the origin and development of the Chinese eremitic tradition. In the monograph, Vervoorn deals with the subject generally in chronological order and he draws most of his primary materials from Chinese historical and philosophical

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 43.

writings. Vervoorn thinks at the center of this Chinese eremitic tradition lies the conflict between one's personal moral ideal and one's social and political responsibilities. That is, in pre-modern China, a person can be called a hermit only if he has other choices such as taking office. Thus, an ordinary farmer or any person in the lower classes cannot be called a hermit. Vervoorn traces the ideas of eremitism in China first in pre-Qin philosophical works. For instance, Vervoorn discovers that it is Confucius (551 – 479 BC) who formulated opinions that give a virtuous gentleman the right to choose his way of life and to leave a ruler who is unable to accept his suggestions. Furthermore, certain chapters in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 evidently champion ideas such as caring nothing about external fame, status, or wealth and achieving spiritual freedom in the human world. For Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca. 369 – ca. 286 BC), a true hermit must be completely nameless and it does not matter whether he lives in remote places or not. Beside what is stated in the *Zhuangzi*, Laozi 老子 (? - ? BC)'s idea of being inactive, pure, and plain and the School of Agrarianism's stress on land cultivation are also related to the Chinese eremitic tradition. Vervoorn also notes the development of the important concept of *shi* 時 during this period, a concept that requires people to adapt to current situations promptly and decide in a flexible manner whether to serve a ruler or to retire from official duties.

Next, Vervoorn examines the development of the eremitic tradition in the Western Han Dynasty. Discounting some scholars' view that Chinese eremitism simply reflects the opposing stances of Confucianism and Daoism, Vervoorn argues that many schools of thought collectively contribute to the development of the

tradition. Starting with an introduction of the political environment of the Western Han, Vervoorn observes that the unification of the Chinese territory fueled the enthusiasm of intellectuals for serving the court. Yet, despite such general enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility shared by many scholar-officials, some situations still might demand that one pursue the option of retirement and seclusion. Vervoorn notes two types of hermits during the Western Han era: those who absolutely avoided political duties as testified by the hermetic character in Liu An 劉安 (179 – 122 BC)’s poem “Beckoning the recluse” and those who did not shun politics and sometimes even advised officials on practical matters such as Huangshi gong 黃石公 (ca. 292 – ca. 195 BC), a hermit who gave the future Han Dynasty minister Zhang Liang 張良 (ca. 250 – 186 BC) a book full of military strategies. The implementation of the selection system called *chaju* 察舉 brought about another type of hermits, who purposefully adopted the hermetic way of life in order to gain fame. Vervoorn names this type of seclusion as the “exemplary eremitism.” Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BC – 23 CE)’s brief rule after his usurpation of imperial power marked a new change in the eremitic tradition. While Wang Mang tried to invite hermits to the court in order to boost his political influence, some opponents of Wang Mang resigned from office or refused to accept posts as a gesture of resistance. However, as Vervoorn shows, not all hermits who declined to go to the court held the same view about Wang Mang. People went into seclusion for a variety of reasons.

Many earlier trends in the Chinese eremitic tradition continued in the Later Han period. For instance, Vervoorn shows that Emperor Guangwu 光武帝 (5 BC – 57 CE)



and his successors treated hermits with respect and tolerance just as Wang Mang did for political purposes. Moreover, the “exemplary eremitism” continued to be an important type of reclusion. As in the past, certain hermits served as advisors. They often explained disasters and unusual phenomena to the court. However, there were also new developments in the Chinese eremitic tradition during the period. As Vervoorn observes, the *danggu* 黨錮 incident near the end of the Later Han caused a group of scholar-officials opposing the power of eunuchs to be banned from taking office, resulting in a kind of “compulsory eremitism.” Furthermore, Vervoorn argues that there was an amalgamation of philosophical thoughts in the Later Han and few hermits went into reclusion under the influence of a single school of philosophy.

Although Vervoorn’s analysis in the monograph does not go beyond the end of the Later Han Dynasty, his emphasis on the Chinese eremitic tradition is still relevant when we examine the culture of the Wei-Jin period. Indeed, the behaviors and personalities of many Wei-Jin literati, or even certain features of the Wei-Jin spirit, can be viewed in light of this significant Chinese tradition. For instance, the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove similarly adopted the Lao-Zhuang thought and pursued spiritual freedom. Moreover, an anecdote from the *Shishuo xinyu* I quote in my thesis shows Wang Ziyou travels on a snowy night by boat to visit his friend Dai Andao, a lifelong hermit known for his painting and zither skills and respected by social elites. In contrast to figures like Dai Andao, some people temporarily lived as hermits but eventually assumed official duties. The most famous representative among them was perhaps the Eastern Jin minister Xie An, who had lived as a recluse in East Mountain for roughly twenty years before he finally accepted a post and later helped the Eastern

Jin court defeat the northern invading army. Xie's reclusion looks similar to the "exemplary eremitism" mentioned by Vervoorn.

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