

REFERENCES FOR TRANSCRIPTION AND ABBREVIATION

ROMANIZATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

1. Chinese: The WADE-GILES system, or the *pinyin* system.
2. Japanese: The Rōmaji system in *Kenkyūsha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*, 5th ed., Tokyo, 1980.
3. Korean: The McCUNE-REISCHAUER system, "The Romanization of the Korean Language," *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 29 (Seoul, 1939): 1-55; 38 (1961): 121-28.
4. Manchu: The MÖLLENDORFF system, in P. G. von Möllendorff, *A Manchu Grammar*, Shanghai, 1892, and in Jerry Norman, *A Concise Manchu-English Lexicon*, Seattle, 1978.
5. Mongolian: The system found in A. MOSTART, *Dictionnaire ordos*, III, "Index des mots du mongol écrit et du mongol ancien," Peiping, 1944, and in Nicholas Poppe, *Grammar of Written Mongolian*, Wiesbaden, 1954.
6. Russian: The system used by the Library of Congress.
7. Sanskrit: The system found in W. D. WHITNEY, *Sanskrit Grammar*, Cambridge, 1931.
8. Tibetan: The system found in Turrell Wylie, "A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription," *HJAS* 22 (1959).

ABBREVIATIONS FOR SELECTED OFTEN-CITED WESTERN JOURNALS

<i>AM</i>	<i>Asia Major</i>
<i>BEFEO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient</i>
<i>BMFEA</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>CAJ</i>	<i>Central Asiatic Journal</i>
<i>CLEAR</i>	<i>Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews</i>
<i>FEQ</i>	<i>Far Eastern Quarterly</i>
<i>HJAS</i>	<i>Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal asiatique</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JAS</i>	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Japanese Studies</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>LIC</i>	<i>Late Imperial China</i>
<i>MN</i>	<i>Monumenta Nipponica</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>Monumenta Serica</i>
<i>TP</i>	<i>T'oung pao</i>

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Article Abstracts

ANDREA S. GOLDMAN analyzes a literary genre known as “flower registers” (*hua pu* 花譜), which chronicled the charms and talents of the cross-dressing boy actors of Qing dynasty Beijing. These texts, she shows, were informed by the rhetoric of literati writings about taste and distinction, the eroticizing discourses of courtesan-connoisseurship literature, and the nostalgia of urban memoirs. *Huapu* authors genuinely appreciated the players of the metropolitan demimonde, but they also found that the genre offered rich parables for articulating their concerns with talent concealed and virtue unblemished. By writing *huapu* they could distinguish themselves as true connoisseurs—different from the moneyed patrons of the playhouses—and reinvent a status distinction that was being eroded in the socioeconomic sphere. These texts are thus equally revealing of actors and their author-aficionados.

The popular and influential *Śūraṅgama sūtra* receives a fresh look in JAMES A. BENN’s study. Although Japanese, Chinese, and European scholars have firmly established the scripture to be an eighth-century Chinese Buddhist apocryphon, its contents and their parallels in non-Buddhist Chinese sources invite further exploration. Benn notes some connections with other Chan-related apocrypha, such as the *Vajrasamādhi sūtra* and the *Yuanjue jing*, but his main focus is on tracing ideas in the *Śūraṅgama* back to works of secular literature that were well known in Tang China. Some passages were clearly influenced by Chinese, rather than Indian, ideas about certain natural phenomena, animals, and demonic beings. The *Śūraṅgama sūtra*, Benn argues, was a sophisticated attempt to create an entirely new hybrid cosmology that would attract the interest of the monastic and lay intelligentsia in China.

HOK-LAM CHAN examines the symbols of legitimacy that various anti-Yuan forces used. Han Liner and Xu Shouhui, two competing anti-Mongol leaders of the White Lotus–Maitreya society, adopted the name of the “Song” dynasty (960–1176) and its Fire patron to legitimate their state. Zhu Yuanzhang also favored the Song symbols while he was serving in Han’s regime. When founding his own dynasty, however, he

adopted the name “Ming” and the Fire symbol traceable to Pure Land Buddhism. Then, to secure his new legitimacy, he obliterated traces of his former subservience to Han Liner and covered up Xu Shouhui’s Song state in the *Yuan shi*. This tampering of pre-Ming evidence, Chan concludes, has misguided modern historians, particularly Wu Han, who incorrectly claimed that the anti-Yuan rebellions and the dynastic name “Ming” were inspired by Manichaeism.

In her study of political movements that “opened up the way for prestigious posts” (*t’ongch’ōng* 通清), SUN JOO KIM focuses on a tension in the social status system of the Chosŏn period (1392–1910). The state and its hereditary ruling elites (*yangban*) tried to protect their privileged access to high bureaucratic posts by pushing aside their competitors: the sons of *yangban* by concubines, administrative clerks, technical specialists, and northerners. Yet, the Confucian meritocratic values, which the Chosŏn dynasty itself upheld, provided these disadvantaged status groups with strong arguments for demanding that the court improve their social and political position. Analyzing memorials through which the marginalized status groups asked the court to abolish discriminatory policies, Kim shows that their commitment to pedigree as a determinant of status constrained and fragmented their anti-discrimination efforts.

Actors and Aficionados in Qing Dynasty Texts of Theatrical Connoisseurship

ANDREA S. GOLDMAN

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Ever since the “Orchids of Yan” were registered, chronicling tales of gay affairs,
Year upon year, time after time, a new version is published.
Be it *New Poems on Listening to Youth* or *A Record of Viewing Flowers* –
To think that money is actually paid for such frivolous rubbish!

譜得燕蘭韻事傳，年年歲歲出新編。《聽春新詠》《看花記》，濫調浮詞竟賣錢。

Dumen zhuzhici 都門竹枝詞 (1814)

Sitting in the balcony of the playhouse it’s so easy to lose one’s heart;
The “old roués” are flush with cash and puffed up with pride.
Hoping for nothing but a smile bequeathed from behind the curtain,
Even thousands in gold can’t buy them the joys of the “exit-door” side.

茶園樓上最消魂，老斗錢多氣象渾。但得隔簾微獻笑，千金難買下場門。

Caozhu yichuan 草珠一串 (1809)

OPERA wielded a seductive power over its audiences in late imperial China. As revealed in these two Chinese-style limericks, or “bamboo-branch ditties” (*zhuzhici* 竹枝詞), which were recorded early in the nineteenth century, the allure of the world of theater and the charm of its performers could lead literate men to squander their

This essay has benefited enormously from the critical advice of mentors, colleagues, friends, and family. For their incisive readings, I owe a debt of gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers of the essay, as well as to David Johnson, Keith McMahon, Tobie Meyer-Fong, James Polacheck,

money on doggerel written in praise of actors and could turn wealthy men into pitiful fools for love.

The first limerick above offers a tongue-in-cheek assessment of texts known as “flower registers” (*huapu* 花譜), texts that evaluated the talents of opera actors.¹ *Huapu* came into vogue in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Part biography, part display of poetic virtuosity, and part assortment of trivia on the demimonde of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Beijing, this genre of writing primarily recorded the skills and exploits of actors who performed the *dan* 旦 role, that is, boy actors who cross-dressed to play the part of young women characters in *kunju* 崑劇 and other regional styles of opera. This particular limerick not only identifies the *huapu* genre but also explicitly refers to the first text of its type, *Yanlan xiaopu* 燕蘭小譜 (A brief register of the orchids of Yan), which was written by Wu Changyuan 吳長元 and printed in 1785. The term Yan refers to Yanjing 燕京, the name commonly used for the capital city of Qing dynasty Beijing because it is located in what was once the territory of the ancient feudal state of Yan. “Orchid” (*lan*) both specifically refers to the central actor featured in *Yanlan xiaopu* (who was noted for his paintings of orchids on folding fans) and alludes more generally to the “flowers”—the cross-dressed boy actors—of the metropolitan stage. Although the limerick is quite dismissive of the quality of writing in *huapu*, its mocking tone nevertheless reveals the popularity of these texts, which were published “year upon year” and apparently went for a price.

The second limerick caricatures a certain type of opera fan, the “old roué” (*lao dou* 老斗), perhaps better translated into more colloquial English as “sugar daddy.”² The image of the *lao dou* is that of a theatrical patron who has a surfeit of money and time on his hands; he

Matthew Sommer, and the late Frederic Wakeman, Jr. Much-needed outsider perspective was generously provided by Rick Bell, Martha Burns, Saverio Giovacchini, Hilary Jones, Clare Lyons, Lisa Mar, Thomas Zeller, and, especially, Lauren Goldman Marshall.

¹ *Dumen zhuzhici* 都門竹枝詞, in Lu Gong 路工, ed., *Qingdai Beijing zhuzhici* 清代北京竹枝詞 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1962), p. 39.

² De Shuoting 得碩亭, *Caozhu yichuan* 草珠一串, in Lu Gong, ed., *Qingdai Beijing zhuzhici*, p. 50. The term *lao dou* designates a wealthy patron of courtesans or actors. Legend has it that the term is a holdover from the patois of official entertainment culture during the Tang dynasty in which the emperor was called *yaigong* 崖公, and his pleasure was referred to as *xiandou* 蝦斗. See Cui Lingqin 催令欽, *Jiaofang ji* 教坊記, in Wang Yunwu 王雲五, ed., *Jiaofang ji ji qita jiu zhong* 教坊記及其他九種 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1939).

indulges in the pleasures of the theater, including the purchase of intimate relations with boy actors and entertainment after performances in the winehouses ringing the commercial playhouse district. Not necessarily advanced in actual years, he is old relative to the actors he ogles; and the “old” in this appellation serves more as an honorific title (if sometimes laced with sarcasm) than a descriptive modifier. Often too, the *lao dou* is depicted as not entirely “in-the-know” when it comes to evaluating the quality of dramatic performances. Rather, he is a bit of a cultural philistine, using money to substitute for what he lacks in taste and refinement, and prone to being swayed by immediate sensory perceptions such as pretty faces and revealing gestures. The stereotypical “old roué” also has a penchant for sitting in the seats facing the onstage “exit door” (*xiachang men* 下場門), what we would call the stage-left balcony seats. Within the commercial playhouse, these particular seats were highly coveted because they afforded patrons the best angle from which to exchange meaningful glances (diagonally across the stage) with the actors as they parted the curtain to enter the stage from the “entrance door” (*shangchang men* 上場門), upstage right. As one mid-nineteenth-century *huapu* author put it: “The most expensive . . . seat is the second one in the ‘exit-door box,’ as that is a convenient spot from which to intercept a sign of the heart or the wink of an eye sent as [an actor] pushes aside the curtain to enter. As a bamboo-branch ditty [says]: ‘A dizzying glance flies to the balcony above; it clinches a date for dinner tonight.’”³

The image of the opera fan, whether it be the licentious *lao dou* or the more sophisticated connoisseur, cannot be separated from *huapu*, which captured, recorded, and sometimes also distorted these characterizations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theater patrons. In fact, much of what is known about opera performance in Beijing during the Qing—about actors, about styles of singing and acting, about management of commercial playhouses, or about commonly performed plays—is culled from *huapu*. Chinese-language scholarship on Qing

³ Yang Maojian 楊懋建, *Menghua suobu* 夢華瑣簿, in Zhang Cixi 張次溪, ed., *Beiping liyuan zhuzhici huibian* 北平梨園竹枝詞叢編, in Zhang Cixi, ed. and comp., *Qingdai Yandu liyuan shiliao: zhengxu bian* 清代燕都梨園史料—正續編 (rpt., Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1988) [hereafter *QJLS*], p. 353. In Qing-era playhouses, it was considered desirable to sit far away from the din of the orchestra (stage right) and the sounds and smells of the crowds in the pit (center front).

dynasty opera has assiduously mined *huapu* for nuggets of historical fact but has largely ignored them as a literary genre or as a source illuminating the cultural practices of the entertainment demimonde.⁴ A recent English-language study by Wu Cuncun has relied upon *huapu* to reconstruct a history of same-sex male desire in the Qing.⁵ But whether writing theater history or social history, scholars have generally looked through—but never at—the *huapu*.⁶ Here, in contrast, I treat the literary claims of the *huapu* seriously so as to understand how they work as texts of theatrical connoisseurship; by taking a close look at the various discourses constituting *huapu*, I aim to gain a more nuanced reading of the social and cultural practices of metropolitan theater in the Qing. The *huapu* turn out to be equally revealing of actors and their author-aficionados, opening a window onto a middling stratum of literati culture in the late empire.

The production of *huapu* texts came in two waves. During the second half of the eighteenth century, the circulation of *huapu* in manuscript and print emerged in tandem with the maturation of a vibrant commercial playhouse culture in the Qing capital. Testament to a metropolitan theater that had become—in the words of its fans—“foremost throughout the realm” (*jia yu tianxia* 甲於天下), these texts were a phenomenon almost exclusive to the capital; although the authors of such texts came from various locales throughout the empire, with few exceptions all *huapu* or *huapu*-like memoirs wrote about the actors and demimonde of Beijing.⁷ During the mid-nineteenth century, the cata-

⁴ For western-language social histories of Qing opera that make use of *huapu*, see Colin P. Mackerras, *The Rise of the Peking Opera, 1770–1870: Social Aspects of the Theatre in Manchu China* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); and Roger Darrobers, *Opéra de Pékin: Théâtre et société à la fin de l'empire sino-mandchou* (Paris: Bleu de Chine, 1998).

⁵ Wu Cuncun, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (New York: Routledge, 2004), esp. Chapter 5; see also Wu Cuncun 吳存存, *Ming Qing shehui xing'ai fengqi* 明清社會性愛風氣 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2000), esp., pp. 179–97.

⁶ Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities*, pp. 134–35. For one recent critique of the elision of the sex industry in histories of Qing theater, see Yao Shuyi 么書儀, “Xiqu shi xushuzhong de Beijing ‘tangzi’” 戲曲史敘述中的北京“堂子,” *Da xiju luntan* 大戲劇論壇 2 (2004): 47–60.

⁷ For the claim that the theater was “nowhere better than in the capital” (*mosheng yu jinghua* 莫盛於京華), see Xiao Tiedi Daoren 小鐵笛道人, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji* 日下看花記 (1803), in *QJLS*, p. 55. See also Lu Eting 陸萼庭, *Kunju yanchu shigao* 崑劇演出史稿 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), p. 223. The most notable exceptions are the two long *juan* on the theater of Yangzhou and its performers (many of whom also performed in the capital) in Li Dou 李斗, *Yangzhou huafang lu* 揚州畫舫錄 (1794; rpt., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), esp. *juan* 5, 9.

clysmic crises of civil war and foreign aggression slowed the tide of flower register writings. When *huapu* production picked up speed again in the 1870s, such texts began to shift their focus from commentary on cross-dressing *dan* actors in mostly *kunju*-centered commercial opera to critical assessment of a wider array of theatrical role types and increasing attention to northern styles of performance. My readings here are based on the extant *huapu* compiled between 1785 and the first half of the nineteenth century, the first wave of *huapu* production. These texts, especially, capture a waggish—even permissive—mood that is rarely associated with Qing intellectual culture, and for this reason, too, they are worthy of consideration.⁸

Central to texts of connoisseurship in general and *huapu* in particular is the concept of evaluative classification (*pin* 品), which was used to rank everything from poetry to people. I begin, therefore, with a brief discussion of this concept and the history of its use, showing how allusions to *pin* enabled Qing theater enthusiasts to position themselves in debates about taste and distinction. Next, I place the Qing dynasty *huapu* in the tradition of evaluative biographies of entertainers that dates back to Sun Qi's 孫檠 late ninth-century *Beili zhi* 北里志 (Chronicles of the northern quarter). Writers of *huapu* engaged in what I call a “borrowed discourse,” invoking the language, imagery, and tone of earlier texts on courtesans and actresses to assess adolescent males specializing in female roles. In appropriating the rhetorical strategies used for courtesan entertainers to record the charms of boy actors, *huapu* writers signaled their perception of opera players (especially the *dan* roles) as purveyors of erotic as well as theatrical spectacle. And yet, I hesitate to cast these chroniclers of the theater in the role of the libertine. *Huapu* writers stress that they were seeking sensibility—not sex—and their deft rhetorical positioning signifies their awareness of the stigma that was associated with the sex trade in boy actors. But in addition to eroticism, the connoisseurs found something deeply appealing about the female gendering of the *dan* actors: the combined vulnerability and resilience of the imagined feminine subject position spoke to their own senses of self.

⁸ For further analysis of this shift, see Andrea S. Goldman, “Opera in the City: Theatrical Performance and Urbanite Aesthetics in Beijing, 1770–1900” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2005), esp. Part 3. On the new cultural sensibilities of Peking opera performance at the end of the Qing, see also Mackerras, *Rise of the Peking Opera*.

Huapu also blended the connoisseurship literature about courtesans with the city guidebook genre. The latter too had a venerable history of commenting on the delights of urban theatrical spectacles, beginning with Meng Yuanlao's 孟元老 1147 memoir of Kaifeng, *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄 (A dream of splendors past in the Eastern Capital). On the one hand, like guidebooks, *huapu* served a practical function. They were discursive maps of one segment of the city—the entertainment district; and they could enable would-be audiences to locate the places and people associated with opera in the capital. In this guise, the *huapu* writer acted as both ethnographer and tour guide, brokering insider knowledge of the metropolitan theater world to outsiders seeking a way in. On the other hand, *huapu* often exuded a strong sense of nostalgia for cherished places and entertainments. The sentimental, wistful quality of such writings reveals as much about the author and his perceived relation to his object of study as it does about the city and the world of theater itself.

