

## ■ A Negative Poetics: Desire and Death in the *Xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*

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### Abstract

This paper argues that the *xiuxiang* text of *Jin Ping Mei*, long eclipsed by the *cihua* text, should be acknowledged for its status in the history of the Chinese novel. This paper argues that in contrast to the political double vision of family and the state in the *cihua* text, the *xiuxiang* text directs our attention to a double vision of desire and death instead, and is consistent with the seventeenth-century Chinese novel concerned with the individual. The negative poetics of desire and death, mapped out on both the moral and allegorical level of the *xiuxiang* text, provide structural as well as ideological unity. More importantly, the *xiuxiang* text of *Jin Ping Mei* presents a negative poetics for the history of the Chinese novel with respect to the conceptualizations and representation of the individual, and marks a significant development in the literati-ization of the Chinese novel.

**Keywords:** desire, death, individual, negative poetics, Chinese novel

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Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell.

Walter Benjamin

## Introduction

As we know, the novel *Jin Ping Mei* utilizes three textual systems: known as the *Jin Ping Mei cihua* 金瓶梅詞話 (alternatively known as the Wanli 萬曆 edition, hereafter *cihua*), the *xiuxiang* 繡像 edition (the illustrated text, also known as the Chongzhen 崇禎 edition, hereafter *xiuxiang*), and the *Diyi qishu* 第一奇書 edition with Zhang Zhupo's 張竹坡 (1670-1698) commentary (hereafter *Diyi qishu*).<sup>1</sup> While the *xiuxiang* text and the *Diyi qishu* edition are almost identical except for some minor textual variations, the *xiuxiang* text and the *cihua* edition differs significantly, thus resulting in varying critical evaluations of the two editions up to date. It is not my intention to add to the long-standing textual, ideological, or aesthetical controversies regarding the *xiuxiang* and the *cihua* editions.<sup>2</sup> My argument is that while the *cihua* edition deserves all the critical attention that it has received,<sup>3</sup> given the wide circulation of the *Diyi qishu* edition before the uncovering of the *cihua* edition in the early twentieth century, the status of the *xiuxiang* edition, from which the *Diyi qishu* edition is copied almost verbatim, should be appropriately recognized in the history of the Chinese novel.<sup>4</sup> My contention in this study is that one of the contributions of the *xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei* to the development of the Chinese novel is that it presents a “negative poetics” of desire and death,<sup>5</sup> a poetics that exerted considerable impact on the

<sup>1</sup> For examinations of different editions of *Jin Ping Mei*, see Patrick Hanan, “The Text of the *Chin Ping Mei*,” *Asia Major* (1962): 1-57. Also see Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, 56-72.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of the differences between the *cihua* edition and the *xiuxiang* edition, especially as reflected in the first half of the first chapter, see Xiaofei Tian, “A Preliminary Comparison of the Two Recensions of *Jinpingmei*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 62. 2 (2002): 347-88.

<sup>3</sup> According to Xiaofei Tian, the *cihua* edition was “uncovered at a fortuitous time: the May Fourth ideology exalted ‘literature of the common people’ and favored ‘low-brow’ over ‘refined,’” which “led directly to the conclusion that the less polished *cihua* text must be closer to the *ur*-text, and that the *xiuxiang* text must be a later version, revised to suit the taste of a more elite readership, or to lower the printing costs, or both” (351).

<sup>4</sup> According to Teramura Masao, the *xiuxiang* text is intended for a more sophisticated readership. See Satyendra, Indira Suh. “Toward a Poetics of the Chinese Novel: A study of the Prefatory Poem in the *Chin Ping Mei Tzu-Hua*.” Ph.D. Diss., U of Chicago, 85. Xiaofei Tian also points out that the *xiuxiang* text is ideologically and aesthetically more consistent, and its wide circulation with Zhang Zhupo's commentary in the Qing dynasty was “probably because an increasingly sophisticated fiction-reading public preferred its tighter organization, its subtler characterization, and the greater ethical complexity that followed from its more serious engagement with Buddhist values” (387).

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that the themes of desire and death are not present in the *cihua* edition. However, with a more consistent Buddhist vision the *xiuxiang* edition made these themes more explicit, as illustrated in the following analysis.

conceptualization and representation of self and desire.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this paper is to tease out the negative poetics of desire and death in the *xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei* as both a structure of signification and organizing principle, and how this negative poetics informs the representation of the individual, a core thematic concern in seventeenth-century Chinese fiction.<sup>7</sup>

In his influential thesis *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, Peter Brooks interprets plot as the interplay of two of Barthes' five narrative codes: Proairetic code which concerns the code of actions (Voice of the Empirical), and Hermeneutic code which concerns the questions and answers that structure a story (Voice of Truth). Plot, Brooks further argues, then might be thought of as an "overcoding" of the Proairetic by the Hermeneutic, the former structuring the discrete elements of the latter into larger interpretive wholes, working out their play of meaning and significance." Based on Peter Brook's theory of narrative plot, I argue that while in the *xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei* desire sets forth the narrative of action, death is the "hermeneutics" of desire.<sup>8</sup>

As pointed out by a scholar, *Jin Ping Mei* is a work about death.<sup>9</sup> Interwoven with the narrative of desire, the pervasive images of death in *Jin Ping Mei* bespeak a sense of profound anxiety over a changing society as a result of rapid commercialization taking momentum from the mid-Ming onward.<sup>10</sup> Reading

<sup>6</sup> "Desire" (*qing* 情 and/or *yu* 慾) is a critical issue in late imperial Chinese literature and it is at the core of the representation of the individual self. It is intimately associated with the intellectual, social and political developments, and foregrounds issues of gender relations, masculinity and femininity in late imperial China. For late Ming discourse of *qinglyu* and its literary representation from the late Ming to the eighteenth century, see Martin Huang, *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*. According to Huang, *Jin Ping Mei* presents a "problematik" for the representation of desire in centuries to follow, 67. In his study on the literary representation of *qing* from the mid to late- nineteenth century Chinese fiction, Keith McMahon links *qing* aesthetics with cultural destiny. See his *Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity*. By investigating literary representations of courtesans and prostitutes in late-Qing fiction, Paola Zamperini illustrates how the *qing* dynamic is closely related to issues of masculinity and modernity (*Prostitution and Masculinity in Chinese Fiction*).

<sup>7</sup> As pointed out by Robert. E. Hegel, like the early European novels, novels in seventeenth-century China are distinguished by "a new degree of concern for the individual." See his *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*, 231. This concern with the individual self was also borne out in autobiographical writings. In his examination of autobiographical writings in traditional China, Wu Pei-Yi identifies the seventeenth century as the golden age of the Chinese autobiographical writing (*The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China*).

<sup>8</sup> Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 17-18.

<sup>9</sup> Sun Shuyu 孫述宇 astutely points out that descriptions of death are the characteristic of *Jin Ping Mei*, idem, *Jin Ping Mei: Pingfan ren de zongjiaojue* 金瓶梅：平凡人的宗教劇，74.

<sup>10</sup> For discussions on Confucian scholars' misgivings and anxieties over the expansion of commercial culture in the late Ming, see Timothy Brook, *The Confusion of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China*. Also see Richard Von Glahn, "The Enchantment of Wealth: The God Wutong in the Social History of Jiangnan." Glahn argues that the social and psychological unsettling effect caused by the commercial boom of the late Ming was best reflected in the image of the god of wealth—Wutong, a diabolic deity that dominated popular mentality in late Ming Jiangnan. According to Glahn, a central theme of the

against its historical context, desire, embodied by money and sex in *Jin Ping Mei*, is the perfect image of commercialized economy which permanently changed the fabric of Chinese society, as evidenced by the endless flow of money and women in Ximen Qing's sensualist world of consumption. In the hedonistic new world of *Jin Ping Mei* where desire is represented as a free-floating signifier disassociated from any social institutions, only death can put an end to people like Ximen Qing with insatiable desires and their disruptive impacts on social order. Put differently, death in *Jin Ping Mei* negates desire and is the signified of the free-floating signifier of desire.

