Writing Women in Modern China

AN ANTHOLOGY OF WOMEN'S LITERATURE FROM THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

EDITED BY

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS NEW YORK

Larson, "The End of 'Funü Wenxue': Women's Literature from 1925–1935," in *Modern Chinese Literature* 4 (1988).

40. Yi-tsi Feuerwerker, "Women as Writers in the 1920s and 1930s," in Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke, eds., *Women in Chinese Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 145. For a critique of such views, see Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading Between West and East* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 158–59.

41. *Woman Writer Magazine* (Shanghai: Jinwu shudian, 1929), 1 (1): 156.

42. Yu Xiao, "Miss Jixing Gan, editor at the Women's Bookstore," in *Dagongbao*, Shanghai, September 1936. We would like to thank Susan Glosser for bringing this article to our attention.

43. *Nüzi shudian tushu mulu* (Index to the publications of the Women's Bookstore) (Shanghai: Nüzi shudian, 1933), inside cover.

44. *Nüzuojia xiao congshu* (Women writers mini-book series), (Shanghai: Guangyi shuju, 1930), 10 v.

45. See, for example, the five collections of contemporary women's diaries, essays, and short stories edited by Wang Dingjiu for Shanghai's Zhongyang Bookstore in 1935, or the seven anthologies of modern women's writing edited by Jun Sheng for Shanghai's Fangguo Bookstore in 1936.

46. In a tragic twist of fate, shortly after the release of *The New Woman* the actress Ruan Lingyu found herself at the center of unwanted media attention and committed suicide.

47. Guo Zhenyi, *Zhongguo funü wenti* (The Chinese woman question) (Shanghai Commercial Press, 1931); Wang Liming, *Zhongguo funü yundong* (The Chinese women's movement) (Shanghai Commercial Press, 1934); Tan Sheying, *Zhongguo funü yundong tongshi* (The history of the Chinese women's movement) (Nanjing funü mingshe, 1936).

48. Lu Jingqing, *Tangdai nü shiren* (Shanghai: Shenzhou guoguangshe, 1931). See also Chen Dongyuan, *Zhongguo funü shenghuo shi* (A history of Chinese women's lives) (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1928); Tan Zhengbi, *Zhongguo nüxing de wenxue shenghuo* (The literary life of Chinese women) (Shanghai: Guangming shuju, 1930).

49. For an illuminating discussion of Xiao Hong's treatment of gender and nationalism, see Lydia Liu, "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong's *Field of Life and Death*," in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow, eds., *Body, Subject, and Power in China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 157–77.

1

Qiu Jin

秋瑾

Qiu Jin (1875–1907)

Remembered for her pioneering role in Chinese feminism as well as her flamboyant participation in the nationalist revolutionary movement during the waning years of the Qing dynasty, Qiu Jin belongs to the extraordinary first generation of radicals who actively searched for solutions to China's political crisis at the turn of the century. In Qiu Jin's view, the problems of "woman" and "nation" were intimately connected, not least because she believed that the

liberation of Chinese women from patriarchal domination would have little meaning if China as a nation were subjugated by foreign powers. Much of her political work and radical writing was devoted to this dual agenda.

Born into a scholarly family from Fujian province in 1875, Qiu Jin was brought up in a traditional manner, although her parents were at times lenient in allowing her to pursue activities normally deemed unsuitable for young ladies of her social class. Her mother reputedly gave up trying to teach her the "feminine arts" of sewing and embroidery when Qiu Jin insisted that she preferred practicing archery and reading martial arts novels. Qiu Jin also received outstanding training in classical literature, which is reflected in the traditional lyrical poetry (*shi* and *ci*) she composed as well as the wide range of poetic allusions in her more explicitly revolutionary writing.

Qiu Jin was first exposed to radical nationalism in 1903, when she moved to Beijing shortly after her marriage. The imperial capital was still reeling from the repercussions of the disastrous Boxer Rebellion of 1900, and it was amid this politically charged atmosphere that Qiu Jin started reading periodicals such as Liang Qichao's *New Fiction* and meeting other progressive intellectuals who shared her growing alarm over China's current situation. To express her deep dissatisfaction with the status quo, Qiu Jin began composing patriotic verses and, much to her husband's dismay, appearing in public in Western male attire. Thoroughly disillusioned by her marriage and determined to contribute personally to the revolutionary movement, Qiu Jin left her husband and her two children in 1904 and embarked for Japan, a venture that she financed by selling her dowry jewelry.

In Tokyo, where she enrolled in Shimoda Utako's Girls' Practical School, Qiu Jin quickly distinguished herself as an ardent advocate of nationalist revolution as well as a leading voice in the nascent feminist movement. In addition to delivering fiery speeches at meetings of Chinese students in Japan, Qiu Jin helped to reorganize the Encompassing Love Society, an early all-women's political association whose members included the future suffragette Lin Zongsu. In 1905, Qiu Jin formally joined Sun Yatsen's Revolutionary Alliance, becoming one of the first female members of that organization.

Like many late Qing activists, Qiu Jin regarded the burgeoning print media as an indispensable tool for galvanizing her compatriots to reform society. In Japan, she began writing for the *Vernacular News*, a revolutionary journal that advocated the use of a more colloquial form of written Chinese. After returning to China, Qiu Jin launched her own journal, *Chinese Women's News*, at the end of 1906. Like many of the periodicals that comprised the so-called women's press at the turn of the century, Qiu Jin's magazine was explicitly addressed to a female readership and took up a variety of feminist issues, including women's education and economic autonomy. The goal of the magazine, as stated in her editorial introduction, was to "unite all Chinese women." Due to financial difficulties, however, only two issues of this ambitious journal ever appeared in print. In 1907, Qiu Jin was arrested and beheaded in Shaoxing for her role in a conspiracy to overthrow the Qing government.

A versatile writer, Qiu Jin was admired for her lyrical poetry as well as her political writings. The latter category included feminist-nationalist songs, patriotic ballads, and impassioned essays on the relationship between women's emancipation and nationalist transformation. Qiu Jin's most ambitious revolutionary opus, however, was the *tanci* she began composing in 1905 in Japan, *Stones of the Jingwei Bird*. A traditional oral narrative form that alternates in performance between recited prose and sung verse, the *tanci* was seen as an ideal medium for reaching the illiterate and semi-illiter-

ate masses. (The alternating verse/prose style has not been maintained in this translation in the interest of preserving the flow of the narrative in English.) The *tanci* held particular appeal among female audiences, which might also explain why Qiu Jin choose this particular narrative mode. Originally conceived as a twenty-chapter work, *Stones* was left unfinished at the time of Qiu Jin's execution, but it remains an important example of this formative moment in modern women's writing in China. The full text appeared in print for the first time in 1962 in Qian Xingcun (A Ying)'s anthology of late Qing literature.

Excerpts from
STONES OF THE JINGWEI BIRD[1]
(1905–1907)

Preface

I live in an era of transition. Taking advantage of the light of the dawning civilization and the paltry knowledge I possess, I have thrown off the yokes of the past. Yet I am often pained that my sister compatriots remain in a World of Darkness, as though drunk or dreaming, oblivious to the changes around them. Even though there are now schools for women, few enroll in them. Let me ask you, of our twenty million women, how many still grovel at the feet of tyrannical men? Alas, today they continue to powder and paint themselves, chatter about their hairdos and bind their feet, adorn their heads with gold and pearls, and drape their bodies in brocade. Toadying for favor, they ingratiate themselves to men—obey-

1. The *jingwei*, a mythical bird, attempted to fill up the ocean with pebbles. Although traditional proverbs about this bird connote an endeavor carried out in vain, here Qiu Jin reappropriates the image to convey in a more positive sense the idea of a monumental yet achievable task.

ing their commands like horses or cows. They are no more than the servile and shameless playthings of men. But though they are subjected to immeasurable oppression, they are unaware of their pain; though suffer abuse and humiliation, they have no shame. They are completely blind and ignorant, saying with idiotic serenity: this is our fate. They feel no disgrace in begging like slaves and groveling on their knees. Instead of supporting their compatriots, they stand on the sidelines obeying their husbands and sons and opposing those who build schools and factories for women. Then there are those delicate ladies of noble families, with their fancy houses and fine appearances, their piles of pearls and gold, who willingly worship stupid temple idols and fatten the Buddhist monks and nuns to pray for their happiness, yet when they see other women who are engulfed in suffering, they don't even offer a helping hand. Alas! Do they feel no compassion?

I continued to be baffled by this situation until, after long reflection, I suddenly awoke. Now I declare: wherever there are women, are there not also heroines, philanthropists, and exceptional individuals to be found? I am not referring to those women in scholarly circles, for they have already been nurtured by civilization. But are there not also heroines even within the World of Darkness? Unfortunately, women suffer from ignorance and limited experience, and thus no matter how many books they may have in their possession, they have a hard time understanding what they mean. For this reason, I have composed this *tanci* in plain language, hoping that all women will comprehend its content and that it will enable them to leave the darkness behind and ascend to the civilized realm. I have tried my best to write systematically about the demeaning realities of women's existence, about their suffering and shame, in hopes of startling my readers, making them aware of their own shortcomings, and rousing them to further enlighten our women's world.

