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Is It Clothes that Make the Man?

Cross-Dressing, Gender, and Sex in Pre-Twentieth Century Zhu Yingtai Lore

Abstract

The legend of Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo is among the perennial subject matters of folk literature in China. Despite its enormous popularity there, it has hitherto received very little attention in Western folk literature studies. This article presents a study of Zhu Yingtai lore across a varied body of pre-twentieth century texts, including the historical account, song-drama, and prosimetric narrative. It proposes a reassessment of the thematic focus and significance of the Zhu Yingtai narrative, arguing that it is primarily about female-to-male cross-dressing. What at the early stage began as a tale of failed recognition and disrupted male companionship, in song-drama and prosimetric narrative of subsequent periods was transformed into a comedy of gender ambiguity. The study of Zhu Yingtai lore offers important insights into the Chinese conceptions of gender and sex and their interrelationship.

Keywords: Zhu Yingtai and Liang Shanbo—female-to-male cross-dressing—gender/sex—Ming-Qing drama—prosimetric narrative

Asian Folklore Studies, Volume 64, 2005: 165–205

IN CHINESE LITERATURE, women who disguise as men figure quite prominently.¹ The two most famous cases are those of the female cross-dressers Zhu Yingtai 祝英台 and Hua Mulan 花木蘭. The Hua Mulan legend is about a woman who dresses as a male warrior and goes off to battle in her father's stead. In modern China, Hua Mulan became important as a national role model of female heroism in times of war (HUNG 1989), but intriguingly it has not become any major subject matter of folk literature. The Zhu Yingtai narrative, more commonly known as "The story of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai" (Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai 梁山伯與祝英台, abbreviated to "Liang and Zhu" [Liang-Zhu 梁祝]), on the other hand, is among the most widely circulated and most often rehearsed topics of folk literature in China and beyond, in much of East and South East Asia.² There is hardly any local drama or other folk literary form that would not feature at least one version of it. This narrative relates the experience of a young woman, Zhu Yingtai, who decides to leave home and attend school in male disguise. During two or three years of study, she shares a room with her male schoolmate Liang Shanbo 梁山伯, but her female sex remains undiscovered. Liang finds out too late that she is a woman, so they eventually cannot get married. After Liang dies from grief, Zhu mourns at his grave on the way to her wedding with another man. The tomb opens up and she jumps into it, so they are ultimately united in death.

There has long been a widely shared assumption that Zhu Yingtai clearly emerged as the protagonist of this narrative, whereas her male companion Liang Shanbo remained in a secondary position, although there have been numerous attempts to revise this underlying narrative hierarchy and reinstate a presumed superiority of the male part. In most versions of the story, the narrative focus remains close to Zhu Yingtai, providing the reader or the audience an opportunity to participate in the experience of a woman disguised as a male. Accordingly, Zhu Yingtai's act of gender bending via cross-dressing has clearly been identified as the thematic core of this narrative.

Nowadays this tale is praised as "China's favorite love story," but despite its enormous popularity in China, it has hitherto received very little attention in

Western folk literature studies.³ Among Chinese academics, a wave of enthusiasm for Zhu Yingtai lore began in the 1920s, when some exponents of the movement for the discovery of “folk literature” (*minjian wenxue* 民間文學) found the story of Zhu Yingtai to be among the most widespread and most often treated subject matters of Chinese folklore. In this regard it could only be compared to the legend of “The woman Meng Jiang” (*Meng Jiang nü* 孟姜女) (HUNG 1985, 49–54, 93–103). The folklorist Qian Nanyang 錢南揚 (1899–1987), following the example of Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) who had promoted the scientific study of the *Meng Jiang nü* legend, published a first collection of research on Zhu Yingtai lore in a 1930 issue of the magazine *Minsu zhoukan* 民俗周刊 (Folklore Weekly, Guangzhou). While the folklore movement’s role in the rediscovery of the folk literary heritage was indispensable, it also proved instrumental in projecting onto this favorite folk narrative some issues of their own times, such as the struggle for women’s rights, and the concept of marriage based on love. These genuinely modern issues of emancipation were claimed as having provided the ideological basis of the legend. Thus, while the folklore movement’s ideological appropriation of this narrative may have further increased its valorization, it also effectively discouraged any fresh and independent reading of it. Nowadays in China, the “canonical” or politically correct reading of this narrative continues to hold that Zhu Yingtai stands for female emancipation, equal rights for both sexes, as well as faithfulness in marriage. These are basically modern readings, however, that were inscribed onto the twentieth-century rewritings of Zhu Yingtai lore. This is the primary reason why the textual scope of the present study remains limited to pre-twentieth-century sources.

In a more recent development, Zhu Yingtai lore is being increasingly appropriated for commercial exploitation, as epitomized by the “Liang-Zhu cultural theme park” (Liang-Zhu wenhua gongyuan 梁祝文化公院), which opened 1999 in Yinxian 鄞縣 (near the city of Ningbo 寧波, Zhejiang province), at the historical site of the Liang Shanbo shrine.⁴ Ever since its opening, mass weddings have been held there annually in the names of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, who have ultimately been transformed into modern patron deities of harmony and fidelity in marriage. Based on the textual tradition alone, less evident are other issues, such as in which region the legend first began to circulate, from where the protagonists Zhu and Liang originated, where they had attended school, or where their tomb was located. Besides the Ningbo region in Zhejiang province, several other regions, including Yixing 宜興 (Jiangsu province) and Runan 汝南 (Henan province), have put forward their claims. Several scholars have intervened in this contested debate about the regional origin of Zhu Yingtai lore, each claiming his own region as the source.⁵

THE TEXTUAL BODY

The full scope of the textual corpus of Zhu Yingtai lore can hardly be assessed, and this is, of course, especially true for the virtually indeterminable field of oral tradition. Moreover, the bibliographical control of both regional song-drama and prosimetric narrative (*shuochang* 說唱) has not even reached a stage that deserves to be called preliminary.⁶ This unsatisfactory situation is also mirrored by the presently available collections of research materials pertaining to Zhu Yingtai lore. A recent four-volume collection (LZWD), while doubtlessly being the hitherto most comprehensive such compilation, in fact provides only a fraction of the extant texts, particularly in the genres of regional drama and prosimetric narrative. Nevertheless, its editor, Zhou Jingshu 周靜書, critically evaluated and considerably expanded the previous collections (LU 1955, QIAN 1956) and thus provided a relatively reliable material basis for the study of Zhu Yingtai lore, and particularly of the early drama texts, most of which have only been fragmentarily preserved. Therefore, for the present study, I have adopted Zhou's compilation as the primary source reference. The scope of the collected textual materials, however, remains too narrowly limited to allow for anything more than broad assumptions about the development of Zhu Yingtai lore across genres, periods, and regions.

From the written materials that are available, it is nevertheless evident that some individual texts, genres, and media featuring versions of Zhu Yingtai lore have been particularly instrumental to its formation, elaboration, and circulation. I have identified three major genres of written text that have played important roles in this process: the historical account, the song-drama, and the prosimetric narrative. The story's basic outline was established by some relatively early historical accounts, as they were recorded in some collections of unofficial history and, from the Song dynasty on, also in a number of local gazetteers. The performing genres, such as the song-drama *zaju* 雜劇 (variété song-drama) from the Yuan dynasty on and *chuanqi* 傳奇 (southern-style song-drama) during the Ming, imaginatively developed the story's most appealing and effective scenes and episodes. Even more detailed elaborations of the narrative are found in the various types of prosimetric narrative popular during the Qing, which apparently also left their mark on the development of the narrative into the twentieth century.

Only fragments, selected scenes or brief excerpts, of Zhu Yingtai song-drama texts from the Yuan and Ming dynasties have been preserved, and even from the Qing dynasty, we apparently do not have any complete script of any Zhu Yingtai song-drama. In order to make up for this gap in the material basis, it would be unwise to draw on the twentieth-century *yueju* 越劇 (Shaoxing regional song-drama) or *chuanju* 川劇 (Sichuan regional song-drama) libretti,

even though they are likely to have been rewritten on the basis of pre-twentieth-century antecedents. As I have already pointed out, the rewriting of these texts was clearly influenced by the distorting perception of the subject matter through a modern lens. While the fragments of early song-drama provide some insights into the dramatic elaboration of selected aspects of the cross-dressing theme, we have to turn to the richly detailed prosimetric narratives for more comprehensive narrative treatments.

The prosimetric traditions popular during the Qing featuring versions of the Zhu Yingtai narrative included *tanci* 彈詞 (strumming lyric), *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scroll), and *guci* 鼓詞 (drum lyric), all of which were, at least indirectly, related to oral performance.⁷ Moreover, their production and distribution was closely tied to regional contexts. I have chosen one text for each type that I will refer to, in the following, generically as the *tanci*, the *baojuan*, and the *guci* version. The *tanci* genre is represented by what probably is the earliest extant example of any prosimetric narrative of Zhu Yingtai lore: the *tanci* script entitled *Xinbian jin hudie zhuan* 新編金蝴蝶傳 (The story of the golden butterfly: newly compiled, 1769).⁸ The distribution of the *tanci* chantefable tradition was regionally confined to the Wu 吳 topelect region of the Yangzi delta. As for the *baojuan* genre, I am referring to the later-period type of precious scrolls, which circulated in about the same region as the *tanci* texts throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. This subtype, basically consisting of *tanci* adaptations, has been specified as *xuanjuan* 宣卷 (preaching scrolls) (LI 1959; CHE 2002, 119–50). The *Shuang xian baojuan* 雙仙寶卷 (The two immortals precious scroll, 1878)⁹ that I have included in the textual corpus, apparently also belonged to this group of texts. Moreover, there is a version in *guci* style, a northern variety of prosimetric narrative, entitled *Xinke Liang Shanbo Zhu Yingtai fufu gongshu huanhun tuanyuan ji* 新刻梁山伯祝英台夫婦攻書還魂團圓記 (The story of the married couple Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai who went to school together and whose returned souls reunited: newly carved edition, 1900). Although the book edition of this text was published in Hebei province in the late Qing, it is likely that this had circulated much earlier as a performance text.¹⁰

From relatively early on in the twentieth century, the adaptation of the Zhu Yingtai narrative for the *yueju* stage started to become its “classic” or standard version, a position that was consolidated by the fact that a *yueju* performance was turned into China’s first color movie (1954).¹¹ Due to the audience’s familiarity with the full narrative from song-drama, and more recently from film and television, folk tales and folk art performances (*quyi* 曲藝) in the modern period rarely retell the entire story (GU 2003). In the modern period, such a process of standardization of Zhu Yingtai lore evidently took place, with a lasting influence on its critical perception, but prior to the twentieth century no single version of the narrative occupied any comparably hegemonic position. Instead there has

been a plurality of versions in a variety of genres. While the basic outline of the narrative (configuration, sequence of episodes, and so on) remained surprisingly stable in the process of rewriting, retelling, and re-enacting, the various genres nevertheless elaborated on the narrative with rather different focus and emphasis, mirroring, first of all, the varying conventions and preferences of the respective genres. The variant versions, when viewed synoptically, combine to a many-voiced chorus, representing a variety of optional solutions and interpretations in dealing with the topics and issues of the Zhu Yingtai subject matter. Therefore, I will treat the selected corpus of texts as one, even though each individual text needs to be considered, first of all, within its own generic framework.

