

# **The Quest for Gentility in China**

Negotiations beyond gender and class

**Edited by Daria Berg and Chloë Starr**

First published 2007  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa  
business*

© 2007 Editorial selection and matter, Daria Berg and Chloë Starr;  
individual chapters, the contributors

Typeset in Times by  
HWA Text and Data Management, Tunbridge Wells  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
MPG Books, Bodmin, Cornwall, UK

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or  
utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now  
known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in  
any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing  
from the publishers.

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

The quest for gentility in China : negotiations beyond gender and class /  
edited by Daria Berg and Chloë Starr.

p. cm. – (Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia : 47)

“First published 2006 by Routledge ... Abingdon Oxon ...”

“Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge.”

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. China—Social life and customs—9601644. 2. China—Social life and  
customs—1644-1912. 3. China—Social life and customs—1912-1949. 4.  
Gentry—China—Conduct of life—History. I. Berg, Daria, 1964– II. Chloë,  
1971–

DS753.2.Q47 2007

302.0951–dc22

ISBN13: 978-0-415-43586-4 (hbk)  
ISBN13: 978-0-203-93823-2 (ebk)

## 4 Negotiating gentility

### The Banana Garden poetry club in seventeenth-century China

*Daria Berg*

#### A literary society for gentlewomen

The Banana Garden poetry club (*Jiaoyuan shishe*) in late seventeenth-century Hangzhou serves well as a case study of the social network of negotiations and exchanges involving perceptions of gentility in late imperial China. The club was one of the first public literary societies founded by a woman and for women.<sup>1</sup> The Banana Garden poets were all gentry women (*guixiu*), ruling-class ladies or 'gentlewomen' from elite families whose fathers, brothers and husbands were higher degree holders, well-known poets, and scholar-officials. Their mothers and sisters also counted many highly educated gentlewomen, female teachers, reputable poets and painters among their number.

The Banana Garden club existed in two stages: at first the Banana Garden Five (*Jiaoyuan wuzi*) included Qian Fenglun (1644–1703), her sister-in-law Lin Yining (1655–after 1730), Chai Jingyi (d. 1680), her daughter-in-law Zhu Rouze (fl. late 17th century) and the Grand Secretary's wife Xu Can (c.1610–after 1677).<sup>2</sup> Chai Jingyi came from a family whose social status ranked slightly below that of the others – her father was only a provincial (*juren*) degree holder, whereas the others were daughters of metropolitan (*jinshi*), or highest, degree holders. The other club members nonetheless recognized Chai Jingyi's literary talent as superior and acknowledged her as their leader.<sup>3</sup> Chai Jingyi counted among the more senior members and her home also became its physical base where the poets gathered.

After a period of inactivity when Zhu Rouze and Xu Can were no longer with the club, Lin Yining reorganized it into the Banana Garden Seven (*Jiaoyuan qizi*) which included four new members: Gu Si who had kinship ties with the Gu, Qian and Lin families in Hangzhou; her niece Feng Xian; Mao Ti who was the daughter of the famous poet Mao Xianshu (1620–88); and Zhang Hao who lived only to the age of twenty-five but was known among the literati in the Yangzi delta not only as a poet but also as a novelist.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the nine main members who counted among the Banana Garden Five and the Banana Garden Seven, other women such as Li Shuzhao and later on Xu Deyin (c.1680–c.1749) were also associated with the society.<sup>5</sup>

Table 4.1 *The Banana Garden Five Poets*

| <i>Name</i>                         | <i>Dates</i>            | <i>Major Works</i>                                                 | <i>Hometown</i>           | <i>Relation</i>                       |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Qian Fenglun<br>zi: Yunyi           | 1644–1703               | <i>Sanhua tan ji</i> ,<br><i>Guxianglou ji</i>                     | Qiantang<br>of Lin Yining | Sister-in-law                         |
| Lin Yining<br>zi: Yaqing            | 1655–after<br>1730      | Mozhuang<br>shiwenji,<br><i>Fengxiaolou ji</i>                     | Qiantang<br>Fenglun's     | Married Qian<br>brother               |
| Chai Jingyi<br>zi: Jixian           | d. 1680                 | <i>Ningxiangshi<br/>shichao</i> , <i>Beitang<br/>shicao</i>        | Qiantang                  | Mother-in-law<br>of Zhu Rouze         |
| Zhu Rouze<br>zi: Shuncheng          | fl. late 17C            | <i>Xiufu yuyin</i> ,<br><i>Siyinxuan<br/>shichao</i>               | Qiantang                  | Daughter-in-<br>law of Chai<br>Jingyi |
| Xu Can<br>zi: Xiangpin,<br>Mingshen | ca. 1610–<br>after 1677 | <i>Zhuozhengyuan<br/>shiji</i> ,<br><i>Zhuozhengyuan<br/>shiyu</i> | Suzhou                    |                                       |

Sources: LFZ; WWTC; BDCW; Ko 1994.

Table 4.2 *The Banana Garden Seven Poets*

| <i>Name</i>               | <i>Dates</i>       | <i>Works</i>                                                                                   | <i>Hometown</i> | <i>Relation</i>                            |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Qian Fenglun<br>zi: Yunyi | 1644–1703          | <i>Sanhua tan ji</i> ,<br><i>Guxianglou ji</i>                                                 | Qiantang        | Sister-in-law<br>of Lin Yining             |
| Lin Yining<br>zi: Yaqing  | 1655–after<br>1730 | Mozhuang<br>shiwenji,<br><i>Fengxiaolou<br/>ji</i>                                             | Qiantang        | Married Qian<br>Fenglun's<br>brother       |
| Chai Jingyi<br>zi: Jixian | d. 1680            | <i>Ningxiangshi<br/>shichao</i> ,<br><i>Beitang<br/>shicao</i>                                 | Qiantang        |                                            |
| Gu Si<br>zi: Qiji         | fl. late 17C       | <i>Jingyutang ji</i> ,<br><i>Youquancao</i> ,<br><i>Dangcuiyuan<br/>ji</i> , <i>Weiqiongji</i> | Qiantang        | Sister of Lin<br>Yining's<br>sister-in-law |
| Feng Xian<br>zi: Youling  | fl. late 17C       | <i>Heming ji</i> ,<br><i>Xiangling ji</i>                                                      | Qiantang        |                                            |
| Mao Ti<br>zi: Anfang      | fl. late 17C       | <i>Jinghao ji</i>                                                                              | Qiantang        |                                            |
| Zhang Hao<br>zi: Chayun   | fl. late 17C       | <i>Qutingyong</i> ,<br><i>Qinlou he gao</i>                                                    | Qiantang        |                                            |

Sources: LFZ; WWTC; BDCW; Ko 1994.

The club members lived and met in the Hangzhou area probably from the late 1660s onwards until the 1680s. The Banana Garden poets contributed colophons to the drama *Qinlou yue* (*Moon at Qin Pavillion*) by Zhu Suchen, which was published in or after 1669 and no later than 1680.<sup>6</sup> This tells us that some of the Banana Garden poets, including Qian Fenglun, Lin Yining and Feng Xian were actively participating in the literary community by 1669, composing poems, commenting and contributing colophons to a drama. It is likely that they had already formed a society by then. The famous poet Shang Jinglan (1605–c.1676) commented on the early death and literary fame of Zhang Hao, one of the Banana Garden Seven.<sup>7</sup> This means that the club in its second incarnation as the Banana Garden Seven must have been active in the years before Shang Jinglan's death in 1676. By 1688 the Banana Garden Seven had certainly become a noted part of the literary and artistic landscape in the Yangzi delta region.<sup>8</sup>

The poets hailed from Qiantang in Hangzhou Bay, except for Xu Can from Suzhou who did not appear to have participated in their gatherings. At first, as long as the poets were still unmarried and lived in close vicinity to each other, they would meet several times a month to compose poetry together. Their meetings later became more sporadic after marriage and family duties took them away from each other and from Hangzhou.<sup>9</sup> As the club's social and cultural network extended beyond Hangzhou and spanned the economically prosperous Jiangnan region, the cultural heartland of late imperial China, this study looks at sources from across the Yangzi delta.