Every day I burn incense, praying that women will emancipate themselves from their slavish confines and arise as heroines and female gallants on the stage of liberty, following in the footsteps of Madame Roland, Anita,[2] Sophia Perofskaya, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Joan of Arc. With all my heart, I beseech and beg my twenty million female compatriots to assume their responsibility as citizens. Arise! Arise! Chinese women, arise!

2. Anita Garibaldi (1821–1849), the Brazilian-born wife of Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi. She appeared as the heroine of a short work of fiction by the late Qing reformer Liang Qichao in 1902.

I lament that the Chinese motherland has descended into darkness. How can we bear to have our magnificent rivers and mountains swallowed up by foreign races? We forty million heirs of the Chinese motherland are but slaves, useless to the bone. We willingly cower before others and seek glory by ingratiating ourselves to them. Fortunately, among us loyal subjects have been reincarnated who will rebuild this entire nation from scratch.

But the pathetic world of women remains without glory, complacently awaiting death amid these seas of sorrow, these cities of sadness. Forgotten are the unwavering courage of Mulan[3] and the heroic spirit of Hongyu.[4] However, the winds of Europe and the rains of America are suddenly surging forth and are beginning to revive such spirits. Chinese women will throw off their shackles and stand up with passion; they will all become heroines. They will ascend the stage of the new world, where the heavens have mandated that they reconsolidate the nation.

[*Editors' note: Chapter 1, "In Slumberland, muddled women suffer in their Dark Prisons; In the Enlightened Heavens, lucid heroines descend to the City of White Clouds," begins with an allegory of "Slumberland," a nation plagued by incompetent officials and corrupt traditions. The Queen Mother in Heaven is so outraged by the oppression of women in Slumberland that she dispatches a troop of immortals to intervene. Interestingly, the divine intervention plot remains undeveloped in the remainder of the narrative and the possibility that the main characters are incarnations of these immortals is only hinted at. As the narrator herself carefully reminds the reader, deities and immortal beings are fictitious creatures worshipped by the ignorant and superstitious. Our excerpt picks up at the end of chapter 1.*]

So let us return without further delay to the main story about one particular family. In the Huang clan of Zhejiang province, there was a prefect by the name of Huang Sihua. He had realized his ambition of attaining high status while a young man, and thus did not bring shame upon his illustrious ancestors, officials who had served in the customs bureau in Fujian Province for generations. As they had been frugal officials, their sleeves were empty[5] and all they bequeathed to their sons were the teach-

3. The legendary woman warrior who disguised herself as a man and took her ailing father's place in battle.

4. A female general who distinguished herself in battle.

5. In reference to an official, having empty sleeves means to be honest and upright.

ings of the Classics. Though the traditions preserved in this family were all very proper, it was an inflexible, old-fashioned family that did not easily accept new ways. For example, girls had never been sent to school and learning was strictly for boys. But enough said about Prefect Huang. His wife, Lady Sang, was extremely virtuous and capable. They were cousins, and after they were wed, she aided her husband in his studies of the Five Classics.[6] Her mother-in-law died young, leaving behind three sons: Prefect Huang, who was the eldest son, and two others, both young boys. Lady Sang had married into the family when she was eighteen years old and had served her mother-in-law with such obedience that she gained a reputation for being virtuous. After her mother-in-law's death, she devoted herself to raising the two younger boys, as though they were her own sons. When they came of age, she married them off and assumed full responsibility for domestic matters in the household. She had suffered a great deal in the past, and now the prosperity she had long deserved arrived. But who could foresee that Heaven does not always obey people's wishes? Although her family now enjoyed prosperity and rank, Lady Sang was not happy. If you want to hear why, allow me to take a rest, and in the next chapter I will continue our story.

Chapter 2: Huang Jurui is born amid the Sea of Remorse; Little Jade laments in the Fragrant Boudoir.

A brisk wind accompanies the winter season, and the Japanese landscape evokes a thousand emotions.[7] I contemplate the crisis now facing China and how hopeless the situation is without any heroes to come to the rescue. My emotions overwhelm me, making it impossible to study, so I sit here before the lamp and continue to write our story. I had written that Lady Sang was a virtuous woman, but even though the family now enjoyed prosperity and rank, she found family life unbearable. It turns out that her husband Prefect Huang was fond of women, and had all manner of liaisons outside his marriage. Naturally, his infidelities sparked frequent conflicts and quarrels between husband and wife at home. It was not that Lady Sang enjoyed getting angry, but Prefect Huang was simply

6. The core texts of a traditional Confucian education, the Five Classics are *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of History*, *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Rites*, and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*.

7. Qiu Jin started composing this work in 1905 while living in Japan.

out of control. Men as a rule are accustomed to rejecting the old and coveting the new, and officials are even worse in this regard. Thus, troubles arose between a husband and wife who had once suffered through so much together. As a result, Lady Sang had grown very unhappy. She had given birth to four sons, but only the fourth, a boy named Zuyin, had survived. She cherished her only son and treated him like a precious jewel.

Prefect Huang had been sent to Shandong to await a vacant position. Now the career of an official is one of competing to get to the top and either maneuvering or begging to secure positions. If you don't beg or maneuver but rely solely on your abilities, then you will never get anywhere. Prefect Huang came from a poor family and he was upright by nature, so he didn't scheme to acquire a position. Thus, even though he had attained a high degree, he was still unemployed and passed his days drinking, writing poetry, and frolicking in the brothels. By this time, Zuyin was already six years old, and due to many childhood illnesses, he was a very frail boy. Lady Sang was pregnant again, and her due date was drawing near. Time passed quickly; the season was already autumn.

It was the auspicious Double Ninth Festival,[8] and the chrysanthemums by the bamboo fence in the courtyard had sprouted branches that withstood the frost. Refusing to yield to cold or snow, yellow flowers piled upon purple ones. Thousands of resplendent branches produced a wondrous sight and the flower blossoms themselves were of a rare beauty. It was as though they were proud to be so spectacular in such a late season—the sole lords of autumn. Prefect Huang said to his wife, "This year the flowers have lasted a particularly long time. They have bloomed in an unusual manner as well, with strange colors and blossoms that illuminate the courtyard. Moreover, this is just the time to celebrate the Double Ninth Festival. Hurry and order a jug of wine and some cups so we can enjoy the flowers." The servant girl relayed this order to the kitchen, which immediately prepared a small feast in the courtyard. Husband and wife came and sat down, with Zuyin and his nanny to one side. They had drunk many cups and were enjoying themselves when suddenly the Mistress wrinkled her brow in pain, pushed back her chair, stood up, and returned to her living quarters. The servant women were all very alarmed. When they inquired after her, they learned that she was about to give birth, so they hurried about in preparation for the delivery. During the delivery, the midwife made her drink some ginseng broth; after a few

8. A traditional autumn holiday observed on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month.

minutes, the room was filled with a scarlet light that dazzled the eye, and a crying baby girl was born. In past years, Lady Sang had suffered through many difficulties in childbirth, but this time it had been as simple as a crow alighting momentarily on a branch. But when the maid reported the good news to the Master, he immediately exploded in anger: "What is there to report about having a daughter? What is there to be happy about? She is nothing more than money-losing goods. How can she ever bring honor to our ancestors?" He raised the goblet in his hand, but his expression revealed his displeasure. Meanwhile, inside, Lady Sang overheard her husband's words and could not help feeling angry. The weakened bonds of affection between husband and wife were such that he casually made these comments and did not even bother to go view his newborn child. Reader, let me ask you: a boy and a girl are both one's children, so why did he treat them so differently? Well, it turns out that in Slumberland people were accustomed to looking down on girls, so that while giving birth to a boy was considered a joyful event, having a girl was a tragedy. That is why Prefect Huang was so unhappy. As for Lady Sang, though she did not attach special importance to having a daughter, the difference was that she possessed a mother's affection. Thus although the father was severe, she, the mother, was kind. She may not have loved her daughter, but since the baby was her own flesh and blood, she did at least treasure her. She named her Jurui,[9] since she had been born at the very moment the yellow chrysanthemums reached their fullest splendor.

Alas! Poor girls born in Slumberland, we know full well the difficulties you face from the minute you are born until old age. Moreover, the custom of privileging the male and despising the female and the precept of honoring men and disdaining women have been passed down for thousands of years from father to son, from older brother to younger brother, so that now there is no escape from them. Women of the literati class have even less freedom. How will Huang Jurui, who was born into this sleeping country as well as into a rigid, old-fashioned family, ever be able to free herself and mount the stage of liberty? One mistake and she could pay for it with her life. But, so much for this digression, let me return now to the main story.

Like a shooting arrow or the shuttle of a loom, time flew by quickly. After a few years, Lady Sang gave birth to another girl, who was named Shuren, and who had a gentle disposition. The passage of time ages people quickly, and Jurui had already turned seven years old. Her brother, Zuyin, had long since begun his studies under the instruction of a tutor named Yu Zhubo. Yu, a cousin of Prefect Huang, was a gentleman of more than forty years old; since he often helped those in distress, he was known as "Old Buddha." As his wife had passed away without leaving him any children and he had no valuable possessions, he drifted from job to job. So Prefect Huang hired him as his secretary, and even though he also had to teach, his duties were very light. He spent every morning reciting new poetry and he often searched high and low for new and amazing books. He had always adored little children and doted on the Huang sisters and their brother. He loved Jurui the best of all and would often amuse her and read poetry to her.