CROSS-DRESSING AND GENDER ISSUES

My discussion of some pre-twentieth-century versions of the Zhu Yingtai narrative will focus on the significance and implications of its cross-dressing motif with its involved issues of gender (culture, social hierarchy) and sex (body). I have chosen to use the term “cross-dressing” rather than “transvestism,” although some authors have used the two notions synonymously. “Transvestism,” however, tends to be more closely associated with male-to-female transgender phenomena, and with behaviors motivated by sexual inclination.

The popularly celebrated examples of Zhu Yingtai and Hua Mulan would suggest, at first sight, that acts of female-to-male cross-dressing (*nü ban nan zhuang* 女扮男妝) were tolerated, even well accepted in pre-modern Chinese society, if they occurred under exceptional historical or personal circumstances and within a clear-cut situational, temporary frame. Beyond the two most famous literary cases of female cross-dressing, accounts of women who lived in male disguise for extended periods of time are also found in some works of official historiography, where they appear in accounts of female virtue of the “biographies of notable women” (*lienüzhuan* 烈女傳) type (CARLITZ 1994, 112). Two collections of thematically organized casual notes, dating from the early seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries, quote numerous other examples of cross-dressing women from various sources, conveying an idea of the plurality of motivations that could lead women to donning male garb in real life.¹² While the official accounts often referred to the women’s need of self-protection in situations of emergency, the unofficial tales also included cases in which the motivation of the cross-dressing women simply was to enable “a more outdoor or exciting lifestyle from the one ordained for them as women” (SUTHRELL 2004, 16). But we also find the more specific desire to participate in the male domain of office, rank, and power as a core motivation.

The question of gender hierarchy is crucial to our understanding of patterns of female-to-male cross-dressing and male attitudes toward them. Female-

to-male dressing-up was perceived as dressing “up,” as an upgrading in social status, and hence as a willful transgression toward more power and freedom. This becomes evident from a comparison of female-to-male and male-to-female cross-dressing, as pointed out by Wilt IDEMA (1998b, 571):

In a patriarchal society, where there is an unequal division of power between gender, it may be unnatural but still understandable that women aspire to the status of men, but the reverse is both unnatural and scandalous. A woman who wants to be a man underlines the superior position of the male. However, a man who willingly acts the role of a woman denies by this act the normalcy of existing gender relations.

Thus, the reversal of the gender order was judged very differently, depending on the direction of the transgression. Female impersonation tended to be despised by men, probably because it implied a serious threat to prevailing notions of masculinity.¹³ Women in male disguise, on the other hand, if detected, tended to be regarded by men as nothing particularly threatening, but rather as a forgivable deviation, as long as the temporary transgression of the borderlines of gender would finally be corrected and did not entail any continuous usurpation of male power.

The literary or theatrical representation of female-to-male cross-dressing served the reconfirmation of the regularity by manifesting its temporary violation; this appears as the theme’s affirmative potential. To a female audience in particular, however, the representation of women in male disguise successfully performing in the domains of masculinity could also serve the imagination of excursions into forbidden zones, thus also rendering painfully visible the truly underprivileged and supplementary role of women; this would appear as its latent critical or subversive potential. The latter was by no means an exclusively modern view, but emerged as a prominent theme in the writings of pre-modern female poets and playwrights (VOLPP 2001). As will become evident, however, this emancipatory or gender-critical element was not particularly relevant to the pre-twentieth century versions of the Zhu Yingtai narrative, quite unlike the subsequent twentieth-century rewritings and interpretations. Cross-dressing, also in the pre-modern Chinese context, “deals with fantasy identities” (SUTHRELL 2004, 16). But was the significance of female-to-male cross-dressing in the Zhu Yingtai narrative reduced to the affirmative function of demonstrating “the impossibility of wishful thinking,” as IDEMA argues (1998a, 110), thus bluntly reconfirming the validity and “naturalness” of the gender hierarchy? I believe that this would mean underestimating the subversive effect of cross-dressing on the perception of gender categories. One critic, discussing male drag on the contemporary American theatre stage, claimed that the representation of

cross-dressing women “can call into question the social conventions of gender roles and gender representation, and, as a result, the very category of gender” (SOLOMON 1993, 146). It will have to be asked whether, to what extent, and with what implications, the conceptualization and representation of gender has been rendered problematic in the various versions of the Zhu Yingtai narrative.

As an almost mainstream position in gender studies, it has been argued that gender “is an achieved status rather than an ascribed biological characteristic and is based on tasks performed and the significance of clothing as well as anatomical and other factors” (BULLOUGH and BULLOUGH 1993, 5). The interplay of biological and social variables, of body features as well as cultural techniques (for example, the register of the voice), in the constitution of masculinity and femininity ultimately enables human beings to switch gender. The notion of “cross-dressing” (like “transvestism”) particularly emphasizes sex-specific attire as the crucial determinant of gender. “Is it clothes that make the man?” The Zhu Yingtai narrative provides an interesting testing ground for this question with regard to pre-modern China. While the various versions of this narrative would suggest that clothing is the primary tool in Zhu Yingtai’s willful manipulation of gender attribution, this is only true to a limited extent since some aspects of her social performance, such as her male bonding, going alone on a journey, or studying outside the home, are at least as important in determining her gender in the eyes of the male-dominated social environment. Since Zhu Yingtai combines her male garb with these various gendered elements of social performance—a male gender habitus, to borrow Bourdieu’s term—she can convey the basic image of masculinity in a sufficiently convincing way, even overruling any doubts based on body evidence.

The attribution of gender, like any other social category, is not in the person’s own hands, but depends on others’ recognition: it is the reconfirmation by others that ultimately determines what category one belongs to, such as whether one is perceived as male or female. Cross-dressing relies on make-believe, on deception, on the willful manipulation of perception. Therefore, it would not seem purely coincidental that the issues of gender perception and personal recognition figure so prominently in the Zhu Yingtai narrative. I will argue that, in this narrative of unfulfilled desire, the unfortunate ending arises from the failed recognition caused by the cross-dressing, which leads to the confusion of ultimately incompatible roles and relations.

INFLUENCE FROM SCHOLAR-BEAUTY ROMANCE

In Chinese narrative literature, the theme of female cross-dressing developed a minor tradition of its own, most prominently in the “scholar-beauty” (*caizi-jiaren* 才子佳人) romance of the early to middle Qing period (ca. 1650–1750).¹⁴

In several respects, the Zhu Yingtai narrative may in fact be viewed as a predecessor to this sub-genre of fiction, and its marked popularity, particularly during the Qing dynasty, may have been at least partially due to its inherent similarities to the scholar-beauty novel. As a standard feature of the “classic” scholar-beauty romance, the woman disguises herself as man in order to get an education and take exams, or to meet face-to-face with the man she hopes to marry. Thus, the talented beauty of the classic scholar-beauty romance shares with Zhu Yingtai the presumption that she is able to do as well as, or even better than, men in the realm of learning:

Such a woman often dresses as a man in order to move about more freely than custom allows; she goes out to get what she wants rather than waiting for things to come to her in her inner chambers.... But in the end all she wants is the man she has chosen for herself, the one worthy of her.

(MCMAHON 1994, 233)

Quite similar to, and probably influenced by, the scholar-beauty romance, at least in some of the later versions of the Zhu Yingtai narratives, the female protagonist's excursion to the realm of learning in male disguise is, right from the beginning, meant to provide her with an active role in choosing a fiancé for herself. After the decline of the scholar-beauty genre, the basic traits of the genre were perpetuated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in some extensive *tanci* narratives, that were a part of the culture of literate women in the lower Yangzi region. In some of these texts, the cross-dressing motif occurred with an even more striking prominence and consequence. It now included the disguised woman's climbing to the very top of the career ladder (BENDER 2001, 1020–23). Given the preference for such imaginary tales of gender reversal in the *tanci* genre, it is hardly surprising that the Zhu Yingtai story was adapted to the *tanci* repertoire relatively early.

It seems likely that the subsequent transformation of the Zhu Yingtai narrative was also influenced by the conventions of the scholar-beauty romance. The Zhu Yingtai narrative, in its early versions, ends with the lovers' reunion in death. The revision of this unfortunate ending was undertaken, first of all, in the *tanci* adaptation, which added another episode that extended the narrative beyond life into the realm of death and enabled the lovers' souls to return to life (*huanhun* 還魂). This resolution in happiness was a typical convention of the scholar-beauty genre. As another element indicating the generic influence from the scholar-beauty romance via *tanci*, the exchange of poems and letters as channels of emotional communication has been introduced in both the *tanci* and the *baojuan* versions: Zhu Yingtai writes poems and a letter to Liang Shanbo with

her own blood; and Liang dies right after he has swallowed her letter (LZWDQX, 318, 351).

CORE SEQUENCES OF HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

The Zhu Yingtai narrative may be broken down into five core sequences that are common to virtually all of its full versions, all the way from the laconic early historical accounts to the imaginatively elaborated prosimetric narratives of the Qing dynasty:

1. Zhu Yingtai disguises as a man in order to be able to go to study. On the road she befriends a male student, named Liang Shanbo, with whom she enters school.
2. During two (or three) years of schooling, Zhu and Liang share the same room, but Liang does not become aware of Zhu's female sex.
3. Zhu leaves school early, taking Liang's promise to visit her soon at her home.
4. Liang visits Zhu belatedly and finds out that she is a woman. His marriage proposal is rejected, since in the meantime Zhu has already been promised to another man. Soon thereafter Liang dies while in office.
5. When the bride Zhu is taken to her fiancé's home in another district, the marriage procession is stopped by a tempest near the site of Liang's tomb. Zhu visits the tomb. Upon her wailing, the tomb opens up and Zhu disappears into it.