What interests us today is what the Banana Garden poetry club can tell us about perceptions of life and the cultural history of late imperial China. In order to explore the way the concept of gentility influenced cultural activities and social negotiations, this study applies to the Chinese context an approach inspired both by Stephen Greenblatt's exploration of the Shakespearean world and also by Catherine Gallagher's study of eighteenth-century women's writings in England, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820*.<sup>10</sup> This chapter seeks to address the following questions: What were the negotiations and exchanges involved in the making of the club in the literary world of the early Qing period? How did the Banana Garden poets acquire meaning and significance in their world? How did others perceive them and portray them? What were the cultural goods that were traded in the making of their success? What were the dynamics of the social network that exchanged their stories? What impact did they have and what legacy did they leave?

### The circle of poets

The voice of Qian Fenglun in her poem entitled 'A Winter Day Feast at Chai [Jingyi] Jixian's Place' leads us straight into the midst of the circle of poets known as the Banana Garden club:

The stars record that the year is soon over,  
The weather is icy, the air cold and desolate.

Shrubs and flowers wither in severe frost,  
 Heavy dewdrops evaporate in the dawn sun.  
 Overjoyed to meet with people of pure and simple minds,  
 We sit together in a beautiful mansion of iris and orchid.  
 Our merry words and laughter give rise to pleasant countenance and speech,  
 In harmony we devote ourselves to literary pursuits.  
 Illustrations and books lie scattered around the chamber,  
 A table made of yew displays our zithers and lutes.  
 As the birds disperse the hall becomes subdued,  
 As the clouds gather the curtains acquire dark shadows.  
 A life in seclusion keeps the hurly-burly of the world far away,  
 Standing aloof, our thoughts are idle and carefree.  
 Time flies like a shuttle on the loom,  
 I worry that our happy get-together will be over too soon.  
 Now that we're tipsy we break into long songs,  
 Having enjoyed to the full such excellent hospitality!<sup>11</sup>

Qian Fenglun's mother Gu Yurui founded the Banana Garden poetry club for her daughter and female companions.<sup>12</sup> Gu Yurui herself did not formally take part or count among its members but she too wrote and published her poetry. Gu Yurui was the niece of the Hangzhou matriarch Gu Ruopu (1592–c.1681), a 'virtuous widow', renowned poet and writer on statecraft and economics, who wielded considerable impact on the literary scene in Hangzhou and its women's culture.<sup>13</sup> Gu Ruopu in particular made her voice heard advocating the importance of women's literary education.<sup>14</sup> In a piece entitled 'Written in Jest to Explain Things Away when Someone Made Fun of Me for Engaging a Teacher to Educate the Girls', Gu urges:

I feel so sorry for my contemporaries who [care about] make-up and dressing up,  
 But fail to arrange early training for their youngsters,  
 And add shame to their families' reputation!  
 Let scholarship make the [girls] join in with each other,  
 Let them engage in debate and investigate things thoroughly!  
 Let the four womanly virtues, the thrice following  
 And the way of the ancients become the standard!  
 Let them learn style and elegance in composition  
 And cultivate their persons to become good and graceful (*shu*) women.<sup>15</sup>

Gu defines her vision of gentility for the girls in terms of acquiring womanly virtue and gracefulness (*shu*) by means of education, scholarship and learning. The Banana Garden poet Qian Fenglun married Gu Ruopu's second grandson Huang Shixu, a tribute student (*gongsheng*), when she was only fifteen.<sup>16</sup> Qian Fenglun would console her husband every time he failed in the higher examinations

and she would sit and study with him deep into the night. One volume of Qian Fenglun's poetry *Guxianglou ji* (*Works from the Pavilion of Antique Fragrance*; preface 1680) was published in 1702.<sup>17</sup>

In showing the Banana Garden poetry club in action, Qian Fenglun's poem conjures up the vision of literati gentility. Since the establishment of the meritocratic examination system under the Sui dynasty (589–618) until its abolition in 1905, the concept of gentility in China was linked less with noble birth and primarily with entry into the scholar élite (*shidafu*) by virtue of learning, success in the examination system and employment in the imperial bureaucratic service – as far as men were concerned. Women, however, excluded as they were from examinations and office, would acquire élite status (marking them as *guixiu* or gentlewomen) by birth or marriage.<sup>18</sup> Here we see how women also sought to acquire the air of gentility – perceived gentility in the eyes of their contemporaries – by virtue of participating in élite activities and the literati arts, in particular the composition of poetry.<sup>19</sup>

The activity of composing poetry and the imagery of books, paintings, fine furniture and musical instruments depicted in Qian's poem epitomise gentlemanly elegance and cultural sophistication. The meeting place of the club displays all the trappings of literati power and élite status – but here the poem transposes the male scholars' world and their tradition of gathering in literary circles into a female context.

Men's poetry clubs existed in China at least since the days of the Jian'an period (196–220) and proliferated in Ming/Qing times;<sup>20</sup> some had a more artistic orientation while others primarily served social and political networking.<sup>21</sup> The late Ming first witnessed the formation of informal networks of writing women in Jiangnan such as Shen Yixiu's (1590–1635) domestic and Shang Jinglan's social communities that largely connected women from related families.<sup>22</sup> As a formal literary society the Banana Garden club appeared among the very first of its kind in the early Qing – a publicly visible institution to connect women across different families and backgrounds. Dorothy Ko calls the club the first 'public' poetry society of women.<sup>23</sup> Although access seems to have initially been restricted to the gentlewomen and their relatives and friends, the Banana Garden poetry club appears among the first literary societies to transcend the boundaries of the family and native place.

The image of the beautiful mansion of iris and orchid in Qian Fenglun's poem alludes to the ancient poem 'Xiang furen' ('The Lady of the Xiang').<sup>24</sup> By comparing the meeting place of the poetry club, the residence of Chai Jingyi, to the abode of the Xiang River Goddess, the poem links the pursuit of scholarship with the world of immortals – a realm that women tended to invoke in their poetry. In this way Qian's poem endows the world of learning with the aura of femininity. Another writer to make explicit the link between women, immortals and literati learning was the seventeenth-century woman poet Wu Xiao from Changzhou.<sup>25</sup> In the preface to her poetry collection *Xiaoxue an'gao* (*Manuscripts from Howling Snow Studio*, publ. 1659) she writes:

It is not so long ago that I flicked through the pages of *The Record of the Immortals of Yongcheng*. I read there the story of how female feathered immortals succeeded in the official examinations. I also read the story of *Hermit Tao* and the *Zhen'gao* revelation texts, I recited the story of imperial concubine An from Jiuhua, who excelled in terms of literary talent, and in my humble mind I was filled with admiration.<sup>26</sup>

Her words toy with the vision of women – however imaginary or unreal – succeeding in a man's world. This success happens in the context of the traditional examination system but women succeed there only in the shape of immortals, not as female scholars or examination candidates. Wu Xiao moreover distances herself from that vision by assigning it to narrated memory, as an image remembered from reading a different book by another author.

The Banana Garden poets were girls of high ambition who had been educated in the spirit of Gu Ruopu, one of late imperial China's most eminent teachers of the inner chambers. And yet, their ambitions remained literary and artistic as their gender excluded them from competing in the examination system and imperial service. Although men wrote literary works for artistic purposes and aesthetic pleasure too, their literary training primarily served them as the means by which they could succeed in the examination system and gain entry into the scholar elite. Women had to put their craft to different use.