For all the attention that *huapu* paid to actors and demimonde gossip, the star of such texts was the author. He (and it was always a he) was the opera fan *par excellence*, the true cognoscente. Through his writings about the theater scene in the capital, he could directly comment on his aesthetic choices, leaving a record for both his peers and posterity. The voices of these opera enthusiasts ring out the most clearly, whereas the interests and opinions of other patrons and the actors are muted and mediated by the texts that purport to represent them. The writer is often a sojourner to Beijing (frequently from Jiangnan or places farther south), and his prefatory remarks usually trace his trajectory from neophyte to cognoscente. Often depicted as having rejected (or been rejected by) the “official life,” the connoisseur drowns his disappointment in obsession with the theater. His dismal prospects in public life—resulting from a lack of recognition of his talent—move him to identify with the lowly actor and, in part, drive his interest in recognizing, ranking, and recording the skills of performers. The connoisseur is concerned with both the artistic prowess and the physical charms of the actors he catalogs, but he insists that his appreciation of talent distinguishes him from less sophisticated fans.

His protestations to the contrary, the *huapu* connoisseur was nonetheless also clearly fascinated with the seedier side of the opera world, and justified this interest by relegating it to ethnographer-like com-

ments about the taste of the *lao dou*, whom he often characterized as “great patrons” (*hao ke* 豪客) or “wealthy merchants” (*fu gu* 富賈). The *huapu* writer's distinctions between self and *lao dou* betray an unease about class and status, which was most likely fostered by the manner in which such connoisseurs partook of the theater. This literature of opera connoisseurship was a byproduct of the mid-to-late Qing commercial playhouse. Unlike their late Ming literary exemplars, who mostly experienced and wrote about the theater in private settings, the men who chronicled eighteenth- and nineteenth-century opera had to share their indulgences with anyone who could afford the ticket price. This troubled them. By their own accounts, they shared the playhouses with men whom they considered their social and cultural inferiors. Through appropriation and transference of the world of performance to the page, these connoisseurs were reinventing a status distinction that was being eroded in the socioeconomic sphere.

THE GENRE

The introductory passage to Wu Changyuan's *Yanlan xiaopu* combines an uncanny mix of whimsy and precision. He writes:

Orchids are not native to Yan, and yet the *Zuo zhuan* records that Consort Ji of Yan had a dream about an orchid in which she was told: “The orchid is the lord of fragrance and so men are won over to it.” Thus we know that the intrinsic virtue of the orchid has been recognized both in the north and in the south. It was midsummer of 1783; [the actor] Wang Xiangyun had a penchant for making ink-brush paintings of orchids. Because he painted several stems of orchids on a folding fan, I, together with some like-minded friends, took a sudden fancy to elaborate upon this gay amusement by making a record of it. My idle merriment not yet abated, I further culled together lore on the best actors to create *A Brief Register of the Orchids of Yan*. This work covers altogether fifty-four actors from 1774 to the present and records 138 poems. It also has a total of fifty entries of miscellaneous verses, anecdotes, and hearsay. It begins with the poems on painting orchids in recognition of its original inspiration. It follows with the entries on the “Orchids of Yan,” which praise the various actors. It ends with the miscellaneous verses, which are invested with sardonic words of caution.⁹

In this recollection of a summer's lark, Wu's pleasures of the theater and the literary games of polite society appear to be reined in and ordered by classical allusion, meticulous detail, and numerical particularity.

⁹ Wu Changyuan 吳長元, *Yanlan xiaopu* 燕蘭小譜, in *QJLS*, p. 3.

In style, tone, and content, this “register” of opera actors ushered in a subgenre of connoisseurship writing about performers, especially about actors playing the *dan* role. The three main features of *Yanlan xiaopu* that he mentions—the use of poetry for describing actors, the ranking of highly skilled actors, and the recording of trivia and gossip about contemporary theater—would be borrowed in part or in full by literate fans writing about theater up through the early twentieth century.

The *huapu* was a relative latecomer within a long-standing tradition of connoisseurship texts that claimed to rank and evaluate things and people. The authors of *huapu* consciously positioned themselves as the inheritors of that tradition through the use of literary allusion in the prefaces, preambles, and colophons of their texts. As poets, “collectors,” and ethnographers of the commercial theater, they presented themselves as the arbiters of good taste. Their writings were virtuoso performances on the page for like-minded opera cognoscenti, and it is clear that many of the *huapu* were in dialogue with each other. Simultaneously they looked outward, capturing the social reality of urban performance; looked inward, writing for the small coterie of social peers who also composed and read such texts; and looked backward, drawing upon a literary tradition that legitimized an interest in things both frivolous and contemporary. I will discuss each of these three perspectives in turn, beginning with the look backward.

Ranking, Taste, and the Concept of pin

Huapu writers signaled their position within the tradition of connoisseurship through the key conceptual words and generic styles they chose for their writings. One such concept was that of *pin*, which, as in the English word “taste,” refers both to the ability to distinguish flavor and to aesthetic judgment (both meanings are rendered in Chinese as *pinwei* 品味). Unlike the English “taste,” however, *pin* has a broader range of meanings having to do with ranking, classification, and evaluation. It is the combination of aesthetic taste, ranking, and evaluative judgment that gives the term *pin* potency in connoisseurship discourses.

Originally associated with grading men for office, the term *pin* had, by the Six Dynasties, become an important conceptual rubric for categorizing and ranking poets and artists, poems and paintings in lit-

erary and artistic criticism. As late as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, allusions to the seminal texts of *pin* literary criticism could still be found in flower registers, although the immediate precursor to late imperial *huapu* literary conventions were books that evaluated “literati things,” which by the Southern Song had come to include poetry, calligraphy, painting, and other artifacts of scholarly material culture.¹⁰ During the Song, catalogs or “registers” (*pu* 譜) of fashionable collectibles—perfumes, bronzes, wines, rocks, and various kinds of flowers and plants—proliferated. Inherent in the hierarchical distinctions of these catalogs was an expression of literati taste, captured in the evaluation and classification of “sensual things” (*youwu* 尤物).¹¹ The Song horticultural catalogs are the original flower registers, the textual references that Qing chroniclers of actors implicitly invoked when calling their own writings “flower registers.”

Beginning in the mid Ming, the concept of *pin* underwent a new development, which entailed the re-displacement of *pin*-style evaluation back onto humans, except that the subjects of appraisal were now people at the lowest end of the social hierarchy—entertainers. This reorientation of *pin* classification from things to “playthings” was facilitated by the lexical slippage between precious things and beautiful women within the Chinese literary imagination. The slippage is graphically captured in the expression *youwu*, which, in both its meanings, figured prominently in the various genres of “writings on things” (*yongwu* 詠物). This literary legacy, then, paved the way for the multiple metaphorical meanings of the term flower to refer to women, especially

¹⁰ Sikong Tu’s 司空圖 *Ershisi shipin* 二十四詩品, with its categories of poetic description rendered in verse, is particularly influential in setting styles and contributing critical vocabulary to latter-day exercises in literary and other types of connoisseurship. On the poetic form of Sikong Tu’s aesthetics, see, for instance, Maureen A. Robertson, “. . . To Convey What Is Precious: Ssu-K’ung T’u’s Poetics and *The Erh-shih-ssu Shih-P’in*,” in David C. Buxbaum and Frederick W. Mote, eds., *Transition and Permanence: Chinese History and Culture* (Hong Kong: Cathay Press Limited, 1972), p. 332; Pauline Yu, “Ssu-k’ung T’u’s *Shih-P’in*: Poetic Theory in Poetic Form,” in Ronald C. Miao, ed., *Studies in Chinese Poetry and Poetics* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, Inc., 1978), 1:97–98; and Zu Baoquan 祖保泉, *Sikong Tu Shipin zhushi ji yuwen* 司空圖詩品注釋及譯文 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1966), p. 68.

¹¹ The opening sentence, for instance, of Fan Chengda’s Song dynasty catalog of flowering plum trees begins: “The plum flower is a thing of ultimate beauty under Heaven” 梅天下尤物. Fan Chengda 范成大, *Meipu* 梅譜, in Chong Tianzi 蟲天子 (Zhang Tinghua 張廷華), comp., *Xiangyan congshu* 香豔叢書 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1994), 3:2863. Fan uses the term *youwu* again to describe the “Mandarin Duck Plum” (*yuanyang mei* 鴛鴦梅); Fan, *Meipu*, in *Xiangyan congshu*, 3:2866.

courtesans, and then, through association, to actors. Although never oblivious to the humanity behind the “beautiful creatures” they described, authors of *huapu* collected and ranked actors and their talents in much the same way they might accumulate or appraise other fine artifacts of literati consumer culture.¹² This commodification of entertainers exhibited in catalogs was part of a larger trend in connoisseurship writings in general.

Literati interest in cataloging fine objects reached its heyday in the late Ming, as the work of Craig Clunas and others has shown.¹³ This development—a product of dramatic increases in book publication and growth in markets for luxury goods—was fostered by the rapidly expanding commercial economy in the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. Writing about objects in the late Ming was a mark of distinction, something that differentiated elite connoisseurs from *nouveau riche* merchant-dilettante impostors.¹⁴ As Wai-ye Li has observed, the literatus wrote about objects so as to assemble and order his world; the process, she tells us, “simultaneously pointed inwards and outwards, defining the self at the same time as it ranked and judged the material world.”¹⁵ Clunas has further identified late Ming fine goods catalogs as a site where literati connoisseurs contested for cultural power with merchant upstarts interested in translating their economic resources into cultural capital.¹⁶

Similar tensions are revealed in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century registers of actors. By the mid Qing, however, with the emergence of the urban commercial playhouse, the new site of cultural competition had become theatrical entertainment itself (and the fine youths who brought it to life). In their ranked guides to boy actors, *huapu* writers playfully appropriated the *pin*-connoisseurship tradition

¹² For two discussions of the late-Ming connoisseurship discourse on boy actors as luxury goods, see Sophie Volpp, “Classifying Lust: The Seventeenth-Century Vogue for Male Love,” *HJAS* 61.1 (2001): 109–16, and “The Literary Circulation of Actors in Seventeenth-Century China,” *JAS* 61.3 (August 2002): 963–72. See also, Wu Cuncun, *Homeroetic Sensibilities*; Darrobers, *Opéra de Pékin*, pp. 333–74, passim.

¹³ Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 8. See also, Wai-ye Li, “The Collector, the Connoisseur, and Late-Ming Sensibility,” *TP* 81.4–5 (1995): 269–302; and Judith T. Zeitlin, “The Petrified Heart: Obsession in Chinese Literature, Art, and Medicine,” *LIC* 12.1 (June 1991): 1–26.

¹⁴ Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, pp. 86–87; Li, “The Collector,” p. 280.

¹⁵ Li, “The Collector.”

¹⁶ Clunas, *Superfluous Things*, pp. 86–87.

to bring order to their experiences of the heady jumble of the world of urban performance. In doing so, their catalogs of “sensual things” shared in literati practices of knowing and differentiating the self and the surrounding material world.

Borrowed Discourse

Situated broadly within the *pin*-connoisseurship literary tradition, *huapu* writers took their cue more narrowly from one strand of discourse within that tradition—evaluative writings about courtesans and actresses. Here too, they had an ample supply of literary templates upon which they could draw to legitimate their interests in recording the lives of performers. And they took pains to make the literary genealogy explicit for their readers. In the preface to the first *huapu*, Wu Changyuan stakes out his position as the inheritor of that literary tradition, explaining:

Those books by writers past that recognize beauty—*Nanbu yanhua lu* 南部烟花錄 (A record of southern flowers in the mist), *Beili zhi*, *Qingni lianhua ji* 青泥蓮花記 (Lotuses in dark mud), *Banqiao zaji* 板橋雜記 (Miscellaneous notes from the wooden bridge), and even Zhao Qiugu’s *Haiou xiaopu* 海鷗小譜 (A brief register of seagulls)—are all about female courtesans and not about boy actors. Even those actors recorded in *Qinglou ji* 青樓集 (Blue tower collection) are female *dan* performers.¹⁷

Wu’s *Yanlan xiaopu* is an effort to remedy the exclusion of the male actor—or, more precisely, the boy female impersonator—from this connoisseurship genre.

To literate readers of the time, Wu’s litany of titles would have been most evocative, conjuring up associations with romantic decadence and the faded glories of famous entertainers of times past. His choice of antecedent texts is particularly studied, embracing broad expanses of history and geography. The first of the titles, *Nanbu yanhua lu*, is a highly embellished account of the amorous adventures of the last Sui emperor, Sui Yangdi, on his travels to his provisional palace at Yangzhou.¹⁸ To those familiar with the text (or simply with the

¹⁷ Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QYLS*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Authorship of *Nanbu yanhua lu* was formerly attributed to Yan Shigu 嚴師古 (581–645), but this is now believed to be spurious. The work is most likely a later composition that gave authorial credit to Yan so as to increase the prestige of the text. Alternative titles for the text are: *Daye shiyi ji* 大業拾遺記 and *Sui yilu* 隋遺記. The text is reprinted under the title, *Daye shiyi ji*, in *Xiangyan congshu*, 1:649–56.

“licentious-last-emperor” lore surrounding Sui Yangdi), the very setting of Yangzhou would have brought to mind “dreams of Yangzhou” (*Yangzhou meng* 揚州夢), which, harking back to an allusion in a poem by the late Tang poet Du Mu 杜牧, had become metonymic for trysts with courtesans.¹⁹ By beginning with *Nanbu yanhua lu*, a text that mixes prurient voyeurism with cautionary injunctions against hedonism, Wu Changyuan implicitly points to his own literary venture as sharing this conflicted perspective on its object of description—in his case, the cross-dressing boy actors.

Three of the next four texts that Wu mentions—*Beili zhi*, *Banqiao zaji*, and *Haiou xiaopu*—are records of famous courtesans. Written in the late ninth, late seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries as nostalgic guides to the pleasure quarters of Chang’an, Nanjing, and Tianjin respectively, these accounts of performers—with their mixtures of biographies, poems, and anecdotes—became the stylistic models for *Yanlan xiaopu* and other *huapu*.²⁰ Wu Changyuan’s choice of title for his collection—the “brief register” (*xiaopu*) of his *Yanlan xiaopu*—was surely inspired by Zhao Qiugu’s 趙秋谷 *Haiou xiaopu*.²¹ Wu, himself, does not belabor the point; rather, he leaves it to his friend and fellow contributor of dedicatory remarks to the volume, the Raconteur of the Western Hillocks (Xicheng waishi 西陸外史), to alert readers to his inventive—if borrowed—title.²²

¹⁹ The final couplet in Du Mu’s quatrain “Qian huai” 遣懷 reads: “Awaking suddenly from a ten-year dream of Yangzhou, I had earned but a reputation as a fickle cad among the women of the Blue Towers” 十年一覺揚州夢，贏得青樓薄幸名。The romantic image surrounding Du Mu is also memorialized in Yu Ye’s 于鄴 (fl. 867) embellished account of Du Mu’s life entitled “Yangzhou meng ji” 揚州夢記, which was published shortly after the poet’s death. See Yu Ye, “Yangzhou meng ji,” reprinted in Wang Yunwu, ed., *Jiaofang ji ji qita jiu zhong*.

²⁰ Sun’s *Beili zhi* (ca. 888) is a record of the pleasure quarters of late Tang Chang’an. A reprint of the *Gujin shuohai* 古今說海 edition (under the title *Sun Neihan Beili zhi* 孫內翰北里志) is in Wang Yunwu, ed., *Jiaofang ji ji qita jiu zhong*. Yu Huai’s *Banqiao zaji* (1697) is a nostalgic account of the courtesans of the famous Qinhuai 秦淮 pleasure quarters of Ming-era Nanjing. It is reprinted in *Xiangyan congshu* 4:3637–71. Zhao’s *Haiou xiaopu* (1704) details the author’s encounters with renowned courtesans in the Tianjin region during the early Qing. This text is also reprinted in *Xiangyan congshu* 1:477–89. The fourth text Wu mentions, Mei Dingzuo’s *Qingni lianhua ji* 青泥蓮花記, reprises anecdotes about famous women—including everyone from Buddhist saints to courtesans—over the ages. See Mei Yusheng 梅禹生, *Qingni lianhua ji* (ca. early seventeenth century), 13 juan; reprinted in *Zhongguo jindai xiaoshuo shiliao huibian* 中國近代小說史料匯編 (Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1981), 12:1–216.

²¹ All of these texts are discussed in Wu, *Ming Qing shehui xing’ai fengqi*.

²² See Xicheng waishi 西陸外史, “Tici” 題詞, in *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QLS*, p. 5.

The last title mentioned in Wu’s prefatory passage, the *Qinglou ji*, is a mid-fourteenth-century collection of biographies of performers, mostly female, from Yuan-era Beijing. Written as a series of short entries, the biographies comment on both the looks (*se* 色) and artistry (*yi* 藝) of each entertainer, and are interspersed occasionally with additional remarks about a performer’s familial or artistic lineage and her admirers or patrons. Although the title phrase, “qinglou” (a colorful term for a brothel, which puns on *qinglou* 情樓, meaning “tower of desire”), clearly links the work to the world of courtesan entertainment, *Qinglou ji* had come to be known primarily as a collection of biographies of actresses.²³ It wedded courtesan literature to theatrical connoisseurship; and in recognition of this, Wu Changyuan gives *Qinglou ji* the ultimate pride of place in his list of originary texts.

The works mentioned in Wu’s preface are some of the textual icons of the courtesan literature discourse. Strewn with the phrases and images of earlier prototypes, the language of such texts acquires an ever increasing density of allusion, as for example in the preface to Yu Huai’s *Banqiao zaji*, which is scattered with references to “southern flowers in the mist” (*nanbu zhi yanhua* 南部之煙花) and “occasional strolls through the ‘northern quarter’” (*ou wei beili zhi you* 偶為北里之遊); or, for instance, in the poetic preambles to *Haiou xiaopu* in which the author expresses remorse for his impassioned indulgences in language highly reminiscent of Du Mu’s poem about his “dream of Yangzhou.” *Huapu* writers borrowed for their own works the highly self-referential and imbricated quality of the language of courtesan connoisseurship literature. Their rhetorical strategies—comparing actors to flowers, projecting an eroticized gaze on the performers, and blending titillation with a tone of *tristesse*—collapsed metaphors of courtesan beauty and talent onto the cross-dressing boy actors. By cloaking their records of contemporary actors in the discourses of courtesan literature, *huapu* authors simultaneously sanctioned and sensualized the *huapu*, enabling them to tap into the rich repertory of images and allusions of corporeal beauty while only rarely having to directly talk about sex. Such veiled eroticism was part and parcel of the aesthetic appeal both

²³ See Sun Chongtao 孫崇濤 and Xu Hongtu 徐宏圖, eds., *Qinglou ji jianzhu* 青樓集淺注 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1990); see also, Wilt Idema and Stephen H. West, *Chinese Theater 1100–1450: A Source Book* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982), pp. 104–72.

of the eighteenth-century commercial theater and of the texts that wrote about it.