The probably most famous individual episode, being the couple's post-mortem transformation into butterflies, was a later addition to this narrative framework, as will be seen. A review of those historical accounts that document the early tradition of Zhu Yingtai lore will prove instructive for identifying the narrative's basic issues and themes and their subsequent transformation at the formative stage.¹⁵

The presumably earliest extant version of the Zhu Yingtai story has come to us as an alleged excerpt from the late-Tang collection *Xuan shi zhi* 宣室志 [Records from the presentation room] by Zhang Du 張讀 (834–886?), as quoted in two mid-Qing (eighteenth century) collections.¹⁶ The extant edition of *Xuan shi zhi*, however, does not include this particular item.¹⁷ It seems likely, though, that the quoted item was derived from a different work by the same author, being the lost historical-geographical treatise *Shi dao si fan zhi* 十道四蕃志 [Gazetteer of the ten administrative units and the four border regions], as indicated by a

source reference given in a Song-dynasty local gazetteer of Ningbo (ZHANG 1177, 2.26a–b). The full account has been translated here as follows:

Yingtai was the daughter of the Zhu family from Shangyu [上虞]. In order to seek instruction, she dressed up as a man for the journey. She travelled together with Liang Shanbo from Kuaiji [會稽]. Shanbo's adult name was Churen [處仁]. Miss Zhu returned home early. Two years later, Shanbo paid her a visit. Only then did he learn that she was a woman. He was disappointed about it. It was as if he had lost something. He had a marriage proposal delivered to her parents, but Miss Zhu had already been engaged to the son of the Ma [馬] family. Later on, Shanbo died from a disease while in office as the magistrate of Mao [鄞] district. He was buried west of the district town of Mao. [On the wedding day], when Miss Zhu was being taken to the Ma family, the boat passed by [Shanbo's] grave. A huge flood wave caused by the wind prevented them from traveling on. Miss Zhu inquired about Shanbo's grave. She went to visit it and wailed heart-brokenly. All of a sudden, a crack opened in the ground, in which Miss Zhu let herself be buried. Xie An [謝安],¹⁸ a chief consultant of the Jin dynasty emperor, bestowed upon the tomb the appreciative epitaph: "Tomb of a righteous woman."

The unambiguous focus on the female character in this account evidently positions her as the protagonist. Although the text follows the historiographical convention of naming the male character by his personal name while defining the female via her family name, Yingtai's name appears right at the beginning of the account. A comparison to a revised account included in a mid-Qing gazetteer of Ningbo prefecture (CAO 1733, 36.2b) betrays that in the later version the male character was shifted to the centre of the narrative. It hardly needs to be pointed out that the tendency of this revision was guided by the gender politics of historiography, which relegated females to the reserved niche of "notable women" (*lienü* 烈女).

The epithet "righteous woman," posthumously conferred upon Zhu Yingtai, has commonly been interpreted as "faithful wife," thus referring to fidelity in marriage. This is also the one virtue for which the names of Liang and Zhu have come to stand in modern popular culture, although, somewhat ironically, according to the narrative, the two were never formally married. It would nevertheless seem more likely that historically the term "righteousness" (*yi* 義) was meant to refer to "chastity," that is, to the woman's firm decision to bind herself to one man in life.¹⁹ In some later comments, the use of the term *fu* 婦 (married woman, wife) in Xie An's tomb inscription was criticized as it was deemed inappropriate for Zhu Yingtai, since she was buried with a man who was not her proper husband (LUO 1227, 13.33a). In place of the ethically problematic original

inscription, the gender-neutral formulation “Tomb of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai” was proposed.

In the presumably earliest known full version of the narrative, as quoted in the translation above, there is a clear implication that the bond between Zhu and Liang is ultimately sanctioned by divine forces, as indicated by the strong wind, which prevents the bride’s boat from advancing. In some later versions, it is Liang Shanbo’s spirit that stops the wedding procession. The intervention of divine forces is also implied by the crack opening up in the ground in response to Zhu Yingtai’s heart-broken wailing at the tomb. The motif of wailing at the tomb, by the way, is strongly reminiscent of the other one of the two most successful subjects of China’s folk-literary heritage, the legend of “The woman Meng Jiang,” where the woman’s wailing at the Great Wall causes it to crumble miraculously, thus laying bare her deceased husband’s bones.²⁰ However, while the woman Meng Jiang laments the forced disruption of her marriage, Zhu Yingtai’s wailing at Liang Shanbo’s tomb is first of all an expression of unfulfilled desire.

The elements of cross-dressing and male bonding (that would later be elaborated into thematic cores) are barely mentioned in this earliest known full account. Nevertheless, there is the highly significant description of Liang Shanbo’s reaction to the stunning discovery of his fellow’s female sex: “He was disappointed about it. It was as if he had lost something” (*changran ru you suo shi* 悵然如有所失). To be sure, Liang’s disappointment is not due to the fact that the girl has already been promised to another man, as Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646) put it in the slightly altered version that he included in his anthology *Qing shi* 情史 [History of emotions, ca. 1626] (FENG 1986, 309). This different understanding is also found in basically all the subsequent versions. Moreover, Liang Shanbo’s death while serving in office is not explicitly put down to lovesickness either. The implication of this is evident enough: what weighs most heavily to Liang Shanbo is the loss of a (male) companion. The classic ideal of intuitional friendship, termed as *zhiji* 知己 (“one who recognizes one’s self,” that is, a soul mate), was commonly reserved for same-sex male bonding, whereas a man-woman relationship was generally not regarded as equivalent to male friendship, because the gap in social hierarchy and the spatial segregation of man and woman prevented them from interacting on the same eye level. There is the saying: “A gentleman dies for one who knows him (*zhi ji* 知己), as a woman adorns herself for one who delights in her (*le ji* 樂己).”²¹ This clearly indicates the asymmetry of a man-woman relationship as compared to male companionship, although the two are paralleled. If the momentum of true male friendship aspiring to the *zhiji* ideal was that of “recognizing” (*zhi* 知) another man’s personality and inner value on an equal social level, then Liang’s friendship with Zhu evidently had broken down, since he had failed to recognize her true sex, being one of the primary parameters of social standing.²² Therefore,

in this early version of the narrative, the marriage proposal appears to be a far less desirable alternative solution after the bond of male companionship has proved impossible. As a matter of fact, the transition from male companionship to marriage relationship would appear to be an unthinkable shift, since the two types of social relationships were viewed on entirely different levels. It might even be argued that Liang Shanbo's marriage proposal was merely an act of decency aimed at bringing this misjudged relationship in line with the norms of social performance as prescribed by the rites, thus saving Zhu Yingtai's honor as a (virginal) woman as well as his own reputation as an official-to-be. This indicates that the years-long companionship of a woman and a man involving a high degree of physical closeness blatantly violated the strictly guarded social imperatives of gender separation and hierarchy. Therefore, in retrospect, their companionship as schoolmates smacks of utter indecency. As a rule, in the later rewritings, the sensitive ethical problem of social as well as moral integrity had to be addressed. Some Ming versions, for instance, introduced the motif of the blossoming twig (or the related motif of the buried strip of red silk) to serve as a preternatural authority providing "prove" to the guarding of virginity and innocence during the years of cohabitation (compare LZWDXY, 9–10). It is beyond doubt that the Zhu Yingtai narrative involved some socially as well as morally problematic gender issues, all of which ultimately derived from Zhu Yingtai's bold act of gender bending via cross-dressing. The failed recognition caused by the act of cross-dressing entails a situation of mutual unfulfilled desire: Liang Shanbo's desire for male companionship is paralleled by Zhu Yingtai's desire for love and marriage, but since the two different desires are placed on divergent social levels, referring to incompatible categories of social relationship, they both are bound to remain unfulfilled.

THE BUTTERFLY MOTIF IN SONG DYNASTY TEXTS

There is yet another earlier, lesser-known document of the Zhu Yingtai legend. Unlike the tradition focused on the Ningbo region, referred to above, it originated from the Yixing region (in present-day southern Jiangsu province), which also claims to be the cradle of Zhu Yingtai lore. A Southern Song regional gazetteer, dated 1268, includes the following piece of information:

The Zhu grave mound is located at Shanquan [善權] hill. Underneath a cliff there is a huge rock, which bears the inscription "Zhu Yingtai's study place," with the studio name "Fresh Green Hut" [Bixian'an 碧鮮庵]. Formerly there was a verse, which read: "Butterflies cover the entire garden, flying up invisibly. / In the empty room of Fresh Green [Hut] there is a study table." Popular tradition has it that Yingtai actually was a woman. While young,

she had studied together with Liang Shanbo, and later they transformed themselves into butterflies. This tale belongs to the category of the fantastic. But I consulted the temple record, where it is said that the Wu emperor of the Qi [dynasty] bought real estate, which had previously been owned by Yingtai. From this, I think, it can be concluded that this person must have had aristocratic rank and was probably not a woman.²³

The Shanjuan 善卷 (or Shanquan) temple was built by the Wu 武 emperor of the Southern Qi dynasty (r. 483–493), and records about it began in 483. Thus, the temple record referred to in the account would be the earliest known document pertaining to the story of Zhu Yingtai. Nevertheless, even this earliest quotation was separated by more than a century from the historical events it claimed to refer to (XU 2003, 44). The potentially most explosive element in the above account is, of course, the conclusion that Zhu Yingtai might not have been a woman, but rather an aristocratic man, whose land an emperor later bought. The mere mention of the idea that Zhu Yingtai might have been an aristocratic man basically reconfirms my assessment of the problematic of gender, recognition, and social hierarchy underlying the legend at its early stages. As another valuable element, this account indicates the existence of an oral, regional, “popular tradition” (*suchuan* 俗傳). The author, Shi Nengzhi 史能之, sought to sort out some historical facts from this popular lore, which he dismissed as “fantastic” (that is, purely fictional). The butterfly motif apparently had already become an important element of folklore. In fact, it would seem very likely that the butterfly motif had been developed in the Yixing line of the tradition of this legend.²⁴

The earliest relatively elaborated narrative on the subject of Zhu Yingtai was found in a Song-dynasty account about a temple dedicated to Liang Shanbo, the text of which was preserved in an early-Qing local gazetteer of Yin district.²⁵ The authorship of this account, entitled “Yizhong wang miao ji” 義忠王廟記 [Record of the shrine for the prince of loyalty, 1107], has been attributed to Li Maocheng 李茂誠, who compiled a now lost local gazetteer while serving the lowly post of administrative clerk of Ming Prefecture 明州 (present-day Ningbo) (HONG 1983, 212). Li’s narrative strikes us, first of all, by its dialogue passages in direct speech. However, it completely omitted any reference to the three-year study period of Liang and Zhu, which would later become the story’s core part. This, however, is not so surprising, since the author aimed at establishing Liang Shanbo’s image as a deity. Therefore any mentioning of Liang’s amusing failures to recognize his fellow’s sex would have seemed inappropriate.

This text, which, of course, was focused onto Liang Shanbo, gave the precise date of Liang’s death as the sixteenth day of the eighth month, 373, and Zhu Yingtai’s entering of the tomb was set to the spring of the year 375.²⁶ This was

the first attempt at a precise dating of the allegedly historical events underlying the story. As another new element in this version, when Zhu Yingtai disappears in the crack that opens up in the ground, the bystanders grasp her skirt, which is blown up into the sky by the wind and dropped at another place. This element is suggestive in several respects: First of all, the image of the skirt floating through the air “like a cloud” may be viewed as a precursor to the motif of butterflies emerging from the tomb, which gradually came to be attached to the narrative.²⁷ Moreover it is tempting to assume an associative link between the butterfly as a symbol of transformation (metamorphosis) and the cross-dressing motif. The act of shedding the piece of female clothing at the moment of entering the tomb strongly indicates that Zhu Yingtai symbolically transcends her female sex and reverts to the former gender relationship between male fellows. The stripping of the skirt, likened to a butterfly’s metamorphosis, is suggested as an act of gender neutralization providing a symbolic resolution for the problem of gender confusion. Thus, the addition of the butterfly motif would appear as a deliberate expansion of the narrative’s semiotic significance. It also needs to be mentioned, however, that in the narrative’s development prior to the twentieth century, the butterfly motif remained quite peripheral.