Women had been writing poetry for centuries. Through the act of writing, the female poet became empowered to enter the domain of *wen*, literary high culture, which since Confucius' time had been predominantly the sphere of men.<sup>27</sup> The traditional literati of Qing China reacted by reducing writing women to two classical types, as modern historian Susan Mann has shown: one was the moral instructress derived from the female Han historian Ban Zhao (c. 48–c. 120), the author of *Nüjie (Instructions for Women)* who initiated the classical tradition of women's learning. The other type was the child prodigy modelled after the 'willow-catkins poet' Xie Daoyun (fl. 399).<sup>28</sup> A gentry daughter famed for her intelligence and wit, Xie Daoyun came up with the brilliant line 'Not so good as willow catkins that the wind has tossed up' in a poetry contest on how to describe snowfall.<sup>29</sup> The clever woman who takes pleasure in competing with men and does not fear insulting them poses a potential threat that male literati rhetoric can defuse by reducing her to being 'only a child'.<sup>30</sup> The modern sinologist Wilt Idema has noted that the dominant male attitude towards writing women in Qing China was one of 'stern condescension'.<sup>31</sup> The celebration of clever women in the male literati's discourse poses a paradox. We shall see below in the analysis of the image of the gentlewoman scholar and its link with the cult of emotions how this paradox developed in late Ming literary discourse and became a popular phenomenon in the seventeenth century.

Qian Fenglun's sister-in-law and fellow Banana Garden poet Lin Yining talks about her education in the preface to her collected works. She states that she received her literary education from her mother and developed a special interest in the classics. Her ambition centred on becoming 'a "great scholar" *daru*, not a

Ban Zhao'.<sup>32</sup> She thus explicitly distances herself from the tradition of writing women and instead models herself on successful literati such as her father, a *jinsshi* degree holder, and her husband who held high office as a censor. Another member of the club, Mao Ti, requested her father Mao Xianshu to instruct her in the art of poetry.<sup>33</sup> Mao Xianshu was a Ming loyalist and member of the literary club called the Ten Poets of Hangzhou (Xiling shizi) who also ranked among the outstanding 'Three Mao of Zhejiang'. When he told his daughter, 'Poetry is not your business', as Confucianists had done since the days of the Song dynasty (960–1279),<sup>34</sup> Mao Ti dared to disagree.<sup>35</sup> Her father not only relented but later even composed a preface to her published work. Lin Yining thus rejected being reduced to either the stereotype of the moral instructress or that of the catkins poetess, while Mao Ti insisted on being taught by her famous father. Both aspired to a place in an artistic tradition dominated by male scholars.

### The Banana Garden

In another poem entitled '[To the Tune of] *Man ting fang*: At the Villa by the Lake I Watch a Group of Girls on a Trip', Qian Fenglun also evokes the image of gentlewomen as immortals and literally sketches the imagery of a banana garden paradise:

Green as dye, the banana leaves  
 Red as fire, the peony  
 Each sight looks more lush and beautiful than the other  
 Having completed my make-up I sit in a small pavilion  
 All alone and silent, not uttering a single word  
 I draw water myself from the gushing spring to make tea  
 How delicious the aroma! How refreshing and soothing!  
 I roll up the screen to have a look  
 At high noon the mist seems keen  
 To obliterate the pale spring mountain scene.  
 On the embankment, a group of girls on a trip,  
 How elegant and graceful!  
 Slender like willows in the wind  
 Swept away by the waves their reflections in the water blur  
 Just like immortals flying through the air  
 How very extraordinary! The slanting rays of the sun are sinking in the west  
 The view ends at the horizon  
 Beyond the expanse of water and the vastness of the sky  
 I wish I were, in the luxuriant fragrant grass,  
 The plain one of a pair of mandarin ducks.<sup>36</sup>

In this poem banana leaves create the illusion of a lush and luxurious pastoral idyll as the setting for literary activities – and of course they allude to the name of

the club.<sup>37</sup> Modern scholars have failed to locate the Banana Garden but conjecture that it must have been one of the many private gardens in Jiangnan that served as the site for literary gatherings and involvement in the genteel arts.<sup>38</sup>

In the centre of the pastoral banana garden idyll in Qian Fenglun's poem sits the author's persona, a gentlewoman scholar. Solitude, serenity and simplicity dominate the imagery. But how would the vision of a garden have acquired meaning and significance in her world? How did it appear in the contemporary discourse?

During the days of the Tang dynasty the poet Wang Wei (701–761) elaborated on the vision of a garden with beautiful scenery for painting and composing poetry.<sup>39</sup> In the late Ming the concept of the garden had come to epitomise gentility. Retired and local gentry indulged in garden-mania:<sup>40</sup> they created, redesigned and competed in owning grand gardens that were to be used for socializing, entertaining and artistic activities such as poetry contests, scholarly lectures and dramatic performances.<sup>41</sup> Their gardens would also display status and wealth. In most cases gardens were visible status symbols open to the public, and even obscure hosts would be able to use the power of their gardens to attract illustrious guests.<sup>42</sup>

Some gardens included grand libraries, the most visible symbols of learning, but also collections of antiques and writing instruments, material tokens of gentility.<sup>43</sup> The garden of Shang Jinglan's husband, the scholar-official Qi Biaoqia (1602–45),<sup>44</sup> stored one of the largest and most renowned libraries in late Ming times. In her study of Qi's garden modern historian Joanna Handlin Smith notes that 'its purpose was not scholarly solitude but social solidarity with a local elite that shared an aesthetic appreciation for property with prize scenery and entertainment in beautiful settings'.<sup>45</sup> Scholarship and solitude thus may have appeared as the façade of the image of the garden but they did not rank among its prime purposes.

Those without elite status but with cultural aspirations, such as the wealthy Huizhou merchant and *bon viveur* Wang Ranming (1577–1655) who settled in Hangzhou in the 1630s, also attempted to join in the discourse on the literati garden. Wang Ranming provided lavish entertainment and literary exercises in scenic settings for the literati, thus gaining access to and wielding influence over their circles.<sup>46</sup> In another sense he effectively *created* literati culture by the very act of trying to *emulate* it. In claiming the image of the Banana Garden as their site, our poets similarly establish a visible symbol – even if only visionary or imaginary – of their existence and carve out a place for themselves in literati culture. In contrast to the merchant, the gentlewomen poets already belonged among the social elite by virtue of birth and marriage. However their gender marked them as outsiders just like the merchants, relegating them to the status of observers of the literary and political elite. Poetry composition and participation in poetic societies appeared as a means to become a *producer* of culture, enabling the gentlewoman to share in and shape the very activities that had been the prerogative of the male elite.

By the 1620s to 1630s 'writing about gardens' had become part of the cultural discourse.<sup>47</sup> Chen Jiru (1558–1639), the late Ming author of literati lifestyle

books, once composed a laudatory piece on Huizhou merchant Wang Ranming's garden in Hangzhou. Aficionado and arbiter of literati taste Chen Jiru shared with his readers his connoisseurship on tasting tea, watching mountains, and sitting quietly<sup>48</sup> – the very activities that Qian Fenglun makes her own in her poem. Like Qian Fenglun, he associated them with solitude, calling them 'pleasures to enjoy when one is alone'.<sup>49</sup>

In Chen Jiru's opinion the creation of a garden expressed the owner's 'cultured mind' (*wen xin*) – a view many of his contemporaries shared.<sup>50</sup> One early Qing scholar echoed this claim when asserting the 'cultured mind' as the key to a fine garden.<sup>51</sup> The association with the image of the garden also takes our Banana Garden poets to the very heart of gentility.