What differentiates the *xiuxiang* text from the *cihua* text is that while the *cihua* text explores the social and political ramifications of desire with a Confucian conceptual framework which corresponds family to state (or the local to the imperial),<sup>11</sup> the *xiuxiang* text confronts the problem of man's existence through man's relationship with desire with a Buddhist vision of emptiness and transcendence. Tying futility of desire and inevitability of death with the Buddhist notion of emptiness, the *xiuxiang* text thus spoke eloquently to the time when it was produced—the restless late Ming when many troubled souls turned away from public life and sought solace in Buddhism.<sup>12</sup> With a greatly dimin-

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popular tales on Wutong is the motif of exchanging women for wealth. In those tales fathers and husbands, in order to receive riches bestowed by Wutong, are shown as willing to accept this bargain, 690. The exchange of female sexuality and money can also be found in *Jin Ping Mei*, as attested by Wu Da's 武大 acquiescence to the adultery between Pan Jinlian and his landlord, Zhang Dahu 張大戶, especially the liaison between Ximen Qing and his business employee Han Daoguo's 韓道國 wife Wang Liu'er 王六兒, a liaison encouraged by the cuckold husband.

<sup>11</sup> The ideological and philosophical pluralism of the *cihua* edition of *Jin Ping Mei* has posed much challenge for a unitary and coherent interpretation. C. T. Hsia states that the novel lacks "ideological or philosophical coherence." See his *The Classical Chinese Novel*, 180-81. However, the scholarly consensus is that the *cihua* edition of *Jin Ping Mei* is informed by Confucian ideology. For instance, David Roy argues for a Confucian interpretation of *Jin Ping Mei*, see the "Introduction" to his translation of *Jin Ping Mei, The Plum in the Golden Vase*, or, *Chin P'ing Mei*, pp. xvii-xviii. Katherine Carlitz also argues that the novel is informed by a Confucian conceptive framework (*The Rhetoric of "Chin P'ing Mei,"* especially chapter 2, "The Structure and Themes of Chin p'ing mei," 28-44). Andrew Plaks, in contrast, reads the novel from a Neo-Confucian perspective, see *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, 55-182. Other critics, inspired by Bakhtin's theory on the novel, have also drawn our attention to the "polyphony" in *Jin Ping Mei*, e.g., Peter Rushton, *The Jin Ping Mei and the Nonlinear Dimensions of the Traditional Chinese Novel*, 5, passim. Chaoyang Liao, "Three Readings in the *Jinpingmei cihua*," *Late Imperial China*, 6, 1/2 (1984), 77-99. Satyendra, Indira Suh, while acknowledging the polyphonic nature of *Jin Ping Mei*, yet still insists on a Confucian perspective, see idem, "Toward a Poetics of the Chinese Novel: A Study of the Prefatory Poems in the *Chin P'ing Mei Tzu-Hua*." Ph.D. Diss., U of Chicago, 113-17.

<sup>12</sup> As far as fictional narrative is concerned, the Buddhist conceptual framework deployed for the conceptualization and representation of individual self as presented in the *xiuxiang* text of *Jin Ping Mei* was further fathomed in some major seventeenth-century novels, among which we can count *Xu Jin Ping Mei* 續金瓶梅, *Xingshi yinyuanzhuàn* 醒世姻緣傳, and the three sequels of *Xiyou ji*: *Hou Xiyou ji* 後西遊記, *Xiyou bu* 西遊補, and *Xu Xiyou ji* 續西遊記. It might not be an exaggeration to say that privatized religious vision, be it in the form of personal ethics of karmic law, or of personal enlightenment and

ished Confucian ideological orientation and a more explicitly articulated Buddhist vision on the emptiness of human desires, the *xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei* therefore marks a big step forward in the “privatizing process” of both the Chinese novel and the representation of the individual.<sup>13</sup> And consequently the *xiuxiang* edition demonstrates further “literati-ization” of the *cihua* edition and thus makes itself a crucial link between the “literati novel” and “the novel of the literati” when we take into account the impacts of the *xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei* on the eighteenth-century masterpiece *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢.<sup>14</sup> Examining the dynamic of desire and death mapped out on both moral and allegorical level, this study hopes to shed light on the conceptualization and representation of the individual in the *xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*.

### A Foreboding Beginning: Overcoding Desire with Death

To better understand how the *xiuxiang* text is informed by a negative poetics of desire and death it is worthwhile to point out the differences of the conceptual framework underlying the narrative of the *xiuxiang* edition and the *cihua* edition as reflected in the first chapter of the two texts. With a re-writing of the first chapter, changes of some of the chapter titles, and especially a more streamlined narrative as a result of deletion of many extra-plot elements, the editor of the *xiuxiang* edition apparently had an agenda significantly distinct from the author of the *cihua* edition. One of the most important ramifications is that while the *cihua* edition is more socially and politically oriented, the *xiuxiang* edition greatly diminishes its social and political concerns and redirects the reader’s attention to a more unified narrative focusing on the individual Ximen Qing and his private

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transcendence, loomed large behind the seventeenth-century cultural landscape. For a study of the relation of Buddhism and late Ming literary culture in Chinese, see Huang Zhuoyue 黃卓越, *Fojiao yu wan Ming wenxue sichao* 佛教與晚明文學思潮.

<sup>13</sup> Martin W. Huang argues that as the first full-length domestic novel *Jin Ping Mei* marks a turning point in the “privatizing process” of the Chinese novel. See *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, 57-59. I would argue that this “privatizing process” was further deepened in the *xiuxiang* edition.

<sup>14</sup> For the concept of the “literati novel,” see Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, 3-52. For discussion on the notion of the “novel of the literati,” see Martin W. Huang, *Literati and Self-Representation: Autobiographical Sensibility in the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Novel*, 15-26. According to Huang, when the literati novel, represented by sixteenth-century masterworks such as *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 and the *cihua* edition of *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, reached maturity, its “literati-ization” seems to have quickened in the seventeenth century (16). On the impacts of *Jin Ping Mei* on *Honglou meng*, see Mary E. Scott, “Azure from Indigo: *Honglou meng*’s Debt to *Jin Ping Mei*.” Ph.D. Diss., Princeton U., 1989.

world.<sup>15</sup> The focus on the individual is further reinforced with changes of some of the chapter titles which explicitly center on Ximen Qing's activities as well as his perspectives.<sup>16</sup> The end result is that the *xiuxiang* edition diverts greatly from the *cihua* text, which is of a general exposé of social mores, to a more focused account of individual self, and in doing so the *xiuxiang* text situates itself firmly in line with the seventeenth-century Chinese novels which are distinguished by thematic concerns with the individual and attendant issues of personal accountability, enlightenment and transcendence.<sup>17</sup>

The first chapter of the *cihua* and *xiuxiang* editions both open with a prologue concerning the thematic concerns of the work, followed by the beginning of the main narrative.<sup>18</sup> The prologue of the *cihua* edition contains a verse about the historical figures Xiang Yu 項羽 (232-202 BCE) and Liu Bang 劉邦 (256-195 BCE), followed by a lengthy explanation on how the heroic images of the two figures are tarnished by their infatuation with women and resultant disaster, thus introducing the theme of the subsequent narrative as a cautionary tale on the danger of “*qingse* 情色” (passion and lust), epitomized by the fearful image of “a beautiful woman who is embodied in a tiger” (*huzhong meinu* 虎中美女). This