Other *huapu* thereafter took their cues from *Yanlan xiaopu* in drawing a connection between actors and courtesan literature. *Xiaohan xinyong* 消寒新詠 (New poems to while away the winter), a collection of actors' biographies composed in 1795, compares its project to texts that dwell on "dreams of Yangzhou" and "the ladies of the willow lanes."²⁴ A prefatory poem in the early nineteenth-century register *Yinghua xiaopu* 鶯花小譜 (A brief register of songbirds and flowers) explicitly equates its thirteen select *dan* actors with the Qinhuai courtesans of late Ming Nanjing.²⁵ The sixteen-year-old youth Tianxi 天喜, according to one writer, would rival the grace of the Ming courtesans of the Qinhuai were he to exchange his hat for a woman's chignon.²⁶ And an actor listed in the 1837 register *Chang'an kanhua ji* 長安看花記 (A record of viewing flowers in the capital) is framed by reference to "Zhao Qiugu's *Haiou xiaopu*, in which he describes [a courtesan] as 'like a bird alighting on one's shoulder'" (*feiniaoyiren* 飛鳥依人). The actor here described, the connoisseur goes on to tell his readers, resembles the courtesan in that he "really moves people with his tender mien."²⁷

It is mostly in the prefatory materials that *huapu* writers, and their friends and commentators, bring the weight of literary precedent to bear upon these texts. It is as if, to fend off the accusation of dabbling in "frivolous rubbish," *huapu* authors feel the need to shore up their intentions with the cachet of a by now respected tradition of courtesan connoisseurship. In the prefaces the flower register writers strike poses and justify their interests—framing their connoisseurship collections to the outside world. In the body of *huapu* texts, however, the discourse of the courtesan literature that they have appropriated works somewhat at cross-purposes to the exculpatory tone of the prefaces; the courtesan literature discourse enables opera fans to read the charms of boy actors as feminine wiles, revealing that, in the minds of male connois-

²⁴ Zhou Yude 周育德, ed. and annot., *Xiaohan xinyong* 消寒新詠, comp. Tiejiao shanren 鐵橋山人 et al. (Beijing: Zhongguo xiqu yishu zhongxin, 1986), p. 3.

²⁵ Yixiang jushi 藝香居士, in *Yinghua xiaopu* 鶯花小譜, in *QJLS*, p. 218.

²⁶ Qixiang shi 緝香氏, *Pinghua* 評花, n.p., 1816, 3a.

²⁷ Yang Maojian, *Chang'an kanhua ji* 長安看花記, in *QJLS*, p. 316.

seurs, the performer—and especially the female impersonator—was gendered female.

The rhetorical gendering of the *dan* performers was achieved, in part, by inscribing metaphors of courtesan beauty onto the boy actors—foremost among them being the flower conceit. Just a glance at the titles of *huapu* attests to the ready analogy of beauties to flowers in such texts. *Xiaohan xinyong* assigns the name of a flower to each of its actors, and these designated flowers then become the thematic tropes within the poems eulogizing the actors. An afterword to the 1803 *huapu Rixia kanhua ji* (A record of viewing flowers in the precinct of the throne), makes the most excessive use of the flower imagery:

A total of eighty-four actors are recorded here. . . . Nine types are recorded. Why the nine types? Each is according to a category. . . . Spring flowers are the most beautiful, just like the actor Langyu. And so, beginning with Langyu, there are eight entries for actors who stand out in terms of beauty. Autumn flowers are the most graceful, just like the actor Xiufeng. And so, beginning with Xiufeng, there are nine entries for actors who excel in grace. In between beauty and grace, there is the warmth of spring and the crispness of autumn, but it is hard to capture both qualities in one actor. But doesn't Liuxi capture both? . . . In spring, blossoms; in autumn, fruit: plants that flower naturally bear fruit; the blossom must wither for the fruit to be plucked. This is a case of skill surpassing beauty. Of this type there are ten actors, including Gu Changsong. . . . As for the young kids with their hair still done up in tufts, they are like buds just beginning to open. Whether they possess the intensity of spring or the subtlety of autumn still remains to be seen. Those selected for inclusion here all have the potential to become exquisite.²⁸

Pin ranking is paired here with the flower as metonym of feminine/actor essence. In this passage, written by a certain Petty Historian who Feasts on Flowers (*Canhua xiaoshi* 餐花小史), a methodological seriousness is applied to something utterly trivial. Here, too, a legitimizing, formalistic style is conflated with the sensual, indulgent content. Even the author's pseudonym captures this sanction/sensuality duality of *huapu* writings: he applies the careful methods of the historian to savoring the visual delights of the flower-actors.²⁹ His fine distinction between types of flowers barely muffles an affective obsession that he can

²⁸ From *Canhua xiaoshi* 餐花小史, "Houxu" 後序, in Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 108.

²⁹ A pun may be at work in the author's pen name since the term *xiao shi* 小史 is also a literary way of referring to actors.

only master through excessive cataloging; and his indulgence in such a scholastic disquisition on flower-actors is what distinguishes him as a true connoisseur.³⁰

The eroticized and feminizing gaze on *dan* actors permeates *huapu* writings. Throughout these texts, actors are compared to crab-apple flowers or to lotuses, or they are described in clichés of female/flower beauty—“so like a pear blossom under the light of the moon” or “with a few plum-blossom freckles dotted upon hibiscus cheeks.”³¹ Mining the phrasebooks of female countenance, the texts describe actors as “beauties” (*jiaren* 佳人), as having the looks to “topple fortresses” (*qingcheng* 傾城), or as possessing “delectable beauty” (*xiuse ke can* 秀色可餐).³² One *huapu* author comments that “watching new actors mount the stage is just like seeing a new bride on the third morning after her wedding; [they] retain a touch of shyness, which only makes them seem even more lovely.”³³ Another enthusiast writes of the female impersonators using the highly suggestive term *youwu*—creatures of supreme sensuality.³⁴ In a poem dedicated to the *dan* actor Fan Rulan 范如蘭, an entranced critic claims, “When [Rulan] has sung through to the red-water flower coda, there’s no one who would take him for anything but a girl.”³⁵ The second quatrain goes on to describe the actor’s quirky charm, and in mid-stanza the gaze shifts its focus from Rulan’s looks to the effect they have upon the admiring poet:

His staged smile breaks into a toothy grin, yet still his aspect
is fair;
With such tender charm, who can tell if he wears a cap or
pins in his hair?
After the lucky scholar is just slightly flushed with wine,
By the light of a sliver moon, he succumbs to the embrace
of rhyme.³⁶

³⁰ On the trope of obsession in early modern literary texts, see Judith T. Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 61–97. On the obsessive personality of the seventeenth-century connoisseur, with particular reference to passion for actors, see also Volpp, “Classifying Lust.”

³¹ Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 75, 92, 93, 89.

³² Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 21.

³³ Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 69.

³⁴ Zhang Jiliang 張際亮, *Jintai canlei ji* 金臺殘淚記, in *QJLS*, p. 232.

³⁵ Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 168.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

In this poem, the opera connoisseur flirts with the contrasts posed by the cross-dressing actor who, even off the stage, seems more girl than boy. The overly studied, acted smile of the boy female impersonator only makes him more “fair” (*jia* 佳) in womanly terms, and his poise and allure blurs the distinction between he who should wear a cap and she who adorns herself with hair ornaments. The balance tips toward the feminine side in the poet’s mind, where, enhanced by drink and moonlight, the gender transformation finally is consummated.

This verse is just one example of literally thousands of poems and biographies about actors that delight in this sort of teasing eroticism. Although the pieces vary, even as late as the 1870s, after *huapu* authors began to include biographies of actors playing the older male role types into their collections (on the grounds that they were more interested in acting talent than in physical attraction), they continued to describe *dan* actors in eroticized, feminine terms. In his *Huafang ji* 懷芳記 (A record of cherished flowers), for instance, the author comments: “Su Shi once remarked that tasting [the flesh of the sometimes poisonous] porpoise was worth the risk of death. I say that if [the actor] Qiufu were a woman, and were to become my concubine, that too would be worth dying for.”³⁷ As many such examples illustrate, the opera aficionados were well aware that they were watching male youths playing the roles of women. Often the texts remind the reader that analogy not verisimilitude is at work: they speak about the actor *as if* he were a woman; when in costume two actors look “*as if* they were sisters, or *as if* they were . . . first and second wives”;³⁸ or they mention that a certain actor makes one “forget that he is a fake woman.”³⁹ Nonetheless, *huapu* compilers found these youths attractive even when they were out of costume. *Yanlan xiaopu* appreciatively notes of the actor Li Xiuguan 李秀官: “After he’s out of make-up, when he pulls aside the curtain [from backstage] to sneak a peek [at the audience], his wrist and fingers are as if made of jade.”⁴⁰

Performing gender with a touch of gender ambiguity was part of the entertainer’s appeal. As recent scholarship on late imperial courtesan literature has noted, it was the literate courtesan—the woman who

³⁷ Luomoan laoren 羅摩庵老人, *Huafang ji* 懷芳記, in *QJLS*, p. 583.

³⁸ Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 23. Emphasis mine.

³⁹ Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 103.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

had mastered the male scholar's skills of literacy and poetry—who held the greatest allure.⁴¹ Her ability to transverse gendered social practices, that is, playing at androgyny, enhanced her charm. Similarly, in mid-Qing texts on *dan* actors, the way boy actors performed women teased gender boundaries, and the theatricality of gender performance ultimately was part of the attraction.⁴² Rather than being the exact double of the courtesan, the boy actor was the reverse image in the mirror; his appropriation of feminine attributes captured in one persona both hetero- and homoerotic appeal.⁴³ The borrowing of the literary tools used in courtesan literature when portraying *dan* actors helped to put under erasure the overt homoeroticism of the Beijing commercial theater and the *huapu*.

Flower register imitation of the tropes and rhetorical strategies of writing about female entertainers, of course, was made possible by the social practices of the Qing entertainment demimonde, in which boy actors performed the role of courtesan both on and off the stage. Boy actors could be bought for sex as well as for their entertainment services, and the contractual relationship between young actors and their trainers was much like that between prostitutes and their madams.⁴⁴ As with the female sex market, talent, and the cultural capital it generated, could be used as leverage against the sale of sexual services, with the result that those actors with the greatest artistic reputations were afforded the luxury to sell their wit, charm, and talent more than their

⁴¹ For arguments about late Ming courtesans and literacy, see especially Paul S. Ropp, "Ambiguous Images of Courtesan Culture in Late Imperial China"; Wai-ye Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal"; and Dorothy Ko, "The Written Word and the Bound Foot," all in Ellen Widmer and Kang-I Sun Chang, eds., *Writing Women in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁴² For discussion of these issues in seventeenth-century writings about actors and the theater, see Volpp, "The Literary Circulation of Actors."

⁴³ For additional studies on homoerotic ideals in the Ming and Qing literary tradition, see Giovanni Vitiello, "Exemplary Sodomites: Chivalry and Love in Late Ming Culture," *Nan Nü* 2.2 (2000): 207–57; Volpp, "Classifying Lust"; Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities*. The *huapu Xiaohan xinyong* includes biographies and poems for actors who specialize in the young male or *xiao sheng* roles as well as for *dan* roles. This text records a total of eighteen actors, half of whom specialize in *dan* and half of whom specialize in *xiao sheng*. This is the earliest *huapu* (1795) regularly to comment on actors playing male roles, and it compares the nine *xiao sheng* performers to flowers.

⁴⁴ On male and female prostitution, see, for instance, Wang, *Zhongguo changjishi*, pp. 317–27; Wu, *Ming Qing shehui xing'ai fengqi*, pp. 78–81, 179–97. For the double role of actors as male prostitutes, see Mackerras, *Rise of the Peking Opera*, p. 150; Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities*, esp. pp. 116–58; Darrobers, *Opéra de Pékin*, pp. 333–74.

bodies.⁴⁵ As in the case of female courtesans, those actors who could preserve their "chastity" in the face of the ancillary deprivations and demands of their occupation were praised and celebrated all the more in the biographies written on their behalf.⁴⁶ Hence, the image of the pure lotus surrounded by mud was every bit as apropos as a metaphor for the boy female impersonator ensnared within the urban opera demimonde as it was for the courtesan in the pleasure quarters.

The parallel circumstances of the lives of actor-catamites and courtesans were reflected in the language used to report these demimonde social practices as well, and this too came to be recorded in flower registers. Borrowing the trade jargon of female prostitution, *huapu* referred to wealthy clients or patrons of boy actors as *lao dou*. In imitation of the manner in which female prostitutes provided entertainment services, the after-theater soirées, for which boy actors were hired to sing, pour wine, and play drinking games, were known as "tea gatherings" (*chawei* 茶圍).⁴⁷ The mid-nineteenth-century *huapu* writer Yang Maojian remarks on the resemblance. "Going into brothels to hang around there," he observes, "is talked about as 'holding a tea gathering' (*da chawei* 打茶圍). Visiting the residences of the various actors to engage in lighthearted conversation is also called 'holding a tea gathering.'"⁴⁸ The miscellaneous notes section of *Jintai canlei ji* further acknowledges the indebtedness of the theatrical demimonde to the language of courtesan culture:

A prime minister is called an "assisting lord" (*xianggong* 相公), the meaning of which is based on [the duties of those who serve as] lords and officials of state. Scholars are called "*xianggong*," the meaning of which is borrowed from the term for a minister of state; this meaning has been in common usage for a long time. The city-dwelling men in the north are all called "master" (*ye* 爺); investigation reveals that their courtesans are sometimes called "*xianggong*." City-dwelling men in the south are all called "*xianggong*"; those in the Wu region also call their courtesans "*xianggong*." Those who perform the *dan* roles in the capital playhouses are called "*xianggong*." Though I do not know

⁴⁵ Mackerras also has observed, "Boy-actors can be best compared not to ordinary prostitutes but to high-grade courtesans," *Rise of the Peking Opera*, p. 152.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the stigma associated with male-male sexual penetration during the Qing, see Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), Chapter 4.

⁴⁷ Wang, *Zhongguo changjishi*, pp. 317–27; see also, Catherine Yeh, *Shanghai Love: Courtesans, Intellectuals, and Entertainment Culture, 1850–1910* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), pp. 96–135.

⁴⁸ Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QJLS*, p. 365.

when this practice began, doesn't it signify that this meaning is also borrowed from the term for courtesans?⁴⁹

In this passage not only is the actor reflective of the courtesan, but both actor and courtesan are framed by terms on loan from the world of officialdom. And this too is a wholesale appropriation from the discourse of late Ming courtesan culture.

In their writings about the late Ming pleasure culture, scholars strongly identified with the courtesans who filled the pages of their texts. They transformed the courtesan into a signifier for something greater than herself: standing for authenticity—the embodiment of noble passion (*qing* 情) (in spite of the obvious paradox of the salability of her love)—the courtesan was the scholar's double, the pathos of her compromised bodily and emotional purity echoing that of the scholar forced to prostitute his talents in the political marketplace. But since the courtesan was often depicted as surpassing the scholar in integrity, she also retroflexively exposed the careerism of the scholar-bureaucrat, thereby iterating through contrast a kind of literati self-reproach.⁵⁰ These tropes were so thoroughly seeded in the literati imagination that well into the nineteenth century they could be applied almost seamlessly to catalogs for boy actors; that is, if the courtesan pointed to the literatus, then by appropriating the courtesan discourse for actors, so too did the *dan* actor.

Unlike in seventeenth-century writings about courtesans, however, the pointed pathos of actors' lives in *huapu* was not inflected by the

⁴⁹ Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 246. Another (most likely apocryphal) explanation for the origin of the use of *xianggong* to refer to *dan* actors claims that the term is a corruption of the compound *xianggu* 像姑 (that is, one who resembles a girl). See Yilansheng 藝蘭聲, *Cemao yutan* 側帽餘譚 (1878), in *QJLS*, p. 603. Even if the etymological research here is false, the explanation underscores an awareness of the mapping of feminine qualities onto boy actors of the *dan* roles. For a strong refutation of the *xianggu/xianggong* phonological association, see Qi Rushan 齊如山, *Xiban* 戲班, in *Qi Rushan quanji* 齊如山全集 (Taipei: Qi Rushan xian sheng yi zhu bian yin wei yuan hui, 1964), 1:42b. See also the discussion in Wu, *Ming Qing shehui xing'ai fengqi*, pp. 179–81.

⁵⁰ See, especially, Ropp, "Ambiguous Images of Courtesan Culture in Late Imperial China"; Wai-ye Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan"; and Ko, "The Written Word and the Bound Foot," all in Widmer and Chang, eds., *Writing Women*. Many of the same scholars who were heavily involved in the cult of *qing* discourse and courtesan culture were also patrons of actors. On actors as signifiers in seventeenth-century literati discussions of romance, authenticity, and the self, see Volpp, "Classifying Lust." Wu Cuncun traces the fascination of Qing literati for boy actors into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; *Homoerotic Sensibilities*. See also, Brett Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 139–61.

trauma of dynastic rupture. The early Qing courtesan literature looked back longingly to mark a temporal and political distance that could never be recovered; in contrast, the mid-to-late Qing *huapu* appropriated the tone of such writings to speak to a more personal sense of anomie. Maybe for that reason—as well as for their homoeroticism—the *huapu* have never been considered as poignant or important as their stylistic antecedents. Nevertheless, the tropes of this literature had already been set during just such a moment of crisis, and by the late eighteenth century it must have seemed natural to borrow the pensive, brooding commentator's voice regardless of the changed social context.