The 'cultured mind' gave the garden its most treasured fruits: the literary compositions and poetry that the gatherings in a garden would inspire. Chen Jiru composed an inscription for a scenic site in another famous literati garden, the Shadow Garden (*Yingyuan*) owned by Zheng Yuanxun (1604–1645) in late Ming Yangzhou.<sup>52</sup> In a recent study the modern Japanese scholar Yasushi Ōki has shown how this garden in the spring of 1640 served as the site for a poetry contest on the theme of the portentous appearance of a rare yellow peony that had wide-scale reverberations as the event encapsulated the political climate of the day.<sup>53</sup> Although the elegant activities in the Shadow Garden ceased with the collapse of the Ming dynasty, the yellow peony poetry contest exemplifies the spread and growing impact of the publishing industry in seventeenth-century China. The owner of the garden, Zheng Yuanxun, published a collection of poems on the yellow peony party. The volume achieved wide distribution and inspired further publications on the topic not only in Jiangnan but also as far south as Guangdong.<sup>54</sup> The author, editor and publisher of books on literati lifestyle Chen Jiru, too, sold handbooks and guides to the gentility that others might seek to acquire or emulate.<sup>55</sup>

In Qian Fenglun's poem the image of the garden shifts its focus from the ambience of gentility, literature and politics normally associated with the male scholar to the image of young women enjoying the scene. In her vision the banana garden almost literally produces the woman poet sitting in a pavilion amidst the scene. As soon as the first-person narrator of the poem appears, she becomes active, making tea and looking outside. She proceeds to survey the scenery outside and the spectacle of nature that unfolds before her eyes. The scenery instantly produces a group of girls, multiplying the image of the woman poet who perceives the roaming girls as elegant and graceful. The girls appear in yet another reflection mirrored in the river, conjuring the image of immortals in the poet's mind. Ultimately the poem links the image of the girls with the vision of female immortals, and thus, by implication, the scholarly gatherings of the Banana Garden poetry club.

Another Banana Garden Five poet inscribed the image of the ultimate literati garden in Ming/Qing times onto the front page of her collected works: Xu Can used the name of the garden as the title of her two poetry collections *Zhuozhengyuan shiji* (*Poetry Collection from the Artless Administrator's Garden*) and *Zhuozhengyuan shiyu* (*Lyric Collection from the Artless Administrator's Garden*). The modest name

of the 'Artless Administrator's Garden' (Zhuozhengyuan) in Suzhou disguises the fact that it became the 'representative type of the Jiangnan classic garden', as the modern art historian Craig Clunas notes in his in-depth study of this site.<sup>56</sup> This famous garden frequently changed hands and at one point in the mid-seventeenth century belonged to the Grand Secretary Chen Zhilin (*jinshi* 1637; d. 1666) from Haining, Hangzhou Bay – the husband of the eminent Banana Garden Five poet Xu Can. Chen Zhilin held the titles of Junior Guardian and Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent under the Ming dynasty, and also served as Minister of Rites and in the Office for the Advancement of Literature in the early years of the Qing period. The emperor granted Xu Can the title of dame-consort of the first rank, making her one of the highest-ranking gentlewomen of her time.<sup>57</sup>

The poet Xu Can lived with her husband in Beijing at the end of the Ming, then moved south – perhaps to their garden in Suzhou – and returned to Beijing after the Qing conquest of China. She followed her husband into exile when he was banished to Shenjing (present-day Shenyang), Manchuria, in 1656 on the charge of conspiracy. He was pardoned, but only two years later was charged with bribing a palace eunuch and stripped of his property and office. Again he was exiled to Manchuria, this time the garrison station Shangyang Ford (Liaoning) where he died in 1666. He probably owned the Artless Administrator's Garden in Suzhou sometime between c. 1640 and 1658 when Xu Can was in her thirties and forties. In 1671 the Kangxi Emperor (r. 1661–1722) granted Xu Can permission to bury her husband's remains in his native place. Xu Can returned to Haining, became a Buddhist nun, styled herself Ziyan and specialized in painting images of Guanyin. We do not know whether Xu Can ever lived in the Artless Administrator's Garden but she named her two volumes of poetry after it. In using the name of a residence in the title of her poetry collection she also followed a literary convention often adopted by the literati.

### Simple, solitary and serene: the image of the gentlewoman scholar

The following section analyses the origins of the gentlewoman scholar's attributes that the Banana Garden poet Qian Fenglun celebrates when portraying her poetic alter ego as simple, solitary and serene. What were her models, where did those values come from and why did they seem desirable? How do these values and ideas tie the works of the Banana Garden poets into the contemporary discourse and the social network around them?

The figure of the woman scholar who personifies simplicity, solitude and serenity had already sparked a literati cult almost a century before the Banana Garden poetry club: in 1580 the leading writer of the day Wang Shizhen (1526–1590, *jinshi* 1547) produced the best-selling biography of Tanyangzi (1558–1580), the Grand Secretary's daughter and self-styled chaste widow from Suzhou.<sup>58</sup> Tanyangzi chose a solitary life, had visions of deities, preached serenity and simplicity and was celebrated as a saint and immortal. Wang Shizhen depicts her in the tradition of the catkins poetess as a child prodigy highly skilled in classical

Chinese. His portrayal of Tanyangzi combines the rhetoric of the late Ming cult of chaste widows, the Neo-Confucian interest in epiphany and enlightenment, the search for authenticity and spirituality and the literati's attempts to rationalize female talent with explanations of sainthood.<sup>59</sup>

The publication of the drama *Mudanting* (*Peony Pavilion*) by Tang Xianzu (1550–1616) in 1589 placed the literary heroine centre-stage in late Ming discourse.<sup>60</sup> Tang's heroine epitomised the late Ming cult of emotions (*qing*) that extolled the concept of innocence and celebrated the child-like mind, a concept inspired by the iconoclastic philosopher Li Zhi (1527–1602).<sup>61</sup> Male critics in seventeenth-century China perceived women writers as particularly suited to expressing the ideal of child-like innocence in poetry.<sup>62</sup> In their eyes, women's poetry responded to the search for the genuine voice, or authenticity, a term that also belonged to the discourse on the cult of emotions.<sup>63</sup> Tang Xianzu too belonged to the circle of Gu Ruopu and her family: he was a friend of Gu's father-in-law.<sup>64</sup> The fictional character Du Liniang became the model for generations of women who aspired to both romance and literary fame, including the poets of the Banana Garden club.

Hangzhou prefecture, in particular Qiantang county, produced the highest number of women writers in Ming/Qing China, with the other Jiangnan cities closely following suit.<sup>65</sup> Both Xiaoqing and Du Liniang continued to exercise the imagination of the Banana Garden poets who grew up in an ambience steeped in West Lake lore.<sup>66</sup> Three members of the Banana Garden club contributed to the *Sanfu heping mudanting* (*Three Wives' Commentary on the Peony Pavilion*, 1694): Lin Yining, herself a playwright,<sup>67</sup> composed a preface while Feng Xian and Gu Si wrote colophons.<sup>68</sup> Gu Si in particular noted how Xiaoqing's story and Du Liniang's drama fascinated the female reading audience: 'For more than a century now a good number of women readers, among them Miss Yu and Xiaoqing, have been the ones who displayed a true understanding of this book [*Peony Pavilion*].'<sup>69</sup>