<sup>15</sup> This more unified narrative on individual self in the *xiuxiang* edition can be gauged by a comparison of the titles of the first and last chapters of the *xiuxiang* and the *cihua* editions. In the *xiuxiang* edition the title of Chapter 1 is “西門慶熱結十弟兄，武二郎冷遇親哥嫂” (Ximen Qing Fervently Forms Sworn Brotherhood with Ten Friends; Wu the Second Coolly Encounters his Real Brother and Sister-in-law), and the title of Chapter 100 is “韓愛姐路過二搗鬼，普淨師幻度孝哥兒” (Han Aijie Runs into Erdaogui on her Way; Master Pujing Redeems Xiaoge'er by a Vision). In the *cihua* edition the title of Chapter 1 is “景陽岡武松打虎，潘金蓮嫌夫賣風月” (On Jingyang Ridge Wu Song Slays the Tiger; Pan Jinlian Detests Her Husband and Flaunts Her Charms), and the title of Chapter 100 is “韓愛姐湖州尋父，普淨師薦拔群冤” (Han Aijie Goes to Huzhou to Seek Her Father; Master Pujing Redeems All the Wrongful Ghosts). The narrative unity in the *xiuxiang* edition therefore is made clear by the focal attention on Ximen Qing since Xiao'ge is Ximen Qing reincarnated.

<sup>16</sup> This shift away from the social and political concern of the *cihua* edition towards the concern of the individual in the *xiuxiang* edition is also substantiated in the changes of many of the chapter-opening verses. While most of the chapter opening verses in the *cihua* edition are sententious verses on proper social conduct, in the *xiuxiang* edition most of the chapter-opening verses are song lyrics presenting private emotions. For a study on the prefatory poems of the *cihua* text and its comparison to the *xiuxiang* text, see Indira Suh Satyendra, “Toward a Poetics of the Chinese Novel: A Study of the Prefatory Poems in the *Chin Ping Mei Tzu-Hua*. According to Satyendra, many of the prefatory poems in the *cihua* edition are sententious and charged with political associations and the *xiuxiang* text replaced these sententious poems with poems expressing emotions (97).

<sup>17</sup> For discussions on thematic concerns and narrative techniques of the seventeenth-century Chinese novels, see Robert. E. Hegel, *The Novel in Seventeenth Century China*.

<sup>18</sup> In this paper, all the citations are based on the following three modern editions: for the *cihua* edition, *Jin Ping Mei cihua (quan jiao ben)* 金瓶梅詞話 (全校本) (hereafter abbreviated as *cihua*), 4 vol. ed., Mei Jie 梅節 (Hong Kong: Xinghai wenhua, 1987). For the *xiuxiang* edition, *Xinke xiuxiang piping Jin Ping Mei* 新刻繡像批評金瓶梅 (hereafter *xiuxiang*). Qi Yan 齊煙, Wang Rumei 王汝梅, ed. (Taipei: Xiaoyuan, 1990). For Zhang Zhupo commentary edition of *Jin Ping Mei*, see *Zhang Zhupo piping Jin Ping Mei* 張竹坡批評金瓶梅. Wang Rumei 王汝梅, et al., ed. (Jinan: Qilu, 1991).



metaphor of *femme fatale* is then followed with the story of Wu Song's 武松 tiger-slaying heroism copied verbatim from *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 which foreshadows his revengeful murder of Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮, thus pointing to the danger of female sexuality through the "tiger" image (*cihua*, 1:1-16). The *xiuxiang* edition begins with two poems, one on the vanity of power and splendor, the other the peril of female sexuality, followed by a long preamble philosophizing emptiness of worldly desire, especially that of "caise 財色" (wealth and women), as a result of the inevitability of death.<sup>19</sup> Citing two lines from *Jingang jing* 金鋼經 (Diamond Sutra), "Life is like a dream, a bubble; it is like lightening, and also like the morning dew" (如夢幻泡影, 如電復如露, *xiuxiang*, 1:3),<sup>20</sup> the prologue of the *xiuxiang* edition concludes with a proposition of renouncing worldly desire and taking Buddhist vows so as to "enlighten to the emptiness of the illusory reality, penetrate to the mechanism of life and death, and thereby achieving supreme transcendence" (參透了空色世界, 打磨穿生死機關, 直超無上乘, *xiuxiang*, 1:3). Therefore, while the prologue to the *cihua* edition functions as a cautionary tale on the danger of female sexuality, the prologue to the *xiuxiang* edition is more philosophically oriented as it ponders upon the meaning of life and death and ties it to the Buddhist notion of emptiness and transcendence, an issue that resonated strongly in late Ming literati circles.<sup>21</sup>

A major difference regarding the first chapter of the two editions is that while the first chapter in the *cihua* edition is devoted to Wu Song's heroic act of tiger-slaying, the first chapter of the *xiuxiang* edition, however, marks a drastic

<sup>19</sup> Hanan argues that the prologue of the *xiuxiang* text was changed in order to give a more forceful moral warning against the behavior of the characters in the novel and the description of the dire consequences resulting from succumbing to wealth and women is more colorful and direct than in the *cihua* prologue (35). Other scholars, however, argue that the *xiuxiang* text often softens the strict moral judgment presented in the *cihua* text and entertains a more tolerant view on desire, and presents a Buddhist vision of emptiness, compassion and transcendence. See Xiaofei Tian, "A Preliminary Comparison of the Two Recensions of *Jinpingmei*," 351. Also see Indira Suh Satyendra, "Toward a Poetics of the Chinese Novel: A Study of the Prefatory Poems in the *Chin P'ing Mei Tzu-Hua*," 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Xinke xiuxiang piping Jin Ping Mei* 新刻繡像批評金瓶梅 (hereafter *xiuxiang*). Qi Yan 齊煙, Wang Rumei 王汝梅, et al., eds. (Taipei: Xiaoyuan, 1990), 3. Future references will be included in the text, followed by chapter number and page number. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations in this study are mine. However, I consult David Roy's translation, *The Plum in the Golden Vase or Chin P'ing Mei*, 4 vols., if applicable.

<sup>21</sup> This philosophical speculation on the meaning of life and death at the opening of the *xiuxiang* text resonates strongly with the growth of philosophical examination of self in the late Ming and early Qing periods, and Buddhism played a crucial role in this emerging philosophical interest. According to Gong Pengcheng 龔鵬程, the core concern of the late Ming philosophical current is the concern of life and death, which revealed the existential anxiety of the late Ming intellectuals (224). Philosophical and religious discourse on "life" and "death" was greatly indebted to and inspired by the revival of Buddhism in the late Ming. On the revival of Buddhism in the late Ming, see Chun-fang Yu, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the Late Ming Synthesis*.

change from the heroic to the quotidian by shifting the narrative focus from Wu Song's heroism completely to Ximen Qing's private world. If the first chapter of the *cihua* edition emphasizes the peril of female sexuality, in the *xiuxiang* edition although the danger of female sexuality is still present, it is the power of money that becomes the focus of narrative attention.