9. The first Chinese character of her name, Ju, is a homophone of the character for chrysanthemum.

Unexpectedly, the superiors sent down an order: Prefect Huang was to proceed without delay to a post in Jinan. After he obtained his appointment, Prefect Huang was extremely busy entertaining his colleagues and friends, who all came to congratulate him. He thanked those who had appointed him, accepted the official seal, and then entertained his guests. Naturally, he was quite busy with these social calls; however, he also found time to marry two concubines. One, named Hou, was the daughter of a common family. The other, named Tao, was a prostitute in a private brothel. They accompanied Prefect Huang and his family to his new post. At this time, Jurui was seven years old.

It is said that Jurui had been heroic since her birth, and despite her youth, she was resolute by nature. Her face had a chivalric aura about it and because she was independent, she disliked dressing up according to the decadent fashions of the boudoir. Whenever she heard tales of women who had been mistreated or abused, she would suffer alone in silence. She watched the cunning and perverse behavior of her father's concubines and how they would often underhandedly stir up mischief to make her father insult her mother for no reason at all. Her mother was very frail by nature and was unable to resist the ever-increasing insolence of her rivals. For her part, Jurui felt more and more indignant but could do nothing about these tyrants. All she could do was secretly plot her revenge as she hid behind sweet words. She yearned to dispel her mother's anger, fearing that she would fall sick and further aggravate the situation. Jurui often stole off to the classroom with her brother and learned to recite a few chapters from his books. When Tutor Yu saw how intelligent she was, he began instructing her as well. Who would have thought that she could memorize texts at a glance and read ten lines in one go? Tutor Yu was extremely pleased and reported to Prefect Huang,

"My niece is remarkably intelligent, and I think your family may produce the second Huang Chonggu."[10] When Master Huang heard this, he replied in shock, "How is it that Jurui is also studying? Only women without talent are virtuous, so what is the point of her studying?[11] This must be her mother's cursed idea. After I have a word with her, she'll tell Jurui to go back and practice her needlework! Why would a girl ever need to study?" Having said this, he was about to leave.

Tutor Yu hurriedly stopped his cousin. "Please wait a moment and listen to me. It was not her mother but I who encouraged her to study. Because she is naturally so intelligent and refined, would it not be a shame to leave such a precious stone unpolished? You say that only untalented women are virtuous, but then why has that legend of Cao Dagu[12] been handed down to the present day? There have been numerous talented women ever since ancient times, and all have admired them. If women are to be virtuous wives, how befitting can it be for them to be completely illiterate? I am but a lowly relative of an official's family, but unlike others I don't think men and women are different. Thus, I have chosen to teach both my nephew and niece. In any case, it does not take any more of my time." At this, Prefect Huang responded, "But cousin, it is not necessary. What's the use of study to a girl, since it's impossible for her to bring glory to the family like a man? Even if she were endowed with eight bushels of talent, when did the government ever establish official exams for women?"

Tutor Yu replied, "Even though there are no official exams for women, I have heard that they are planning to establish women's schools. Cousin, have you ever met a man from Canton who calls himself a great loyal official?[13] Didn't he present a clear proposal for implementing a new government? He has many followers, who are called something like the Bao Kuang Party![14] They advocate all sorts of reform, including one that

10. A woman poet of the Tang dynasty (618–906).

11. "To be virtuous is to be untalented" is a saying applied to women that became popularized in the late Ming (16th–17th centuries), a period when, perhaps not coincidentally, significant strides were being made in gentrywomen's education. The term *talent* refers in a general sense to knowledge beyond the traditional feminine arts of needlework and embroidery.

12. A respectful form of reference for Ban Zhao [Pan Chao] (c. 49–c. 120), the famous woman historian of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) and author of the Confucian classic *Precepts for Women*. A translation can be found in Nancy Lee Swann, *Pan Chao: Foremost Woman Scholar of China* (New York: The Century Co., 1932).

13. Most likely a reference to the late Qing reformer Kang Youwei (1858–1927), a native of Canton province.

14. Literally the "Full of Madness" Party. Qiu Jin, who was vehemently opposed to the Manchu court, here seems to be punning on "Bao Huang Hui," Kang Youwei's Protect the Emperor Society, which he founded in 1899.

is argued something like this: 'In order for the nation to nurture talent, we must have education, therefore we must build schools everywhere. Since women are the mothers of civilization, and family education in the home depends on women, we must build schools for both women and men.' So you see, the establishment of schools for girls is not far off, yet you still object to my niece studying a bit? If you allow her to get an education now, in the future not only will she not fall behind others, but all her talents and intelligence won't have gone to waste. At the very least she could become a teacher!"

Prefect Huang laughed at his cousin. "You believe the strangest things! Are the ancient customs of the ancestors so easily changed, so easily replaced by barbarian fads? Is not abolishing our traditional schools an insult to Master Confucius? If men and women possess no differences, won't such anarchy make the rest of the world mock us? If women change the way they dress and cut their hair short, won't this insult the ways of the Han Chinese?"

Prefect Huang was about to continue when Tutor Yu stopped him by bursting out in laughter and pointing at his clothes and queue.[15] He asked his cousin, "Is this the attire of the Han dynasty? The only people who still don Han-style clothes are those actors who dress up in ancient costumes that cross in the front and who sport yarn hats on their heads. Nowadays, with a new dynasty, we have queues and shaved heads and narrow sleeves. These peacock plumes, the decorations on our hats, and the official insignias on our robes are all foreign dress. My virtuous cousin, you wear these yet you do not think it strange. When the Empress Dowager came to power and implemented the rule of might, she was respected like the Virgin Mary and her righteousness and charity were praised; only later were her evil ways revealed for all the world to see. Yet when had she ever entered a school that offered equal education for boys and girls? The schools of today won't be like those in the past, because male and female education will be based on the same principles. When people are well-educated, they naturally become noble; equal education will certainly not lead to licentiousness and corrupt ways. Let me ask you, do prostitutes and women of that sort know anything about literature and the classics? Yet there have always been 'talented girls' who do know of such things and I have never heard complaints about them. So, based

15. These are all Manchu fashions, which were introduced during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Although by this time few real distinctions still existed between the Manchus and the Han, the dominant ethnic group in China, the nationalist sentiment of this period renewed perception of the Manchus as foreign.

on this comparison, it would in fact seem imprudent for women not to be educated."

When Prefect Huang heard this, he heaved a long sigh. "Cousin, when you put it this way how can I refuse? But once she gets educated and becomes talented like Xie Daoyun,[16] all she'll be able to do is write poems lamenting the bitter fate of being a talented beauty."

Tutor Yu laughed and replied, "Cousin, how can you believe such nonsense? Surely you have read the poems that Yuan Mei[17] wrote for his wife Wanqing, which illustrate that talent and happiness are not incompatible! But later on, it will be you who wields the power to choose a good husband for Jurui, so be careful. Don't make the mistake of marrying her to a rich merchant. I have heard that you don't care much for your daughter, and I'm afraid you might throw this precious pearl away by marrying her off to the wrong kind of man."

Prefect Huang was silent, then said, "What parent on earth does not love his own sons and daughters? But even though I will permit you to teach them both, don't go preaching to them about the damned revolution or some nonsense about freedom and equality. The Huang family has been honest and virtuous for generations and I don't want to bring injury to our ancestors by earning a reputation for being rebels. As for topics like foreign clothes, don't go talking about them either!"

Tutor Yu responded, "Cousin, don't worry, how could I ever bring harm to your family? But wouldn't it be marvelous if your family were able to produce a female heroine, a female knight-errant to be admired and worshiped by everyone? I fear more that your family will miss out on such fortune!" Having said this, he walked off with a smile.

After that, Tutor Yu went back to the classroom and Jurui was ecstatic when she heard the news. From then on, she was exceedingly diligent in her studies, and the years raced by. Before you knew it, she had already turned fourteen, and her knowledge was like a vast array of jewels and her writing like a rich brocade. Tutor Yu could not have been more pleased, for to have a disciple such as her was rare indeed. By this time, Jurui's brother Zuyin was already twenty years old and had been married for two years. He had a son who had turned one and was just learning how to talk. At this time, Jurui was busy with her studies, and she didn't have to worry about assisting her mother.

16. A woman poet and calligrapher of the Eastern Jin dynasty (c. 221–207 B.C.).

17. Yuan Mei (1716–1797) was a poet from the early Qing famous for his patronage of female poets.

One morning, she was sitting at her desk writing when the maid from her mother's quarters, Fragrance, came to announce that guests had arrived and wanted to see her. Jurui reported to her tutor, then took her leave. When she arrived in the hall, she looked up and saw on her left a guest dressed in silk, wearing a formal imperial necklace and insignia. At her side was a girl with delicate features. She was dressed in brocade, and wore a long necklace. She looked about fifteen or sixteen and conveyed an air of intelligence and competence. As soon as Jurui gazed upon her, she felt an immediate affection for her, as though she had known her in a previous life. As she was turning these thoughts over in her mind, her mother ordered her to quickly pay her respects to Lady Liang, so she made a deep bow and stood in the middle of the hall. Lady Liang took hold of Jurui's jadelike hand, and scrutinized her from head to toe. She saw that Jurui was not inferior in appearance: her complexion was like beautiful jade and her mouth the color of rouge. Her lightly painted eyebrows contained a chivalric air and her clear eyes displayed dignity. When she raised her eyes, she appeared at ease yet not at all vulgar, and her deportment was modest and unaffected. But her independent and heroic nature was apparent, and her behavior seemed easy and carefree. When Lady Liang learned that Jurui studied and attended school, she felt that such an intelligent and refined look suited her well. She called Little Jade to her side to meet Jurui and when they had made their greetings, they clasped hands and gazed at one another, both thinking that they had known each other before. When Jurui asked her name, she learned that her childhood name was Little Jade. Then Jurui said to her attentively, "Sister! Were we not destined to meet today? I hope that you will never abandon me, but that we will always cherish and comfort one another."