When flower register writers comment on the parallels between actors' and courtesans' lives, they are careful to distance themselves from the market in male prostitution (and in this respect too they differ slightly from earlier biographers of courtesans); the tone of their writings switches from that of the addled fan to the bemused ethnographer.⁵¹ They broach the subject of the sex work of actors obliquely, couching it, for instance, in detached philological notes about the term *xianggong*, or tucking it, now and then, into apologetic parenthetical asides in the biographies of skilled performers with "tarnished" pasts. Their coy rhetoric in this regard is reminiscent of seventeenth-century literati writings about same-sex male desire, which Sophie Volpp has perceptively labeled as the "ethnographic mode," a literary trope that decenters and deflects such practices as curiosities always happening elsewhere in time and space.⁵² But in contrast to late Ming cultural commentators such as Shen Defu 沈德符 (1578–1642), or even Zhang Dai 張岱 (1599–1684?), the observers of the mid-to-late Qing metropolitan theater come off less as armchair ethnographers; the *huapu* connoisseurs are writing from within the demimonde—their "field work" consisting of, among other things, joining *dan* actors in post-performance drinking games and poetry parties.

When they do write about their own more intimate engagements with actors, the *huapu* authors profess to be latter-day devotees of the "cult of *qing*," in search of the ideal expression of emotive feeling, something

⁵¹ In this voice too, however, they are still connoisseurs, collectors of the lore and beauty of the theatrical world. Protestations to the contrary, some of them did partake of the sexual market in boy actors. On the sexual dimension of liaisons between actors and their connoisseur patrons, see Wu, *Homoerotic Sensibilities*, pp. 116–58.

⁵² Volpp, "Classifying Lust," pp. 94–97.

that they take pains to differentiate from sexual license. The most sublime pleasure, as one connoisseur puts it, is “getting slightly tipsy in the midst of flowers.” The author continues with a description of a “tea gathering” with a few friends at the residence courtyard of one of his favorite *dan* actors on a calm, moonlit night:

Some sipped tea, others played chess, still others ingested the night fragrance or viewed paintings—each seeking out his own delight. [My friend] the poet tapped out a *kun* rhythm while the actor Yanxian 豔仙 accompanied him on the flute. At that moment, the jade disc of the moon and the jade-like actor vied with each other in radiance. The branches in the courtyard exhaled puffs of perfume as if in counterpoint to the elegant music.⁵³

This passage emphasizes sensuality rather than raw sexuality. It defines the supreme expression of sensual climax as a chaste—unspent—desire, and this aesthetic preference tempers the homoeroticism of the transvestite theater and its literary chronicles.⁵⁴ Thus, even as flower register authors recorded gossip about love affairs between boy opera stars and famous statesmen, often the stated point of their anecdotes was to show actors embodying the ideals of true friendship—loyal to their patrons even after these men of power had fallen on hard times.⁵⁵

The *tristesse* of the actor’s plight held a special poignancy for *huapu* writers. Their fascination with the *dan* actor as symbol of despoiled purity—compromised both by his occupational hazards and by the passage of time (since flowers will wither and die)—spoke to the writers’ own sense of personal and temporal loss. It also allowed them to present their interest in recording the charms of boy actors as informed by such weightier concerns as the evanescence of life and beauty. In the words of one *huapu* preface:

Ranking actors and distinguishing [literary] talent may seem to be cut from a different cloth but can achieve the same results. In the search for perfection, plain clothes and fine robes are displayed side by side. Suspended between illusion and reality, sadness and joy both mount the stage. . . . Ah, how sad that time passes never to return; the theaters and stages of the past already have been replaced. Know now that this too is

⁵³ Yilansheng, *Cemao yutan*, in *QJLS*, p. 608.

⁵⁴ This same sensibility is reflected in Chen Sen’s 陳森 mid-nineteenth-century novel set in the Beijing demimonde, *Pinhua baojian* 品花寶鑑. Keith McMahon has eloquently discussed the novel’s aesthetics of chaste same-sex male desire in which “tumescence is enough” in “Sublime Love and the Ethics of Equality in a Novel of the Nineteenth Century: *Precious Mirror of Boy Actresses*,” *Nan Nü* 4.1 (2002): 70–109.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 252.

the fate of men. Have no delusions about what the future holds in store for voice and beauty. Upon returning a second time, the fisherman lost his way on the ford leading to Peach-blossom Paradise. Since the alabaster beauty’s passing, the palm-dancing consort of the Shaoyang Palace whirls no more.⁵⁶

The mood of the authorial voice here is again reminiscent of that in early Qing memoirs about famous late Ming courtesans, where, as Wai-yee Li has observed, the “pain of remembrance retroactively legitimizes pleasure.”⁵⁷ The nostalgic melancholy of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *huapu* works in much the same way—alternately enhancing and constraining the eroticism of these texts. Thus, when *huapu* writers adopted the discourse of courtesan literature to describe boy female impersonators, they were borrowing not only literary tropes for categorizing beauty, but also strategies for negotiating between pleasurable desire and a desire for respectability.

Huapu and Urban Memoirs

Huapu had a practical side too: they collected and recorded the ephemera of the city; and since actors and the cultural life generated by urban theater were key attractions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Beijing, *huapu* served as a specialized kind of guide to the sights and pleasures of the capital. Combining factual information on how to identify and locate the city’s best actors (their names, troupe affiliations, and—sometimes—places of residence) with more subtle guidance on how to recognize artistic excellence and physical beauty (and which actors excelled at which roles), *huapu* initiated the reader into the domain of theatrical connoisseurship. Balancing the detached eye of the ethnographer with wistful longing for vanished people and things, *huapu* authors conveyed not only how to watch plays but also how to play the aesthete. In this regard too, they had a respectable literary tradition to fall back on: the urban memoir. By peppering their texts with the appropriate allusions, they placed themselves within a textual genealogy tracing back to the mid-twelfth-century record of Kaifeng, *Dongjing menghua lu*.

A chatty account of the pleasures of the prosperous capital city of the Northern Song, *Dongjing menghua lu* has been characterized as literate but not highly literary, reflecting the sensibilities of a leisured and educated

⁵⁶ Zhou, ed. and annot., *Xiaohan xinyong*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Li, “The Late Ming Courtesan,” p. 47.

(but not necessarily officially positioned) urban stratum.⁵⁸ The central motif of the title, “dreams of splendor” (*menghua*), works as a pun, alluding both to the vibrancy of the metropolis and to the mythical kingdom of Huaxu 華胥—a legendary Elysium that one could visit only in dream. This pun aptly captures the central tension in this work, juxtaposing the delectable and dazzling enumeration of quotidian delights of food, spectacle, and entertainment with cautions about the impermanence of worldly things. Written from the author’s refuge in the southern city of Shaoxing some twenty years after the fall of Kaifeng, *Dongjing menghua lu* is intrinsically nostalgic, attempting to reconstruct the lost capital through memory. Or, to put it another way, *Dongjing menghua lu* compensates for the material losses of the city by capturing, collecting, and classifying them through the written word.

As attentive readers of the literary legacy, Qing dynasty *huapu* writers found in the *Dongjing menghua lu* a ready blueprint for articulating their own fascination with the minutiae of the urban demimonde. The precedent set by this and other nostalgic guides to cityscapes enabled them to cast their own writings as party to a larger endeavor of preserving the ever-vanishing past. The first writer who explicitly links *huapu* and the urban memoir tradition is Yang Maojian 楊懋建, his *Menghua suobu* 夢華瑣簿 (Assorted notes toward a dream of splendors past) performing a dual act of obeisance to literary inheritance and self-flattery via direct allusion to the “dreams of Hua.” A close look at his literary apology will illuminate other *huapu*, too, as a subset of this genre.

In the opening passage of his *Menghua suobu*, Yang characterizes his flower register as belonging to the realm of historical discourse, within which he identifies two strains of writing: official history and private history. Both strains, he observes, have a lengthy record of being used to document city life. Culminating the official model is, Yang writes, the late eighteenth-century imperially commissioned compendium of the sights of Qing Beijing, *Rixia jiuwen kao* 日下舊聞考 (A study of ancient accounts from the precinct of the throne).⁵⁹ In Yang’s words, “This is

⁵⁸ Stephen H. West, “Playing with Food: Performance, Food and the Aesthetics of Artificiality in the Sung and Yuan,” *HJAS* 57.1 (1997): 69.

⁵⁹ *Rixia jiuwen kao* was published in 1785. It was based on the 1688 guide to Ming Beijing, entitled *Rixia jiuwen* 日下舊聞, which had been compiled by the early Qing scholar Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊. On the compilation of this guide, see Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 453–59. On official versus private histori-

an enormous compendium, to the likes of which my innumerable jottings could never dare to compare.”⁶⁰ Though feigning humility before court-sponsored history, Yang clearly identifies with a private scholarly tradition of historical authorship. “Beginning in 1831,” he writes,

I spent eight years as a sojourner [in the capital]. Thinking back on it now, it was like viewing flowers from on horseback; it was all as if in a dream. In the Song dynasty, there was *A Dream of Splendors Past in the Eastern Capital*, which recorded the prosperity of Bianliang [Kaifeng]. In our dynasty, Sun Chengze 孫承澤 wrote *Chunming mengyu lu* 春明夢餘錄 (A record of remembered dreams of the capital). I’ve secretly cultivated myself in the mold of these writers, desiring to create something comparable. For that reason, I’ve called this: *Assorted Notes Toward a Dream of Splendors Past*.⁶¹

Nearly all *huapu* authors make some claim to be writing in a historical vein, even if they do not explicitly mention earlier literary guides to cities. As the three authors of *Xiaohan xinyong* state, “We place those who live by mounting the stage and making music into the poet’s bag; and we enable those decked out in costume and make-up to ascend the rosters of private history.”⁶² Mixing self-pity with self-vindication, in the preface to his *Rixia kanhua ji*, the author, The Latter-Day Adept of the Iron Flute (Xiao tiedi daoren 小鐵笛道人), complains that he has been “reduced to writing the history of entertainers.”⁶³ Zhang Jiliang 張際亮, writing under the literary alias The Master of Huaxu (Huaxu *dafu* 華胥大夫), goes so far as to append personal commentaries to his biographies of actors, all of which begin with the phrase, “The Master of Huaxu says” (Huaxu *dafu* yue 華胥大夫曰)—clearly both a salute to private memoir-style history of the “dreams of Huaxu” variety and an attempt to mimic, and mock, the commentary tradition of “grand history.”⁶⁴

The claim to be writing history was both genuine and rhetorical posture; after all, most flower registers wrote about contemporary or near-contemporary people and things. Nevertheless, they envisioned themselves as leaving a record to posterity. For the majority of *huapu* authors writing between the 1770s and the 1840s, their role as

ography, see Harold Kahn, *Monarchy in the Emperor’s Eyes: Image and Reality in the Ch’ien-lung Reign* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 47–64.

⁶⁰ Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QJLS*, p. 347.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Zhou, ed. and annot., *Xiaohan xinyong*, p. 3.

⁶³ Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 55.

⁶⁴ Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 228–53.

historian was limited to that of biographer. Three flower registers from this period, however, Wu Changyuan's *Yanlan xiaopu*, Zhang Jiliang's *Jintai canlei ji*, and Yang Maojian's *Menghua suobu*, made more ambitious claims as works of minor history. And it is these three texts that most closely resemble the urban memoir literature.⁶⁵ In the fifth and final volume of his *Yanlan xiaopu*, Wu Changyuan dispenses with actor biographies and instead adopts a rambling, discursive style, loosely stringing together anecdotes and lore related to theatrical performance in the capital. The jottings discuss such matters as musical styles or where certain patrons sit in the audience. "In the past," one entry reads, "when *dan* actors in the capital imitated [walking with] bound feet, the practice was limited to just a few plays and their movements were always rather tentative. Ever since [the actor] Wei San 魏三 came to prominence, all [*dan* actors] use [fake] bound feet when they take to the stage; their feet dance and their eyes flash in perfect harmony with the plot."⁶⁶

Half a century later, Zhang Jiliang, emulating Wu Changyuan's *huapu*, appends a volume of assorted notes to his own *huapu*. These notes detail over thirty items of historical or contemporary lore concerning performance in Beijing, including everything from the patois of the opera demimonde to the locations and admission prices of the city's theaters. Zhang's text suggests that he is applying the methods of Qing evidential scholarship to the subject of urban theater. He writes, for example:

Among actors in the south, over half of those who play the female impersonator role are named so-and-so *guan* (*mouguan* 某官). Based on evidence recorded in *Yanlan xiaopu*, it can be verified that in times past this was also common practice among *dan* actors in the capital. In those days, there were also *dan* actors named so-and-so *er* (*mouer* 某兒). Nowadays, that simplicity has been replaced with literary airs. The fashions of our times are truly lamentable.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Wu Changyuan is one of the few *huapu* authors who do not openly acknowledge the influence of the urban guidebook on his record of theater. Yet he, too, was well acquainted with this tradition: three years after the publication of his *Yanlan xiaopu*, he also published a more comprehensive guide to the city of Beijing, entitled *Chenyuan shilüe* 宸垣識略 (rpt., Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1981), which was essentially intended as a privately-issued "pocket edition" of the imperially commissioned *Rixia jiuwen kao*.

⁶⁶ Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 46.

⁶⁷ Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 246. Here, Zhang is concerned that the older style suffixes—a lexical diminutive which is appended to an actor's name (and which denoted his servile status)—have gone out of fashion. Instead, actors are now adopting sobriquets in imitation of men of letters.

The *huapu* writers' ethnographic look at capital theater culture is also evident in Yang Maojian's *Menghua suobu*, which devotes an entire register to "anecdotes, talk overheard at banquets, self-mocking stories told by those fallen upon hard times, information gleaned from scraps of old paper, and gossip from the alleys—anything having to do with the theater."⁶⁸

Huapu authors appropriated not just the style but also the tone of the urban memoir tradition for their biographies of contemporary actors, invoking the melancholic coupling of personal loss with worldly pleasure, and the Buddhist-influenced trope of the dreamlike quality of all earthly things. In the process, they translated the temporal nostalgia of *Dongjing menghua lu* into figural loss, retaining the nostalgic voice even when writing about the present. The textual preservation of theater sights and the nostalgic framing of such records were two sides of the same ethnographic-historical project: one a history of the "other"; another, an allegory of the self. If, as James Clifford has observed, ethnography aims to capture on the page a disappearing object, an other who is lost "in disintegrating time and space," in which "nostalgia is as much self-definition as memory,"⁶⁹ then the nostalgia of the Qing *huapu* is actually about the evanescence of beauty and talent, where the plight of the actor-object redounds to that of the connoisseur-scholar.⁷⁰ In this doubled narrative of self and other, the legitimizing nostalgias of both borrowed discourses—courtesan literature and urban memoirs—blend together.

Zhang Jiliang is the most eloquent—if somewhat maudlin—articulator of the centrality of nostalgia and pathos to the historian's calling. Placing himself in a line of chroniclers emanating from Confucius, he prefaces his flower register with the following lament:

Confucius wept over the capture of the unicorn, and ever since there have been two kinds of tears in this world.⁷¹ Scholar Jia [Jia Yi 賈宜] of the Han Dynasty cried about

⁶⁸ Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QJLS*, p. 347.

⁶⁹ James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 112.

⁷⁰ Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, p. 4. See also Gaurav Desai, "Old World Orders: Amitav Ghosh and the Writing of Nostalgia," *Representations* 85 (Winter 2004): 140–42.

⁷¹ According to legend, Confucius was responsible for compiling the *Chunqiu* 春秋; he stopped his record at the "capture of the unicorn." As a result, the *Chunqiu* is often referred to as the *Lin jing* 麟經 (Classic of the unicorn) or *Lin shi* 麟史 (History of the unicorn).

the times in which he lived. Ruan Ji 阮籍 of the Jin Dynasty cried over his own lack of career prospects. I have lived in the capital for three years. I have observed closely the present state of the world; I can offer advice about what will benefit it and can cure its ills. But since I had no one to provide me with an introduction, I dared neither to submit suggestions nor to write them in books; hence, I cried bitterly. My family encountered many misfortunes, and lamenting that my talents had gone unrecognized, I cried bitterly again. My friends took pity on me, and fearing that I might grow sick with grief, they frequently sought out youths from the opera troupes to amuse me with song and wine. Once drunk, I would cry bitterly yet again. Now, I am about to return to my native home. While sorting through my old clothes, I happened upon a piece still stained with my tears from days gone by. With a sigh I said, "Ah, though I have cried the last of my tears, the stains remain behind." Even so, my fond affections of times past should not be forgotten. And so it is that I composed these ten biographies, fifty-nine poems, three elegies, and thirty-seven miscellaneous entries. Yan [Beijing] has long been a golden site for theater. For this reason, I call this collection *A Record of Tear Stains from the Golden Stage*.⁷²

The written record is cast as—in the words of another *huapu* author—an expression of “knotted melancholy” (*chou jie* 愁結).⁷³ The scholar sheds his copious tears as much for himself as for his companions in solace—the lowly, unappreciated actors. Likewise, by leaving records of the actors to posterity, he also ensures his own survival in the literary legacy. Neither the nostalgia nor the underlying story of the authorial self necessarily negates the credibility of the outside world as described in these records. Rather, the representations of both selves and others in these texts are, to borrow Paul Rabinow’s insight about the phenomenology of ethnographic practice, “social facts.”⁷⁴ The dual narrative of the *huapu* provides two interrelated histories—one pointing inward to the cognoscenti authors, and one pointing outward to the circumstances of actors, performance practices, and theatrical patronage in Qing Beijing.

THE CONNOISSEURS

Writing and reading *huapu* demanded two kinds of inside knowledge—fluency in the literary tradition (to appreciate the allusions and import of the poetry and prefatory prose passages) and familiarity with

⁷² Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 225.

⁷³ Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 55.