According to the “Record of the shrine for the prince of loyalty,” Liang’s numinous power became manifest for the first time when an attempt to open his tomb, ordered by Zhu’s fiancé, was prevented by a huge serpent guarding it. Some twenty years later, in 397, the successful military defense against a local rebellion was attributed to Liang’s divine intervention, after defender-in-chief (*taiwei* 太衛) Liu Yu 劉裕 received a dream apparition to that effect. This led to the bestowing of the title “Divine and Holy Prince of Loyalty” (Yizhong Shensheng Wang 義忠神聖王), which officially acknowledged Liang’s status as a deity of state-related significance. A temple was built, and a local cult, which spread to other places, later developed.²⁸ As a regional deity commanding apotropaic powers, Liang was believed to protect the local population against a variety of evils, such as epidemics and drought. The elevation of Liang Shanbo to a deity appears like an attempt to counterbalance the earlier focus on Zhu Yingtai and the official epithet of “righteous woman,” which according to the previous account had posthumously been conferred upon her.²⁹

THE COMPARISON TO HUA MULAN

In the late Ming, Feng Menglong employed the Zhu Yingtai legend as a minor introductory narrative to the twenty-eighth chapter of his collection *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說 [Stories old and new, 1620]. In this vernacular rendition, a clear-cut thematic context is construed by the introductory discourse as well as the joint parallel stories cited in the narrative. The thematic focus of the chapter

is introduced by the following circumscription: “I shall tell only of bizarre, enigmatic pretenders of masculinity who lack the yang element—or, rather, true women who are in men’s disguise.”³⁰ Hence, Feng made it perfectly clear that, in his perception, cross-dressing indeed provided the thematic core of the Zhu Yingtai narrative. He combined it with two other stories on the same topic: the legend of Hua Mulan, the woman who disguised as a male warrior to become a military hero,³¹ and the tale about Huang Chonggu 黃崇嘏, a woman who dressed up as a male student to rise to high official rank.³² Feng’s choice of these two related stories is likely to have been inspired by Xu Wei’s 徐渭 (1521–1593) two short plays about them included in a cycle of four dramas.³³

The legend of Hua Mulan in particular provides some interesting parallels and differences as compared to the tale of Zhu Yingtai. At first sight, Mulan’s female heroism in the field of the “military” (*wu* 武) and Yingtai’s entering of the realm of the “civil” (or “literary learning,” *wen* 文) would appear as corresponding fantasies about women’s gaining access to the two complementary domains of masculinity (LOUIE and EDWARDS 1994). Despite the two narratives’ superficial thematic similarity, however, the significance of the cross-dressing issue is indeed quite different in them. This may be related to the fact that the Hua Mulan story is generally believed “to derive ultimately from history or legend of a northern non-Chinese people” (ALLEN 1996, 346), whereas the Zhu Yingtai story is most certainly of Han-Chinese origin. Quite similar to the case of Zhu Yingtai, Hua Mulan’s disguise as a male warrior remains undiscovered by her comrades at war. When they accompany her home, she eventually makes an appearance in female clothing, revealing and thus putting an end to her male disguise:

Her messmates were startled out of their wits.
They had marched with her for twelve years of war
And never known that Mulan was a girl. (WALEY 1923, 130)

The ballad of Mulan ends on the rather amusing apologetic note claiming that the sex of hares cannot easily be discerned, when one sees a male and a female hare “scampering side by side.” The crucial scene in the Hua Mulan story is not the act of putting on male disguise—merely implied by mentioning how she buys the accessories for horse-riding—but in fact the moment of her restoration of a woman’s proper appearance. Upon her return from more than a decade of military service, she enters the women’s quarter of her family’s residence to revert to female gender: “She cast aside her heavy soldier’s cloak, /And wore again her old-time dress” (WALEY 1923, 130). The seeming ease and seamlessness of this gender switching reconfirms the idea of two clearly separated gender roles, unambiguously distinguished by attire. The case of Zhu Yingtai is more

complex: the story's unfortunate ending with the impossibility of marriage and the reunion in death indicates that Zhu Yingtai's male impersonation caused a lasting rupture in the gender order. Therefore, she cannot seamlessly revert to her "original" gender role anymore, but remains caught once and for all in the paradigm of sworn brotherhood. This is the ultimate significance of her leaping into her male fellow's tomb. The symbolical shedding of the female gown in the very moment of disappearing in the tomb indicates a utopian act of negating, and thus transcending, gender constraints.

While Zhu Yingtai may have been celebrated in folklore, members of the scholar-official elite tended to perceive her in rather critical terms. For instance, an early Ming scholar, Yang Shouzhi 楊守陞 (*jinsi* 1478), in a poem "Bixiantan" 碧鮮壇 [Fresh Green Terrace], after having introduced Hua Mulan as the positive model of gender role switching, commented on Zhu Yingtai in the following lines:

And how about Zhu Yingtai?
 Through her deceitful attire she violated the code of morality.
 Ban Zhao [班昭] had not advocated that females should not study,
 But why make friends with a male?
 A virgin girl who wants to be marriageable,
 Must properly stick to the six rites in her behavior.
 But she neglected this and submitted to studying with a schoolmate,
 So she died a trivial death as light as a goose feather. (WU 1882, 9.15a–b)

The judgment on Zhu Yingtai in the light of the Confucian ethical code was unambiguously negative: her mixing with the male world was considered unacceptable, because it could not claim any sufficient social motivation. Only an emergency situation, such as the one in the Mulan legend, where the young woman heroically took the place of her ailing father due to the lack of an older brother, could have justified her behavior.

THE REVELATION SCENE

Based on the extant textual tradition, it may be said that, up to the Song, the Zhu Yingtai legend remained a relatively crude and undeveloped narrative. The crucial process of episodic elaboration and embroidering occurred later in the genres of drama, and also in the various types of prosimetric narrative, which will be discussed in the remaining half of this article. The subject of Zhu Yingtai, with the cross-dressing theme at its core, was early recognized by playwrights as offering some scenes and situations that could be effectively and entertainingly presented on stage.³⁴ Unfortunately, in the known corpus of pre-Qing song-drama texts, there is no complete text of any Zhu Yingtai play.³⁵ Several excerpts

from such plays have, however, been preserved in miscellanies and anthologies of drama scenes. Some of these Ming editions were commercial imprints from Jianyang 建陽 prefecture (Fujian province) meant to appeal to a large and diverse audience (CHIA 2002, 241–42). The selection of scenes included in these kinds of anthologies hardly occurred at random, but is likely to have mirrored the contemporary audience's specific interests in the subject matter. Among the excerpted scenes from pre-Qing plays on the subject of Zhu Yingtai, two episodes appear to have been clearly favored: "The Farewell" and "Visiting the Friend." "The Farewell" comprises the sometimes rather lengthy episode of how Zhu Yingtai, accompanied by Liang Shanbo on her way home, repeatedly but vainly, tries to hint at her female sex. "Visiting the Friend", on the other hand, dramatizes the moment of Zhu Yingtai's inevitable and definitive self-revelation as a woman on the occasion of Liang Shanbo's first visit at her family residence. The apparent preference for these two scenes indicates a shifting of the narrative's thematic focus in the course of its elaboration and its adaptation to the theater stage; but first of all it implies a marked emphasis on the gender theme. I will now discuss the elaborations of the revelation episode in the various versions of "Visiting the Friend" ("Fang you" 訪友) in early song-drama, but also in the later prosimetric narrative.

The earliest material evidence for any adaptation of Zhu Yingtai lore to song-drama is presumed to be a small fragment of a Yuan drama, which survived in an anthology of excerpted *nanqu* 南曲 (southern tunes).³⁶ This piece of text is far too short to convey any general impression of the lost drama, but even this microscopic sample indicates that some new concerns and ideas had by then begun to be attached to this narrative. The scene is Liang Shanbo's visit at Zhu Yingtai's home, where he is eventually made to realize that she is a woman. While Liang now blames himself for having failed to properly interpret Yingtai's evident signs of femininity, he also reproaches her for such intentional deceit. Zhu Yingtai defends herself with the following response:

"It was not that this humble person wanted to deceive you. As it is known of old: where there is an advantage to gain, who would want to miss the opportunity? However, I was a traveller, and I was a girl, moreover both of my parents were of old age, and my person had no master [that is, husband]."
(LZWDXY, 1)

Zhu Yingtai's justification primarily addresses the issue of her motivation to disguise herself as a man. This was perceived as a serious gap in the basic narrative as it is known from historical accounts. The above statement indicates at least one core motivation for female-to-male cross-dressing, which has been universally shared across cultures and historical periods: the self-protection a single

woman needed while traveling and spending extensive periods of time outside home (DEKKER and POOL 1989, 6–8). A woman traveling alone was extremely exposed, not only to the common dangers of the road, but also to male gazing and molesting; moreover, a single female traveler, by her mere appearance, was bound to provoke among the male public suspicions of banditry, indecency, or prostitution.³⁷ Donning male disguise was a well-known temporary strategy that adventuresome women in late imperial China occasionally employed.

In the passage quoted above, Zhu Yingtai justifies her decision to don male garb as a way of gaining some personal advantage. The early accounts do not provide any clear answer as to exactly why she is seeking instruction from a teacher outside the home. In the relatively late account by Shao Jinbiao 邵金彪 (fl. 1821–1850), Zhu Yingtai explains that she wanted to attend school in order to find “a worthy scholar” whom she can serve (that is, who deserves her) (WU 1882, 9.14b). This would suggest a parallel to the standard plot of the scholar-beauty romance, which grants the woman an active role in arranging her own marriage. In the *tanci* and *baojuan* versions, Zhu Yingtai expresses as her motivation for attending school the wish to make herself a name as a “talented woman” (*caimü* 才女) in the locality, which would once again appear as influenced by the scholar-beauty genre (LZWDQX, 298, 329). Some of the elaborated texts of song-drama and prosimetric narrative even have substituted a family background for Zhu Yingtai’s bold action. She is either made the only child (equally reminiscent of the scholar-beauty romance), or the only one to live up to adulthood in a wealthy gentry family.³⁸ While most texts represent her as taking it upon herself to continue a family tradition of learning (compare MANN 1994, 19), there is no implication whatsoever that Zhu Yingtai is studying for the sake of gaining office and power. The assumption that Zhu Yingtai goes out to study in order to claim the same rights as a man would seem a typical twentieth-century reading (IDEMA 1998a, 110). Her male disguise is represented as strictly temporary, it enables her to acquire some learning, but no more than that, even though she demonstrates at various occasions that her level of learning is superior to that of her male schoolmate. The construed family background as found in the *zaju* song-drama, entitled *Zhu Liang yuan* 祝梁緣 [The karmic bond of Zhu and Liang], is a rather extreme case.³⁹ In the opening act, Zhu Yingtai explains that her parents lacked a son, so to console themselves they made her wear boy’s clothing as a child; now they demand that she go to study in male disguise together with a fellow male student (LZWDXY, 18). By transforming Zhu Yingtai into a victim of forced reverse gender socialization, this version also denied her any initiative in the act of gender crossing.