When Little Jade heard these words, she felt very sad, and her jadelike countenance looked mournful as tears welled up in her eyes. She lowered her head and clasped Jurui's hands and said, "Your words will remain etched on my heart. I have heard that you are a fine poet[18] and that your talents are immense. Would you be willing to accept me as your disciple? I fear only that I have not been fated to receive such happiness!"

Jurui promptly responded, "Why be so modest? Between sisters, let us not use such formulaic and polite speech."

18. Qiu Jin is alluding here to the talented woman poet Xie Daoyun mentioned earlier, who, according to legend, impressed people with a poem she composed on the subject of the snow.

Lady Sang smiled and said to Lady Liang, "Listening to them talk and looking at the way they hold each other's hands so affectionately, they must have been fated to meet!" Then she said, "Jurui, why don't you take Jade to your room and show her your books. I'll order some snacks for you to relax with." Jurui was extremely pleased, and Jade just looked at her mother without saying a word; the two then went hand in hand through the inner chambers. They arrived at the Perching Phoenix Pavilion.

These were the living quarters for the Huang sisters. Shuren was slightly unwell and was in her room to avoid the cold, so she did not come out. Jurui's room was to the left. When they entered, all Jade could see was a paper screen, a bamboo bed, and a desk in front of the window upon which books and various writing utensils were laid. Next to the desk were several cases of books and a few chairs. The room was simple but elegant. Jurui, with her unadorned dress and dignified manner, was the perfect occupant of such a room. All of Jade's feelings of envy and jealousy about such wealth were instantly dispelled.

They sat together and talked about their families' difficulties and honors. Only then did Jurui learn that Jade was actually the daughter of a concubine. Even though Lady Liang, her father's first wife, had three sons of her own, she was exceedingly jealous and mean by nature. She was completely unforgiving toward her husband's concubines and merciless in her curses and beatings. Even Jade's father, who was now old and sickly, feared his first wife. Jade's mother was a concubine who had been purchased by the wife, and so whenever they were in the presence of other people Lady Liang always acted very kind and generous, but at home she treated Jade's mother like a prisoner. When they went out Lady Liang would tell people that they got along like sisters, and she was so good at pretending that people would have been hard pressed to believe otherwise. When they were in public, she would act polite and courteous to Jade's mother, but at home she would pick fights with her. Little Jade's life had been hard; being at home was worse than being a bird in a cage. Lady Liang treated her harshly and Second Brother was even more cruel. If she and her real mother ever wanted to speak to others, the servants were to follow and watch over them like prisoners or criminals. Lady Liang also seldom let them accompany her on her outings. "But today, because she was coming over here, she called me to her room to help her dress. She then instructed me carefully that I should often accompany her to your house. My real mother could not object, and today my visit makes me feel happier than passing the civil service exam. Jurui! Today, I am pouring all this out to you, but please don't pass it on to anyone. If Lady Liang ever

found out, she would definitely be infuriated. I wouldn't complain if I were blamed, but I'm afraid my mother would suffer."

Jurui nodded her head to indicate she needn't worry. "Sister, I won't say anything. My father has two concubines who run the whole house and get whatever their hearts desire. When they are dissatisfied, they curse and yell at the maids until they're blue in the face, so everyone rushes about to please them. They're ten times more powerful than my mother. They are only satisfied when they provoke quarrels between my mother and father, and my mother has no choice but to give in. But even still, the two of them often quarrel with her. Who would have thought that in your family, it's the concubine who is good while the wife is lacking in virtue. The ways of Heaven are certainly not flawless. I would like to call upon Heaven to explain this inequality, but at the moment I can only think of how oppressed you have been. The fragrant boudoir is worse than prison, so why have you been banished there? How can you bear it? What a waste of intelligence and courage.

"If you don't study, you'll never be independent and you will have to rely on people who don't care about you. When will we ever find a way out of this sea of bitterness? This oppressive system is infuriating, and our lack of independence maddening. How often I wish we women could escape these slavish confines. I deeply regret that I have no way to help you and that we can't spend time together talking every day because I believe that you and I are no less intelligent or talented than any man. In fact, those faint-hearted, shameless men don't even measure up to us. In the past, there were countless extraordinary and brave women, such as Hongyu, Xun Guan, and Mulan, or Yunying and Qin Liangyu of the late Ming,[19] who led armies with such discipline that when the bandits heard about them they lost their nerve. In strength and courage they stood alone. The ones who have surrendered and turned over their territories have always been men. I am ashamed that such men were traitors to China.

"So if you compare men and women, the most disgraceful and shameless are the men. Women ought to occupy the superior position, so why do they act in such a servile manner? Rather than striving to be independent and to make their own living, they keep their heads low and live

19. Xun Guan (Jin dynasty) became famous when she was just thirteen years old for rescuing the besieged city where her father served as prefect. Shen Yunying (1623–1660) was noted for her horsemanship and archery skills; when her father was killed in battle, she personally retrieved his body. Qin Liangyu (1574–1648) was a well-educated woman who took over her husband's military command after his death and defeated rebels in Sichuan province. On Hongyu and Mulan, see notes 2 and 3.

in someone else's house.[20] If I, Jurui, ever have the good fortune to become independent, I will certainly help you climb out of the pit you are now trapped in. How can you tolerate such oppression and humiliation? Even though they say suffering produces heroes, each day you pass in that dungeon must feel like a year. It saddens me to see a person of talent suffer so." Having said this, she sighed and was filled with such sorrow that tears spilled over onto her blouse.

When Little Jade heard these words, she was moved and frowned, her own troubles and worries weighing heavily upon her. She knew her ambitions were not ordinary, but why had she ended up like this? It was improper for a guest to cry, so she held back the tears welling up in her eyes. She thought to herself how brave the Huang girl was, and how uncommon her heroic manner. If they were to become sworn sisters, then in the future they could rely on each other in times of trouble. She lowered her head, but didn't say anything.

Jurui guessed what she was thinking and urged her, "Sister, if you want to say something, why don't you? We already have so much in common, what is there to stop you from speaking up?" So Little Jade revealed her wish and Jurui promised without hesitation. Instead of setting up an incense table as others would do, they knelt in front of the window and made the following pledge: "We will never forget each other if we obtain wealth and rank, and in poverty we will share our lot; we will support each other in times of extreme difficulty. Let she who forgets these words be struck down, as Heaven is our witness." After they completed this vow, they stood up and clasped hands, and their mutual love and affection grew even stronger than before. They addressed each other as Little and Big Sister, and they felt closer than biological siblings. Even if the seas ran dry and the earth crumbled, their affections for one another would not falter.

Just as they were preparing to sit down and continue talking, the maid came to report, "Lady Liang is preparing to leave. A relative from afar has arrived, so the young lady is to make haste and not delay departure." The two had no choice but to hurry, as they could see Lady Liang straightening her clothes in preparation to leave. When Little Jade came with Lady Liang to say goodbye, the latter turned her head and said, "Miss Huang, come to visit our home sometime. As your illustrious parents are so kind, I hope you will not stand on ceremony and will visit us often. The friendship between our two families is special." Jurui promised she would do so. The two girls looked at each other and were sad, but what else could they do? Who was to know that they would soon meet many other unusual girls and that many strange events were to follow. Wait until I relate them slowly, one at a time. The chapter ends here so I can rest a moment. If you want to know what happens, please read on to the next chapter.

20. From the saying that a person who lives in a house with low eaves has to keep his/her head low; referring here to a woman who has to submit to an inferior position in her husband's home.

Chapter 3: Parents force a marriage; Deprived of rights, brother and sister fight.

The storms from abroad grow more threatening by the day and I am increasingly disheartened as I look toward my homeland. A great calamity is at our doorstep, and yet my compatriots remain deep in their slumber; I have called out to them ten thousand times, yet they still fail to respond. In the previous chapter, I ended with matters regarding the Liang family; Lady Liang and Jade had returned home and entered the hall. The maids and servant girls all came out to greet them, along with the concubines and Master Liang. They were informed that Lady Liang's sister had arrived, accompanied by her son and daughter. Thereupon, Lady Liang immediately hurried in to welcome her sister, Madame Bao. They entered the main hall to make formal greetings and the sister then presented her son and daughter.