The female commentators on the *Peony Pavilion* moreover suggested that Tanyangzi had inspired the creation of Du Liniang, although seventeenth-century male literati did not agree. In the view of early Qing women the discourse on Tanyangzi, Du Liniang and Xiaoqing – as well as their own literary efforts – belonged to the same continuum. In commenting on these heroines and in contributing to the *Three Wives' Commentary* our poets assert their place within an active network of women writers among Hangzhou's literary circles – they do not write in solitude but are part of an interactive discourse linking families, friends and neighbours.<sup>70</sup> As commentators on men's writings, these women also enter into a dialogue with the male literati. Like the vision of the ideal garden, the image of the solitary gentlewoman scholar reveals itself as literati rhetoric telling us more about the fantasies of both the literati and the gentlewomen than about female realities.<sup>71</sup>

### The Banana Garden girls in the male gaze

The genteel image of girls on a trip in Qian Fenglun's poem resonates with a Hangzhou male scholar's sketch of the Banana Garden poets on a boat trip:

In those days the citizens of Hangzhou indulged in extravagant habits. When the weather was warm and bright in spring, pleasure boats with brocade screens would crowd the lake; both tourists on the water and on land would vie with each other in showing off their finery. Everyone would wear glittery earrings, jade jewellery in the shape of feathers, and silk robes trailing with pearls. Only Chai [Jingyi] Jixian would go out in a small boat with Feng [Xian] Youling, Qian [Fenglun] Yunyi, Lin [Yining] Yaqing, and Gu [Si] Qiji, all of them gentlewomen. Wearing simple outfits made of raw silk and their hair tied in a bun, they would busy themselves with ink brush and paper. When the women on pleasure trips in the other boats around them saw them, they lowered their heads with shame, realizing that they could not live up to them.<sup>72</sup>

This early Qing scholar perceived simplicity as the key to their gentility. The concept comes straight from official Confucian rhetoric: in 1605 the motto 'simplicity' (*danjian*) appeared as a stern reminder on a newly erected screen on Huating district yamen<sup>73</sup> – in close proximity to the place where Tanyangzi lived and lectured on this very term, as her biographer, the eminent late Ming scholar Wang Shizhen, informs us.<sup>74</sup>

Another scholar from Hangzhou Bay, Gu Ruopu's brother Gu Ruoqun, comments on the prominence of women writers in his native Qiantang in the 1630s:

In the past I asked [Gu Ruopu] to transmit the tales of extraordinary women in order to give them their due place in history. In recent times women scholars have authored many works. Just speaking of our Hangzhou, over the past decades the place has produced women writers such as Mr Tian [Yiheng] Ziyi's daughter Yuyan who wrote the *Jottings Left behind from Jade Tree Pavilion*, Mr Yu Changru's daughter Jingfang who wrote the *Songs Left behind from the Garden of Mirrors*. Speaking of living women, we have Zhang Qiongru's calligraphy, Liang Mengzhao's paintings, and Zhang Siyin's poetry. Their works are all ladylike and elegant, leaving behind a gorgeous legacy like a lingering fragrance. The words of Mr Ma are most appropriate: 'The splendor of the landscape of Qiantang with its winding river and rolling hills cannot be the monopoly of the sashed and gartered male scholars.'<sup>75</sup>

Gu Ruoqun here concedes to the women writers the privilege of sharing the public arena traditionally reserved for men.

The literati continued to discuss the merits of the Banana Garden poets throughout the Qing dynasty. One of the most influential and prolific lyric (*ci*)

poets of the seventeenth century, Chen Weisong (1626–82),<sup>76</sup> commented on Xu Can's lyrics:

Her works display grace and beauty and she produced great lyrics. As a matter of fact she ranks as the best woman writer of song lyrics since the Southern Song dynasty. Her lyrics surpass those of [Zhu] Shuzhen and are comparable to those of [Li] Qingzhao.<sup>77</sup>

In his eyes Xu Can ranks alongside the two most famous women poets from the Song dynasty. His judgement places her writings firmly in the female literary tradition while avoiding comparison with men's works of the same genre.

The Qing poet and critic Shen Deqian (1673–1769) praised Chai Jingyi's poetry primarily for its moral value:

[Chai Jingyi's] works include her *Collected Poems from the Studio of Condensed Fragrance* (*Ningxiangshi shichao*). [Her writings] originate in the purity of her mind and develop from the correctness of her education. Her poetry is full of admonitions and does not seek to go into matters related to themes such as wind, clouds, moon and dewdrops.<sup>78</sup>

In 1801 the renowned classicist Ruan Yuan (1764–1849) who became Governor of Zhejiang province also praised the Banana Garden Seven poet Feng Xian and her husband for their filial piety: 'As the advanced years of the husband's mother, the couple looked after her day and night. In their spare moments they composed volumes of harmonized verse.'<sup>79</sup> In sum, the Banana Garden girls continued to fascinate the literati throughout the Qing.<sup>80</sup> What these traditional male scholars found most praiseworthy were both academic achievement and moral excellence.

### Through female eyes

The poet and painter Shang Jinglan from Shaoxing, widow of the garden-lover and Ming loyalist martyr Qi Biaoqia, came across a manuscript by the Banana Garden Seven poet Zhang Hao who had died aged twenty-four. Shang Jinglan was so impressed by the depth of Zhang Hao's emotions that she composed a preface for the girl's posthumously published works.<sup>81</sup>

When Shang Jinglan commended Zhang Hao's literary talent and filial piety to her own informal poetry club of daughters and daughters-in-law, one of them asked why Heaven had not given Zhang Hao a few more years to live if she was really so talented and filial. Shang Jinglan replied:

The premature death of women who possess literary talent is not due to the will of Heaven but rather to exhaustion in the composition of poetry. Had Chayun [i.e. Zhang Hao] enjoyed longevity without leaving behind any works of poetry, then who would remember her name in the course of history?<sup>82</sup>

Shang Jinglan echoes the male literati's interest in the poet's moral as well as academic achievements. It is likely that Shang would have known about Zhang Hao's affiliation with and the existence of the Banana Garden poetry club. Shang stresses the importance of fame more than one would expect for that time. Female modesty and the cloistered life do not rank among Shang's priorities when celebrating the young poet's achievements. She stresses fame and public visibility at the expense of traditional ladylikeness. The perceived gentility of the woman writer here rather takes its defining features from male elite culture.

By perceiving the talented but tragic poetess in the image of Xiaoqing, Shang Jinglan includes the Banana Garden club in the discourse on the cult of emotions. Zhang Hao's fate would have reminded Shang Jinglan of the talented but tragic daughters of Shen Yixiu, Ye Wanwan (1610–32) and Ye Xiaoluan (1616–32), both accomplished poets whose early deaths seemed to vindicate common views about the fatality of literary females. Late Ming male literati apotheosised the Ye sisters, as they did with Tanyangzi, Xiaoqing and other talented women who had suffered similar fates.

Depictions of these girls appear to foreshadow a change in beauty ideals from the rotund depictions of women in the mid-Ming to the slender, oval and ephemeral figure of the educated but ill-fated child-woman that dominates the Qing era.<sup>83</sup> In the early Qing writers' eyes the Banana Garden poets embodied the new concept of beauty linked with talent and tragedy that became popular at the end of the Ming era. The image of the Banana Garden poets perhaps illustrates a change of attitudes during the early Qing as the native Chinese elite eschewed the athletic prowess associated with the Manchu conquerors, which they perceived as vulgar, while embracing the frailty and sentimentality of the sophisticated, literary and ultimately tragic type, which they associated with homegrown and native Chinese ideals. The female figure appeared particularly suited to convey this new, and native, concept of gentility with its emotional and tragic overtones. In this respect the early Qing discourse on the Banana Garden club anticipates the depiction of the protagonists in the *Honglou meng* (*The Dream of the Red Chamber*).