As a crucial element in the introduction of the cross-dressing motif, there is the initial “test” episode: Zhu Yingtai, negotiating with her father about her unconventional plan to seek instruction at a school outside her home, makes

him agree that she could go to study if she can successfully appear in male disguise before her parents without being recognized as a woman. In order to prove her skill in cross-gender impersonation, she then dresses up as a fortune-teller. In this role she can “foretell” her own future when the parents consult the fortune-teller. The earliest documented version of this episode is in Feng Menglong’s vernacular *Gujin xiaoshuo* rendition, which was probably based on a Ming song-drama version. In the Qing versions, this episode became a standard element of the narrative.

In many texts, there remains a strong tendency to put the blame on Zhu Yingtai for her cunning deception. Feng Menglong’s vernacular rendition, again, has Liang take all the blame for his failure to correctly recognize her sex: “He reproached himself for not having been discerning enough to guess the truth.” But in the evaluative verse the reader is advised: “Blame not Shanbo for overlooking the truth” (FENG 1991, 417; 2000, 491–92). In the *tanci* version, there is the apologetic statement: “Since Shanbo was deceived by her, / it was hard for him to discern Yingtai’s feminine looks” (LZWDQX, 334). In the *baojuan* version, too, there is the line: “They studied together for three years, but did not share the same quilt, / how could he have noticed that the one dressed as a man was a woman” (LZWDQX, 316). In the respective revelation scenes of the *tanci* and *baojuan* versions, there is a strong sense of bitterness in Liang’s reaction: he feels deceived by her who denied being a woman even upon repeated questioning (LZWDQX, 342, 308). This resentment, however, is specific to the prosimetric narratives that incorporated some elaborate scenes in which Liang expressed his doubts about Zhu’s maleness (see further below).

A brief excerpt from a late Ming *chuanqi* song-drama, entitled *Tongchuang ji* 同窗記 [The schoolmates],⁴⁰ also renders the act “Visiting the Friend” (or a part of it), starting with Liang’s reaction to Zhu’s revelation. Here, Liang repeatedly accuses Zhu of having lied at him: “not even half a sentence of what you said was true” (LZWDXY, 9, 10). Due to this experience he arrives at the disillusioned conclusion that “one knows someone, knows his face, but doesn’t know his heart” (*zhi ren zhi mian bu zhi xin* 知人知面不知心) (LZWDXY, 9). Zhu defends herself by arguing that she did not dare to tell the truth because she had to maintain her oath of chastity. She blames Liang, in turn, for his failure to understand the numerous hints she gave when they bade each other farewell: “Brother, who would have thought that you were not aware of [Zhuo] Wenjun’s [卓文君] intention, that you did not understand Bo Ya’s [伯牙] mind” (LZWDXY, 10). Zhu’s argumentation alludes to two literary topoi of the recognition theme, in both of which mutual intuitive understanding is achieved via the musical medium of the zither (*qin* 琴) (compare IDEMA 1984, 66; HENRY 1987, 9–10). Thus, both Liang and Zhu refer to the concept of recognition, providing ample evidence for

its continuous importance also in the early song-drama interpretations of the narrative.

The *guci* version includes one major transformation of the plot, which in the twentieth-century local drama versions became a standard feature. Before leaving the school, Zhu Yingtai reveals herself to the wife of her teacher, who was well aware of her (female) sex right from the beginning. The teacher's wife tells Liang Shanbo the truth about Zhu Yingtai after her departure. Moreover, she hands him a stitched shoe implying the promise of marriage. Thus, when he arrives at the Zhu residence, he would be expected to know about Zhu's gender-crossing, but his entire behavior shows that, despite the anticipated revelation, his gender image of Zhu Yingtai has not yet been adjusted. It takes her physical appearance as a feminine person, in women's dress, for him to change his perception (LU 1955, 85).

Other texts emphasize Zhu Yingtai's femininity when she first appears as a woman vis-à-vis Liang Shanbo. In the *tanci* version, her feminine beauty is hyperbolically expressed in mythical comparisons (LZWDQX, 342). The *baojuan* version, on the other hand, especially mentions her "lotus steps" (*lianbu* 蓮步), referring to a graceful way of walking due to her bound feet, as the epitome of femininity. This attribute is evoked twice, when encountering her parents upon return, and at the occasion of the friend's visit (LZWDQX, 306, 308). (The *guci* version, for example, only mentions Zhu Yingtai's "small feet" in order to point out her difficulties of walking all the way to Hangzhou [LU 1955, 63].) The Ming *chuanqi* version, on the other hand, emphasizes Liang Shanbo's difficulties in grasping Zhu Yingtai's change into a female "beauty" (*jiaren* 佳人): he can only voice his profound bewilderment about her stunning transformation from "pale-faced scholar" (*baimian shusheng* 白面書生) to "pink face with shiny black hair" (*zhuyan lübin* 朱顏綠鬢) (LZWDXY, 9). The incompatibility of these two gendered images indicates a serious crisis of perception.

THE "FAREWELL" SEQUENCE

As pointed out already, the Zhu Yingtai narrative involved the important epistemological theme of (failed) recognition, primarily with regard to gender. One early account included the critical remark: "In the beginning, Shanbo did not recognize that Yingtai was a woman: such was the extent of his simplicity and naturalness" (ZHANG 1177, 2.26a–b). Even though the characterization of Liang Shanbo as "simple and natural" (*pu zhi* 樸質) may originally have had some rather positive connotations ("pure, unadorned"), it also implied a deficit of cultivation and learning. This is mirrored by the consistent representation of Liang Shanbo as a student of rather rudimentary learning, as compared to Zhu Yingtai's superior degree of familiarity with the literary tradition. Therefore, one

cannot help but assume an implied correlation between his lack of insight, his failing recognition, and his deficient degree of scholarly sophistication. Such a link is also emphasized by the farewell episodes as elaborated in two early song-drama versions.

In the sub-tradition of Zhu Yingtai song-drama adaptations, the “Farewell” episode, dramatizing Liang Shanbo accompanying Zhu Yingtai on her journey home, was clearly the preferred part of the narrative. Later it was generally titled “Shi ba li xiangsong” 十八里相送 [Traveling company over eighteen miles], and it was expanded excessively and even performed separately in some local drama styles (compare LZWDXY, 73–94). In this episode, while Zhu and Liang are wandering through the countryside, she is continuously trying to hint at her female sex, about which Liang remains oblivious. She does so by suggesting, over and over again, that objects of the material and natural worlds they encounter on the way share relationships similar to that of Liang and herself. The resulting sequence of verbose allusions and riddles creates the idea of a gendered universe. Liang nevertheless continues to either ignore her rhetoric, or dismiss it as nonsensical talk. The various song-drama versions vary widely in their ways of elaborating on Zhu Yingtai’s attempts at self-revelation, covering a wide spectrum of rhetorical strategies, from sophisticated allusion to blunt hinting. Liang Shanbo’s incapacity to understand Zhu’s rhetorical performance characterizes him as a limited mind, though to varying degrees.

In “He Liang fenmei” 河梁分袂 [Parting from Liang at the river], an act preserved from an otherwise lost Ming drama entitled *Tongchuang ji* 同窗記 [The schoolmates],⁴¹ Zhu Yingtai hints at her true sex by a series of rather sophisticated literary allusions, as they were the convention in the highly literary genre of Ming *chuanqi* song-drama.⁴² Alluding to *Shi jing* 詩經 [The song classic], Zhu Yingtai compares her relationship with Liang Shanbo to that of a married couple, and their separation to the death of one spouse. She also alludes to some classical episodes about scholars’ encounters with female immortals, which is misunderstood by Liang Shanbo as implying an offer to arrange a marriage for him. Nevertheless, in this case, Liang can decode the literary allusions, whereas he is unable to link the wordplay to the real world. In a scene “Shanbo fenbie” 山伯分別 [Farewell from Shanbo], apparently preserved from a different Ming drama, but quoted by the same title as the above-mentioned *Tongchuang ji*,⁴³ Zhu Yingtai’s attempts to hint at her female sex are described in a rather different manner: the alluding references are keyed less to the world of texts than to the world of objects. At first, she makes an apologetic comment (reminiscent of the Mulan ballad) that the sex of animals is often hard to tell. When they observe a white crane couple sitting on a treetop, she sings: “They are so similar in voice and shape, / How could one decide which is female and which male?” When they arrive at a temple dedicated to both the earth god and the earth goddess,

she raises the question whether these deities share the same temple at night. Liang, who dismisses this remark as foolish, also fails to grasp her third hint, when Zhu Yingtai points to a mandarin duck couple, symbolizing fidelity in marriage, and asks: “Why can’t men do as these birds do?” and so on.

Such “allegorizing by way of comparison with objects” (*tuowu bixing* 托物比興; LZWDXY, 15) was by no means limited to the relatively sophisticated *chuanqi* genre, but also occurred in an act entitled “Ying Bo xiangbie huijia” 英伯相別回家 (Ying[tai] bids [Shan]bo farewell on her way home), preserved from an unidentified play, written in a rather lowbrow style, judging from the folk songs it employed for the arias.⁴⁴ On the way, Yingtai points to a white crane couple at a river and hints at their being a mirror image of Shanbo and herself: “The male walks in front, while the female following behind calls him ‘older brother.’” The excerpt in question also includes a rather straightforward punning reference to her female sex: When they are crossing a river, but there is neither a bridge nor a ferry, Zhu Yingtai asks Liang Shanbo, who has just waded through the river: “My older brother, I ask you how deep the water is. Let’s see whether it will soak me up to where the character 可 is” (LZWDXY, 17). Yan Dunyi 嚴敦易 interpreted this as a punning reference to the female genitals (YAN 1953, 103). The fact that Liang Shanbo does not understand it attests to his innocence in sexual matters.⁴⁵ Yet, after he has proven so stubbornly immune to all of her suggestive hints, Zhu mocks him in an aside, calling him “a true fool.” In the *zaju* version, in a similarly straightforward manner, Yingtai hints at her true sex by ostentatiously associating herself with female attributes: she sings girls’ songs and displays women’s stockings. Liang, however, responds to these more than obvious hints merely by criticizing her for the indecency of keeping women’s private belongings (LZWDXY, 22).