⁷⁴ Paul Rabinow, “Representations are Social Facts,” in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture*, pp. 234–66.

the theatrical practices in the capital city (to decipher the jargon and shorthand for plays, actors, and performance techniques). Mastery of these two fields of knowledge was not necessarily mutually inclusive: the former required years of training in classical texts, the latter residence in Beijing and the leisure and funds to spend one’s days watching plays and associating with actors. The merger of these two kinds of expertise distinguished the opera connoisseur.

There is something almost staged about *huapu* writings, as if through choice of literary styles and motifs the authors are self-consciously performing for literary, aesthetic, and social peers. These literary tours de force usually were not acted alone. Rather, through the contribution of dedicatory poems, prefaces, and afterwords, friends and fellow aficionados played supporting roles in each others’ flower registers; and these cameo appearances further enhanced the self-image of the opera connoisseur. Always played to that audience of peers (the look inward), *huapu* reenacted on the page the camaraderie and word-play exhibitionism of the literary salon. Participation in the creation of flower registers, in other words, both reflected and sustained a belletristic social community.

Textual Community

The printing of Wu Changyuan’s *Yanlan xiaopu* in 1785 established a new tradition of urban theatrical connoisseurship, prompting emulation and the publication of new flower registers “year upon year” and “time after time,” as the humorous popular ditty put it. These texts entered into conversation with other contemporary and near-contemporary *huapu*; their authors were highly conscious of participating in the creation of a new textual tradition. *Yanlan xiaopu*, the pioneering text of the genre, is often acknowledged in other flower registers, as for instance in the following description of an actor listed in *Rixia kanhua ji*: “*Yanlan xiaopu* regarded [the actor Wei] Wanqing as the leading female [impersonator] of his age. This assessment could also be applied to [the actor Gao] Langting.”⁷⁵ Two nineteenth-century *huapu*, *Jintai canlei ji* and *Menghua suobu*, frequently reference *Yanlan xiaopu*, *Rixia kanhua ji*, and other flower registers in reconstructing the historical practices of opera

⁷⁵ Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 103. Explicit referencing of *Yanlan xiaopu* is also made in Zhou, ed. and annot., *Xiaohan xinyong*, pp. 70–71.

performance in the capital.⁷⁶ Sometimes the nod to textual counterparts is somewhat oblique; surely, The Petty Historian Who Feasts on Flowers is invoking the title allusion of Wu Changyuan's *Brief Register of the Orchids of Yan* in his disquisition entitled "On Orchids" (which is appended to the 1803 *huapu*, *Rixia kanhua ji*).⁷⁷ So too, the author of *Zhongxiang guo* 眾香國 (The realm of many fragrances), who in explicating the motivation for his own collection of poetry about actors claims: "pretty Song Yus become a pretext for these minor verses, the Orchids of Yan a reason to reinvent this brief register."⁷⁸

At other times, the recognition on the part of *huapu* authors of belonging to a textual community comes from explicit positioning vis-à-vis other flower registers. Authors often mention having read or consulted contemporaneous flower registers, or they try to explain their own works in contradistinction to other *huapu*.⁷⁹ Another *huapu* writer observes that in contrast to his own preference, "a friend's" flower register ranks a certain actor in the "the top spot."⁸⁰ And the afterword to *Rixia kanhua ji* poses the question: "How does this record compare with others such as *Yanlan xiaopu*, *Menghua wailu* 夢華外錄 (The extended record of dream splendors), *Fengcheng huashi* 鳳城花史 (A history of flowers in the phoenix city), and *Yantai jiaohua lu* 燕臺校花錄 (A record of evaluating flowers of the Yan stage)?"⁸¹ The author, The Latter-Day Adept of the Iron Flute, responds:

Last summer, by chance I perused several flower registers but none of them were to my liking. The problem was that their entries were either all based on hearsay and their criteria for selection were erratic, or those actors who occasionally met with favor did so because the authors were partial and biased. I'm afraid that even after having

⁷⁶ See, for instance Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 249, 250; and Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QJLS*, pp. 367, 379.

⁷⁷ Canhua xiaoshi, "Lan wen" 蘭問, in Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 112–15.

⁷⁸ Zhongxiang zhuren 眾香主人, *Zhongxiang guo* 眾香國, in *QJLS*, p. 1011. The phrase "pretty Song Yus" is also responding to the last line of the preface to *Yanlan xiaopu*, which reads: "But why should I fear tossing out [this piece] of Yan Stone (Yan shi 燕石) so long as it calls forth Song Jade (Song Yu 宋玉) from others." Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 3.

⁷⁹ See also, *Zhongxiang guo*, which comments: "The ages and places of origin of all the actors are recorded in detail in *Rixia kanhua ji*, *Pianyu ji* 片羽集 and *Hua yuedan* 花月旦. This collection does not duplicate that information." Zhongxiang zhuren, *Zhongxiang guo*, in *QJLS*, p. 1017.

⁸⁰ Laiqingge zhuren 來青閣主人, *Pianyu ji* 片羽集, in *QJLS*, p. 145.

⁸¹ Canhua xiaoshi, "Houxu," in Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 109. The last three of the texts mentioned here are no longer extant.

written my draft volume, *Panhua oulu* 判花偶錄 (An occasional record of judging flowers), which strove for greater subtlety and was rather pithy in places, it still overlooked orchids in favor of mugwort and discarded jade while retaining common alabaster. For this reason, I had a couple of close friends review it, only then trusting that what lay in my heart day after day was not simply personal whim. Then, after careful revisions, I finished this draft, naming it *A Record of Viewing Flowers in the Precinct of the Throne*.⁸²

The Latter-Day Adept is clearly familiar with the *huapu* genre and draws inspiration from previous works in this style for his own creation. Even his self-deprecatory remarks about his abilities to distinguish talent—the references to orchids and jade—can be read as subtle replies to the images studding the preface to Wu Changyuan's *Yanlan xiaopu*.

The Latter-Day Adept's comments further underscore that writing a *huapu* was in itself often a communal endeavor. Here, the *huapu* author writes of verifying his own standards of theatrical appreciation with friends. According to the postscript to *Yanlan xiaopu* by the Recluse of the Drunken Bamboo (Zhuhan jushi 竹酣居士), this was a common practice. The Recluse writes: "Every time the Mountain Woodsman [Wu Changyuan] finished a draft, he showed it to me for critique, and this has gone on now for many a day."⁸³ Some *huapu* are more open collaborations, as in the case of *Tingchun xinyong* 聽春新詠 (New poems on listening to youth), which gathers into one work poems evaluating the talents of *dan* actors by some thirty different litterateurs.⁸⁴ Even the practice of soliciting from friends dedicatory poems, prefaces, or afterwords for flower register collections was an expression of the participatory quality of the compilation. As one contributor to *Tingchun xinyong* explained, "The Petty Historian of the Approaching Vernal Pavilion showed me a draft . . . and requested that I add some ink to it."⁸⁵ Not only did *huapu* authors read other works evaluating actors; they also, as these and other remarks suggest, often were friends or acquaintances. As revealed by *Pinhua baojian* 品花寶鑑 (A precious mirror for ranking actors)—the mid-nineteenth-century novel set in the Beijing demimonde—literati social gatherings were often prime occasions for

⁸² Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 55. For other examples, see Liuchunge xiaoshi, comp., 留春閣小史, *Tingchun xinyong* 聽春新詠, in *QJLS*, p. 152.

⁸³ Zhuhan jushi 竹酣居士, "Ba" 跋, in Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 52.

⁸⁴ Liuchunge xiaoshi, comp., *Tingchun xinyong*, in *QJLS*, pp. 149–207.

⁸⁵ Tianyai fangcao ciren 天涯芳草詞人, "Bianyan" 弁言, in Liuchunge xiaoshi, comp., *Tingchun xinyong*, in *QJLS*, p. 152.

the creation of *huapu*.⁸⁶ A connoisseur's poem about a favorite actor, then, quite often entailed a literal as well as a literary performance. Wu Changyuan suggests as much when, in commenting on the inspiration for his *Yanlan xiaopu*, he remarks: "I, together with some like-minded friends, took a sudden fancy to elaborate upon this gay amusement by making record of it."⁸⁷ The flower register textual community reflected an underlying social network of men of letters tied together, in part, through devotion to opera connoisseurship.

Social Milieu and Self-Representations

Reconstructing the biographies of individual *huapu* authors can be difficult, in part because writers often did their best to conceal their identities by using pseudonyms, only a handful of which can be matched to historical figures. Of sixteen extant *huapu* written between 1785 and the 1840s, authorship has been verified for only seven, four of which are by the same author.⁸⁸ For the remaining texts, the most that can be identified is a surname, as in the case of *Xiaohan xinyong*, for which we know that the trio of authors had the family names Li, Liu, and Chen.⁸⁹

This practice of adopting whimsical pen names further underscores the ambivalence that lettered men felt about their involvement in the creation of such works. Using pen names was one way they negotiated between play and respectability. The *huapu*, in other words, intentionally was a semi-public text: its content was open to an educated reading audience but the author's identity was veiled—at most acces-

⁸⁶ See the numerous descriptions of literati poetry parties (with actors in attendance) in Chen Sen, *Pinhua baojian* (1849), Chapters 7, 15, 17, 20, 24, and esp. 60.

⁸⁷ Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 3.

⁸⁸ The identifiable authors are: Wu Changyuan, the author of *Yanlan xiaopu* (1785); Zhang Jiliang, author of *Jintai canlei ji* (1829); Yang Cuiyan 楊翠巖, author of *Yantai hongzhuaji* 燕臺鴻爪集 (ca. 1832); and Yang Maojian, author of *Xin ren gui jia lu* 辛壬癸甲錄 (1834), *Chang'an kanhua ji* (1837), *Dingnian yusun zhi* 丁年玉筍志 (1837), and *Menghua suobu* (1842). My determination that Yang Cuiyan is the author of *Yantai hongzhuaji* is a new finding. All of the Chinese language scholarship on these texts follows the original editor of *QJLS* in assuming that the identity of the author, who goes by the pseudonym of Suhaian jushi 粟海庵居士, cannot be recovered.

⁸⁹ For analysis of the authorship of *Xiaohan xinyong*, see Zhou Yude, "Xiaohan xinyong zhaji" 消寒新詠札記, appended to Zhou, ed. and annot., *Xiaohan xinyong*, p. 137. Or, in the case of *Rixia kanhua ji*, internal textual notes coupled with analysis of the author's chosen sobriquet suggest the possibility that the author was surnamed Yang. See Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 88, 109.

sible only to the select few fellow connoisseurs who were on intimate enough terms with the author to know his various literary aliases. As one *huapu* commentator put it: "The point of adopting a sobriquet is to allow one to engage in frivolous writing. Those who know [the author's real name] naturally are in the know, but it is not necessary for everyone to know."⁹⁰ Then again, since the turnover of actors in the capital was rapid—according to one account, a new generation of *dan* actors came to the stage every five years—these theater guides quickly fell out of date; and few connoisseurs, surely, wished to be identified with faded stars and old news.⁹¹ The pseudonym protected the critic's reputation, keeping him as ephemeral as the acting world he described.

Whether or not the *huapu* authors can be identified, they were all classically trained and some were highly literate. Their prefaces and dedicatory remarks delight in the conspicuous display of esoteric erudition. Nearly all of the prefatory materials parade the writers' training in parallel prose (*pianti wen* 駢體文), a rhetorical craft that demanded rigorous formalistic and thematic pairing of poetic couplets or allusions. At times, a literary parlor game quality creeps into these writings, as, for instance, in the prefaces and poems in *Pianyu ji*, in which the first two characters of every phrase correspond to the first two words of poems by either Yuan Zhen 元禎 (779–831) or Yuan Haowen 元好問 (1190–1257).⁹²

Literary skill, however, does not seem to have translated into success via the traditional literati path to bureaucratic advancement—at least, not often. If *huapu* writers were insiders when it came to mastery of the lettered arts, for the most part they were outsiders when it came to having access to the social position that theoretically devolved upon those educated in the high cultural tradition.⁹³ Relegated to the margins of

⁹⁰ From the "Houxu" by Canhua xiaoshi, in Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 109.

⁹¹ Yang Maojian writes that having stayed in the capital for seven to eight years, he was witness to three generations of actors. Yang, *Dingnian yusun zhi*, in *QJLS*, p. 330.

⁹² Laiqingge zhuren, *Pianyu ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 119–23. The author of this text likely was surnamed Yuan; he calls himself a latter-day Yuan Haowen (p. 122), and his poems and prefaces are all cobbled together with phrases from the poetry of either Yuan Zhen or Yuan Haowen. This style of creating text from a patchwork of lines from Tang and Song dynasty poetry is also exhibited in Bohua jushi 播花居士, *Yantai jiyuan* 燕臺集豔, in *QJLS*, pp. 1037–55.

⁹³ As a social-cultural type, these authors essentially correspond to what David Johnson has termed the "classically educated/self-sufficient" group—a group that "played a very important role in the integration of Chinese culture." See David Johnson, "Communication, Class, and

political power, these men devoted themselves—often ostentatiously, even defiantly—to urban theater culture. Here too, however, the mid-Qing chronicler of actors negotiated a fine line between insider and outsider, his ethnographic perspective striving to mark a respectable distance between the observer and the observed. This jockeying for position exhibited in *huapu*—the simultaneous claims to be insider and outsider—captures an analogous concern on the part of the connoisseur to distinguish himself in the social realm.

One of the most successful *huapu* writers in terms of career was Wu Changyuan, originally a native of Hangzhou. Beginning in 1783, Wu spent over ten years in the capital, some of that time serving in a modest post as an editor of imperial documents.⁹⁴ He had obtained the *jìnshì* degree, and apparently he was on reasonably good terms with fellow Hangzhou native Yu Ji 余集, since the latter, a Hanlin Academician, wrote a preface for Wu's other publication, the 1788 guide to the sights of Beijing, *Chenyuan shilüe* 宸垣事略 (A concise sketch of the imperial enclosure). Although little else is known about Wu, it is tempting to associate him with the influx of literate men summoned into the capital to work on the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete works of the four treasuries), with which Yu Ji was actively involved, or on other late-Qianlong imperially sponsored editing projects. Or, given Wu's printing of *Chenyuan shilüe*, a "pocket-edition" guide to the city, he may have had some role in the imperial publication of *Study of Ancient Accounts from the Precinct of the Throne*.⁹⁵

More typical of *huapu* compilers, however, were the circumstances of the author of *Pianyu ji*, who mentions in the marginal notes to his biog-

Consciousness in Late Imperial China," in David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 58–61.

⁹⁴ See the preface to Wu Changyuan's *Chenyuan shilüe* by Yu Ji, in Wu, *Chenyuan shilüe*. For additional biographical sketches of Wu Changyuan, see the *huapu* author biographies by Zhang Cixi in *QJLS*, p. 24; and Mackerras, *Rise of the Peking Opera*, Appendix B, pp. 237–39.

⁹⁵ The birth of this genre of theatrical connoisseurship and the roughly contemporary development of a full-fledged commercial theater in Beijing may also have been facilitated by the influx of scholars into the capital for imperial-sponsored projects during the later Qianlong years. On the lure of eighteenth-century Beijing to the scholarly elite and Yu Ji's role in the *Siku* project during the 1770s and 1780s, see Kent Guy, *The Emperor's Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch'ien-lung Era* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987), pp. 47–49, 126. On the imperial sponsorship of the *Rixia jinwen kao*, see Naquin, *Peking*, pp. 457–59.

raphy of actors that he failed the 1804 metropolitan-level examination; or the three authors of *Xiaohan xinyong* who complain that their "ten years of study by the light of the window have been in vain for as many spring and autumn moons."⁹⁶ Another author who failed to move up the examination ladder was Zhang Jiliang, the author of *Jintai canlei ji*. Zhang was a rather prolific poet from Fujian who in 1825 had traveled to the capital to participate in the metropolitan exams. His talent caught the eye of Yao Ying 姚瑩, a one-time district magistrate in Fujian Province, and, as Yao's protégé, Zhang was introduced to various literary salons in the capital, eventually becoming a central figure in the Spring Purification Association (*zhanchun ji* 湛春集).⁹⁷ The patronage networks fostered through such loose associations of scholar-poets, as the work of James Polachek has shown, often served as a conduit for political advancement; when political appointment was thwarted, these groups became the locus of oppositional sentiment—often voiced through aesthetic pursuits.⁹⁸

In Zhang's case, personal eccentricity and failure to curry favor with powerful metropolitan patrons condemned him to perpetual *ju-ren* status. In 1829 he complained bitterly in the preface to his *huapu* about being closed out of the world of officialdom. The tears of self-pity induced by his frustrations were channeled into empathy for actors, culminating in the recognition of the talents of the opera world in his *Tear Stains from the Golden Stage*. Zhang also did not shy away from using his record of actors to voice disgust for the hypocrisy of successful bureaucrats. He ridiculed those powerful officials who fraternized with *dan* actors but then mouthed Neo-Confucian pieties in public; and he castigated fellow provincial graduates who, in his view, took advantage of actors.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Laiqingge zhuren, *Pianyu ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 136, 142; and Zhou, ed. and annot., *Xiaohan xinyong*, p. 3.

⁹⁷ For biographical information on Zhang Jiliang, see the biography by Yao Ying 姚瑩 in *Zhang Hengfu shixuan* 張亨甫詩選 (1882), 1.1b–4a, in Xu Gan 徐幹, comp., *Shaowu Xu shi congshu* 邵武徐氏叢書, vols. 29–34. See also the *huapu* author biographies by Zhang Cixi in *QJLS*, p. 25; Mackerras, *Rise of the Peking Opera*, Appendix B, pp. 240–41. Zhang Jiliang is also discussed in James M. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), pp. 70, 81, 218–24.

⁹⁸ Polachek, *Inner Opium War*, pp. 87–94.

⁹⁹ See, for instance, Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 244, 231.