In the early nineteenth century another woman poet from Qiantang, Shen Shanbao,<sup>84</sup> a sought-after teacher renowned for her filial piety, praised the Banana Garden club leader Chai Jingyi and likened her works to those of a man.<sup>85</sup> This shows that women still drew inspiration from the club a century and a half later.<sup>86</sup>

### Women and publishing

The reason we today can still hear the voices of the Banana Garden poets – chatting, laughing, and composing verses – and visualize them on a trip is because their voices belong to the story of publishing and the marketplace that revolves around issues such as 'authorial personae, printed books, scandalous allegories, intellectual property rights, literary reputations, incomes, debts, and fictional characters', as Catherine Gallagher notes in her study of women writers in early

modern England.<sup>87</sup> In the Chinese context we might add to these issues cultural aspirations, the search for gentility, and the desire for transcendence.

Women's books were in most cases published by their menfolk, sometimes posthumously. But the Banana Garden women seem to have embraced public authorship eagerly, vying with each other to compose prefaces and commentaries for each other's works. It is not clear whether they made money out of their writings or whether they would ever have needed to. As daughters of Jiangnan's most prominent families this may not have been on their minds. Some seventeenth-century women, however, did not shy away from remunerative authorship.<sup>88</sup>

Writings by, about, and for women came into fashion during the seventeenth century.<sup>89</sup> The modern scholar Yasushi Ōki detects the beginnings of 'mass communication society' in the late Ming printing culture of Jiangnan.<sup>90</sup> The vast reading public and thriving publishing industry provided a profitable environment for women writers and the editors of their works. When the late Ming editor and commercial publisher Zhao Shijie from Hangzhou described women's poems as 'whispered conversations' and 'private laughter',<sup>91</sup> he was actually advertising his anthology of women writers entitled *Gujin nüshi* (*Lady Scholars Past and Present*, 1628). Ellen Widmer has noted that some Hangzhou literary editors in the 1660s were 'unusually supportive of creative women'<sup>92</sup> – but they too must have profited by the very act of catering to the craze for women's writings.

In his recent study of women's poetry Wilt Idema has reminded us that in publishing her writings, a woman 'presented herself to the public gaze in her most intimate moments'.<sup>93</sup>

As Charlotte Furth has put it:

For a woman's writing to be seen or known was for her to be perceived sexually by outsiders. The Chinese woman who was published and read by an impersonal public of readers unknown to her occupied space more like that of a Muslim woman who walks the city street without a veil.<sup>94</sup>

The problem here derives from the perceived conflation of the author and her persona. In publishing her works, a woman appeared to make part of her available to the public in exchange for money or reputation and fame. As we have seen in the discourse on the Banana Garden poets, both the male literati and the elite women emphasized the moral purity of the published gentlewoman writer. In their discourse they prevented her from becoming a 'public woman' and preserved her gentility.<sup>95</sup>

### The legacy of the Banana Garden club

What goals did the gentlewomen poets pursue? Susan Mann suggests that Qing women wrote for the sake of transcendence.<sup>96</sup> The Banana Garden poets reached transcendence in ways they probably never imagined. When they were gone, many more public women's networks and poetry clubs came into being. In eighteenth-century Suzhou, for example, the poet Zhang Yunzi (b. 1756),

the wife of the literatus Ren Zhaolin (fl. 1776–1823), founded the Clear Brook Poetry Club (Qingxi yinshe) for herself and another nine of her husband's female disciples. They were also known as the Ten Poets of Suzhou (Wuzhong shizi), an allusion to the prestigious seventeenth-century male poetry club of the Ten Poets of Hangzhou (Xiling shizi) who, as noted above, included Mao Ti's father. Ren Zhaolin taught these women music and poetry and acted as their patron. In 1789 he published their writings under the title *Wuzhong nüshi shichao* (*Selected Verses of Suzhou Lady Scholars*).<sup>97</sup>

At the same time in Nanjing, the poet and essayist Yuan Mei (1716–98), another native of Qiantang, gained notoriety for gathering twenty-eight poets as female disciples at his Sui Garden (Suiyuan).<sup>98</sup> He also published an anthology of their poems entitled *Suiyuan nüdizi shixuan* (*Selected Poetry by the Female Disciples from the Sui Garden*) in 1796.<sup>99</sup> The Sui Garden with its twenty-four pavilions and a miniature imitation of Hangzhou's West Lake functioned as a literary meeting place and helped establish Yuan Mei's literary fame.<sup>100</sup> The garden probably once belonged to Cao Yin (1658–1712), an ancestor of the novelist Cao Xueqin (1715–63), and Yuan Mei believed it to have inspired the creation of the most famous of all imaginary gardens – Prospect Garden (Daguanyuan) in the novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber*.<sup>101</sup>

The discourse on the clever women of the Banana Garden poetry club thus can be seen as culminating in the main female protagonists, the girls from the Jia family, founding the Crab-flower poetry club (Haitang shishe) in Prospect Garden together with the main male protagonist Jia Baoyu. *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, however, confines the artistic activities and literary output of its poetry club to within the walls of the family garden – whereas the Banana Garden club seems to free its poets from the confines of the inner chambers, leading them out into the public arena and lending them visibility before a wider audience.<sup>102</sup> One might wonder whether during the decades that lie between the Banana Garden and the Crab-flower poetry clubs, the cult of the simple, solitary and serene lady scholar became submerged and silenced within the state-sponsored restoration of Neo-Confucian moral order that would have emphasized women's more traditional roles.<sup>103</sup>

### Whose story is it anyway?

Much to the chagrin of many a modern scholar,<sup>104</sup> and in contrast to Catherine Gallagher's findings of women writers in early modern Europe,<sup>105</sup> it is difficult to find any scandalous allegories in our case study of the Banana Garden poetry club. The voices of the poets from the past remain difficult to analyse as they have come down to us transmitted through the filter of many other voices – those of their editors, publishers, anthologists, and observers, male and female. As is true of many works, their transmission has undergone certain processes of selection and silencing according to the criteria of later writers with other goals living in different times. When the eminent gentlewoman scholar Wanyan Yun Zhu (1771–1833), for example, set out to compile her monumental anthology of women's writings

*Guochao guixiu zhengshi ji* (*Correct Beginnings: Collected Women's Poetry of Our Dynasty*) she chose to omit all poems she considered erotic and therefore not decent or genteel enough, and she also excluded all poetry by women she did not regard as proper gentlewomen.<sup>106</sup> The voices of the Banana Garden poets as they reach us today thus tell only part of the story.

### Concluding remarks

To sum up, we have seen how the Banana Garden poets left behind self-representations that portray them as cool, aloof and beautiful while publishing their works and becoming visible on the literary landscape. Yet they also managed to escape criticism of appearing self-promotional or overly visible.

A reading of literary and non-literary source materials in context shows how late imperial Chinese citizens engaged in a network of social negotiations and exchanges involving works of art and acts of self-fashioning.<sup>107</sup> Analysis of the cultural discourse reveals how the dreams, desires, aspirations and ideals surrounding perceptions of gentility in currency at that time set such negotiations and exchanges in motion. This study has traced how the poets constructed images of gentility in their works and promoted themselves as both members and producers of mainstream elite culture. The poets drew on the contemporary literati discourse to construct their literary self-portrayals. Their values and role models derived from famous literary figures created by male authors. Male readers and observers praised the Banana Garden poets for combining academic achievement with moral excellence. Female readers and commentators stressed the importance of their fame, public visibility and masculine characteristics, at the expense of a more traditional image of ladylikeness that would include modesty and cloistered living.

The perceived gentility of the woman writer here takes its defining features from male elite culture. This construct of the writing woman's gentility also helped to overcome the threats to the gentlewoman as an outsider of mainstream literary culture who remained excluded from the examination system and official life. In the realm of poetry, however, the gentlewomen found themselves able to compete and construct their identities and elite consciousness. In their poetry they dreamt of becoming immortals and participating in the official examinations. Their imagination and literary activities gave them wings to transcend the traditional boundaries and enter the cultural circle of the scholar gentleman by virtue of their learning, knowledge and literary accomplishment. Their literary output gave them public recognition, fame and immortality, without diminishing their veneer of gentility.