In the *guci* version, the “farewell” scene also includes a series of more than obvious verbal clues by Zhu Yingtai as to her female sex. But the most remarkable hint provided is that she writes down the character 女 (*nü*, woman, female), either upside down or inverted (*fanxie* 反寫), and asks Liang Shanbo about its meaning. He, however, cannot identify it, so she sends him back to the school in order to ask their teacher about it (LU 1955, 72). The implied message of this “lesson” is, quite evidently, that a defamiliarized (that is, disguised) female is not easy to recognize. One might even go as far as to claim that the inversion of the character 女 might be read as a *chiffre* for gender reversal as such. The teacher calls Liang a pedant (*shudai* 書獃) for not recognizing the inverted character. The same term is later used apologetically by Liang himself to explain why he did not become aware of Zhu’s female sex (LU 1955, 72, 96).

I have argued that Liang Shanbo’s continuous failure to recognize Zhu Yingtai’s female sex was due to his inability to perform a paradigmatic change of perception. However, beyond his personal limitations, there is perhaps also

a more general principle of gender perception underpinning his behavior. Alisa Solomon has pointed out that, “as the presumed universal, maleness is more invisible in its artificiality. Sociological studies have demonstrated that maleness is assumed, unless proved otherwise” (SOLOMON 1993, 145). It takes a lot to shatter Liang’s belief in the authenticity of Zhu’s male disguise. In fact, it takes more than just body evidence (which can be argued away, as will be seen). In order to believe in Zhu’s female gender, Liang requires the full set of signifiers of femininity, but first of all, female attire.

THE GENDERED BODY IN THE “DOUBT” SCENE

While Liang Shanbo remains inattentive to all of Zhu Yingtai’s attempts at alluding to her true gender in the “Farewell” scene, at least one song-drama version nevertheless presents him as quite aware of physical as well as behavioral gender attributes. In yet another Ming *chuanqi* song-drama entitled *Tongchuang ji* 同窗記 [The schoolmates], the physical closeness of the two is described as surpassing the common notion of “sharing the table for eating and the bed for resting.” They are likened to the two wings of a bird, or two trees grown from the same root. As a direct consequence of such a high degree of physical closeness, Liang Shanbo discovers that some of Zhu Yingtai’s body attributes and habits are rather unusual, and he gradually begins to ask about them: Why does she not undress when she goes to rest, and why does she not stand upright when relieving herself? Moreover, he asks her why her demeanor is so retreating and quiet, why her hands are so tender, why her earlobes are pierced and her eyebrows slant: in short, why her appearance is so effeminate. Zhu Yingtai responds to these suspicions by arguing that the shaping of the human body is a result of cosmic processes. She claims to know a passage in a canonical book stating that men who look as fine and delicate as women are bound to achieve high rank and office. She even provides an explanation for her pierced earlobes, saying that the ear piercing was an educative measure introduced by her parents (LZWDXY, 6–7). I refer to this section of the narrative as the “Doubt” scene. The preserved Ming *chuanqi* episode indicates that this “Doubt” scene, with its theme of the gendered body, might initially have been added to the narrative by a playwright. In the subsequent prosimetric narratives it was developed into a major, perhaps even the climactic, episode.

Lu Gong 路工, in the preface to his collection of prosimetric Zhu Yingtai narratives, originally published in 1955, dismissed the cross-dressing theme, and particularly the episodes about the near-discovery of Zhu Yingtai’s female sex, as an element that had been “unnecessarily exaggerated” by literati who produced “vulgar and lowbrow works” (LU 1955, xi).⁴⁶ Despite the certain bawdiness of tone in these prosimetric narratives, they treated the issue of the gendered body

in a particularly intriguing manner. The author-performers of the prosimetric narratives must have been well aware that the sexual implications of the body theme were certain to attract the attention of the folk audience.⁴⁷

In terms of narrative logic, the “Doubt” scene may be viewed as diametrically opposed to the “Farewell” scene: while the former seeks to cover up, the latter aims at revelation. As the two sides of the semiotics of the cross-gender comedy, they also mirror the basic ambivalence of the cross-dressing situation. The main reason why the two scenes remain contradictory is that they assign incompatible characterizations and roles to Liang Shanbo: in the “Doubt” scene he appears as curious and on the verge of discovering the truth about Zhu Yingtai’s sex, whereas in the “Farewell” scene he conveys the impression of an entirely insensitive person, unable to apprehend even the most obvious hints. The “Doubt” scene, which is likely to have been developed later than the “Farewell” scene, implied a positive reevaluation of the Liang Shanbo character. Due to the basic incompatibility of the two scenes, the song-drama favored the “Farewell” scene, whereas the prosimetric narrative tended to prefer the “Doubt” scene.⁴⁸ Among the prosimetric narratives, the *tanci* version is the only one to include full elaborations of both the “Doubt” scene and the “Farewell” scene, inevitably resulting in a contradictory characterization of Liang Shanbo. In the *guci* version, on the other hand, the “Farewell” scene is merely mentioned, but not elaborated on (LU 1955, 79), and in the *baojuan* version, the “Farewell” scene was completely omitted (LZWDQX, 304–5). This indicates that the author-performers of these prosimetric narratives were well aware of the internal contradiction between the “Doubt” scene and the “Farewell” scene.

In the process of adapting Zhu Yingtai lore to the sub-genres of prosimetric narrative, some distinct, new elements were introduced. For instance, as a hilarious anachronism, the master under whose guidance Yingtai studies is no one else than Master Kong (Kong Zi 孔子, that is, Confucius) himself; moreover the study place has been shifted to Hangzhou 杭州.⁴⁹ To the Master’s (and his wife’s) discerning eyes, Zhu Yingtai’s true gender cannot remain hidden. Nevertheless, he keeps his discovery to himself and even proves helpful with Zhu Yingtai’s continuous efforts to hide her female sex: when she is worried about the risk of being detected by her male schoolmates on the toilet, the Master supports a new rule she proposes, demanding that the students go to the toilet one by one.

Nevertheless, what follows now in the prosimetric narratives is a series of awkward situations during which Liang Shanbo nourishes doubts about Zhu Yingtai’s gender attributes and in fact gets close to discovering her true sex. The author-performers of these chantefables, and presumably also their audience, obviously found much delight in these episodes. It starts when, on a hot summer day, Shanbo happens to set eyes on the naked upper body of Yingtai, who has just taken off her upper garments. Upon his naïve question why she has a

protruding breast, she hastens to respond: “Don’t you know that a male with a large breast is bound to rise to high office? This principle is evidently true.” (LZWDQX, 343) Unlike in the song-drama, where she claims the classics as the source for this alleged principle, in the *baojuan* version she refers it to physiognomy (*xiangshu* 相術) (LZWDQX, 302). It would not seem an entirely unrealistic representation if Liang Shanbo is shown to be quite uncertain in positively identifying the sexual characteristics of the female body, since it is doubtful that in pre-modern rural China an unmarried adolescent ever had the chance to see the naked body of the opposite sex, or even a pictorial representation of it.⁵⁰ Henceforth Zhu Yingtai is more cautious about taking off her clothing and does not undress despite the heat. When urged to explain such behavior, she puts forward the excuse that she catches illnesses easily. In both the *tanci* and the *baojuan* version, she has to explain why she is squatting down on the toilet (indicating that someone peeked at her). She argues that urinating while standing insults the “three luminaries” (*san guang* 三光) and should therefore be avoided (LZWDQX, 335, 303). In both versions, the ultimate test of masculinity is the tossing of pebbles at mandarin ducks. When Zhu Yingtai is unable to hit the target, her male fellow students ridicule her for being “like a female tender woman” (*xiang nü jiaoniang* 像女姣娘). This highly redundant expression stamps her as being too effeminate, however it does not expose her as a woman (LZWDQX, 335). Nevertheless, for fear that her female sex might eventually be revealed under embarrassing circumstances, she decides to leave school one year early and returns home before the end of the full study term.

The *guci* version, with its numerous distinct features, includes an even broader expansion of the rewarding theme of the gendered body. In this text, Liang Shanbo eventually confronts her with his suspicion that she is actually a woman disguised as a man:

“You’re saying you are a real man (*nanzihan* 男子漢), but I say you are a female hairpin-and-skirt (*nü chajun* 女釵裙): the way you walk is the female way, the way you talk is particularly with a female tone, on your face there are traces of Hangzhou powder, and on your ears there are marks of earring piercing.” (Lu 1955, 67)

The expression “female hairpin-and-skirt,” referring to the archetypal attributes of female attire, bears an implication of cross-dressing. Liang derives his suspicion from some cultural markers of feminine gender that he noticed, such as the register of voice, and the traces of female adornment. Zhu Yingtai now comes up with a far-fetched explanation that, as a boy in her village, she was chosen to impersonate Guanyin 觀音 at a religious festival in celebration of this Buddhist goddess, and therefore they pierced her ears and powdered her

skin. This argument is in itself quite intriguing for it includes both the element of cross-dressing and that of androgyny (Guanyin had originally been a male deity, but was later transformed into a female deity).

In the *guci* narrative, the critical point is eventually reached, when Liang Shanbo invites Zhu Yingtai to join him for a swim in the lotus pond. He raises this to the ultimate test of masculinity:

“Since you are a real man, / strip off your clothes to make it clear.” / Shanbo stripped himself all naked / and jumped into the lotus pond to refresh himself. / The beauty Yingtai’s face blushed: / she retransformed into a woman’s true appearance [*bian ge nüzi huo xianxing* 變個女子活現形]. (LU 1955, 69)

The wording of this key passage is very intriguing. Liang Shanbo’s words imply that gender/sex is ultimately defined by the naked body, and particularly by (male) genital evidence. Thus, this text performs “a synecdochal collapse of masculinity into its ‘part’” (BUTLER 1993, 139). Zhu Yingtai’s blushing is due to the implied reference to the male sexual organ. It is only in this extreme case of doubt about a person’s gender/sex attribution, however, that bodily evidence is raised to the ultimate criterion, so the sex/gender division collapses. This reminds us that for Zhu Yingtai, due to her male impersonation, gender and sex are divided from the beginning, whereas for Liang Shanbo sex and gender are united, an assumption that is now thrown into crisis. It remains remarkable though to what extent Zhu Yingtai was allowed to pass as a male on the basis of cultural signifiers. This reconfirms Charlotte Furth’s conclusion, developed in her study of cases of sex change in late imperial China, that gender mostly, but not completely, overshadowed sexuality in the definition of male and female (FURTH 1989, 18). As if to illustrate the primacy of cultural and social factors in defining gender, the text identifies Zhu Yingtai’s blushing as the actual revelation of her true gender. Blushing is typically a gendered response: a sign of feminine shame and embarrassment. It is the proper and expected reaction of a “beauty,” the epithet of decent femininity, when confronted with the other sex. Thus, it takes the recourse to the body to shatter Zhu Yingtai’s illusionary disguise.