The title of Chapter 1 in the *xiuxiang* edition, "Ximen Qing Fervently Forms Sworn Brotherhood with Ten Friends; Wu the Second Coolly Encounters his Real Brother and Sister-in-law 西門慶熱結十弟兄，武二郎冷遇親哥嫂," presents us with two deliberately contrasting scenes regarding one of the cardinal Confucian human relationships—brotherhood, as indicated by the juxtaposition of the two words "heat" 熱 and "cold" 冷, which, according to Zhang Zhupo, is the structural pattern of *Jin Ping Mei*.<sup>22</sup> Given the fact that at the beginning of *Jin Ping Mei* Ximen Qing is a small-time merchant, the forming of sworn brotherhood proposed by him can be seen as Ximen Qing's desire for power. And this way the opening of the *xiuxiang* text introduces Ximen Qing as an ambitious desiring subject.<sup>23</sup> This directs our attention to the role of money, especially mercantile wealth, as a new form of social power in *Jin Ping Mei*.<sup>24</sup> Money "talks" big in the first chapter of the *xiuxiang* edition. It makes its first appearance in the discussion about the forming of sworn brotherhood between Ximen Qing and his two friends Ying Bojue 應伯爵 and Xie Xida 謝希大, as he asks them to contribute to the ceremony of the forming of sworn brotherhood so as to show their "brotherly" feeling while he pays the bigger portion. By linking money to the forming of sworn brotherhood and to the manifestation of feeling, the sworn brotherhood formed here is therefore an unequivocal parody of that celebrated in

<sup>22</sup> Zhang Zhupo characterizes *Jin Ping Mei* as "a book of heat and cold (*yanliang shu* 炎涼書), see Zhang Zhupo's chapter heading commentaries for Chapter 1, *Zhang Zhupo piping Jin Ping Mei*, 1, also cf. his essay "Lengre jinzhen 冷熱金針" (The golden needle of heat and cold). The discussions of "heat" and "cold" are also scattered around in his "Piping Diyi qishu *Jin Ping Mei* dufa 批評第一奇書金瓶梅讀法" (How to read *Jin Ping Mei*) as well as his chapter heading and interlinear commentary. For a discussion of the interplay of the image of "heat" and "cold" in English, see Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, 82-85.

<sup>23</sup> When discussing with his principal wife Wu Yueniang his intention of forming a sworn brotherhood with his friends, Ximen Qing says that the purpose is "to rely on them in the future" (明日也有箇靠傍些, *xiuxiang*, 1:6).

<sup>24</sup> "Money" of course is a major theme in the *cihua* text as well, however, many of the changed chapter titles in the *xiuxiang* edition highlight the transaction of money, power and sex in Ximen Qing's world; they also accentuate Ximen Qing's principal wife Wu Yueniang's preoccupation with money and status whenever possible. For instance, the title of Chapter 43 in the *xiuxiang* edition is "Fighting for Favoritism, Jinlian Flies into a Temper; Showing off Wealth and Status, Wu Yueniang Ingratiatingly Initiates a Betrothal (爭寵愛金蓮鬥氣，賣富貴吳月攀親)," whereas the title of the same chapter in the *cihua* edition reads as "Because of the Missing Gold Ximen Qing Curses Jinlian; As a Result of the Betrothal Yueniang Meets Madam Qiao (為失金西門慶潘金蓮，因結親月娘會喬太太)."



*Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義, *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 and *Xiyou ji* 西遊記; it also calls into question the very nature of this sworn brotherhood.<sup>25</sup> The talk of money is resumed when Wu Yueniang 吳月娘, Ximen Qing's principal wife, complains to him of the stinginess of his friends as she shows him their shares (*xiuxiang*, 1:10). On the ceremony for the forming of sworn brotherhood, despite the fact that he is not the oldest, Ximen Qing is recommended to be the "big brother" for the reason that, as pointed out by Ying Bojue, "nowadays only money and power matters" (如今年時, 只好敘些財勢, *xiuxiang*, 1:14). And Ximen Qing's recommendation of his neighbor Hua Zixu 花子虛 to fill in the vacancy left by the deceased Bu Zhidao 卜知道 is because he "has money 有錢" (*xiuxiang*, 1:14). The forming of the brotherhood initiated by Ximen Qing thus sets in motion the narrative of exchange of money and power characteristic of *Jin Ping Mei*. However, riding the historical and political opening of the *cihua* edition and focusing exclusively on the private and the quotidian, the *xiuxiang* edition marks a step forward in representing the private and the individual self, thus making itself in keeping with the "private" turn of the seventeenth-century Chinese literati culture.<sup>26</sup>

While money plays such a "hot" role for social bonding at the mimetic level, it takes on an ominous significance on the symbolic level. As mentioned above, the most conspicuous differences regarding the first chapter of the two editions is that the first chapter of the *cihua* edition focuses on Wu Song's tiger-slaying heroism, whereas the *xiuxiang* edition opens with a new beginning featuring Ximen Qing. While Wu Song's tiger-slaying in the *cihua* edition foreshadows his murder of Pan Jinlian, a beautiful yet fatal "tiger"; in the *xiuxiang* edition the narrative focuses our attention on a "tiger" image symbolizing money. The image first appears in the form of a painted tiger on the wall of the Temple of Jade Emperor (*Yubuang miao* 玉皇廟) where Ximen Qing and his friends swear their brotherhood. When walking around the temple, Ximen Qing and his friends see a painting of the dark-faced Marshal Zhao (Zhao yuantan yuanshuai 趙元壇元帥), the God of Wealth, accompanied by a "big tiger" (*da laohu* 大老虎).<sup>27</sup> The comparison of

<sup>25</sup> Ximen Qing asking his friends to contribute to the "share" for the forming of sworn brotherhood in Chapter 1 reads utterly ironic when we take into account the fact that his sworn brothers contribute stingily once again to the "share" for his funeral gifts in Chapter 80 (*xiuxiang*, 80:1161).

<sup>26</sup> For the "private" turn to domesticity and private pleasure in seventeenth-century China, see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, 153-54.

<sup>27</sup> One of the alternative names of 趙元壇元帥 is Zhao xuantan yuanshuai 趙玄壇元帥 or Zhao Gongming 趙公明. The identity of this Daoist deity had undergone a long history of evolution. By the sixteenth century he was known as "martial god of wealth" (武財神) in popular Daoism. For instance, in the sixteenth-century novel *Fengshen yanyi* 封神演義 he is described as a god in charge of the wealth in

Ximen Qing to the God of Wealth is made explicit when Ying Bojue jokes that he and the other brothers are tigers “eating off” and “following” (吃你的隨你, *xiuxiang*, 1:13) the wealthy Ximen Qing, whereas Wu Song’s heroic tiger-slaying is merely related briefly by Ying Bojue to Ximen Qing later in the chapter. The image of the painted “big tiger” then draws out a joke told by Ying Bojue which again links tiger with money. The real “tiger” presented in the *xiuxiang* text therefore is money. By shifting the narrative emphasis on the real tiger killed by Wu Song to the painted tiger signifying wealth, the first chapter of the *xiuxiang* text therefore introduces the theme of money and presents Ximen Qing as the real hero (the God of Wealth). Ying Bojue’s comparison, however, sounds ominous as we consider how Ximen Qing eventually brings on his own undoing by his sexual escapades made possible with his money. In other words, Ximen Qing is eventually eaten off by the “big tiger” of money.

While the first chapter of the *xiuxiang* edition introduces the “hot” topic of money, it also presents the “cold” theme of death. In the first chapter of the *xiuxiang* edition death serves as a foreboding undercurrent of the “hot” talk of money and sex. It is introduced into the narrative rather casually, but the significance of this “casualness” can be observed on multiple levels. First, this casual way of representation fits well with the quotidian narrative of *Jin Ping Mei*. Second, Bu Zhidao’s sudden death represents the wantonness of life—an important subject of *Jin Ping Mei*. Third, by embedding the news of Bu Zhidao’s death in the conversations between Ximen Qing and his two friends Ying Bojue and Xie Xida 謝希大—all of whom are friends of the dead, on the beauty of the courtesan Li Guijie 李桂姐, not only is the nature of their friendship made problematic, it also sets forth the interplay of desire and death, or, that of “heat” and “cold.” Moreover, Bu Zhidao’s death anticipates his replacement Hua Zixu’s impending death caused by dispute over family inheritance. What is most significant about Bu Zhidao’s death is that it anticipates Ximen Qing’s own death. When learning of Bu Zhidao’s death, Ximen Qing thus responds: “It hasn’t been long since I heard that he’d been sick, but who could have known he would die in no more than a few days like this” (便是我聞得他不好得沒多日子，就這等死了, *xiuxiang*, 1:7). As it turns out, Ximen Qing himself also dies within a few days after a series of sexual escapades. His response, therefore, is rendered most ironic with regard to his own death.