The booming publishing industry and the early Qing vogue for women's writings also helped propel them into literary stardom. Although the Banana Garden poets may not have vied for profit, their literary craft helped them construct and participate in a network of social negotiations and exchanges. This network involved the circulation of poems, printed books, literary reputations, idealized images of the gentlewoman poet, and carefully constructed representations of

the female self. Through this network the woman writer in late imperial times re/created, manipulated and negotiated perceptions of herself and those of the writing woman's gentility.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professors Glen Dudbridge and Ellen Widmer, and Dr Chloë Starr for valuable comments and Dr Carolyn Ford for help with bibliographical items. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Leverhulme Trust for providing me with one of its much-prized fellowships that allowed this research to take shape.

### Notes

- 1 The Banana Garden club has received some scholarly attention in recent Chinese literary histories of women poets from the early Qing period (e.g. Liu Zhenkai 1995: 86; Liang Yizhen 1932: 23–34; Shi Shuyi 1987: 81–132; *DKWJT* 9: 904; Tan Zhengbi 1984: 350–2; Tang Qun 2002; Hu Ming 1995: 100–2; Zeng Binglan 1994; Guo Mei 1994; Xia Xiaohong 1996). Dorothy Ko's pioneering work *Teachers of the Inner Chambers* provides an in-depth study of the club, comparing it to other formal and informal women's networks in seventeenth-century China (Ko 1994). Wilt Idema and Beata Grant have recently devoted one chapter of their monumental anthology of Chinese women's writings *The Red Brush* to the history of the Banana Garden club and the translation of selected poems (Idema and Grant 2004). Ellen Widmer has elucidated some aspects of the club and its legacy in her recent study of women and fiction in nineteenth-century China, *The Beauty and the Book* (Widmer 2006).
- 2 Qian Fenglun (zi: Yunyi), Lin Yining (zi: Yaqing), Chai Jingyi (zi: Jixian), Zhu Rouze (zi: Shuncheng), and Xu Can (zi: Xiangpin, Mingshen). On Qian, see also *LFZ* 756–8; on Lin, *LFZ* 542–3; on Chai, *LFZ* 434–5; on Zhu, *LFZ* 278; on Xu, *LFZ* 481; Wong Yin-lee 1999.
- 3 On Chai Jingyi and her artistic talent (including a reproduction of a painting by Chai), see Marsha Weidner *et al.* 1988: 108–9.
- 4 On the Banana Garden Seven, including Gu Si (zi: Qiji), Feng Xian (zi: Youling), Mao Ti (zi: Anfang), and Zhang Hao (zi: Chayun), see Ko 1994: 234–50. On Gu, see also *LFZ* 802; on Feng, *LFZ* 655; on Mao, *LFZ* 229; on Zhang, *LFZ* 514, Deng Hany 1672: 12.32a; Widmer 2006: 8.
- 5 Cf. Mann and Cheng 2001: 174–5. On Xu (zi: Shuze), see Widmer 2006: 163–7.
- 6 The play includes colophons by Qian Fenglun, Feng Xian, and Lin Yining, but also others such as Shang Jinglan and Gu Si and the famous dramatist Li Yu. The drama must have appeared by 1680, the year Li Yu died, as Li also added notes to it. On the dating of the play see Xu Fuming 1987: 213. Here I am indebted to Ellen Widmer.
- 7 *Qinlou hegao*; see *LFZ* 514. This is discussed in detail below.
- 8 Cf. Xu Shumin and Qian Yue 1934: *liji* 39a.
- 9 Idema and Grant 2004: 472; Widmer 2006: 163.
- 10 Greenblatt 1988; Gallagher 1994.
- 11 *GGSC* 2:4.2a (p. 464).
- 12 On Gu Yurui (zi: Zhiqiong), see Ko 1994: 236–7; *LFZ* 800; Shi Shuyi 1987: 2.23b.
- 13 On Gu Ruopu, see Ko 1994: 139; 163–4; 236–40; 245f; 248; 281; *WWTC*, 302–13.
- 14 Cf. Ko, 1994: 164.
- 15 *WYXG* 1898–1900: 2.1b–2a.
- 16 Or sixteen *sui*; cf. *LFZ* 757.

- 17 Extant. Qian also published another volume of poetry entitled *Sanhuatan ji* (*Collected Works from the Sanhua Beach*), cf. *LFZ* 756–8.
- 18 On women in traditional China, see Ebrey 1993; Ko 1994; Mann 1997; Widmer and Chang 1997. On the term *guixiu*, short for *guifang zhixiu*, literally ‘elegance from the inner quarters’, see Ko 1997: 80.
- 19 See also Robertson 1997 for a brief discussion of Qian Fenglun’s poetry.
- 20 Confucius already pointed to the link between friendship and learning; see *Lunyu* 12/24. On the Jian’an poets, see e.g. Cutter 1985: 228–62. On poetry clubs, see also Angele 1987.
- 21 Late Ming literary societies included: the Wangshe, Kuangshe c.1620; Nanshe c.1620; Yingshe 1624; the Fushe with its political movement (cf. Wakeman 1985: 137; Atwell 1975: 333–67); in the early Qing (late 1640s) three major literary societies appeared in Jiangnan: Yuanshe in Songjiang; Shenjiaoshe and Tongshengshe in Suzhou prefecture, cf. Dennerline 1981: 308. Many literary societies were forbidden during the Shunzhi era for fear of political unrest, cf. Struve 1982: 257ff.
- 22 On Shen and Shang, see Ko 1994: 179–250.
- 23 Ko 1994: 234ff.
- 24 In ‘Jiuge’ (Nine Songs), *Chuci* (Songs of Chu, 3rd century BC). Tan Jie fu 1978: 346–7.
- 25 *WWTC* 375–82. See also *WWTC* 690.
- 26 *LFZ* 106.
- 27 Cf. Mann 1997: 119.
- 28 For Xie Daoyun’s official biography, see *Jinshu* 96.2516. For a discussion, see Mann 1997: 78–82.
- 29 *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian*, 1:2.113.
- 30 See Mann 1997: 83.
- 31 Idema 1999: 46.
- 32 *WWTC* 406.
- 33 On Mao Xianshu, a licentiate under the Ming who became a literary recluse under the Qing, see *ECCP* 564. The two other Mao were Mao Qiling (1623–1716) and Mao Jike (1633–1708).
- 34 Ebrey 1993: 120ff.
- 35 Ko 1994: 242.
- 36 *ZXC* 1.42a. Also in *GXLJ* 5a-b.
- 37 Banana leaves – a symbol of self-discipline and teaching oneself – belong among the Fourteen Treasures (*bao*), the emblems of the scholar (*shi*); cf. Eberhard 1985: 33, 161–2.
- 38 On garden culture in Ming/Qing times, see Weidner *et al.* 1988; Handlin Smith 1992: 55–81; Clunas 1996.
- 39 Hardie 1988: 125n5.
- 40 Handlin Smith 1992: 57.
- 41 Handlin Smith 1992: 66.
- 42 Handlin Smith 1992: 68, 94.
- 43 For example, the gardens of Zhang Dai (1599–c.1684) and Qi Biaoja; see Handlin Smith, 1992: 66, 68, 70.
- 44 On Shang and Qi, see Handlin Smith 1992; Ko 1994: 226–32.
- 45 Handlin Smith 1992: 66.
- 46 Handlin Smith 1992: 73–4; Widmer 1996: 82–3. Wang Ranming sponsored writers and artists such as Li Yu and befriended several of the leading women writers such as Huang Yuanjie (Jieling, c.1620–c.1669) and Wu Shan (fl. mid-seventeenth century); see Widmer 1989: 13.
- 47 Discourse in Foucault’s sense of the word as ‘practices that systematically create the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault 1972: 49). For the discourse on gardens, see Wang Shizhen’s *Gujin mingyuan shubian*; Wen Zhenheng’s (1585–1645)