CONCLUSION

The early stage of the Zhu Yingtai narrative, as represented by the account presumably dating from the ninth century, suggests a reading in which love between the sexes does not play any significant role. As I have shown, the narrative originally was a story of disrupted male companionship. It introduces the man’s failed recognition of Zhu Yingtai’s sex as the main motif. Through Zhu Yingtai’s retransformation into a woman, Liang Shanbo loses his male companion. Accordingly, in this version, Liang does not die of “lovesickness,” as in the later

versions. Zhu's disappearance in the tomb signifies her ultimate denial of female gender, as indicated by a motif introduced to Zhu Yingtai lore around the eleventh century, the act of shedding the female clothing, which was later fused with the butterfly motif to a symbol of transcendence.

The various forms of song-drama and prosimetric narrative played important roles in the further elaboration of the Zhu Yingtai narrative and particularly in the development of the basic ambiguity created by the cross-dressing theme. The psychology of cross-dressing, as suggested by this formative stage of Zhu Yingtai lore, is conditioned by the cross-dressing woman's fear of being detected and exposed under embarrassing or even threatening circumstances. All her efforts serve the creation and continuation of pretense. However, as a counter-movement, there develops a secondary anxiety about not being recognized as a woman by the man to whom she hopes to get married, and thus also her desire to reassert her sexuality. This perhaps also betrays an anticipation of the difficult, ultimately even impossible, transformation of the bond of sworn brotherhood, with its subliminal homo-eroticism, into a regular heterosexual husband-and-wife relationship.

On the semiotic level, the basic ambivalence of cross-dressing translates into two contradictory impulses: one covering up, the other one seeking to reveal. However, these two impulses are not given the same weight in the song-drama texts as compared to the prosimetric narratives. The song-drama, favoring the one side of the ambiguity, emphasizes Zhu Yingtai's efforts to reveal her female sex and to rectify her gender role. This has been dramatized in a long sequence of hints toward Liang Shanbo, by which she seeks to indirectly signal the unspeakable—that she is in fact a woman. The prosimetric narrative, on the other hand, focuses on the difficulties of the cross-dressing woman to keep up the disguise, and eventually exposes the cross-dressing woman as a physically deficient pseudo-male. Unlike in the case of Hua Mulan, whose warrior attire remains perfectly opaque, the translucency of Zhu Yingtai's male disguise is crucial to such gender comedy: the woman who poses as a man is ultimately betrayed by cultural as well as physical evidence, by the traces of femininity as well as the physical marks of the female sex that shine through the disguise. Thus, the earlier theme of recognition, or more accurately, of gender perception, was perpetuated and further elaborated on in both the song-drama and the prosimetric narrative. To late imperial Chinese audiences, the profound gender ambivalence as embodied by Zhu Yingtai apparently became a source of both anxiety and amusement.

It is important to note that Zhu Yingtai is not simply "betrayed by her body" (IDEMA 1998a, 110). Rather, her body is the site of the socio-cultural construction and definition of gender. The representation of Zhu Yingtai's female-to-male cross-dressing in song-drama and prosimetric narrative in fact served

the highlighting and performance of gender: gender comedy constituted its primary significance. By enacting a border crossing, it served the sharper definition (and hence reconfirmation) of masculinity and, by negative implication, also of femininity. This gender defining function, however, was only rendered possible by the basic translucency of her male disguise. Zhu Yingtai “transgresses the borderlines of gender toward power” (SOLOMON 1993, 146), but unlike the other notable female cross-dressers in the Chinese literary tradition, and particularly those in the scholar-beauty genre tradition (such as Huang Chonggu), she shies away from pursuing the way toward rank and office, and hence from entering the actual male domain of power, to which the school is merely the anteroom, as Liang Shanbo’s subsequent official career indicates.⁵¹ Her act of gender transgression served “to reinforce accepted social hierarchies by a controlled display of their inversion” (FURTH 1989, 24), but this is not to preclude that the Zhu Yingtai narrative, especially when enacted on stage, could also have served the subversive function of a fantasy of temporary excursion into the domain of masculinity, specifically aimed at a female audience. The two functions are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

It is significant that Zhu Yingtai, unlike some other female cross-dressing characters in literature, ends unhappily. Why is it ultimately impossible for her to find her bliss in marrying Liang Shanbo, her schoolmate? It is definitely not just for the trivial reason that Liang Shanbo arrives too late with his marriage proposal. The emotive power of this narrative, culminating in the scene at the tomb, strongly suggests a more profound obstacle to their marriage. The way the May Fourth folklorists viewed it, Zhu Yingtai fell victim to the oppressive ideology of Confucianism, which denied her the free choice of a husband. Yet they considered her death less a desperate gesture of self-sacrifice than a brave act of resistance. Another reading emphasized the socioeconomic background of the two protagonists: Zhu’s family is of high status and wealthy, whereas Liang’s is relatively poor and of low social standing. His hesitation to visit her at her home (while he still considers her his male peer) is put down to his shame about his own family background. Such a reading already emerged well before the twentieth century.⁵²

Such readings that sought to link the unfortunate outcome to “objective” socioeconomic factors, however, ignored the basic conflict of the narrative: Zhu Yingtai’s cross-dressing first of all signifies a problematic confusion of gender roles and ethical values. Her attempt to transform a male bond of schoolmates into a marriage relationship is bound to fail because it involves an impermissible confusion of ultimately incompatible roles and relations. Liang Shanbo’s failure, and in fact inability, to recognize Zhu Yingtai’s “true” sex directly results from this state of confusion, even though it is also conditioned by certain factors of gender perception. It may even be claimed that Liang Shanbo, at least in the

character's early conception, died from a "category crisis" (GARBER 1992, 16). This indicates the destabilizing potential of cross-dressing well beyond the realm of gender. Zhu Yingtai's desperate leap into the gaping mouth of the opening tomb, on the other hand, although conventionally celebrated as a proof of emotional attachment between the lovers, may as well be analyzed as an involuntary act of submission to male-centered gender values, which placed male companionship far above any marital relationship.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the International Conference on "Perception of Bodily Sensations and Emotions in South and East Asian Cultures," held in Venice, 27–28 May 2004. I gratefully acknowledge the valuable comments offered by Martin Lehnert, Paolo Santangelo, and Peter Knecht. I am solely responsible for any remaining flaws. The translations are my own unless otherwise noted. I should also like to mention the work of HONG Shuling (2004, 69–129), which deals with a prosimetric ballad version in a local Taiwanese style but draws on a large set of earlier prosimetric narratives for comparison. Therefore it studies partly the same material as the present article. Moreover, it is the only previous study of Zhu Yingtai lore to address gender issues. However, as Hong's book was published recently and only came to my attention after the present article was already finished, I have not included any detailed references to it.

2. For the story's reception in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Java (Indonesia), see QUINN 1987 and OEMOTO 1987; on the reception in Korea, see TROTCEVICH 1987, 97–99.

With regard to the character for *tai* in the name Zhu Yingtai, both the "long" form 臺 and "short" form 台 are used in different texts, the former appearing in formal texts written in classical Chinese, the latter in informal texts, such as those related to oral performance. Thus, the writing of this character is not a matter of traditional vs. simplified characters, but rather of formal vs. informal or "vulgar" (*su* 俗) writing.

3. The notable exceptions are the few pages in EBERHARD 1968, 440–41, HUNG 1985, 99–103, and IDEMA 1998a, 109–112. This lack of interest among Western scholars stands in stark contrast to the considerable number of translations into the major European languages of various versions of the Zhu Yingtai narrative: for example, YANG and YANG 1956, being an English translation of the Sichuanese song-drama (*chuanju* 川劇) *Liu yin ji* 柳蔭記 [Story of the willow shade]; BOESKEN 1984, being a German translation of the Taiwanese song-drama (*gezaixi* 歌仔戲) *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai*; ZHANG 1993, being an English translation of the 1954 novel (ZHANG 1955) by the famous novelist Zhang Henshui 張恨水 (1895–1967); and ZHAO 1998, being an English translation of the 1956 novel by the female writer Zhao Qingge 趙清閣 (b. 1914).

4. See the website www.zjyinxian.gov.cn/t/fjms/lz/. Compare the website www.liang-zhu.org, based in Shangyu district (Zhejiang province). Both websites accessed 1 November 2005.

5. For an article advocating the Ningbo region's claim, see ZHOU 2003; for the Yixing region's claim, see XU 2003; and for the Runan region's claim, see MA 1997.

6. For an up-to-date survey of the material situation of research into Qing-dynasty prosimetric narratives, see LIU and CHE 2003.

7. For useful introductions to the definition and taxonomy of prosimetric narratives, see MAIR 1997 and MCLAREN 2001, esp. 990–91.

8. LZWDQX, 329–58; compare LU 1955, 237–58. Referring to the distinction between *tanci* scripts for performance and *tanci* narratives for reading, as pointed out by SUNG 1993, the present text clearly belongs to the former type.

9. In *Shuang xian baojuan*, the religious element is limited to the ending: after Liang and Zhu have returned to life (the *huanhun* scene apparently being an addition that first occurred in the *tanci* genre), they achieve all the possible worldly success, but only to renounce it in the end and practice Buddhist philanthropy and self-cultivation. For the text of *Shuang xian baojuan*, based on a manuscript version, see LZWDQX, 297–328. Several more *baojuan* (or more accurately, *xuanjuan*) scripts rendering the Zhu Yingtai narrative (or some part of it) have been included in ZHANG 1994, 34: 381–495, and 37: 121–378. However, I have not included them in the present discussion.

10. LU 1955, 55–105; not included in LZWDQX. The *guci* form of chantefable began in the seventeenth century and spread all over Northern China. Prior to the twentieth century, hardly any of these texts were ever put to print. The performance and writing of this text is therefore likely to have preceded by far its printing. For a summary introduction to the *guci* genre, see SHAHAR 1998, 123–25. The choice of the “Liang-Zhu” subject matter would seem rather untypical for the genre, “which features courageous warriors and invincible deities only” (SHAHAR 1998, 124).

11. ZHOU 2000, 88. In 1926, the story had already been turned into one of the early silent movies in China’s film history. The 1963 movie adaptation of the Huangmei 黄梅 (central Anhui region) song-drama version became a huge success in Taiwan.

12. See the entries in the collections by Xu Yingqiu 徐應秋 (*jinshi* 1616) and Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814); XU 1993, 10.1a–5b, and ZHAO 1990, 42.761–62, respectively.

13. For a discussion of some cases of professional female impersonators and their treatment by Qing law, see SOMMER 2000, 78–83; for an analysis of the notorious case of Sang Chong 桑冲, see ZEITLIN 1993, 98–116.