The specter of death associated with the outer world of male bonding also creeps into the inner chamber of erotic desire. At the very beginning of the

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the world. See *Fengshen yanyi*, Yang Zongying 楊宗瑩, ed. (Taipei: Sanmin, 2004), chapter. 99, 1022. Ximen Qing fits with the image of the “martial god of wealth” as the official post he obtains later on is a military post.

narrative we read Ximen Qing and Wu Yueniang discussing Ximen Qing's third concubine Zhuo Diu'er's 卓丟兒 illness, and her death is mentioned in the next chapter. Zhuo Diu'er's nickname, "second sister" (*er'jie* 二姐) alerts us to the parallel between her and Li Ping'er, who is called "second mother" (*er'niang* 二娘) in Hua Zixu's household, thus her lingering death anticipates Li Ping'er's. But most significantly, it is Zhuo Diu'er's death that draws forth the death goddess Pan Jinlian, as we are told that Ximen Qing's first encounter with Pan Jinlian takes place right after Zhuo Diu'er's death when he strolls on the street after the funeral.<sup>28</sup> In Chapter 1 desire and death provide a matrix for interlinking events and characters by juxtaposing Bu Zhidao's death of the outer male world and Zhuo Diu'er's death of the inner quarter, and especially by connecting Zhuo Diu'er with the death goddess Pan Jinlian who is responsible for the deaths of several characters. In presenting desire and death inextricably entangled, the first chapter of the *xiuxiang* edition thus sets forth the pattern of meaning for the ensuing narrative.

### The Structure of Desire and Death

While the first chapter of the *xiuxiang* text presents a negative poetics of desire and death, this negative poetics is further borne out with the moral thrust of the ensuing narrative. Once again the *xiuxiang* text differs from the *cihua* edition in that while moral seriousness in the *cihua* text is often presented through authorial intervention, in the *xiuxiang* text it depends largely on representational devices with a tightened narrative on the dynamic of desire and death.

Zhang Zhupo has long pointed out the cyclic mode of representation in *Jin Ping Mei*.<sup>29</sup> For the interest of our analysis, however, what is significant is that this cyclic mode of representation not only provides textual linkage for separate events, it also provides a pattern of meaning with regard to the Buddhist concept of retribution, thus pointing up the moral thrust of *Jin Ping Mei*. Many a situation presented in *Jin Ping Mei*, especially those concerning characters met with unnatural death, are reenactments of the original situation of the characters

<sup>28</sup> In the *xiuxiang* text we learn of Zhuo Diu'er's illness in the very beginning of Chapter 1, and her death is reported in Chapter 2, whereas in the *cihua* text her illness is mentioned in Chapter 3 and her death is reported in Chapter 6. It is obvious that in the *xiuxiang* text the theme of death takes a more important role than in the *cihua* text as far as conceptual framework is concerned.

<sup>29</sup> Zhang Zhupo, "Piping Diyi qishu Jin Ping Mei dufa," #38, in *Zhang Zhupo Piping Jin Ping Mei*, p. 37; trans. David Roy, in *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, David L. Rolston, ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 224.

in question. The significance of the sense of *déjà vu* is that, structurally, it points to the “retrospectivity” of the narrative;<sup>30</sup> ideologically, it alerts the reader to the Buddhist notion of retribution and hence moral accountability of the individual.

It is interesting to note that almost all the women who have illicit sexual relations with Ximen Qing, including Pan Jinlian, Li Ping'er, Song Huilian and Wang Liu'er, are associated with images of death that permeate throughout the narrative of *Jin Ping Mei*.<sup>31</sup> These fallen women therefore cast a dark specter over Ximen Qing's reckless pursuit of sexual desire. As a point of departure, let us take a look of the character Song Huilian 宋蕙蓮. The episode of Song Huilian is characterized by her meteoric rise and sudden suicide. Song Huilian, whose original name is also Jinlian, is one of the parallel characters of Pan Jinlian.<sup>32</sup> Song Huilian's downfall results from her rising ambition as well as her naivety. After becoming Ximen Qing's sexual partner,<sup>33</sup> she makes no effort to conceal the liaison; rather, the liaison becomes a public secret as the result of her showing-off.

Despite all the similarities in their backgrounds and their flirtatious nature, there is one crucial difference which makes Song Huilian distinct from Pan Jinlian. Although both of them cuckold their husbands by forming an adulterous relationship with Ximen Qing, Pan Jinlian ends up murdering her husband Wu Da. Conversely, whereas Song Huilian, whose liaison with Ximen Qing also leads to her husband Laiwang's 來旺 undoing, still remains concerned about her husband's well-being, and has a lingering feeling of guilt over her husband's misfortune when the latter has fallen victim to Ximen Qing and Pan Jinlian's intrigues. Her concerns for her husband, however, are taken advantage of by her rival Pan Jinlian to manipulate Ximen Qing, who vacillates between the two women as to how to dispose Laiwang, who refuses to swallow the humiliation brought about by the liaison. When Pan Jinlian instigates Sun Xue'e 孫雪娥, Ximen Qing's most

<sup>30</sup> For discussions of “retrospectivity” as in narrative plot, see Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Note that Pan Jinlian is talented with needlework and the first product she makes is Dame Wang's “burial garments” (送終衣服). Also note that not only Pan Jinlian, but also her variations Song Huilian 宋蕙蓮 and Wang Liu'er 王六兒 are associated with death images as well, as we are told later in the narrative that Song Huilian's father is a coffin maker while Wang Liu'er father is a butcher.

<sup>32</sup> On the parallel relations among the female characters in the novel, see Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, 105-117.

<sup>33</sup> The specter of death even hovers around when Ximen Qing and Song Huilian are having sex. In their secret tryst in the “Snow Cave” (*xuedong* 雪洞) in Ximen Qing's pleasure garden Hidden Spring Grotto (*cangchun wu* 藏春塢), displeased with the cold of the cave, Song Huilian complains to Ximen Qing that “I'd better put a rope in my mouth so if I freeze to death, you'll have something to haul me out” (口裡啣著條繩子，凍死往外拉, *xiuxiang*, 23:297). The image of her holding a rope with her mouth is deadly ironic given the fact that she ends her life by hanging herself.

neglected and least respected concubine, to humiliate Song Huilian, it proves to be too much for her and she consequently commits suicide by hanging herself (*xiuxiang*, 26:342-43).<sup>34</sup>

What makes the situation ironic is that it is her concerns for her husband Laiwang that connect Song Huilian's present to her past. In the beginning of Chapter 22 we are told that she had a liaison with Laiwang behind the back of her previous husband Jiang Cong 蔣聰. When Jiang Cong was killed by someone accidentally in a fight over money, Song Huilian avenged her husband's death by bringing the person in question to justice with the help of Laiwang. The similarity of the two situations concerning Song Huilian only accentuates the irony of her present situation. With the vicious Pan Jinlian as her rival, this time Song Huilian's concerns for her husband Laiwang prove fatal to both her husband and herself. The reenactment of this past situation in the present accentuates causality which is the determining force in representing the individual in *Jin Ping Mei*.