Madame Bao was generous by nature and always kind to others. From birth, the two sisters had very different personalities, and she was not at all irritable like her older sister. Just then, everyone came in and sat down and they spoke of all their heartfelt emotions since they had last seen each other. Madame Liang prevailed upon her sister to stay so they could continue catching up on all the years they had been apart. Madame Bao agreed and ordered a messenger to go back to inform her brother-in-law, Prefect Zuo, of her whereabouts. Shortly, her personal belongings were sent over, along with Hibiscus, an exceedingly competent serving girl. The maids and serving girls were all sent to wait on Madame Bao and soon a welcome feast was prepared. By the time the banquet was over, it was already evening. Guest quarters had been prepared for her in a small lane to the west.

There were three rooms in a row, flanked by two side rooms, with an arched entrance. The door to the left led to the main quarters of the house; the door to the right led to the outside. It was very convenient, and Madame Bao was especially pleased by the peace and quiet, so she decided to stay in the room to the left. Her daughter took the right-hand

room at the back. The maids stayed in one of the wing rooms, while the remaining room was used as a small kitchen, where they could prepare food to their own liking. Since the son was already grown up, he stayed in the study in the outer quarters.

The two sisters had a marvelous time talking every day, while Madame Bao's daughter Unity and Little Jade got along splendidly as well. In the mornings, they would stroll hand in hand in the garden, and in the evenings they would lean against the outer railings of the window and take pleasure gazing at the moon. Sometimes, they would discuss literature. Little Jade was extraordinarily intelligent, while Unity was exceedingly well-educated. Every day Unity would teach her younger cousin several passages from a variety of books. Naturally clever, Little Jade learned quickly and easily with little instruction. The two of them stuck together like glue, and had endless things to talk about.

One morning, as they were sitting together at the dressing table, Unity sighed that half a month had already passed. Then she mentioned, "I have a cousin in the Zuo family named Awaken, who is both kind and virtuous. She is also a very loyal friend. She is the same age as you and she is quite strong physically. Although she's not terribly beautiful, her poetry is unusually good. When we were living and studying together we would stroll about hand in hand together. We have been separated now for half a month and I miss her terribly. She once promised that she would come over to spend a few days with me here. If you like her once you meet her, you mustn't keep any secrets from her. I wonder, as you have lived here for a long time, if you have made any friends?"

Little Jade replied, "Speak of this no more. I am like a caged monkey. It's hard enough for me to move about freely at home, let alone go out to make friends. The day you arrived was the first time in my life that I had ever ventured past the front door. I paid a visit to the Huang residence in our prefecture and when I met her daughter it was as though we were old friends. We became sworn sisters at once. Her name is Jurui. She is bold and straightforward, and her face exudes character. Even though she may not be a top-notch beauty like Yang Guifei,[21] her eyes are pretty, her brows long and her mouth cherry red. Her face is egg-shaped and her complexion beautiful. Overall, she has a remarkably dignified beauty. As for her comportment, she is a champion of justice and sympathizes with

21. The most famous beauty in Chinese history. According to popular legend, the Tang Emperor Xuanzong's infatuation with the lovely Yang Guifei (716–756) caused him to neglect his political duties, allowing a rebellion to occur during his reign.

all who suffer. In dress, she strives for simplicity. She has been studying for many years, which isn't at all common for young ladies. Since we became sworn sisters from our first meeting, I really wonder why I haven't heard any news from her for a fortnight. I miss her dearly, and not a day goes by when I don't think of her. But Jurui hasn't come herself and I have nobody I can send to ask after her. It's terribly distressing not to have any news!"

When she finished speaking, she heaved a sigh and knit her brow. Taking her hand, Unity said, "Dear sister, why get so upset? I can send somebody over to inquire after her, though I don't know whether Jurui's mother is kind or whether she's as strict with her as your stepmother is with you."

Little Jade replied that this wasn't the case at all. "Lady Sang is modest and amiable, and very polite. Although she isn't as generous as your mother, she isn't as strict as my stepmother either. If you send somebody, I am sure she wouldn't mind." Unity nodded and promised to tell her mother to send a maid the next day to ask after Jurui. Later that evening, Unity asked her mother, who agreed to send Hibiscus, since she was both clever and reliable.

The following morning, when the dawn sun was still red, Hibiscus called for a small sedan chair and left without delay. Before very long, she reached the front of the residence of Prefect Huang, where all was a-bustle. When Hibiscus explained her purpose in coming, she was invited in and led into the inner hall. Lady Sang was busy doing something and there were two people at her side helping, with envious looks on their faces. There were holiday fruits of all varieties placed on the table and upon closer inspection Hibiscus thought it looked as though someone were getting married. But knowing that their daughter was still so young, she wondered how they could have chosen a groom so soon. Hibiscus sighed and hurried over to the center of the hall and kowtowed respectfully, then said to them, "The young lady of the Liang residence sent me to ask after Madame and the young lady of the house."

When Lady Sang heard this, she seemed to hesitate, then ordered the maid Spring to take her to see her daughter. The maid nodded in reply and led Hibiscus downstairs to the courtyard. She heard the maid muttering to herself, "I wonder if she's in her room or in the study? These past few days she has been so irritable, and it will be bad luck for me if I get a scolding." When Hibiscus heard this, she said to her, "May I ask how old you are?" The maid replied, "I'm eleven." Then Hibiscus asked her what the cause of the young miss's anger was, to which the maid swiftly replied,

"I will tell you the whole story. There is a rich man, Millions Gou, who has recently made a fortune. This year his son turned sixteen. It is said that he's very unattractive. When the Gous heard about the talent and beauty of our young lady, they hired a matchmaker to act as the go-between for them. Prefect Huang and his wife were more than willing, but that troublemaker Tutor Yu has been insisting the two are not well-suited. The young lady is exceedingly displeased herself and has hinted as much to her mother. It's not that her mother doesn't love her, but because the Gou family is rich, she just told her, "Stop interfering. This decision is up to your father and me, how can you be so shameless? Haven't you heard of the traditional rules of the Three Obediences?"[22] The young lady has been livid ever since and sulks from morning until night. Even though she has kept herself busy these days studying, she constantly knits her brows in worry. That loathsome Tutor Yu often bemoans that such a talented girl has been promised to a bandit. Even though the Gou family is rich and reputable, that tactless Tutor Yu loves wagging his tongue and the young lady is more and more persuaded by him, and secretly weeps every day, sighs, pouts, or just sits there still as a statue. She is a complete fool for not liking a family such as the Gous. But the Gou family is in a hurry, so the engagement is to take place in about ten days. Because of this, the young lady won't eat and hides herself away during the day. The Madame says that it's because she's shy and has instructed us not to bring up the subject with her. I usually wait only on the Madame, so I don't know where the young miss is right now."

When Hibiscus heard this she understood immediately. "No wonder she hasn't been over to the Liang residence. I suspect that the young master Gou is hardly a good match and is terribly unsuited to marry such a fine young lady. Too bad her parents are taking such oppressive measures and bringing so much suffering upon their own daughter. In our household, the Madame is benevolent, and the young Master Bao and his sister both support the reform movement. So I suspect that they won't encounter the injustice Miss Jurui is now suffering."

She was just pondering this when suddenly Spring called out loudly to another maid, "Maid, is the older miss in that room?" Thereupon, they heard a young maid reply, "She is in her own room." So Spring escorted

22. As detailed in such classical texts as the *Nü'er jing*, "The Three Obediences" (*sancong*) exhorted women to submit to the authority of their fathers and older brothers, their husbands, and their sons. "The Four Virtues" (*side*) stated that women should comply with Confucian ethics, be reticent in speech, be conscientious but modest about physical appearance, and fulfill their domestic duties.

Hibiscus to Jurui's room, where they found a girl sleeping on a small chair and saw that the bed curtain had been lowered. It turned out that Jurui was napping. Hibiscus immediately whispered, "Don't say anything, the young lady is sleeping." But Jurui had already heard them and asked, "Who is it?" Spring replied, "Young Miss, the Liangs have sent over a girl to see you."

As soon as Jurui heard this, she got out of bed and Hibiscus went over to kowtow to her. Jurui rushed to help her up and woke up the maid to move the chair over to the side of the bed. "Please sit down." Hibiscus, who didn't dare, said, "I'm just a maid so it is proper that I remain standing." Thereupon, Jurui said, "Don't be that way, there's no difference between high and low, so please stop making excuses." Hibiscus had no choice but to sit down modestly, while the maid went back to report to her mistress. Jurui sat in the middle of the bed and when she looked up she saw a pretty girl who had a face like an hibiscus flower, a willowlike waist, slender shoulders, a cherry mouth, and kingfisher brows. Her eyes were pretty and full of courage—she was not at all a common person. A character so upright and stern, yet she had the misfortune of being born a maid. Could it be that beauties really are condemned to bad fates? As a multitude of feelings surged in her heart, Jurui sat thinking to herself.

Hibiscus also took a look at Jurui and thought that she looked exceedingly noble. Her eyes were beautiful but dignified, her brows were slender but full of heroic spirit. Her manner was forthright and direct, her figure sturdy. How could she be in such distress? Thereupon, she conveyed Little Jade's wishes. Jurui asked about how Little Jade had been recently, and Hibiscus told her everything.