Zhang's Fujian compatriot, Yang Cuiyan 楊翠巖, the author of *Yantai hongzhua ji* 燕臺鴻爪集 (A collection of goose-traces from the Yan stage),¹⁰⁰ seems to have taken a somewhat more sanguine approach to examination failure, as is suggested by the long descriptive title to one of the poems in his collection which explains: "[My friend] Liu Lixian failed the exams and had set a date to return home. Suddenly, he made plans to stay through the summer, at which I was so happy that I sent him this poem in jest. Lixian recently has become close with [the actor] Yang Manqing (Qingxi)." The poem goes on to read:

A cuckoo caws at the moon and the traveler's thoughts fly home;
Who would've thought at the moment of return his plans would
go all wrong?
I love the Three Mountains of Fujian and I'm crazy for Little
Brother Four (Lixian);
But half the reason he's staying on is for his willow-flower
Yang.¹⁰¹

In this instance, examination failure gives would-be officials all the more opportunity to linger in the capital and spend time with their favorite actors.¹⁰² The author in another poem in the collection describes daydreaming within his examination cubicle about his pleasurable activities in the company of actors. Yang Cuiyan's jottings reveal that he boarded at the Jade Antipodes Cloister (Yuji'an 玉極庵) located in the southern half of the city while he was in Beijing; but once he departs the capital—around late 1831 or 1832—he falls out of the historical record.¹⁰³ It is ambiguous as to whether he is being sent as an official himself or if he is following a relative to a post in the Nanjing region.¹⁰⁴ Yang Cuiyan, too, fits the pattern of the *huapu* writer social

¹⁰⁰ Cuiyan 翠巖 is probably Yang's style name (zi 字). I have not been able to track down his *ming* 名. Zhang and Yang were *tongnian* 同年—that is, they both passed the provincial-level examination in Fujian during the same session. That Zhang Jiliang contributes several dedicatory poems to Yang's *Yantai hongzhua ji* further attests to the close personal networks involved in flower register creation.

¹⁰¹ Yang Cuiyan (pseud. Suhaian jushi), *Yantai hongzhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 266.

¹⁰² Yang Cuiyan's teasing mock jealousy of the actor in this poem suggests that literati peer bonds, too, were cemented through participation in the theatrical demimonde. For more on the way in which poems written in praise of actors forged homosocial bonds among seventeenth-century literati, see Volpp, "The Literary Circulation of Actors," pp. 963–72.

¹⁰³ Yang, *Yantai hongzhua ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 269–70, 263.

¹⁰⁴ Zhang, *Zhang Hengfu shixuan*, 6.39a, in Xu Gan, comp., *Shaowu Xu shi congshu*, vol. 32.

type; he is essentially a literary "insider" relegated to the fringes of officialdom.

The carefree tone in Yang Cuiyan's poetry is somewhat unusual. Most *huapu* writers adopted a plaintive whine, as seen in the preface by Zhang Jiliang or in the autobiographical musings of Yang Maojian. Yang Maojian was something of a polymath. In his youth, Yang had studied under Ruan Yuan 阮元 at the newly established Xuehai Tang Academy 學海堂 in Guangdong, where he had been trained in evidential scholarship, poetry, and Chinese and western mathematics.¹⁰⁵ Stationed in Beijing for eight years beginning in 1831, he twice failed the *jinshi* exams, and the second time he was temporarily jailed for having used a taboo character.¹⁰⁶ Thereafter doomed to a life of exile, he comments on his fortunes in the opening passage of his *Menghua suobu*, writing: "As a young man, I listened to the rain from inside the opera house; in middle age, I listen to the rain from within the cabin of my traveler's boat; the shadowy illusions of this present world have left me quite out of joint."¹⁰⁷

Other *huapu* connoisseurs express even greater resentment at their exclusion from the upper reaches of the political elite, for this affected not only their career prospects but also their enjoyment of opera. As one writer complained, "From my listening perch behind the thrust of the stage, the song and dance is partly concealed; when it comes time for a moonlight assignation, the double curtain of the secret chamber is not rolled up for me."¹⁰⁸ The implication here is that, lacking money and power, the connoisseur had access neither to the choice seats within the playhouse nor to intimate relations with actors.¹⁰⁹ He continues, "I

¹⁰⁵ For scholarship on Ruan Yuan (1764–1849) and his Xuehai Tang Academy (est. 1820), see Benjamin Elman, "The Hsueh-hai Tang and the Rise of New Text Scholarship," *Ch'ing-shih wen-t'i* 3.7 (November 1977): 105–13; *From Philosophy to Philology*, pp. 125–26. See also, Steven B. Miles, "Celebrating the Yu Fan Shrine: Literati Networks and Local Identity in Early Nineteenth-Century Guangzhou," *LIC* 25.2 (December 2004): 33–73.

¹⁰⁶ For additional biographical sketches of Yang Maojian, see the *huapu* author biographies by Zhang Cixi in *QJLS*, pp. 25–26; Mackerras, *Rise of the Peking Opera*, Appendix B, pp. 241–42.

¹⁰⁷ Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QJLS*, p. 348. I suspect that those authors we can trace—Wu Changyuan, Zhang Jiliang, and Yang Maojian—are likely to have been the most high profile or successful on the politico-literary scene. Often, it is because they have left behind other literary compilations that we can trace their literary names to specific individuals. Moreover, the writing in the *huapu* by this trio of identified authors tends to be more innovative, while that of the nameless authors seems more derivative.

¹⁰⁸ Zhongxiang zhuren, *Zhongxiang guo*, in *QJLS*, p. 1011.

¹⁰⁹ It is hard to tell how much this statement reflects the writer's actual circumstances and

take advantage of my fleeting glimpse of things ephemeral to tell the tales of actors. My dreams are not careerist like the Dream of Nanke; and my heart goes out to a pretty smile."¹¹⁰

The themes that emerge from such writings—the sojourner (usually a southerner) waiting in the capital for his moment of opportunity, the boredom generated by the waiting (which is assuaged by indulgence in the theater), and the lament for wasted talent and frustrated ambitions—are brought together most poignantly in the opening passage of the dedicatory remarks to *Yanlan xiaopu*, in which the commentator, The Raconteur of the Western Hillocks, paints a virtual (self-)portrait of the opera connoisseur-cum-*huapu* writer. He writes:

The western wind in the trees shakes the leaves downward with a sigh early one morning. The black hat of a recluse visible amid the yellow dust, the sojourner has been detained for so long in his solitude. Watching the boldly passing days, a white frost crystallizes in the hair. Listening to murmuring new voices, Blue Tower Dreams get broken. In the midst of this ennui, one creates some words of fond infatuation. The delighted giggles and the angry curses are written into chapter and verse; the jostle of bracelets and whirl of flowers become one with the World of Brahma. Seeking out singing boys and comparing talents, one occasionally joins actors in casual amusements. The dance stages and the song daises become the stuff of idle chit-chat filling the Watery Heaven.¹¹¹

In this verbal tableau, the thickly laden imagery of the parallel prose presents the quintessential cognoscente as a world-weary sophisticate suspended in time and place at the autumn of his journey. As if in imitation of the ironic couplings of locutions, the passage portrays the connoisseur as a man who has reached transcendence through (perhaps, in spite of) immersion in quotidian pleasures. These images are echoed in the preface to *Rixia kanhua ji*, in which the author writes: "As for me, I am a man with white hairs in the red dust of this world. For three years, I have relied on the kindness of others, having squandered everything like whitecaps on a windy sea. All that remains is amusement in dissipating pleasures."¹¹² As sojourner, as bureaucrat,

how much it is rhetorical posturing to distance him from the stigma of participation in the sex market.

¹¹⁰ The dream of Nanke is an allusion to a Buddhist-inspired fable about a man who falls asleep beneath a tree. In the dream, he embarks on the scholar's career path, passes the examinations, and becomes embroiled in the domain of high politics. He awakes to discover that what he thought was an entire lifetime has been nothing more than an afternoon nap. Zhongxiang zhuren, *Zhongxiang guo*, in *QJLS*, p. 1011.

¹¹¹ Opening passage of the dedicatory remarks by Xicheng waishi in *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 4.

¹¹² Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 55.

and as epicure, the connoisseur-*huapu* writer is poised on the cusp of an insider/outsider divide. He is represented as down-and-out in the capital, and his straitened circumstances confer upon him (he presumes) a cool perspicacity with which he eyes the surrounding material world.

The *huapu* writer's embrace of the world of opera often is presented as a principled stance against careerism; and in this guise—in the conscious turn from politics to pleasure—the connoisseur willfully adopts the role of the eccentric. Flower registers draw heavily upon imagery and allusions associated with past eccentrics—paragons of talent and virtue who had retreated from politics for less tainted pursuits. They invoke, among others, Qu Yuan 屈原 (340?–278 B.C.), Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361), Ruan Ji (210–263), and Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770)—all literary luminaries left “out of joint” by the times in which they lived.¹¹³ And the Raconteur of the Western Hillocks sums up his dedication to *Yanlan xiaopu* with this analogy: “Should you claim that, upon reaching middle age, Wang Xizhi¹¹⁴ gave vent to his feelings of sorrow and joy [in his preface to the *Orchid Pavilion Collection*], then, truly, you understand us. If you say that, while at Wu Gorge, Du Fu praised [the unacknowledged talent of Song Yu's rhapsody on] the tryst of rain-and-clouds,¹¹⁵ then, indeed, this endeavor is just the same.”¹¹⁶

The allusions and rhetoric displayed here are entirely consistent with the broader aesthetic vogues of literary circles in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Beijing. In his study of early nineteenth-

¹¹³ The symbolic imagery of certain flowers in *huapu*—the preference, say, for orchids—can also be linked to the self-image of the connoisseur; the orchid was associated with both Qu Yuan and Wang Xizhi, and the flower came to stand for literati integrity. See Laurence A. Schneider, *A Madman of Ch'u: The Chinese Myth of Loyalty and Dissent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 52–59. See also Zuyan Zhou, *Androgyny in Late Ming and Early Qing Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), p. 205.

¹¹⁴ Wang Xizhi was acknowledged as one of China's canonical calligraphers. Wang Xizhi was most noted for his poems written at the *Lanting hui* 蘭亭會 (Orchid Pavilion gathering), and especially his preface to the collection of these poems.

¹¹⁵ This is an allusion to Du Fu's poem “Yonghuai guji” 詠懷古跡, the second stanza of which elegizes the poet Song Yu, lamenting that Song Yu's poem “Gaotang fu” 高唐賦 had not been understood. “Gaotang fu” tells the legend of the meeting between King Xiang of Chu and the Fairy of Wu Mountain. This tale becomes the *locus classicus* for the use of the term “clouds and rain” to mean sexual congress; and the allusion is invoked here, perhaps, to deflect potential criticism about the prurient content of the *huapu*.

¹¹⁶ Xicheng waishi, in *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 5. Notice here how embedded the language is. In order to make the full meaning intelligible in translation, I must add explicit mention of the implied allusions: the *Orchid Pavilion Collection* and Song Yu's rhapsody. But to the expected audience of literary insiders, such explication would have been entirely unnecessary.

century poetry clubs, for instance, Polachek has shown that the identification of a marginalized stratum of frustrated exam candidates with poet-aesthete culture heroes extended beyond the written page. Poetry banquets held by the Spring Purification Association—the literary circle to which the *huapu* writer Zhang Jiliang belonged—conducted ceremonies to reenact Wang Xizhi's Orchid Pavilion gathering.¹¹⁷ And in their emulation of great literati eccentrics, this “brotherhood of aesthete-connoisseurs” (as Polachek has called them), took their grandiose vision of themselves and their chosen passion very seriously. In the case of flower register writers, that passion was opera.¹¹⁸

For *huapu* writers too, the eccentricity of the true connoisseur was manifest in his actions as well as through his words; he was someone who derived pleasure from violating the rules of propriety of polite society.¹¹⁹ Yang Maojian's characterization of one Chubby Zhu the Ninth (Zhu Jiu Pangzi 朱九胖子) pithily captures the image of the eccentric opera buff. Yang recounts:

Chubby Zhu the Ninth, grandnephew of the late Grand Mentor, was a peculiar man.¹²⁰ He spent his days wandering the opera halls. When people saw him, they would call out, “Brother Nine, come have a seat,” and he would sit right down. If you were to ask him: “Which troupe is performing at which playhouse?” or “Which actor is performing what play today?” the litany would come tripping off his tongue like so many beads on a string. But before a single aria had come to an end, he would have sauntered off. He had something of the aura of the Jin [dynasty eccentrics] about him.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Polachek, *Inner Opium War*, pp. 83–87. The allure of eccentrics and outcast officials to nineteenth-century literati is also discussed in Miles, “Celebrating the Yu Fan Shrine,” esp. pp. 56–58.

¹¹⁸ *Huapu* authors had models from the more recent past too, some of whom pointed the way for the literati fondness for opera and male *dan*. One such model was the seventeenth-century scholar Chen Weisong 陳維崧 (1626–1682), whose literary influence on early nineteenth-century scholar elites is discussed in Polachek, *Inner Opium War*, p. 27. On Chen's anthology of poems about the female impersonator Yunlang 雲郎, see Volpp, “The Literary Circulation of Actors,” pp. 963–72. In one poem in *Yanlan xiaopu*, Wu Changyuan explicitly compares his admiration for the late eighteenth-century actor Wang Xiangyun with the story of Chen Weisong and Yunlang. See Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 11.

¹¹⁹ On this tendency in seventeenth-century literati writings, see Lynn A. Struve, “Ambivalence and Action: Some Frustrated Scholars of the K'ang-hsi Period,” in Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, eds., *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 331. On the seventeenth-century eccentric, see also Frederic Wakeman, Jr., “Romantics, Stoics, and Martyrs in Seventeenth-Century China,” *JAS* 43.4 (1984): 631–65.

¹²⁰ The “late Grand Mentor” is a reference to Zhu Gui 朱珪 (1731–1807), who served as chief tutor of the princes from 1799–1805. See Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 185–87.

¹²¹ Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QJLS*, p. 368.

A few pages later, in a description of his own behavior at the playhouse, Yang casts himself as the eccentric. He recalls:

Once at the height of summer, I went to the Guangde Playhouse to hear a performance by the Chuntai troupe. It was extremely hot. [My friends] . . . were already at the theater. The red-hot sun had climbed high in the heavens, and there was not the faintest wisp of cloud in any of the four corners of the sky; the sight of it was enough to make my horse pant like a working ox. . . . By the time I arrived, sweat was pouring down my body like sauce. I was uncomfortable, but there was nothing I could do. I leaned against the balustrade of the balcony and cast my eyes downwards. From amidst the teeming sea of humanity, a roiling rumble of chatter and laughter bubbled upwards to meet me like steam in a cauldron. [The actor] Qiufang was performing the play “Selling Rouge,” and the acting was incredibly suggestive, which only made me feel all the more hot under the collar. On impulse, I untied my belt and draped it over the balustrade. I loosened my summer gown and fanned my bare chest. I caught sight of a watermelon and downed the whole thing, and then, only after quite some time, was I able to cool down. From all over the theater—balcony and house floor—ten-thousand eyes stared at me. Acquaintances and strangers alike all exclaimed: “What a wild man this is!” The next day news spread quickly throughout the capital that a bare-chested man had gone into the playhouse. Concerned friends sought to counsel me, saying: “Confucianism has its own realm of pleasure.” I laughed saying, “I may not live among the land of bare beasts, but man, after all, is naked too. What harm is there in roaming about in the flesh? It's not that I'm wild; it's just that man's nobility lies in his mind.”¹²²

An eccentric's break with convention could also be conveyed through his aesthetic preference in opera, as Wu Changyuan's *Yanlan xiaopu* illustrates. One manifestation of Wu's cultural defiance was his eclectic embrace of both the *kunju* and *huabu* 花部 styles of opera. As a scholar from Hangzhou, he naturally would have been drawn to Kun opera; by the mid-seventeenth century *kunju*—originally derived from embellished folk tunes from the Suzhou region—had come to be the opera of choice of the lettered elite. *Huabu*, or “flowery-style opera” (a broad category that included most regional musical genres other than *kunju*), however, was considered far less refined—both musically and linguistically—than *kunju*. Lumped under the general rubric of *huabu* were various forms of “clapper opera” (*bangzi qiang* 梆子腔), including, among others, *qinqiang* 秦腔—a musical style that had originated in northwestern China and that over the course of the eighteenth century seems to have followed merchant trade routes from Shanxi and Shaanxi into

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 376–77.

the capital.¹²³ As if flouting long-standing literati standards of taste, Wu Changyuan gives pride of place to “flowery-style” opera, devoting three of the five *juan* of his flower register to *huabu* actors and only one *juan* to *kunju* performers. His valorization of the lowbrow *huabu* opera would have been read at the time as a rather bold move.¹²⁴

Just how radical Wu’s move was is underscored by his cautious defense of his focus on clapper opera actors at the expense of *kunju*. He explains: “[The *qingqiang* actor] Wei Changsheng 魏長生 initiated the current style in performance. While his biography here heaps on him quite a bit of ridicule, nevertheless, his excellence in singing and acting truly surpassed those of his time. . . . [*Kunju* actors] are the old wheelwrights of the opera stage; they do not mingle with the common multitudes. They are all placed in the last volume so as to ensure that . . . one style of singing is differentiated from the other.”¹²⁵ Further explaining his sequence of the *kunju* actors in the last *juan*, Wu remarks: “Northerners do not like *kunju*-style *dan* actors. The two actors Wu 吳 and Shi 施 also perform clapper operas. They are listed first following the taste of the times. I end with [*kunju* actor] Faguan 法官 so as to finish on an elegant note.”¹²⁶ Wu’s ordering of his material again reflects his ethnographic outlook—his interest in capturing “the taste of the times” and the likes of “northerners.”

This Jiangnan native’s aesthetic eclecticism may exhibit his own rejection of literati mores, and yet Wu can never fully identify with northerners and popular taste. Commenting on the *bangzi* actor Chen Yinguan 陳銀官, he laments: “At those many times I witnessed exquisite moments, what a shame that I could not bring myself to let out

¹²³ For scholarship on the spread of *qingqiang*—and, more generally, *bangzi qiang*—throughout northwest China and into Beijing, see Liu Wenfeng 劉文峰, *Shan-shaan shangyuan yu bangzi xi* 山陝商人與梆子戲 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1996). See also, Colin P. Mackerras, “The Growth of Chinese Regional Drama,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 9.1 (January 1971): 58–91.