The working of causality also figures prominently in Li Ping'er's fate. Li Ping'er's beauty, wealth, and social status make her the consummate embodiment of Ximen Qing's pursuit of money, power and sex.<sup>35</sup> She also produces for Ximen Qing his first heir, Guan'ge 官哥, thus further reinforcing Ximen Qing's favoritism for her, which elicits a series of attacks from Pan Jinlian who is determined to bring harm to Guan'ge. Guan'ge's premature death proves to be a fatal blow to Li Ping'er. However, Li Ping'er brings on her undoing by her own nefarious deeds. One of the recurring images concerning the characterization of Li Ping'er is that of "medicine" (*yao* 藥). The image of "medicine" first appears in the episode regarding her husband Hua Zixu's death. We are told that Li Ping'er is bent on getting rid of her husband after her liaison with Ximen Qing. When her husband lost the case about the disposition of his family inheritance, in order to see to it that he will not be able to get himself established again, Li Ping'er not only secretly transfers their property to Ximen Qing, she even refuses to provide for her husband's proper medical care when he has fallen ill, thus contributing to Hua Zixu's early death (*xiuxiang*, 14:173-77). The image of "medicine" reappears after Hua Zixu's death. When having sexual intercourse with Ximen Qing, Li Ping'er says that he is "the medicine for me" (就是醫奴的藥一般, *xiuxiang*, 17:208). As it turns out later, her "medicine" will cost her life.

Later Li Ping'er marries doctor Jiang Zhushan 蔣竹山 when she lost contact with Ximen Qing, who promised to marry her into his household. Li Ping'er

<sup>34</sup> In Chapter 99, Sun Xue'e dies the same way (*xiuxiang*, 99:1402).

<sup>35</sup> Li Ping'er was the concubine of the Prime Minister Cai Jing's 蔡京 son-in-law, Liang Zhongshu 梁中書.

then gives Jiang Zhushan three hundred taels of silver to open up an herb shop (*sheng yaopu* 生藥鋪). Although Jiang Zhushan attempts to please Li Ping'er in bed by concocting some aphrodisiac drug (*xiyao* 戲藥), Li Ping'er is still unsatisfied since Jiang's sexual prowess cannot measure up to Ximen Qing's (*xiuxiang*, 19:238). When Jiang Zhushan gets involved in a lawsuit framed up by Ximen Qing, Li Ping'er reluctantly gives him thirty taels of silver so that he can get himself exonerated. But when he comes back from the courtroom Li Ping'er refuses to let him stay, and the last words she says to him are once again associated with "medicine," "You might as well regard the whole episode (referring to their short-lived marriage) as a fit of delirium on my part, and those thirty taels of silver as the fee for the medicine" (只當奴害了汗病，這三十兩銀子問你討了藥吃了。 *xiuxiang*, 19: 241). When Ximen Qing, displeased with her marriage to doctor Jiang Zhushan, humiliates her on their wedding night, she says to him once again that he is the "medicine" for her (*xiuxiang*, 19:247). Li Ping'er's likening of Ximen Qing to "medicine" becomes most ironic when later on she suffers from a prolonged period of menstrual illness caused by Ximen Qing's insistence on trying out the aphrodisiac drug obtained from a foreign monk during her menstrual period. Hereafter Ximen Qing's household is frequented with doctors but no medicine could save her from her deteriorating health and eventual death. The image of "medicine" thus weaves a connecting thread linking all these men, past and present, in Li Ping'er's life, providing a clear trajectory of Li Ping'er's (self-) destructive sexuality and bringing into relief the dynamic of desire and death.

The same device is more thoroughly employed in depicting Pan Jinlian, especially in describing her relationship with the two men who decide her fate, Wu Song and Ximen Qing. In Chapter 1 the introduction of Pan Jinlian's background is immediately followed by a scene which sets up Pan Jinlian's image as a seductress, "Every day, after she had seen Wu Da out the door, this woman would stand behind the blind, cracking melon seeds with her teeth, and revealing her tiny golden lotuses for all to see" (那婦人每日打發武大出門，只在簾子下嗑瓜子兒，一徑把那一對小金蓮故露出來, *xiuxiang*, 1:21). This scene becomes a primal scene by introducing two central images as to the characterization of Pan Jinlian. One of which is the erotic image of Pan Jinlian's "tiny golden lotus," the ultimate symbol of female sexuality embodied by her.<sup>36</sup> The other one is the image of the "blind" (*lianzi* 簾子) with which a sequence of similar scenes is linked that not only provides a trajectory of Pan Jinlian's life, but more significantly, alerts the reader to the working of retribution. Following this primal scene pre-

<sup>36</sup> For discussions of the erotic image of the "golden lotus" in *Jin Ping Mei* from a feminist perspective, see Naifei Ding, *Obscene Things: Sexual Politics in Jin Ping Mei*, 165-76.



sented in Chapter 1, the image of the “blind” reappears in Chapter 2 in the episode of Pan Jinlian’s seduction of Wu Song. On a wintry day when Pan Jinlian is determined to give a try in seducing Wu Song, the narrative depicts her “standing inside the hanging blind at the door, all by herself” (獨自冷清清立在簾兒下, *xiuxiang*, 2:28) as she watches her object of desire approaching home. As if the fragile “blind” could protect Pan Jinlian’s sexuality from being compromised and hence his brother’s masculinity undamaged, Wu Song, before setting out on his business trip to the capital on behalf of the district magistrate, cautions Wu Da about outside trouble and instructs him to return home early, lower the blind and secure the household. Ironically, it is precisely when one day Pan Jinlian is lowering the blind that she encounters Ximen Qing.

The primal scene in Chapter 1 and the seduction scene in Chapter 2 are reenacted in Chapter 86 and Chapter 87. Pan Jinlian, now staying with Dame Wang after being expelled from Ximen Qing’s household by Wu Yueniang upon the exposure of her liaison with Chen Jingji, still likes to stand behind the blind and watch passersby as she used to. And her object of desire appears right in the next chapter. Upon learning that Ximen Qing is dead and Pan Jinlian is staying with Dame Wang, Wu Song, back from his exile, decides to take the opportunity to avenge the murder of his brother. When he comes over to Dame Wang’s house the narrative once again depicts Pan Jinlian “standing behind the hanging blind” (正在簾下站著, *xiuxiang*, 87:1244). The only difference between the scene presented in Chapter 2 and the one presented here is that while Pan Jinlian is the seducer in the scene presented in Chapter 2, in this scene Wu Song takes on the role of seducer. With Pan Jinlian’s passionate lust for Wu Song and Wu Song’s cold-blooded murder of her, the structural pattern of desire and death introduced in Chapter 1, and the associated imagery of “heat” and “cold,” come in full circle in this episode.

### The Allegory of Desire and Death

As mentioned earlier, the Buddhist notion of emptiness is introduced in the opening of the *xiuxiang* edition. The prologue of the *xiuxiang* text expounds on the notion of illusory reality, concluding with a proposition for renouncing worldly desire and taking Buddhist vows so as to enlighten to the identity of *se* 色 and *kong* 空, *sheng* 生 (life, which in *Jin Ping Mei* is embodied in robust appetite and insatiable carnal desire) and *si* 死 (death). In the following section I will demonstrate that by connecting the inevitability of death with the futility of worldly desires (*se* 色) in the *xiuxiang Jin Ping Mei*, death becomes the concretization of

the concept of emptiness (*kong* 空).<sup>37</sup>

The connection between death and emptiness is best spelled out in the second part of *Jin Ping Mei*. In comparison to the first part of the novel, the second part is characterized by several distinctive features, and is particularly punctuated by several deaths taking place in quick succession, of which the deaths of Guan'ge, Li Ping'er, and Ximen Qing are of crucial importance with regard to our discussion on desire, death, and emptiness.<sup>38</sup>

Let us first take a look at the ill-fated Guan'ge's career. The symbolic significance of Guan'ge in respect to Ximen Qing's rise to political power is explicitly indicated by the first half of Chapter 30, "Ximen Qing Begets a Son and Gains an Office 西門慶生子加官."<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Guan'ge's fate is closely linked with the death goddess Pan Jinlian even when he is still a fetus. In Chapter 27 when Li Ping'er discloses her pregnancy to Ximen Qing, Pan Jinlian happens to be eavesdropping. Stirred up by burning jealousy, Pan Jinlian in the ensuing narrative makes some sarcastic remarks referring to Li Ping'er's pregnancy, one of which rings utterly ominous. When she intentionally sits on a clod stool which elicits Meng Yulou's 孟玉樓 caution for endangering her health, she replies that there is nothing to worry about since she "has no fetus to chill (不怕冰了胎, *xiuxiang*, 27:351)."<sup>40</sup>