When Jurui heard this, she sighed and said, "I am deeply grateful to your young mistress, since now that my sworn sister Jade has a companion, I suspect that she won't have to endure so much abuse. When you return, tell her for me that I am in good health and she needn't worry. However, because of some other pointless matter, I have been terribly unhappy and depressed. In a few days, I will pay her a visit and tell her all about it in person, and then I can pay my respects to your honorable lady and the young mistress as well. May I ask how old you are and when you first came to the Bao family? How do your employers treat you? Have you ever learned to read? With such great talent and beauty as yours, it truly is an insult and great injustice to have fallen into the sordid waters of servitude. If you and I were educated, we would easily be outstanding people. Someday, if I'm ever free, I swear that I will rescue you from this

dungeon. We can become sworn sisters and consult with each other on everything; we will become heroes among women."

After she finished speaking, she sighed deeply and Hibiscus knew that she was being treated like an intimate friend and felt deeply grateful for this. She thought silently about her unfortunate life and marveled at the compassion Jurui had shown her. Her passion really moves me, yet I worry for her, she thought. Thereupon, she replied, "My mistress, as well as her son and daughter, are benevolent people and don't treat their servants as others do. I have been particularly well-treated, and since the young mistress once taught me some literature, I even know a few poems. I am already fifteen years old this year. I was sold into the Bao family when I was seven, and my masters have treated me well ever since. I have never thought about freeing myself since I was sold to them, and besides there's nothing I could do about it. Thank you so much for your high regard; I will never forget your friendship."

Jurui smiled and said, "This is even more marvelous than I thought. Having such a fine poet as Unity teach you as her disciple, you must be very smart. If you become educated, one day you will surely be independent. But I am afraid you are silently laughing at me as a fool or dreamer because of what I have said about saving you, since these days I'm worse off than you." Hibiscus immediately protested, then comforted her by saying that Jurui should try to make do and that things would get better; then she encouraged her to visit the Liang residence to relieve her depression. Jurui laughed coldly, "It's not that I don't know about calmly accepting my fate, but that I'm afraid my life won't be calm. I have long since wanted to go visit the young ladies. If I don't go tomorrow, I'll certainly be there the following day."

Thereupon, Hibiscus took her leave. Then she bid farewell to the Madame, who gave her a tip and some nuts and fruit and told her to send her regards to her mistress and the young lady. As she got into the sedan chair in front of the yamen[23] to return home, she could see that the evening crows were already spreading their wings to fly. When she reached home and went inside, she did not see her mistress and the place was quiet, so she went over to the Liang residence, where she heard the sound of voices inside Jade's room. She hurried in and saw her mistress and Unity sitting together next to the canopy bed. Little Jade was lying in bed sobbing.

23. A government office in imperial China.

[*In the section that follows, Hibiscus learns that during her absence Little Jade has been severely beaten by Second Brother for ordering some medicine for her mother without permission from Lady Liang. That night, Jade restlessly contemplates the news of Huang Jurui's impending marriage to the good-for-nothing son of Millions Gou; she laments the lot of women and begins to wonder whether the old adage that talented women are fated to suffer might be true. The narrative picks up the following morning, in the middle of chapter 4, "The Resentful Daughter passes a sleepless night; The Four Beauties lament social customs."*]

When breakfast was over and the tea had been served, the girls had only been chatting for a short time when the maid rushed in and reported that Awaken had arrived. Unity ordered the maid to receive her and was quite delighted. Soon, a very pretty girl walked in. After joyful greetings, Awaken said that she had recently made a new friend who had come over together with her. Madame Bao immediately asked the whereabouts of this friend and Awaken replied that her sedan chair had been delayed. Thereupon, the mother and daughter hastily sent a maid to greet her when she arrived. The maid left at once, and it was not long before a graceful girl with a jadelike countenance appeared. Her eyes were radiant and her teeth white. She was indescribably beautiful and her figure was very striking. Everyone exchanged greetings and upon inquiry they learned that her surname was Jiang and she was from Jiangnan; her name was Vitality, and she was fifteen years old. Her father had come to the city to wait to fill an official post.

As soon as everyone was introduced, they were all like old friends, sitting together, laughing and talking. Vitality asked Little Jade, "Is something the matter? Your face looks so drawn. Could it be that you have been ill?" Upon hearing this, Unity sighed several times. "When did she get sick?" Then Unity described to them how Jade had been beaten. When the two heard this, they were both incensed, and Vitality started speaking. "Among those of us born on this earth as women, are there any who aren't considered inferior? In matters trivial or important, we're not even allowed to put in a single word."

At that point Awaken also sighed. "Poor women, we're considered less than human. If a daughter is born, people say she is bad luck and that she will belong to another family once she is married. Enlightened parents will still love her, but those who aren't will hate her the instant they see her. They always say that girls are useless and do nothing more than cost them a lot of dowry money. But when a son is born, everybody loves and

treasures him. They let him go to school to study the Five Classics, while girls aren't even permitted to get near books. On the contrary, they claim that talented girls will suffer a bad fate. But if you think about it carefully, when have women ever been weaker than men? We are equal to men in talent and intelligence, and if we were able to get an education, we too could earn money to support our parents.

"The root cause of suffering, however, is that girls have no way to make their own living. We are kept locked away deep in the inner chambers our whole lives. I am fortunate to come from a good family, and I have studied the classics with my older brother. Although I am not what you might call a talented girl, I am better off than those ignorant illiterate men. In my heart, I often curse the world for looking down on women. My ambitions soar higher each day, yet I can't do the things I'd like to do because girls have no way to make a living; it's even impossible to go anywhere in public. It makes me loathe being a woman. Everyone knows that Unity is extremely talented. Vitality is also far from common. Little Jade, as well, seems so intelligent and pretty that I am certain that her knowledge is superior to most people's, and ten times better than all those boys who never study. Why are we all willing to submit to this? Just thinking about it makes me angry at the injustice of it all."

Vitality sighed and said, "Women suffer in so many ways! But as for the most painful—it is being mismatched to some oaf, for it's a tragedy when true beauties have such bad fates. Men have made up lies about how the husband guides his wife. They have such high opinions of themselves, yet they go out and frolic with prostitutes in the brothels and despise their wives who have lost their good looks from being locked behind closed doors. Beating and abuse is common and so is favoring concubines over the wife. There are also those merchants who go off to other provinces and marry another woman or get a concubine and simply abandon their wife at home. They couldn't care less if she starves or freezes because they have severed all feelings of duty toward her; they'll let her weep to her heart's content about her hunger and suffering or whine that she has nobody to rely on.

"Then there are those women who suffer along while their husbands study for the civil service exam, putting up with his poverty and low status. But the day he becomes a successful official, he marries a pretty concubine and abandons his wife to the wind to fare for herself, completely forgetting all that she has done for him. That's the type of man who is completely ungrateful and merciless, who forsakes the old and covets the new. Then there are women who endure in-laws no less tyrannical than

Yama.[24] They loathe their daughters-in-law but spoil their grandsons. They give free rein to their sons to play around with other women and even encourage them to do so, and if the husband and wife happen to get along, then they complain that ever since the daughter-in-law came, their son has changed; when they curse him for being disobedient, they'll blame it on the wife, saying she's the coquette behind it all. They're only happy when they have turned their son against his wife.

"There are also those husbands who are frivolous by nature and spend their time gambling and visiting prostitutes. They complain that their wives don't interest them anymore. Even in this situation, the mother-in-law will still try to sow discord between her son and his wife as well as abuse the wife herself. But what is most tragic of all is when a talented girl is married off to a fat merchant, just like a phoenix forced to follow a crow. Her great wisdom is all in vain, and all she can do is pour her grief into her poetry. There is nobody who understands her, and all she can do is sit alone in her chamber and weep despondently. How can a violent and uncouth husband appreciate the elegance of a spray of plum flowers? Having no confidantes and being stuck with a vulgar man, these women spend their entire lives deep in the inner chambers weeping in indignation. Alas, how many talented girls have been buried like this since antiquity! But the cuckoo lamented to the Eastern Wind in vain.[25] Just thinking about this situation makes me miserable. How I regret that Heaven is so muddled and unfeeling that it treats us women like this; it's as though it deliberately wants to harm us out of spite." She frowned as she said this, and when she lifted her eyes she saw that Little Jade had started crying again. She asked at once, "Sister Jade, your sadness shows that you must have strong feelings on this subject. Why don't you speak out, and we'll listen."

Jade replied, "I have a sworn sister, the daughter of the illustrious Prefect Huang. Her name is Jurui and from the age of seven until today, at fourteen, she has studied diligently and is very knowledgeable. Her personality is gallant and heroic. Who would have thought that her parents would arrange a match for her with that son of fat merchant Gou, who is the precisely the kind of irresponsible playboy you spoke of? Is this not regrettable beyond measure?" Without realizing it, she sighed

24. Mythical ruler of the Chinese underworld.

25. This is a reference to the story about a cuckoo who was so grief-stricken when its mate died that it cried until it spat blood and died.

several times before continuing, "Heaven is so unjust. Why create a person with such qualities as Jurui only to destroy the lovely girl with such savage storms? I don't know how she has been these days, but I fear that she has grown thin and pale. I deplore the fact that just when such a tender bud was beginning to blossom the spiteful winds and rain have ravaged her. When the talented Han Dan[26] was married off to a lackey, was not Heaven once again preventing a talented woman from marrying a talented man? How can such suffering be alleviated? But it is no use beseeching Heaven. If her own parents are behind this, how can others possibly assist her in getting out of this bad engagement?"