¹²⁴ Only at about this time did other texts—texts more strictly in the tradition of music and drama scholarship—begin to be written about *huabu* plays and performance. See, for instance, Li Diaoyuan 李調元, *Ju hua* 劇話, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成, 10 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1982) [hereafter *ZGXLJ*], 8:30–72; Jiao Xun 焦循, *Huabu nongtan* 花部農譚, in *ZGXLJ*, 8:221–31. These texts are more in the tradition of the “talks on poetry” (*shihua* 詩話) connoisseurship. Some of the *huapu* created in the years shortly after the publication of *Yanlan xiaopu* are not quite so eclectic when it comes to musical taste. *Xiaohan xinyong* (1795), for instance, focuses primarily on *kunju* actors and performance.

¹²⁵ Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 6.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

a shout of ‘bravo!’ (*hao* 好).” He follows up by observing that “when northerners watch plays, they emit loud shouts of ‘hao’ at all those moments that really strike their fancy; this is something that my sort (*wo bei* 我輩) is unable to do.”¹²⁷ These comments once again reveal the Jiangnan connoisseur as on the margins (or stuck in-between)—unable completely to cast aside the decorum of men of his standing but deeply drawn to those who can give full vent to their emotions.

For Wu Changyuan, the embrace of non-elite musical styles was but one means of asserting his nonconformist individuality. On a broader level, the turn to opera and aesthetics was a way for the connoisseur to distinguish himself—to carve out a niche in which he (and his cohort of under-employed literati) was expert. If *huapu* writers usually were not guardians of the state, they could at least be minders of artistic excellence, and this self-conferred authority, coupled with the visceral and emotional delight of performance, was salve to their festering political ambitions. Through ranking and cataloging the talent of actors, they restored themselves to their assumed rightful position at the top of a hierarchy of aesthetic discrimination. And the parallels between political and aesthetic ranking were never far from their minds. In the congratulatory opinion of The Raconteur of the Western Hillocks, Wu Changyuan’s *Yanlan xiaopu* was “like filling in a catalog of flowers or seeking out worthies for the ranks of the Hanlin registers.”¹²⁸ The opera cognoscente’s vision of artistic excellence, then, re-inscribed his position in an ideal sociocultural order.

The Aesthetics of the Connoisseur

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century flower registers judge actors (mostly performers of the *dan* role) according to three basic criteria: beauty, artistry, and temperament.¹²⁹ This last criterion, also sometimes characterized as personality or charisma, was a source of pride for connoisseurs—a standard of aesthetic appreciation that they

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹²⁸ Xicheng waishi, “Tici,” in *ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Pan Lizhu has identified a slightly different set of criteria: (1) beauty-talent; (2) personality; (3) temperament. I see personality as a variant of temperament. See Pan Lizhu 潘麗珠, *Qingdai zhongqi Yandu liyuan shiliao pingyi sanlun yanjiu* 清代中期燕都梨園史料評藝三論研究 (Taipei: Liren shuju, 1998). See also, Chen Fang 陳芳, *Qianlong shiqi Beijing jutun yanjiu* 乾隆時期北京劇壇研究 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2001), pp. 304–36.

felt differentiated them from most other opera fans. In the words of the Latter-Day Adept of the Iron Flute: “When I evaluate actors, I don’t only consider beauty and talent; I also take into consideration personality, with charisma as its highest expression.”¹³⁰ Not surprisingly, *huapu* connoisseurs appreciated those actors who were to a certain extent modeled in their own image. They praised actors who had acquired some literacy, and they expressed sympathy for actors of formerly good family background who, as victims of misfortune, had stumbled into the degraded profession. The actor Wang Xiangyun 王湘雲—the inspirational source for Wu Changyuan’s *Yanlan xiaopu*—is notable in the eyes of the author-connoisseur because he paints ink-brush orchids in a style imitating the Yuan dynasty literati painter Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301–1374). If the poems about Xiangyun are somewhat patronizing—marveling that an untutored youth could have such talent and cultivation—the actor’s mimicry of literati hobbies and his less-than-perfect execution of them flatter the self-image of the scholar-patron.¹³¹ One Zhu Fuxi 朱福喜 is praised for being “cultured like a student, without the slightest trace of fawning, and yet graceful and personable.” “When you chat with him face to face,” the admirer continues, “it’s as though he were the son of a good family; and when he waits in attendance upon you, you don’t get the feeling that he is an actor.”¹³² Such comments display a striking dissonance in the connoisseur’s expectations—an unspoken contradiction between appreciation of the youth’s similarity to himself and preservation of the patron’s superior status.

The evaluation of actor temperament was as much about their performance at literati gatherings (or as quasi-courtesan companions) as it was about onstage acting.¹³³ The two kinds of performance were intimately linked. According to one account, when the eleven-year-old actor Zhang Changui 張蟬桂 sang the emotional highlights from the scene “Cangzhou” 藏舟 (Hiding in the boat), “tears naturally coursed down his face” and “all who watched sighed in amazement.” His stage talents made him a sought-after prize at parties, “a source of pride”

¹³⁰ Xiao tiedi daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 107.

¹³¹ The “downgraded expectations” for actors and courtesans as honorary literati is also noted in Chloe Starr, “Shifting Boundaries: Gender in *Pinhua Baojian*,” *Nan Nü* 1.2 (1999): 292.

¹³² Luomoan laoren, *Huafang ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 585.

¹³³ Some actor biographies even comment on the actor’s capacity to hold liquor. See, for instance, Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QYLS*, pp. 377–78.

for the host.¹³⁴ Thus, much as *huapu* authors claim that as men of culture they would never dream of defiling the *dan* actors, they are clearly implicated in the demimonde transactions of urban performance.¹³⁵ Still, in the eyes of the connoisseurs, actor temperament had artistic reverberations too. If the actor’s frustration and misery (echoing the scholar’s own angst) induced in him a melancholic disposition, that could often be a fortuitous source of emotional authenticity on the stage. Yang Maojian, for instance, writes of one actor who felt trapped, “like a parrot in a cage.” Try as he might, the actor was unable to suppress the furrow in his brow, but his dejection translated into exquisite verisimilitude when he performed plaintive heroines, such as Xiaoqing 小青 from the drama *Liaodu geng* 療妒羹 (Jealousy-curing stew).¹³⁶

Although any number of actor temperaments has the potential to please *huapu* connoisseurs, there is one overriding performance aesthetic that emerges from the corpus of flower registers: subtlety—often rendered as *hanxu* 含蓄 or *qiu dan* 求淡.¹³⁷ This aesthetic preference, the connoisseurs claim, is something that distinguishes their own taste from that of the popular crowd. In describing the characteristics of an actor who captures this ideal, Wu Changyuan writes:

Xue Sier 薛四兒: . . . [He] is one of the most winsome graces among the *dan* of the Western Troupes—slender and delicate, with a face like a flowering lotus. In scenes of romantic flirtation, he is rather restrained, and so the shouts of “*hao*” from the audience are but few. Oh, what a shame!¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Liuchunge xiaoshi, comp., *Tingchun xinyong*, in *QYLS*, p. 167.

¹³⁵ Yilansheng, *Cemao yutan*, in *QYLS*, p. 605. The iconoclast Zhang Jiliang is the only *huapu* author to have explicitly acknowledged a sexual liaison with an actor companion, Xu Guilin 徐桂林. Zhang explains: “After failing . . . in the summer of 1826, I stayed on in the capital. [Other] sojourners were wont to invite me to watch operas but my interest was not keen. Only upon meeting Xiao Xi 小猗 [pet name for Guilin] was my passion aroused. That winter on the fifteenth of the tenth month (24 November 1826), there was a Buddhist ceremony held on behalf of the actor Wu at the Longquan Monastery 龍泉寺. XX invited XXX and myself to go, and Xiao Xi was among those present. After that, we gradually became intimate. I wrote for him ‘A Song for Xulang’ (‘Xulang qu’ 徐郎曲), which came to be rather widely circulated.” Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 229. The term Zhang uses to describe his intimacy with Xulang, *xia* 狎, is the same character used in the common (and usually derogatory) phrase denoting those who engage in sexual relations with actors, *xiaoyou* 狎優.

¹³⁶ Yang, *Chang’an kanhua ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 310.

¹³⁷ For *hanxu*, see, for instance, Liuchunge xiaoshi, comp., *Tingchun xinyong*, in *QYLS*, p. 204; for the concept of *qiu dan*, see also, Zhou, “Xiaohan xinyong zhaji,” in Zhou, ed. and annot., *Xiaohan xinyong*, p. 144.

¹³⁸ Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QYLS*, p. 27.

Rushing to the actor's defense, Wu argues that "pretty flowers are best when only half open; as for the passions of the boudoir, it's the suggestion, not the manifestation, that arouses. Watching 'raw coupling' . . . has no more flavor than chewing on wax."¹³⁹ These sentiments are echoed in an assessment of the actor Jiulin 九林 in *Rixia kanhua ji*, for which the commentator writes: "There are those in the audience who feel [his] portrayal [of the White Snake] is too stiff. . . . I say . . . that if the performance is overly slick, it takes on the flavor of chewed wax"; and the connoisseur concludes this entry by cautioning other actors against mindlessly imitating the current vogue for excess.¹⁴⁰ Of course, *huapu* did record actors who rendered more flamboyant interpretations of romantic heroines on the stage. Consequently, accounts of such actors as Wei Changsheng and his student Chen Yinguan—who were notorious for their racy performance style—have been preserved in the historical record.¹⁴¹ Nonetheless, the connoisseur ranked what he watched, placing the half-open flower—or veiled eroticism—at the top of the aesthetic hierarchy.

The *huapu* aesthetic had less to do with policing morality than with the search for the expression of *qing*—or true emotion—on the stage. That is, overly broad representations of romantic attraction ran the risk of devolving into burlesque, especially when depicted in a transvestite theatrical tradition, and although the resulting comedic effects may have been entertaining to many in the audience, in the eyes of the cognoscenti they had the potential to undermine the "authenticity" of the emotional content and even the eroticism of certain scenes.¹⁴² In this regard too, connoisseurs express rather strong opinions about the age of actors playing the *dan* roles. The heyday of female impersonators playing ingénue roles well into middle age and beyond lay far in the twentieth-century future. In the mid-to-late Qing, most *dan* actors either stopped performing or switched role types sometime in their mid-twenties. Still, there was a typical range of ages for *dan* roles, and

¹³⁹ Ibid.; see also, *ibid.*, p. 47, for similar comments.

¹⁴⁰ Xiao tieda daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 69.

¹⁴¹ For the entries on Wei Changsheng and Chen Yinguan, see Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QYLS*, pp. 32–33, 17–18; 44–47, respectively. Wei Changsheng is also mentioned in *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QYLS*, pp. 104–5; *Tingchun xinyong*, in *QYLS*, p. 204; and Li Dou's *Yangzhou huafang lu*, p. 132.

¹⁴² On situating performance along a *qing/qi* continuum in the portrayal of the heroine of the romantic comedy "Si fan," see Andrea S. Goldman, "The Nun Who Wouldn't Be: Representations of Female Desire in Two Performance Genres of 'Si fan,'" *LIC* 22.1 (June 2001): 113, 113 n. 131.

huapu connoisseurs did not fail to make known their preferences. Complaining that the ten-year-old children bought into the profession were too immature to understand the content of their performances, Yang Maojian writes: "With tender mouths still smelling of mother's milk, they are forced onto the stage. They 'um' and 'ah' as if they were reciting from rote memory. They can barely understand how to respond to the melody or the beat, much less convey an emotionally convincing portrayal."¹⁴³ But *dan* actors at the upper end of the age spectrum also were not appreciated by *huapu* authors. Another connoisseur, writing in the 1850s, comments that watching forty-something actors playing the *dan* role made him want to vomit.¹⁴⁴ Either extreme threatened to detract from the emotional and visual integrity of performance. The connoisseurs' taste in opera, then, gravitated to an ideal of immanent sensuality, preserving artistic standards on the page that ran the risk of becoming corrupted by the burlesque, the kitsch, and the exploitation of the metropolitan commercial stage.

THE LAO DOU AND OTHER PATRONS

The comments about performance style in *huapu* reveal more than the cognoscenti's own definition of theatrical excellence; they also transmit an awareness of the taste and theatergoing practices of other members of the audience. The true connoisseur distinguished himself by constantly referencing his own likes and dislikes to the tastes of the times, the crowd, and the *lao dou*. If the *dan* actor was the intended focus of the opera aficionado's critical eye, then other theater patrons, and more specifically, the *lao dou*, were the unintended object of the *huapu* writer's ethnographic gaze. Especially when recording the practices associated with the theater-going culture of the capital—the drinking parties at winehouses after the performances, the patronage of various actors, the purchase of sexual favors from actors, and so forth—*huapu*

¹⁴³ Yang, *Xin ren gui jia lu*, in *QYLS*, p. 282. Qixiang shi, in contrast, writing in 1816, praises an eighteen-*sui dan* for not having lost his charms even though he was "getting on in years." Qixiang shi, *Pinghua*, 8b.

¹⁴⁴ Luomoan laoren, *Huafang ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 588. See also the comments in *Yanjing zaji*, which claim, "The period of fame for boy actors is no more than a few years; it starts when they are about thirteen or fourteen *sui* and lasts until they are seventeen or eighteen *sui*; by the time they reach twenty, they have already gone into retirement and the traffic outside their doors has grown scarce." *Yanjing zaji*, cited in Zhang Cixi, ed., *Beijing liyuan zhanggu changbian*, in *QYLS*, p. 898.

devoted considerable attention to what I call the look outward, that is, what other opera fans did. Whereas the actor—his talent, his predicament, and (in spite of everything) his integrity—was often framed in the connoisseur-writer's own image, *huapu* always presented the *lao dou* in marked contrast to the true cognoscente. The *lao dou* was a figure against which the connoisseur constantly measured himself, and, typically, he came up short in the estimation of *huapu* writers. Echoing *huapu* sentiment, “old roués” become a figure of fun in one early nineteenth-century popular ditty:

His face may be swarthy or pocked,
Yet always he insists on fancy dress.
Without millions in golden ingots,
That old-roué éclat is hard to possess.¹⁴⁵

As this mocking jingle reveals, the *lao dou* was distinguished first and foremost by extraordinary wealth. But two types of theater patrons could fit such a description: powerful officials and rich merchants. Squeezed between these two groups, *huapu* writers felt themselves to be compromised vis-à-vis both the official elite and the socioeconomic power of merchants. And their anxiety over this interstitial (and often downwardly mobile) condition is reflected in *huapu* depictions of opera enthusiasts and theater culture. Although the politically well connected become the target of much gossip (so-and-so is infatuated with such-and-such an actor), *huapu* writers reserved the brunt of their disdain for ostentatious merchants.

Of course, which of the two types of *lao dou* is being described can be ambiguous since *huapu* authors on occasion simply refer to them as “great patrons” (*hao ke*). In describing the lifestyle associated with theatergoing in the capital, for instance, Wu Changyuan offers the following portrayal of “great patrons” and their interactions with *dan* actors:

When the various *dan* see that their patrons have arrived in the playhouse, either they send over a plate of sweetmeats or they personally go up to them with a curtsy. . . . After a short while, before the song and music have even finished, [actor and patron] have left together in the same carriage for the winehouses. Returning home—tongues clucking from drunken speech—it is as though a scene from the [Song dynasty] Alum-Paper Winehouse were being replayed before our eyes.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ From Yang Jingting 楊靜亭, *Dumen zayong* 都門雜詠, cited in *QJLS*, p. 1174.

¹⁴⁶ Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 47. The Alum-Paper Winehouse was a famous tavern in Song-era Kaifeng. Recorded in *Dongjing menghua lu*, the Alum-Paper Winehouse or Fanlou 樊樓 (so

According to *huapu* writers, it is the *hao ke* or *lao dou* who patronize the *dan* actors in their secondary entertainment roles as drinking and sexual companions. A source from the 1820s grumbles, “Successful officials, large-scale tradesmen, and the sons of powerful nobles coerce boy-actors to accompany them to winehouses; they will spend up to several hundred taels on a single banquet. More family fortunes are squandered and reputations ruined by this than by anything else. And yet the customs in the capital are such that nobody thinks it amiss.”¹⁴⁷

The *lao dou*'s money was not always spent in entirely self-serving ways. According to Zhang Jiliang, great patrons sometimes paid up to three thousand taels to purchase a young actor out of his service contract (a practice akin to buying a prostitute out of servitude to a brothel)—although Zhang hastens to add that this usually happened when an actor was in the flower of his youth; after an actor reached maturity, no one bothered to favor him with such attention.¹⁴⁸ And yet, as another anecdote by Zhang reveals, buying an actor out of the profession did not always confer freedom upon him. “Manchu Vice Minister XX,” Zhang quips, “bought [the actor Quanxi 全喜] to serve as a page boy for the sum of one thousand taels.”¹⁴⁹ In what is perhaps intended as a subtle condemnation of the acquisitive greed of this official, Zhang ends with the observation that the “Vice Minister has since met with political misfortune and been banished to a border region.”¹⁵⁰

named because it was located near the shop for alum-paper merchants) is described as a place frequented by wealthy merchants. From the description, it is clear that one of its main attractions was the prostitutes who worked out of the establishment. Wu's invocation of the Fanlou is surely his oblique way of commenting on the parallel role of the *dan* in his own times.

¹⁴⁷ From *Yanjing zaji*, cited in Zhang Cixi, ed., *Beijing liyuan zhanggu changbian*, in *QJLS*, p. 897.

¹⁴⁸ That is, after he reached capping age (*ruo guan* 弱冠). Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QJLS*, pp. 246–47.