In Chapter 39 an extravagant Taoist ceremony is staged on behalf of Guan'ge. We are told that the date chosen is the birthday of the Jade Emperor, thus it is auspicious enough; alarmingly, it is also Pan Jinlian's birthday. In Chapter 48 Ximen Qing sets up a pompous ancestral memorial rite at the compound of his family cemetery. Despite Guan'ge's easily-frightened disposition and Wu Yueniang's advisable opposition, Ximen Qing, out of his vainglory, insists that Guan'ge be present at the rite. Guan'ge falls ill upon coming back from the cemetery. When the witchdoctor Dame Liu 劉婆子 is called in, she diagnoses that on the way back home Guan'ge "encountered with the 'General of the Five Ways'" (撞見五道將軍, *xiuxiang*, 48:618), which, as we know, is a reference to the death image

<sup>37</sup> For a brief discussion on the dialectics of *se* 色 (illusory reality) and *kong* 空 (emptiness) as presented at the end of the *cibua* text, see Andrew Plaks, *The Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel* 179-80.

<sup>38</sup> Paul V. Martinson observes that the representation of the three deaths covers a section spanning over one-fifth of the novel in terms of chapters, but in terms of total pages and characters it approaches one-third. See his "Pao Order and Redemption: Perspectives on Chinese Religion and Society Based on a Study of the *Chin P'ing Mei*" (Ph.D. Diss., U of Chicago, 1973), 253-54.

<sup>39</sup> The symbolic image of Guan'ge is further reinforced when Ximen Qing's celebration of his political rise and the celebration of Guan'ge one-month old birthday (*manyue jiu* 滿月酒) is arranged on the same day.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion on Chapter 27, see Katherine Carlitz, "Puns and Puzzles in the *Chin P'ing Mei*," *T'oung Pao* 67. 3-5 (1981): 216-39. Also see *The Rhetoric of Chin P'ing Mei*, 77-82.

associated with Pan Jinlian.<sup>41</sup> In the same chapter Ximen Qing is accused of abusing justice in his handling of Miao Qing's 苗青 case, however, the accusation is promptly fixed up by virtue of his bribery of Prime Minister Cai Jing 蔡京, and he is notified of a more promising political prospect awaiting him (*xiuxiang*, 48:617-22).

The same pattern continues in Chapter 51. First, the ominous white cat named Xue shizi 雪獅子 (Snow Lion) owned by Pan Jinlian comes to our view, thus introducing a chain of feline images closely linked to Guan'ge's death.<sup>42</sup> Second, Ximen Qing's advancement in his political career continues in this chapter, as attested by his reception of high-ranking officials. What is especially noteworthy is that this chapter also introduces a long passage expounding on the Buddhist notion of emptiness, as Nun Xue 薛姑子 recites a passage on the futility of worldly desires from a Buddhist sutra, with Ximen Qing's six wives all present:

I have heard tell that: the flash of lightening is quickly extinguished; the spark from a flint is difficult to sustain. Fallen blossoms are not fated to return to the tree; flowing water is not destined to return to its source. Though you dwell in painted hall and brocade room, when your life is over, they are like the infinite void; though you possess supreme rank and lofty office, when your salary stops, they resemble nothing but dreams. . . . It is bitter! Bitter! Bitter! The breath is transformed into a clear breeze, the dust returns to earth; the wheel of transmigration turns inexorably, it cannot be called back; the head is altered and the face replaced an infinite number of times.

蓋聞電光易滅，石火難消。落花無返樹之期，逝水絕歸源之路。畫堂繡閣，命盡有若長空；極品高官，祿絕猶如做夢。苦，苦，苦！氣化清風形歸土。點點輪迴喚不回，改頭換面無遍數。 (*xiuxiang*, 51:669)

A couple of noteworthy points deserve attention here. First, this passage brings up the notions of death, transmigration, and emptiness that are central to conceptualizing and representing the individual in *Jin Ping Mei*. Secondly, the image of "clear freeze" (*qingfeng* 清風) introduced here epitomizing the notion of emptiness reappears at several crucial points in the subsequent narrative, and therefore serves as a signpost to signal to the reader the empty nature of things.

<sup>41</sup> When Ximen Qing enquires from Dame Wang 王婆 about Pan Jinlian after his initial encounter with her, Dame Wang says that "She is King Yama's younger sister, the daughter of the General of the Five Ways 他是閻羅大王的妹子，五道將軍的女兒" (*xiuxiang*, 2:37). While King Yama is the god of the dead, the General of the Five Ways is one of the regents of the Chinese Hell. See David Roy, trans., *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, Vol. 1, *The Gathering*, notes 24, 25, 477.

<sup>42</sup> In Chapter 52 Guan'ge's fate is once again linked to Pan Jinlian, as we are told that Guan'ge is left unattended by Pan Jinlian when the latter is busy frolicking with Chen Jingji in the grotto. When Meng Yulou comes to fetch Guan'ge, she finds that there is a big black cat squatting in front of Guan'ge's head. This black cat anticipates the fatal attack launched by the cat Snow Lion (*xiuxiang*, 52:691).

Between the first appearance of the cat, Snow Lion, in Chapter 51 and Guan'ge's eventual death in Chapter 59, the focal point of the narrative in the intervening chapters is Ximen Qing's advancement in his political career, culminated in the cementing of his connection with Cai Jing when the latter becomes his foster father (*xiuxiang*, 55:721-23). In Chapter 57 Ximen Qing complacently boasts to a monk that he "is content with everything" (萬事已是足了, *xiuxiang*, 57:745). Only one chapter later this self-deceptive bubble bursts when Guan'ge dies of fright caused by the cat, Snow Lion. By setting the rise of Ximen Qing's political career against the background of Guan'ge's deteriorating health and death, the life and death of Guan'ge thus points out the futility of Ximen Qing's pursuit of political power.

Guan'ge's death is immediately followed by Li Ping'er's illness and death. Even more so than with Guan'ge's case, the contrast between Li Ping'er's illness and death and Ximen Qing's soaring ascendancy is made more explicit. In Chapter 60 we are told that, anguished by Guan'ge's death and Pan Jinlian's gloating, Li Ping'er's menstrual ailment flares up and quickly worsens. Li Ping'er, with her wealth, beauty, the birth of Guan'ge, and the affection she receives from Ximen Qing, is the emblem of mundane splendor of which a woman of her status could possibly imagine. However, the death of her son and her own death only prove the transience and futility of mundane splendor, as pointed out in her eulogy which accentuates the notion of emptiness once again, "Her mind will be without impediments, in realizing that the four elements are all empty. It is bitter, bitter! bitter! The breath is transformed into a clear breeze, the form returns to earth; the numinous soul's true nature, once lost, will never be recovered; the head is altered and the face replaced an infinite number of times" (一心無掛，四大皆空。苦，苦，苦！氣化清風形歸土。一靈真性去無迴，改頭換面無遍數。 *xiuxiang*, 65:881).