Jade's regret and resentment were profound, and her tears overflowed, dampening her clothes. When the others heard this they too were miserable. Unity heaved a long sigh and poured out the following eloquent words, "What woman doesn't suffer? We are confined to the inner chambers our whole lives; we have our own opinions but can do nothing on our own initiative; we are completely restricted and haven't an ounce of power, as if we were orphans who must obey our master's every word. At home, our parents won't teach us and forbid us to leave our chambers. All day long they watch over us and demand that we learn to sew, to the point where our hunched-over backs ache. When we've embroidered a pillow, we start on some trousers; after that's done, there are covers for the mirrors and the teapots, the canopy-tops and sides; then skirts and hems and painted screens. As soon as purses are embroidered, it's on to fan cases; when that's finished, there are still sleeves and collars and endless other trivial things. Every day we strive to perfect our skills in sewing and coordinating the colors of the thread, without a moment's rest to even walk around. And in the end, either our minds are completely numbed or we fall ill with consumption. Even if we don't fall ill, our shoulders and backs will have become disfigured. And the truth is, embroidery is completely useless. It's a total waste of money that buys nothing but suffering; the purpose of all that embroidery is merely to make the bridal trousseau pretty. Let me ask you, if you get stuck with an ungrateful husband, are not all those fashionable items for naught? If he's useless, all this splendor will not rescue you from poverty. If he's a playboy and later abandons you by the wayside, there's nothing you can do but suffer, since it's impossible to live off one's clothing. And if your husband is a profligate, he'll gamble it all away. All that crouching over

26. Another unhappily married beauty from ancient times.

your embroidery day after day will have been completely in vain, since in a single instant it isn't worth a dime."

Jade then continued, "My dear sisters, the world is so unjust. What is most deplorable is that the ancients came up with this malicious system that treats girls as lowly beings but respects boys. Even if a family has a huge estate, girls aren't entitled to a single share, while the boys inherit it all. Even though it is obvious that they belong to the same parents and are made of the same flesh and blood, when it comes to the inheritance, girls are considered to be completely different. The minute you're married off, they simply let you suffer abuse as if they know nothing about it. If you have frequent quarrels with your spouse because you've been mismatched, they simply say that you have a bad destiny. The Three Obediences are even more absurd, since they exalt the husband as if he were a god. Even though we speak of 'husband and wife,' in fact, how can the wife ever decide what goes on in the house since she is supposed to obey her husband in every minor matter? If she does one thing by herself, everyone will talk about it. And if her husband reprimands her, all she can do is meekly agree. Once she has become completely submissive and humble in all matters and gains a reputation as a model wife, she still must let her husband frolic about as he pleases; otherwise, if she quarrels with him, others will ridicule her for being a jealous wife. And, after she's suffered enough and he's become an official, she'll have to put up with his numerous concubines and mistresses.

"There are other men who ignore their families and play around, and buy new houses in which to install their new wives. Even if the first wife were permitted to be jealous, in this case she would be unaware of what is going on.[27] Then there are those who often bicker at home and abuse their wives as though they weren't human, and even when the wife is dying of anger or grief in her chambers they continue dallying in the brothels. If you are of the lower classes, you can always go out to work as a servant to make a living and avoid this horrid treatment, but if you are of the upper classes, a single move out the door requires a sedan chair and maids to accompany you. These women know little of the outside world and have no skills with which to make a living. And, of course, it's impossible for an upper-class woman to find employment as a maid.

27. A woman's jealousy was traditionally one of the seven grounds on which a man could divorce his wife. The others included failure to produce a son; adultery; lack of filial obedience to her husband's parents; illness; theft; and being too talkative.

"This is all so infuriating. Sometimes it's a case of you crying in the north courtyard while he's off being entertained in the south courtyard, since he loves a new woman and despises the old. You waste your youth being sick and worried every day from dawn to dusk. But if you make even the slightest protest, your husband will be rude and outsiders will all deem you an unvirtuous wife. You have no freedom in domestic affairs, and when it comes to property, it belongs entirely to the husband. We lead the lives of animals or slaves who have to obey their master's every command. In the event of the husband's death, the wife is left with nothing; everything goes to other members of the family. She won't even have control over a hundred pieces of gold. If something happens, she's not allowed to appear in public, and if she doesn't know a man who can act on her behalf, no one will believe what she says. Raising a daughter won't help her get by since even if her daughter's husband is rich, she will still be poor. For if a daughter tries to help her mother or father, she will be considered a criminal by her husband's family. On the other hand, when a woman's husband's family is poor, even if her mother's residence is wealthy, how can she depend on them? A woman has no power either way.

"How did we wind up so inferior? In this world, nothing is so unequal as men and women. It makes me furious that life is so unfair. Just because we're girls, we're not able to make our own living but have to rely on others like useless creatures. I was born a woman and I have suffered at home; I have no way to make a living, so in the years to come it's unlikely that I will have a good future. But being angry is pointless: The question is, how can I save my sisters from this hell? Since my mother herself is a concubine, how can I have a free life? I don't blame the first wife for treating us cruelly, but if she's so jealous why did she allow her husband to take a concubine in the first place? How can I hope that in this life I won't become a slave myself? Heaven is truly cruel. Why are there women in the world anyway?" As Jade said this, her heart was overcome with grief and endless tears streamed from her eyes, wetting her clothing.

The three other girls thought about this and were all depressed too, dreading what awaited them in the future. The women's world is so cruel, but who can avoid it? Unable to bear the thought, they wept silently together. Suddenly, Hibiscus came in carrying a tray of pastries for the guests. As soon as she saw this scene, she was shocked, but as she was in no position to inquire, she just murmured softly to herself: "Everything was fine just now but suddenly everyone looks sad, something must have happened. I should ask, but what can I say? Then again, I can't simply let it go

by either." Extremely perplexed, she finally had no choice but to arrange the plates and invite the young ladies to sit down. "Since Madame Bao is busy discussing matters with a guest," she explained, "she is unable to join you. Please don't stand on ceremony and come have something to eat."

They all dried their tears, stood up, and forced themselves to serve each other politely, though they could hardly swallow a bite. As they sipped their green tea quietly, nobody said a word, but just sat there with their heads lowered, fiddling with their sleeves. Finally Unity broke the silence and said, "Vitality, I have long since heard that you are as fine a poet as Xie Daoyun whose verses are so beautiful. In the past I read your poems and deeply admired them. I hope that you will accept me as your pupil."

Vitality immediately replied with modesty, "Sister, why be so polite? Although I have studied a bit of poetry, how could I ever measure up to your reputation? I bow in admiration to your poetry. Yours is far superior to mine."

Then Awaken chimed in, "You two, stop being so modest! Both of you are famous for your poetry. I'm the one everyone should laugh at, with my scrawl-like writing of a beginning student and my embarrassing attempts at poetry. You would all laugh hard if I read any of it, unlike the fine verse of Vitality and Unity that one never tires of hearing."

Vitality hastily said, "Enough of this formality. I have long since heard that your poetry and essays are superb and that your reputation as a writer surpasses that of Zuofen.[28] Others hardly come close to your talent and erudition. Why are you making fun of us?" Awaken was about to reply when suddenly they heard a maid announce, "Jurui has arrived and is in Lady Liang's quarters at present. Lady Liang sent me to ask you to come." Jade stood up hastily and was about to go when the other three detained her for a moment. As for what they talked of next, the following chapter will tell the astonishing tale. At this point, let me take a rest and a sip of tea before I relate the story in detail.

Chapter 5: American and European influences suddenly cure old diseases; Rousing the deaf and enlightening the blind, heroes are born.

China has been engulfed in darkness for thousands of years; women have never had an ounce of power. But today the divisions between men and

28. An imperial consort during the Eastern Jin dynasty who was renowned for her literary abilities.

women are being broken down and women have risen to the stage where they rouse the world. I imagine that readers who learned of what the girls discussed in the previous section were pained. But I am ashamed that I lack the ability to write more vividly; I am unable to fully describe the sufferings of women, and who knows how many things I have left out? But in a word, women's lives are no better than those of domesticated animals—they are oppressed, imprisoned, and insulted throughout their lives. Their glory or shame is entirely dependent upon men. Westerners say that the women of China let men manipulate them as if they were five hundred times more inferior than men. Alas, the women of China are no different from cows and horses; they study neither technical skills nor academic subjects. They lack any kind of knowledge. They merely flatter men, unashamed to grovel on their knees and beg. Hearing such things makes one infinitely sad! How many times have I cried to the wind and lamented to my compatriots, "Why are women willing to be so lowly, even stooping to be slaves or animals?" It is said that women are incompetent by nature. But how can people not realize that just as women too have four limbs and five senses, their talent and knowledge are not inferior to those of men? It is simply because they don't aspire to autonomy but seek only comfort and ease. As far as Chinese society is concerned, men and women have never had equal rights. Speaking of all the ways in which women suffer, how can I, the author, prevent my tears from flowing? But I pray that my readers ponder these words and that they don't treat this book like any ordinary novel. All the tears and blood are meant to awaken my compatriots from their living hell. I only hope that every one of my sisters can find a way to become independent and stop relying on men.