¹⁴⁹ Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 243. The XX in this passage corresponds to two blank spaces in the original text. Throughout Zhang's *huapu*, blank spaces—either two or three—are used in lieu of the names of people with official position. As far as I can tell, these blank spaces were introduced into the text by the author and are not the result of later emendation by the editor of *QJLS*. If this is so, then Zhang's practice in this regard is most revealing. Zhang is essentially gossiping about contemporaries, but does not wish to invite trouble by giving actual names. And yet, contemporary audiences of his *huapu* (and certainly political insiders) would have been well able to guess the identities. If anything, adding the blank spaces, introducing a not-too-difficult guessing game into the text, would have enhanced the *huapu* allure. It would also have been a way of distinguishing between those readers in-the-know (the insiders) and those who didn't know but wanted to be in-the-know (the outsiders), all of which would have tagged the author as someone in-the-know.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

The antagonism directed toward *lao dou* is more explicit in a comment in *Menghua suobu*, which describes those who constantly harass the actors by showing up outside their doorsteps for a “tea gathering” (*da chawei*) as “having no shame.”¹⁵¹ A passage about an actor in *Yanlan xiaopu* is more explicit still about setting up a contrast between the rich but callow *lao dou* and the sometimes penniless but always sophisticated connoisseur, claiming with a note of self-satisfaction that the actor Liu Erguan 劉二官 “is petulant when in the company of great patrons; but when he comes into contact with . . . poor scholars, he forms intimate friendships founded on literary elegance.”¹⁵² And *huapu* author Zhang Jiliang writes with palpable admiration (if not vicarious thrill) of the actor Meng Changxi 孟長喜 who, when under the influence of drink, had the foolhardy habit of cursing the officials he was entertaining.¹⁵³

The critical attitudes expressed in *huapu* about patrons identified as merchants tend to be sharper still. *Yanlan xiaopu*, for example, records the following story about the relationship between two virtuous actors and their merchant patron from Zhejiang:

A certain merchant from Xiuzhou 秀州 was on intimate terms with [Tang Yulin 唐玉林 and Fang Lanru 方蘭如]. He squandered all his funds for trade on the pleasures of wine and song. Later, the merchant was arrested for defaulting on his loans. The two [actors] reported this to the merchant's friend. They said: “You know what has happened to him. If we can enlist your support to get him out of trouble, then we will contribute two thousand taels so that he doesn't lose everything he owns.” The friend was moved by their words and intervened to settle the lawsuit on the merchant's behalf. Not long afterwards, the merchant took up with a different actor. In disappointment the two actors said: “You can't save a drowning man! We did not fail the merchant, but the merchant has failed us.” Thereafter, the merchant depleted his entire fortune.¹⁵⁴

On the surface, this story is designed to highlight the righteous behavior of the actors, but in the process it presents a portrait of an ungrateful, profligate merchant.¹⁵⁵ In another anecdote, the merchant is not so

¹⁵¹ Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QJLS*, p. 376.

¹⁵² Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, p. 19.

¹⁵³ Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QJLS*, p. 234.

¹⁵⁴ Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, pp. 42–43.

¹⁵⁵ If the details of this anecdote can be relied upon, this passage also illustrates that popular actors could accumulate a significant fortune. Nevertheless, regardless of their economic well being, the mean status of actors excluded them from the full range of legal prerogatives available to commoners, such as, in this instance, appearing in court to plead on behalf of a defendant.

much the villain as the dupe. Wu Changyuan regales his readers with the story of “a certain rich merchant from Jinling [Nanjing] who, in 1773, used his wealth to purchase a post as a department vice magistrate (*biejia* 別駕).” The story continues:

When [the merchant] first arrived in the capital, he had a fancy for jade vessels but had no other indulgences. In a matter of a few months, he met two men at a playhouse who were—to use the colloquial term—“go-betweens.” They invited actors to come to his lodgings, and this increased with each passing day. The merchant's domestics viewed these two men as devils. Thereafter, the rich merchant's magnanimity was aroused and he began to spend lavishly on wine, delicacies, carriages, and horses. He spent his days in opera halls and winehouses and he spent his nights in drinking and gambling. Every evening he would retain a *dan* actor to lie with him through the night. He went on to arrange marriages and purchase houses for the actors, complete with all the accompanying clothing and household items—spending more than a thousand taels per actor. In just five months he arranged marriages for three of them. Having exhausted the funds he had brought with him to the capital, the merchant sent home for more. His son came to the capital and urged him to return south, but he would not listen. Still, his money was not so plentiful as it had been before. Some time later an actor came to him to borrow three hundred taels in silver. The merchant agreed to provide the money in a few days but then was unable to make good on his promise. The actor cursed out the merchant on the doorstep to his lodging; this was one of the actors whom he had previously set up with a wife. On hearing the actor's curses, the merchant was overcome with remorse and chagrin. That night he hanged himself. In less than a year, the merchant had spent more than ten thousand taels. His son wanted to bring a suit [against the actor], but native-place compatriots cautioned him against broadcasting his father's vices. So, all the son could do was swallow his cries and conceal his tears. Alas! In truth, who was it that brought him to such an end? It was all the fault of those two devils! Those who take up residence in the capital cannot be too careful when it comes to making friends! I heard this from the rich merchant's neighbor who saw everything with his own eyes. Though I have concealed the merchant's true name, I record this as a warning to others.¹⁵⁶

These, and many other anecdotes recorded in *huapu*, have the ring of cautionary tales to them.¹⁵⁷ But that is precisely the point. Working with the rumors generated by the metropolitan gossip mill, *huapu* writers

For more on the legal status of actors, see Mackerras, *Rise of the Peking Opera*, pp. 42–43, 219; and Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China*, pp. 129–30, 271.

¹⁵⁶ Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QJLS*, pp. 48–49.

¹⁵⁷ Written in a simple classical prose, some of these anecdotes remind me of the stories one might find in Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 *Liaozhai zhi yi* 聊齋誌異. Wu makes a point of specifying his source, as if he were aware that without such attribution this anecdote would read like a fable.

embellished and shaped their stories of the theatrical demimonde in familiar patterns; in the process, they cast the *lao dou* as *nouveau-riche* yahoos—lacking both the refinement and the savvy to be true aficionados.

Ultimately, what really distinguished the merchant *lao dou* from more cultured opera patrons in the eyes of *huapu* connoisseurs was his lack of aesthetic sophistication—as evident even in his choice of winehouse. Another anecdote, this time provided by Yang Maojian, makes a not so subtle dig at the taste of *lao dou* merchants. Writes Yang:

The Pork Market district has the largest concentration of winehouses; the smell here is most odious—completely incompatible with the clientele. I have always said that taking beauties to the Pork Market district to drink and dine is tantamount to burning a zither for firewood or boiling a crane for food. Just south of there is the Jinyuan Winehouse. It's a place where merchants from the western regions gather. It doesn't have second-story private guest alcoves; and the actors won't set foot in the place. In the playhouses, when the actors ask: "Where will the feast be held tonight," if the response is, "Jinyuan Winehouse," they shake their heads and walk away.¹⁵⁸

Yang's anecdote, aside from being remarkable for the sense of agency it accords to the actors, once again exposes the connoisseur's subliminal preoccupation with hierarchy and ranking—in this case, of patrons.¹⁵⁹ The implicit highest rank is reserved for the true cognoscenti—such as Yang himself—who would not dream of subjecting favorite actors to the smelly winehouses. The next level down in the hierarchy is revealed by adopting the perspective of the actors, especially the highly successful and popular ones, who had their own method of sizing up potential patrons; that is, like the connoisseurs, the actors ranked the *lao dou* by the winehouses that they visited. In Yang's vision, the "merchants from the western regions" are relegated to the bottom rung of the hierarchy of patrons; even the actors, he implies, know better than to frequent the second-rate winehouses.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QYLS*, p. 353.

¹⁵⁹ Yang's definition of "the actors" here is clearly limited to those at the top of their field; it is easy to imagine that the less popular actors—those who never made it into *huapu* collections—would have been less choosy about where they entertained their clientele. Just this sort of differentiation and distinction among actors is revealed in *Pinhua baojian*, which presents a hierarchy within the acting world: the best *kunju* actors lay claim to the highest rank; less attractive and less skilled *kunju* and *pihuang* 皮簧 actors fill the middle rungs; and, occupying the lowest rung of the ladder of entertainment and sex-work, are the barber-boy apprentices who double as singers of popular tunes.

¹⁶⁰ Yang, *Menghua suobu*, in *QYLS*, p. 357.

Even more telling was the *lao dou*'s aesthetic preference in opera. Some *huapu* writers simply allude to this as "the taste of the times," which they always describe as inferior to that of the connoisseurs.¹⁶¹ A number of *huapu* writers express regret that a favorite actor has changed his performance style to cater to the taste of the times. "Several years ago," Tieqiao shanren writes, "Yuling . . . was quite proper and demure but later he poured all his effort into flirtation plays; I think it must be that he really wanted to make a name for himself, and so he did this to appeal to the taste of the times."¹⁶² *Rixia kanhua ji* similarly critiques the actor Cai Sanbao 蔡三寶.¹⁶³ Behind the phrase "taste of the times," however, is also recognition that the connoisseurs and the *lao dou* were watching (and patronizing) essentially the same actors. This is confirmed by other comments in *huapu*. The actor Feng Hongxi 馮紅喜, for instance, was admired by Zhang Jiliang for his outspoken personality and his fondness for wine; and according to Zhang, Feng was also especially popular with merchants.¹⁶⁴ *Huapu* present merchant *lao dou* as uninterested in *kunju*;¹⁶⁵ and they describe bankers from the northwestern regions as particularly fond of *qinqiang* and clapper opera.¹⁶⁶ For connoisseurs such as Wu Changyuan to take an interest in clapper opera is presented as a mark of eccentricity (and thus distinction); for merchants to like such plays is expected, and therefore simply common.

In the end, it was the proximity of taste and theatergoing practices in the capital that prompted the connoisseurs to differentiate themselves. Since in practice the connoisseurs and the *lao dou* all watched much the same actors and plays in the same commercial playhouses, ultimately what really distinguished the connoisseurs from the *lao dou* were their methods of opera consumption and connoisseurship. *Lao dou* expressed their appreciation of actors through direct patronage while *huapu* connoisseurs did so by patronage (when they could afford it) and by cataloging the actors and their talents through the written record. What marked someone as a true cognoscente, in other words, was the very act of writing a *huapu*.

¹⁶¹ See, for instance, Wu, *Yanlan xiaopu*, in *QYLS*, p. 21; and Xiao tiedi daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QYLS*, pp. 69, 71, 78.

¹⁶² Zhou, ed. and annot., *Xiaohan xinyong*, p. 23.

¹⁶³ Xiao Tiedi Daoren, comp., *Rixia kanhua ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 78.

¹⁶⁴ Zhang, *Jintai canlei ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 234.

¹⁶⁵ Yang, *Chang'an kanhua ji*, in *QYLS*, p. 311.

¹⁶⁶ Chen Yanheng 陳彥衡, *Juju cong'an* 舊劇叢談, in *QYLS*, p. 859.

CONCLUSION

The derivative or appropriated nature of the many literary tropes in flower registers tends to mask just how new the experience of commercial opera was in high Qing Beijing. The development of the full-fledged commercial playhouse during the eighteenth century widened the circle of audiences who attended opera performance in enclosed theatrical venues; (outdoor and festival opera continued apace). On the one hand, this development extended a proximate experience of the select and elegant mandarin's salon to anyone with the means to buy his way in (and quite likely many of the anonymous and marginal literati who wrote *huapu* would not have had such ready access to urban opera without the opportunities thus provided);¹⁶⁷ on the other, the lowered (and now purely monetary) threshold of exclusivity of the commercial playhouse prompted a desire on the part of literate fans to inscribe new boundaries—boundaries founded on the intangibles of culture and sensibility rather than power and money. The expanded economic possibilities (both upward and downward) of the high Qing fostered greater anxiety about one's place in the changing social arena—especially for men sandwiched between official status and mercantile wealth. These concerns were refracted in texts about theater in the capital. *Huapu* writers loosed their wits and passions on the demimonde when the path to and through the “monde” was often blocked and treacherous. The gender-bending practices and evocative metaphors of the metropolitan acting world, in which playing the *dan* and the experience of being “feminized” were valorized, generated potent stuff out of which to craft morality tales about integrity under duress and talent in the face of adversity.

The anxiety about place—place within a long historical and literary legacy, place among contemporary peers, and place within the slippery social hierarchy—is reflected in the three intertwined looks of the *huapu*. The look backward involved a conscious deployment of concepts and allusions drawn from the rich corpus of antecedent con-

noisseurship literature to frame *huapu*-writers' interest in contemporary opera and actors. If display of familiarity with the classical tradition was a way of legitimating what they themselves sensed (and sometimes even acknowledged) was a frivolous literary endeavor, it was also a way of demonstrating that they alone were truly equipped to be the arbiters of aesthetic excellence. The look inward spoke to and for a small cohort of like-minded and similarly situated men who took delight (and sometimes refuge) in opera performance. But there was considerable overlap between the look inward and the look backward, since one of the means by which *huapu* authors laid claim to be members of this exclusive group of literary and theater sophisticates was through facility in classical genres and allusions. The look outward also cannot be separated from the look inward, for self-definition of the true cognoscenti was always predicated upon observing and writing about actors (and the theatrical demimonde) and articulating a contrast between themselves and other (in their eyes) less cultured audience patrons. The exclusivity of the connoisseur's aesthetic and social vision thus could only be fully articulated against a backdrop of vulgarity—whether that be the taste of the *lao dou*, the taste of merchants, or, more simply, the “taste of the times.”

To understand the impact of the flower registers, we must turn, briefly, from the writers to their readers. Readers responded differently to the three looks of the *huapu*. The look backward, which I locate primarily in the prefaces, postscripts, and dedicatory essays and poems that frame the *huapu*, would have had the most selective audience. The language of these passages, though full of *mea culpas* and self-justification, was also the least accessible. If we can judge from the comments put into the mouths of characters in the late Qing novel *Pinhua baojian*, probably most readers just passed over the highly literary and exceedingly ornate prefatory statements to get to those parts of the *huapu* that actually described actors and operas. In the opening chapter of the novel, for example, when an uninitiated young scholar picks up a *huapu* for the first time, he notices “several prefaces, which were none other than four-six parallel prose,” and he is told by his educated friends (including the author of the *huapu*) to “skip those” and get on to the biographies of the actors.¹⁶⁸ In actuality, then, readership for such

¹⁶⁷ Recent scholarship on theaters in eighteenth-century Beijing speculates that regular commercial playhouses developed out of the practices of opera patronage at winehouses and scholar-official lodges and trade guilds. See, for instance, Liao Ben 廖奔, *Zhongguo gudai juchang shi* 中國古代劇場史 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1997), pp. 86–88; Wang Qiang 王強, *Huiguan xitai yu xiju* 會館戲臺與戲劇 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 2000), pp. 239–312.

¹⁶⁸ Chen, *Pinhua baojian*, 1.7b.

abstruse passages may well have been restricted to the author, his immediate circle of friends and patrons (who had been asked to respond to the compilation with dedicatory remarks), and later *huapu* writers. And reading this material was probably not the point; its presence as a frame for the text sufficed to lend the desired imprimatur of high belles-lettres and connoisseurship.

A literate but somewhat wider readership would have been drawn to the look inward, which permeated the core of *huapu* and their framing texts. This was the look that spoke to the fellow connoisseurs and social peers, and it engaged sympathetic opera buffs in a conversation about beauty, authenticity, and standards of moral integrity and theatrical excellence. Entry into this conversation required knowledge of the language of the theater as well as classical erudition, but presumably one could accrue familiarity with the jargon of performance through frequent visits to the playhouses and not just via book learning; thus, even a mediocre man of letters could become well versed in opera lore. Still, maintaining a threshold of exclusivity would have been important to preserving *huapu* claims to true mastery of connoisseurship skill, paradoxically delineating insiders from outsiders, and thereby accentuating the appeal—and the marketability—of such texts for readers desiring to acquire that insider knowledge.

It was via the look outward, as guidebooks—as primers to playing the connoisseur and as aids to finding the best actors in the capital—that flower registers would have attracted the largest and most heterogeneous audience. As one nineteenth-century observer put it: “Sophisticated dandies write ‘rosters of the famous flowers in the precinct of the throne,’ detailing their places of residence and names; they evaluate their beauty, artistry, and temperament. . . . Those in search of romance have but to glance at this and they will find it.”¹⁶⁹ Surely, then, it was the allure of opera in the capital—and the resulting demand for and interest in these guides to popular actors—that enabled flower registers to be published “year upon year,” and which ensured that “money was actually paid for such frivolous rubbish.”

¹⁶⁹ From *Yanjing zaji*, cited in Zhang Cixi, ed., *Beijing liyuan zhanggu changbian*, in *QJLS*, p. 898.

Another Look at the Pseudo-*Śūraṃgama sūtra*

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IN the later Chinese Buddhist tradition, one text above all others has been extolled for the profundity of its ideas, the beauty of its language, and its insight into the practice of meditation—this is the scripture popularly known as the *Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經 or *Śūraṃgama sūtra*.¹ Because of conflicting evidence regarding its provenance, and because the text seems to owe so much to other sources, modern scholars have concluded that the *Śūraṃgama* is an apocryphal sutra that was fabricated in China at the beginning of the eighth century.² That is to say, although

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¹ *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* [hereafter T.], no. 945, 19:105–55.

² See, for example, Mochizuki Shinkō, *Bukkyō kyōten seiritsu shiron* 佛敎經典成立史論 (Kyoto: Hozokan, 1946), pp. 493–509; Paul Demiéville, *Le Concile de Lhasa: une controverse sur le quietisme entre Bouddhistes de l'Inde et de la Chine au VIIIe siècle de l'ère Chrétienne* (1952; rpt., Paris: Collège de France Institut des hautes études chinoises, 1987), pp. 42–53; and Kim Chin-yōl 김진열, *Nungomgyong yon'gu immune* 楞嚴經研究入門 (Seoul: Unjusa, 1993). For studies of other major apocryphal works, see Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮, *Gikyō kenkyū* 疑經研究 (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku Jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1976); and Robert E. Buswell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1990).