- Zhangwuzhi* (written c.1615–20); Ji Cheng's *Yuanye*; Wen Zhengming's (1470–1559), 'Zhuzhengyuan ji' (Record of the Artless Administrator's Garden, 1533); cf. Clunas 1996: 138–9.
- 48 See Yasushi Ōki's chapter in this volume.
- 49 Chen Jiru 1936.
- 50 Jin Xuezhi 1990: 51; cf. Clunas 1996: 165; *ECCP* 83–4. Chen Jiru was also a friend of Wang Shizhen and Wang Xijue, the biographer and the father of Tanyangzi (see below).
- 51 Jin Xuezhi 1990: 51.
- 52 Chen also composed a preface to Zheng Yuanxun's short essay (*xiaopin*) collection named after the garden's scenic site, *Meiyouge wenyu*.
- 53 Ōki 2000: 33–46.
- 54 Ōki 2000.
- 55 See Ōki's chapter in this volume. On Chen Jiru and his publishing activities, see also Ōki 1990.
- 56 Clunas 1996: 31; on its history see *ibid.*, 23.
- 57 Chen Zhilin (*zi*: Yansheng, *hao*: Su'an). Cf. *BDCW* 248–50.
- 58 Wang Shizhen 1970: 78.1a–31a. On Tanyangzi, see Waltner 1987.
- 59 Cf. Berg 2004.
- 60 On Tang Xianzu and his play, see Hsia 1975: 249–90; for a discussion of Tang Xianzu and emotions, see Ko 1994: 68–112.
- 61 See his treatise 'Tongxin shuo' (On the Child-like Mind), in Li Zhi 1975; for discussions, see Wai-ye Li 1995: 32–52; Huang 2001: 39.
- 62 Huang 2001: 40; Ko 1994: 59ff.
- 63 On Li Zhi and the concept of authenticity, see Epstein 2001: 74–9.
- 64 Cf. Ko 1994: 238.
- 65 See Mann 1997: 229–32.
- 66 Ko 1994: 88; Zeitlin 1994: 148.
- 67 Lin is credited with the authorship of a southern drama entitled *Furong xia qulu* (of which seven scenes are extant); cf. Xu Fuming 1987: 270–1.
- 68 *TXZHB* 2: 889–90.
- 69 *TXZHB* 2: 906. The late Ming woman critic Miss Yu, or Yu Erniang, from Suzhou (Taicang) was depicted as devoted to literature and doomed to an early death. Yu describes herself as following in Du Liniang's footsteps and praises *Mudanting* for its pure expression of emotions. Her story was first recorded by a male friend of Tang Xianzu's and later retold by other women, in particular Li Shu and Gu Si; see Lin Yining 1986: 1ab, 2b. Tang Xianzu himself composed poems lamenting Yu Erniang's death. Yu Erniang's story was merged with that of Xiaoqing in the 1625 play *Chunbo ying* which makes Xiaoqing comment on Yu Erniang.
- 70 Cf. Zeitlin 1994: 148.
- 71 On male fantasies and female realities in traditional Chinese poetic discourse, see also Idema 1999.
- 72 Wu Hao 1874: 30.10b–11a.
- 73 Cf. Meskill 1994: 147.
- 74 Wang Shizhen 1970.
- 75 *WYXG xu*: 5a.
- 76 On Chen who also served under the Qing, see Nienhauser 1986: 238–9.
- 77 Chen Weisong 1833–44.
- 78 Shen, Wong and Zhou 1975: 31.7a.
- 79 Ruan Yuan 1995–2000: 40.13a (Vol. 1684, p. 475). Feng Xian's husband was Qian Tingmei.
- 80 Another Qing critic praised Qian Fenglun's poetry as possessing the pure style of the ancients, and for lacking any references to kerchiefs and graceful eyebrows (*ZSJ* 2:4/6a). Wu Hengzhao (1771–?) praised Xu Can's lyrics as innovative and unique

- in its vitality, counting them among the best lyrics authored by women (*LJC* 4.1a–b (p. 39)). Wu Qian (1733–1813) commended Xu Can for having abandoned the traditional ornate style of writing while developing her own new style (Wu Qian 1922: 4.17a/b).
- 81 *Qinlou hegao*; see *LFZ* 514.
  - 82 Shang Jinglan 1960: 289.
  - 83 See van Gulik 1974: 294ff.
  - 84 On Shen Shanbao, see *LFZ* 366–7; *BDCW* 189–90.
  - 85 See Shen Shanbao 1995–2000: 1.8b–9a (pp. 551–2).
  - 86 In 1680 the eminent matriarch Gu Ruopu commented on Qian Fenglun in her preface to *Guxianglou ji*. She compared Qian's poetry to 'beautiful birds singing in spring, and the sun shining upon the new blossoms.' Gu continued: 'Though her academic attainment has not reached the top she excels in intelligence and imagination' and expressed the hope that her granddaughter-in-law would continue writing to transmit Gu's literary legacy to future generations (*BDCW* 170; *LFZ* 757–8).
  - 87 Gallagher 1994: xiii.
  - 88 Huang Yuanjie earned a living by selling poetry, painting and calligraphy; Wu Shan also sold her paintings for a living; cf. Weidner 1988 *et al.*: 14; Yu Yingshi 1987: 154. Some women were also known as publishers in the eighteenth century – among them a Huizhou merchant's wife (*LFZ* 542–3).
  - 89 Ellen Widmer has noted a 'minor boom in the publishing of women poets' around 1612, the alleged date of Xiaoqing's death (Widmer 1992: 125).
  - 90 Cf. Ōki 1991.
  - 91 *WWTC* 750.
  - 92 Widmer 1989: 29.
  - 93 Idema 1999: 25.
  - 94 Furth 1992: 6.
  - 95 See also Idema 1999: 25.
  - 96 Mann 1997: 119.
  - 97 On the Clear Brook poetry club, see Ko 1994: 198–216; Robertson 1997; Grant 1999: 286–307.
  - 98 Yuan Mei named the garden after a previous owner called Suihede, a textile commissioner of Nanjing. On Yuan Mei, see *ECCP* 955–7; Schmidt 2003. The 'Younger Daughter' (*dui*) trigram of the *Yijing* (Book of Changes) has the gloss 'learning among friends'; the eighteenth-century poet Yuan Mei and his circle interpreted this as showing that Confucian tradition appeared to have sanctioned the idea of women joining in literary activities; see Yuan Mei 1913: 32/14b; cf. *WWTC* 777–81; *LFZ* 934.
  - 99 On the female disciples of the Sui Garden, see Chang 1997a: 163–4; *WWTC* 777–81.
  - 100 Cf. Waley 1956: 48.
  - 101 Nienhauser 1986: 957.
  - 102 Compare Widmer 1989: 1–3. On *The Dream of the Red Chamber* and the Banana Garden poetry club, see also Mo Lifeng 2001; Xue Haiyan 2002.
  - 103 Cf. Idema 1999: 46.
  - 104 Cf. Idema 1999.
  - 105 Cf. Gallagher 1994.
  - 106 Cf. Mann 1997: 94–8. The female anthologists of women's poetry even outshone men in their eagerness to rank women poets according to their virtue; cf. Chang 1997a.
  - 107 On the concept of female self-fashioning in late imperial China, see Berg 2007.