14. For a brief survey of the cross-dressing theme in pre-modern Chinese literature, see ZEITLIN 1993, 116–25; for the modern period, see McDOUGALL 2003, 123–26. On the tradition of male impersonation by female actors on the drama stage, see CHOU 1997; for the reverse, the tradition of female impersonation on stage, see TIAN 2000; compare VOLPP 1996. For a translated and commented example of a female playwright’s drama on the topic of cross-dressing, see VOLPP 2001; compare HUA 1998. For a multi-faceted survey of cross-dressing phenomena across cultural histories (but mostly Western cultures), see BULLOUGH and BULLOUGH 1993. More specifically on female-to-male cross-dressing in early modern Europe, see DEKKER and POOL 1989.

15. There are numerous accounts of the formative history of the Zhu Yingtai legend. The earliest and therefore “classic” survey of the early sources is QIAN 1930. Among the most accurate accounts is Zhang Henshui’s piece, which served as the final chapter to this popular writer’s modern rewriting of the story in novel format (ZHANG 1955, 251–58). See also ZENG 1973, 121–29.

16. ZHAI 1751, 37.11a–b; LIANG 1981, *xu* 6.353. A quotation of another relatively early version (for example, not including the butterfly transformation) with a similar wording is found in a collection of notes (preface 1573) by the late Ming scholar Tian Yiheng 田藝蘅 (TIAN 1992, 21.393). This version also includes a valuable reference to the contemporary popularity of the Zhu Yingtai story on the *zaju* drama stage.

17. See the standard edition ZHANG and HOU 1983, which is based on a late Ming edition. However, the missing of the entry is not surprising in the light of the editorial principle, as stated by the compiler of the *Xuan shi zhi*, to strictly limit the scope of his collection

to accounts referring to Tang dynasty events, whereas the “Zhu Yingtai” entry includes a historical reference to the Eastern Jin dynasty (LI 1993, 833).

18. On Xie An (320–385), see FANG 1974, 7: 79.2072–77.

19. MOU 2004, 179: “For men, loyalty entails faithfulness first to their ruler and second to their country. For women, ...loyalty dwells above all with their husbands.”

20. Compare WANG 1977. The motif of the woman’s entering the tomb of her beloved one is also found in the introductory story to the entry “Huashan ji: er shi wu shou” 華山讖: 二十五首 [Mount Hua in the environs of the capital: 25 poems], as quoted in GUO 1979, 2: 46.669; compare LI 1981, 4: 161.1162, the tale “Nanxu shiren” 南徐士人 [The scholar from Nanxu]. The events referred to in the account “Huashan ji” are dated 423, hence later than those in the “Zhu Yingtai” narrative. Moreover, despite the certain similarity of its ending, “Huashan ji” does not include any cross-dressing motif.

21. HENRY 1987, 10. See this entire article for a good survey of the concept of recognition and its broad implications.

22. On male bonding, see MANN 2000 and the contributions to the AHR Forum introduced by this article.

23. SHI 1268, 27.10a–b. For a mid-Qing quotation of the *Piling zhi* entry with a partly different wording, see WU 1788, 2.14a–b.

24. The motif of postmortem transformation into a butterfly apparently began no earlier than the late Tang or the early Song (JIAO 1995).

25. WEN and WANG 1686; as quoted in LZWDGG, 289–90.

26. Other accounts date the events underlying the story to the Yonghe 永和 era (345–356). However, the historical setting in the Ning kang 寧康 era (373–375) is more common.

27. Another account describes how the silk garments transform into butterflies and fly away. See Shao Jinbiao’s “Zhu Yingtai xiaozhuan” 祝英臺小傳 [Short biography of Zhu Yingtai], as quoted in WU 1882, 9.14b. In one version by Feng Menglong the garments are being burnt as a sacrifice, and the ashes transform into butterflies (FENG 1986, 309). The author attributed the butterfly transformation episode to the “aficionados” (*haoshizhe* 好事者). Feng’s vernacular version offers the following description: “Her clothes, which followers in the procession tried to grab, flew off in pieces, like skin sloughed off by a cicada” (FENG 2000, 491; compare FENG 1991, 417). The comparison to the metamorphosis of the cicada is also suggestively close to that of the butterfly.

28. A shrine (*miao* 廟) is also mentioned in ZHANG 1177, 2.26a–b. However, the entry did not specify that the shrine was exclusively dedicated to Liang Shanbo.

29. HUNG 1985, 101. He Xuejun interpreted the emphasis on the loyalty theme against the historical backdrop of the threat posed by the Jurchens (Jin 金), which raised the loyalty to the Song throne to the supreme virtue (HE 1995, 41–47).

30. FENG 1991, 415; 2000, 489. Compare the different translation in ZEITLIN 1993, 258, n. 56: “For now, I’ll just tell you about that really weird, really bizarre sort of false male who lacks the proper tool, a real woman who binds her hair in a man’s turban.”

31. In its earliest version, this legend is known from the two ballads (*yuefu* 樂府), “Mulan shi er shou” 木蘭詩二首 [Two poems on Mulan], included in GUO 1979, 2: 25.373–75; for translations see WALEY 1923, 128–30, and ALLEN 1996, 344–46. For discussions of the Mulan legend, see ALLEN 1996 and LAI 1999, 81–88.

32. LI 1981, 8: 367.2924–25; for a translation see IDEMA 1998b, 554–55. A now lost song-drama by a Yuan author, entitled *Chuntao ji* 春桃記 [The spring peaches], also dealt with this subject matter.

33. *Nü zhuangyuan ci huang de feng* 女狀元辭鳳得鳳 [A top female graduate refuses a phoenix-hen and obtains a phoenix-rooster]; and *Ci Mulan ti fu cong jun* 雌木蘭替父從軍

[A female Mulan replaces her father and goes to war], both belonging to the cycle *Si sheng yuan* 四聲猿 [Four cries of the gibbon]. For contrasting discussions of these two plays, including relevant comments on the treatment of the cross-dressing theme, see IDEMA 1998b and HSIUNG 1998.

34. For a discussion of extant texts of early (that is, Yuan- and Ming-dynasty) Zhu Yingtai song-drama, see YAN 1953, 101–108.

35. The only song-drama text mentioned in any Ming-dynasty listing is a lost *chuanqi*, entitled *Mudan ji* 牡丹記 [The story of the peony], by one Zhu Chunlin 朱春霖 (Lü 1959, 248).

36. Excerpt from the late-Ming drama selection *Huizuan Yuan pu nanqu jiu gong zheng-shi* 彙纂元譜南曲九宮正始 [Collected excerpts of southern tunes scored in the Yuan with nine tones and corrected sounds], LZWDXY, 1.

37. In the vernacular narratives of the late Ming and early Qing, there are some telling examples of women being molested and suspected of prostitution while traveling alone: for example, the fourth story in the first series of Ling Mengchu's 凌濛初 (1580–1644) collection *Paian jingqi* 拍案驚奇 [Slapping the table in amazement]; and chapters 40–41 in Wu Jingzi's 吳敬梓 (1701–1754) novel *Rulin waishi* 儒林外史 [Unofficial history of the scholars].

38. The recurring element “Ninth” (*Jiu* 九) in alternative names for Zhu Yingtai (Jiuniang 九娘, Jiuhong 九紅, and so on), if interpreted as a *paihang* 排行 name indicating the birth sequence in a lineage, would suggest a rather large number of older brothers (or cousins). However, the number nine might also be reconsidered in terms of the numerology according to the *Yijing* 易經 [Classic of changes], where it is the *yang* 陽 (that is, male) number par excellence. Accordingly, it might also be interpreted as a marker of gender reversal.

39. This four-act song-drama (LZWDXY, 18–28), preserved as a late-Qing manuscript, might have been indirectly based on the lost Yuan-dynasty work *Zhu Yingtai si jia Liang Shanbo* 祝英台死嫁梁山伯 [Zhu Yingtai marries Liang Shanbo upon death], by the famous playwright Bai Pu 白樸 (1227–1306).

40. It was detected in a late Ming selection of drama excerpts for actors to practice, entitled *Chantou bailian* 纏頭百練 [A hundred drills for distinguished singers] (QIAN 1956, 12–17; LZWDXY, 9–13).

41. Excerpt preserved in the compilation *Qiuye yuexin qin tianxia shishang nanbei xindiao* 秋夜月新鉞天下時尚南北新調 [New melodies from north and south fashionable all over the empire, printed by Full-Moon-in-an-Autumn-Night]; LZWDXY, 2–4.

42. Due to its learned allusions and classical diction, Yan Dunyi regarded this excerpt as a product of distorting appropriation of the popular tradition by high literati culture (YAN 1953, 107).

43. Another excerpt from *Qiuye yuexin qin tianxia shishang nanbei xindiao*; LZWDXY, 5–8.

44. “Ying Bo xiang bie hui jia,” QIAN 1956, 18–21; LZWDXY, 14–17.

45. Quite unlike other contemporary Chinese scholars of folklore (such as Lu Gong, see further below), Yan Dunyi considered such obscenities as a mark of authentic, uncensored folk literature.

46. The extent of the editor's “revision” (*xiuzheng* 修正) of passages he considered indecent or otherwise problematic remains unclear. Zhou Jingshu included in LZWDQX most of the prosimetric texts covered by Lu Gong as well as several others more. Apparently he was cautious enough not to copy directly from Lu's compilation, but to go back to the original texts.

47. HUNG 1985, 102–103: “[T]he folk were more interested in episodes from [Zhu Yingtai's] daily life than any moral issues. For instance, Zhu Yingtai's careful attempts to

avoid showing any sign of womanhood in a men's school captivated the imaginations of the country folk far more than the issue of chastity." McLAREN 2001, 1002: "[I]t is the raunchy details that most delight the audience."

48. For example, in the *Yueju* version, the element of doubt remains marginal and does not provide any counterweight to the broadly elaborated "Farewell" scene (LZWDXY, 104–106).

49. In the *guci* version, following the text's regional affiliation, Zhu Yingtai's family is said to live in Dongjing 東京 (Henan province), but the place of study is nevertheless Hangzhou. In some later adaptations, probably due to the introduction of Confucius as teacher, Qufu 曲阜 (Shandong province), his historical provenance, was made the place of instruction.

50. Compare the remark in GULIK 1961, 230; and the discussion of the question of nakedness in JULLIEN 2000.

51. As an exception, the version of the Zhu Yingtai story found among the folk narratives written in women's script (*nüshu* 女書), reserved for a female audience, included statements of female ambition as they are not found in any other versions of the story. See LIU and HU 1994, 311–12, and IDEMA 1998a, 110; compare LUO 2002, 45–48.

52. Shao Jinbiao, "Zhu Yingtai xiaozhuan," as quoted in WU 1882, 9.14b.

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ABBREVIATIONS

LZWD

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Individual volume titles

LZWDGG

Liang-Zhu wenhua daguan: gushi geyao juan 故事歌謠卷 [Tale and song].

LZWDQX

Liang-Zhu wenhua daguan: quyi xiaoshuo juan 曲藝小說卷 [Folk art performance and fiction].

LZWDXY

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