Most significantly, the specter of Li Ping'er's death becomes the background against which the drama of Ximen Qing's pursuit of money, power and sex is set until Ximen Qing meets his own death, as attested by the fact that from Li Ping'er's death in Chapter 62 until Ximen Qing's death in Chapter 79, Li Ping'er's post-mortem rite, i.e., the sequence of the Serial Seven (*lieqi* 列七) rites, serves as narrative unit within which the narrative of desire unfolds. The narrative center of the intervening chapters is the accelerated exchange of money and political power, as evident by Ximen Qing's extravagant receptions of powerful court officials and eunuchs, paralleled with his ever-expanding sexual conquests.<sup>43</sup> This parallel is rendered most explicit when the parvenu Ximen

<sup>43</sup> From Chapter 51 through Chapter 79, in addition to continuing his sexual relations with his old

Qing strikes an affair with the aristocratic Lady Lin and becomes the foster father of Lady Lin's son Wang Sanguan 王三官. However, by interweaving Ximen Qing's meteoric rise to political power and his frenzied sexual conquest with the post-mortem rites dedicated to the recently deceased, the specter of death hovers persistently over Ximen Qing's ever-expanding of desire and consequently points to the illusoriness of his perceived reality.

Chapter 66 warrants special attention. At the interval of an elaborate memorial rite conducted for Li Ping'er by the imperial Daoist priest Perfect Man Huang 黃真人, Ximen Qing receives an unexpected letter from the capital notifying his impending political promotion. When the rite is resumed, the priest chants a long invocation exhorting humans' benightedness to the empty nature of worldly desire as death reverts everything to emptiness (一朝傾逝，萬事皆空, *xiuxiang*, 66:896). This invocation can be read as a prophetic exhortation for Ximen Qing if we take into account his impending death and the drastic decline of his family fortune following his death. But the immediate narrative effect is the intensification of the intertwining of the "hot" narrative of desire and the "cold" intimations of death and emptiness.<sup>44</sup> Ximen Qing's rise in his political career culminates in the imperial audience. It is interesting to note that Li Ping'er's ghost even follows him all the way to the capital, thus casting a shadow over the imperial pomposity in which Ximen Qing takes part.

The illusory nature of Ximen Qing's reckless pursuit of worldly desire is substantiated by the betrayal of his sworn brothers and the disintegration of his household following his death, but most clearly by the identity of Ximen Qing and Xiaoge. When at the end of *Jin Ping Mei* Wu Yueniang gives Xiaoge away to Pujing as his disciple at Yongfu si 永福寺 (Temple of Ever-lasing Felicity),<sup>45</sup> Xiaoge's taking of Buddhist vows signals his social death and therefore sounds the greatest

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flames of Li Guijie and Wang Liu'er, Ximen Qing's sexual conquests include the prostitute Zheng Ai'yue'er 鄭愛月兒, Madame Lin 林太太, the nanny Ruyi'er 如意兒, Ximen Qing's butler Ben Si's 黃四's wife, and the new servant Laijue 來爵's wife Huiyuan 惠元.

<sup>44</sup> A big portion of the elaborate Daoist memorial rite depicted in this chapter in the *cibua* edition is deleted in the *xiuxiang* edition. The first notable deletion is the "inscription on the placard" (*bangwen* 榜文) describing the purpose of the ceremony. The inscription begins with a passage detailing the location of Ximen Qing's residence on the "map" of the Great Song Empire (Da Song Guo 大宋國), and concludes with the imperial calendar. The deletion can be interpreted as a deliberate effort to distance from history and hence to make the novel more allegorical. Another conspicuous deletion is Perfect Man Huang's long intonation of the "five offerings" (*wu gongyang* 五供養), "nine precepts" (*jiu jie* 九戒), and "ten classes of homeless souls" (*shilei gubun* 十類孤魂) that concludes the elaborate rite. As indicated by the content of the intonation, the intonation was probably part of the process of the rite directed to the general audience at the time. Both deletions may serve to downplay the role of Daoism and in turn accentuate the Buddhist conceptual structure in the *xiuxiang* edition, but the most direct result is making the narrated events more tightly evolve around Ximen Qing and hence the foregrounding of the individual.

clarion voice of emptiness introduced at the opening of the *xiuxiang* text. With the two of them “transformed to a clear breeze and vanish right away” (當下化陣清風不見了, *xiuxiang*, 100:1421), Ximen Qing and his sensualist world is gone like a puff of wind. As the concretization of the notion of emptiness, the *qingfeng* image thus reverberates with the Buddhist notion of emptiness introduced at the beginning of the *xiuxiang* edition.

### Conclusion: Desire, Death and Beyond

The narrative of *Jin Ping Mei* does not end with Ximen Qing’s death in Chapter 79. Rather, the narrative continues with twenty more chapters. The narrative of desire, which works as narrative momentum, continues in the last chapters of *Jin Ping Mei*, as the “vacancy” left by Ximen Qing is shortly filled by another profligate Zhang Er’guan 張二官 who takes over his official post as well as his friends and servants.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, in marked contrast to the main narrative, the last twenty chapters are distinguished by pervasive descriptions of brute violence and death of extremely accelerated frequency, as evidenced by the violent deaths of Pan Jinlian, Chen Jingji, Chunmei 春梅, Sun Xue’e 孫雪娥, Ximen Dajie 西門大姐, and Dame Wang 王婆, to name just a few. The extremely quick succession of death presented in the last chapters seems to suggest that the author sees in death a solution to end his narrative of desire which seems to perpetuate itself.

Desire and death, the double vision of the *xiuxiang* edition of *Jin Ping Mei*, continue to figure prominently in Chinese novels written after *Jin Ping Mei* as a thematic concern of representation of the individual self. From the faceless Xiaoge’s enforced entry of Buddhist order at the end of *Jin Ping Mei*, to Di Xichen’s 狄希陳 arduous realization of the karmic working at the end of *Xingshi yinyuan zhuan* 醒世姻緣傳, to Jai Baoyu’s 賈寶玉’s entry of the Buddhist priesthood at

<sup>45</sup> In Zhang Zhupo’s view, the Temple of Everlasting Felicity is the very embodiment of desire and death: “The Temple of Everlasting Felicity refers [homophonically] to what is pouring out from below one’s abdomen. What can this thing be? One of the monks from this temple is called *huseng* (Indian monk) and the other Daojian (hard thing). The former refers to the appearance of that thing and the latter describes its supposed prowess. The Temple of Everlasting Felicity is indeed ‘the place where one is born as well as the place where one encounters death.’ this is why all these people find their resting place here after they are dead. This is to underscore the consequence of lust” (夫永福寺，湧於腹下。此何物也？其內僧人，一曰胡僧，再曰道堅，一肖其形，一美其號，永福寺真生我之門死我戶，故皆於死後同歸於此，見色之厲害也)。 See “*Jin Ping Mei yuyi shuo*,” in *Zhang Zhupo piping Jin Ping Mei*, p. 17.

<sup>46</sup> That Zhang Er’guan is meant to be another Ximen Qing is evident by the parallel of their names, as Ximen Qing is also known as Ximen Daguoren 西門大官人。



the end of *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢 after undergoing a great deal of emotional vicissitudes, to Wei Chizhu 韋痴珠's sentimental love and death in *Huayue hen* 花月痕, Buddhist notions of retribution and emptiness continue to work as a conceptual structure for conceptualizing and representing the individual as well. The transformation of this "negative poetics" of desire and death presented in the *xiuxiang* text of *Jin Ping Mei* deserves separate research and is beyond the scope of this study.

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## 慾望與死亡在《繡像金瓶梅》中的呈現

### 摘要

這篇文章討論慾望與死亡在《繡像金瓶梅》中的呈現。雖然繡像本歷來遠沒有詞話本受到學者的重視，這篇文章指出，基於其對個人的關注，繡像本在明清小說發展史上的地位應該予以承認和重視。不同於詞話本家國一體的意識形態架構，繡像本關注慾望和死亡，並由此反思個人和慾望的關係以及個人的存在價值。繡像本對個人的關注使其成為十七世紀中國小說發展的重要一環，也在明清小說從文人小說到文人化小說發展過程中有重要的一席之地。

**關鍵字：**慾望，死亡，個人，文人化小說