But enough of this idle talk; let me return now to the main story. In the previous chapter, I had gotten to where Jurui had arrived, and Jade was just about to turn around to go greet her when the three others stopped her and said, "Why don't you send a maid to invite Jurui in here to your room? Our conversation has been so open, why must we go out there with everyone else and feel constrained?" Jade then explained that she wished to avoid being scolded by her father's first wife. Unity suggested "Why don't we say that my mother said it was fine? I'm certain that auntie won't say anything, but if she does reproach us, my mother will take the blame." Thereupon she petitioned her mother, who sent Hibiscus to fetch Jurui without delay.

Not long after Hibiscus had left, the noble Jurui came into the main hall where she first greeted Madame Bao. When she walked over, the four

girls all stood up together and when everyone had completed their greetings, all retired to the bedroom. As Madame Bao had a guest, she didn't have time to stay with them, so she instructed her daughter to entertain her guests by herself. The girls all sat down politely and looked at one another. Jurui took Jade's hand and was shocked wondering what could have happened to make Jade's face so thin and pale. "Sister, why are you so thin? When I asked Hibiscus yesterday, she told me you were not ill!"

Jade heard this and explained, "My destiny is unlucky, there's nothing more to say. But you, my sister, you yourself look thin. I must urge you to stop taking things so hard. This is all your parents' doing, and it's impossible to break an engagement."

Jurui could not contain her anger and color rose to her cheeks, as she laughed wryly, saying, "Sister, what is truly intolerable is accepting this engagement and being treated like a slave. My parents gave birth to me so I ought to be filial and try my best to please them. My honor is intact and I would never do anything improper to shame them. This is all well and good, but my parents ought to let me live without regret and enjoy a full life. In selecting my mate for life, however, why do they consider only the money and not the man? They lie to me and say it's fate, but that's absurd. Accepting that women live their entire lives like beasts of burden, they don't even consider whether the man studies or whether his behavior is good or bad. They haven't looked closely at anything about him, but just listen to the unreliable words of the matchmaker. It's ridiculous and infuriating all at once.

"But I'll have you know, I will not submit. Recently, I've had the chance to read many books from Europe and America that discuss the right to liberty, and how women and men are created equal. Heaven was impartial in endowing us with rights and privileges. The strength of a nation and a race hinges entirely on women, as it is the mother who is charged with overseeing family education. And since women are capable of being independent, everyone is promoting women's rights. There are so many women heroes whom men don't measure up to. Women's schools are all equal to those of men, and at school, women are equal to men and have entered all fields. Unlike China, where we still only study the classics and history, in other countries each field is divided into many specialities. In elementary school, students first study a variety of subjects before they go on to higher education. At the university, all sorts of specializations are open, including philosophy, physics, chemistry, arts and crafts, pedagogy, and agriculture. Every field is dynamic, and men and women compete, striving for excellence in their research, so that every person can live inde-

pendently. The spirit of independence burns like fire. Men respect women like their superiors, and whenever they encounter a woman, they stand and bow in humble respect.

"In teahouses and pubs, if a man is already seated and he sees a lady, he has to stand up to show respect. If the seats in a carriage are all taken and he sees a woman board, he has to give his seat to her. Women, however, don't have to do the same for men. The reason that women in other countries command so much respect is that, first of all, they are independent and don't rely on men.[29] Second of all, women always try as hard as they can in whatever they do, with the result that there are numerous heroic women who elicit the reverence and respect of others. And finally, the mother is essential in family education and in giving birth to the new citizens of the nation; therefore, in civilized nations, men value the relation between men and women and recognize that women's rights are equal.

"If they get married, women are free to choose their spouses themselves, and they don't have to blindly obey their parents. Men and women can become friends, and they respect each other, for as a rule, such friendships remain pure and proper. Often, women marry someone they have known well in school. This is because, first of all, they understand each other's individual character and educational level, and second of all, they know each other's personality and ambitions. But only if their love is profound do they get married. This has nothing in common with China, where marriage often lacks mutual love and is comparable to two strangers living together. Ordinarily, in other countries, husbands and wives love each other and respect each other profoundly, and this spares the family from contentious and quarrelsome relations. In some places, rights are even further developed and everyone is filled with the spirit of independence. Some women are employed in business, and there are even more working in education. They can both support themselves financially and have professional careers. When women and men's rights are equal, their patriotic spirits burn, and the nation grows strong and the family prosperous.

"If you compare them to Chinese women, it's as though they are living in Heaven while we are stuck in Hell—the difference seems like more than a million miles. Is it that we weren't born human, or simply that we are willing to be servile, like slaves or animals? We quietly endure

29. Here Qiu Jin mistakes certain customs of etiquette in Western culture for evidence of women's high social status.

our oppression. As long as we can dress up and fuss over the latest fashions, we don't complain that we are prisoners in hell with no freedom. We never try to obtain education or careers, or think about independence or self-reliance. We never consider escaping this slave trap, or becoming women heroes, or achieving a reputation that is known abroad, or making great contributions to the world or attaining the kind of success that will be recorded in history books, or doing something outstanding that will make millions of people remember our name. Nor do we think about the thousands of ways in which we suffer, or about escaping this living hell. But today, I have awoken from this former dream, and therefore I am confident that I can achieve my goals. When a phoenix is inside a cage, who can appreciate its brilliant colors? But one day it will fly to heaven, breaking out of its stupor to seek independence. I have decided, therefore, to pursue my studies in Japan, and I have come today to ask whether you would be willing to come along with me."

When Jurui finished what she had to say, all those who heard were exalted and happy. In a great clamor, they all asked at once, "Does such a wonderful possibility really exist? It's as though we have just awoken from a dream. But has any woman ever tried to seek an education before?" Jurui replied, "I read of one girl who has already gone."

The others said excitedly, "We were just lamenting the fact that girls can't be independent and that they don't live up to their talents and ambitions. But this is wonderful! Where did you learn such news?" Jurui replied, "My tutor admires reform and recently bought some books and newspapers to show to me that explained the situation of women abroad. Otherwise, how could I ever get such books to read at home?"

Jade said, "Of course I want to go with you, but where will I ever get the money?" "Don't worry," Jurui replied, "I have already thought of a way to obtain an adequate sum of money. Since the Gou family is so anxious for me to marry into their family as soon as I turn seventeen, my mother has already set aside 1000 pieces of gold to use for my wardrobe and jewelry. I can secretly steal this money. Wouldn't it be better to use this to fund our studies than to feed it to that dog? It's enough for both of us to study for two years. After that, Tutor Yu has said that he will figure something out for me, so we needn't worry."

At that point, Unity spoke up. "Sister Jurui, your words anger me because it seems you only want Jade to go. Do you mean to suggest that the three of us aren't human? Even though we might lack talent and knowledge, we too can follow remarkable people and compete for excel-

lence. Why should we be willing to stay behind? But we would need a man to travel with us, otherwise it will be inconvenient since we are unfamiliar with the place and the people. I'm afraid we might get lost!"

Jurui hastily replied, "Sister, why would I be unwilling to have you come along? But I am afraid that, first of all, it will be difficult for you to overcome barriers at home and, second of all, you haven't enough money. But as for getting lost, stop worrying. The entire journey is by ship, so the route is simple; why must we rely on men? Do you mean we couldn't accomplish it on our own? I am willing to take responsibility for everything myself and I can assure you, sisters, we will have no problem. I have already devised a plan that will enable us to escape, but we must arrange for some more money, otherwise it'll be difficult to do anything."

Awaken and Vitality said in unison, "We both have some jewelry that we could try to sell. The problem is that we have no one to buy it." Jurui responded, "That's easy. I will provide the funds for the trip; then I will secretly give my tutor your jewelry and have him sell it for you." The two then replied happily, "Splendid!"

Jade then asked Unity, "What about you?" Unity said, "My mother has a great deal of money that I could steal, as well as gold and pearl jewelry. If there are four or five of us, I think that if we can come up with several thousand pieces of gold, that should be plenty for three years of study. But we must proceed with a single heart and mind, and shouldn't divide things up into yours and mine!" Everyone responded in unison, "You are right, if any one of us is not of one heart and mind, and doesn't share the difficulties that may befall us but is half-hearted, that person will not die a peaceful death!"

Then Vitality asked, "But how should we convene and by what means should we escape?" Awaken said, "The eighth day of the fifth month is my aunt's birthday. Let's use this as a pretext to gather, and that way we can also bring along lots of jewelry. As for escaping, we'll have to ask Jurui." Jurui thus replied that she had already made certain arrangements, which she explained to them. Everyone murmured "Splendid" in subdued voices. Jurui then said, "On that day, no matter what, we must all meet together. If someone doesn't show up, we cannot wait for her." They all nodded their heads in agreement.

Jurui then started talking about unbinding their feet, and everyone agreed, except for Vitality, who looked a little uncomfortable and said that she feared that it would look inelegant. Jurui proceeded to reveal the

disadvantages of bound feet to her, saying, "Bound feet have always been a disgrace. You torture your own body to make lotus-petal feet. With such painful broken bones and withered muscles, how can you walk anywhere freely? Because of these feet, we become frail and weak and even catch tuberculosis. How can we blame this on anything but our ignorance? We're unable to fend for ourselves since we can't even walk. We have to lean on our maids for support, and if we walk more than a few *li* our feet hurt like festering sores. From morning until night, we sit still like statues, and if some calamity strikes, we're like prisoners who want to escape but can't move. The pains we suffer are self-inflicted.

"Then, there are those who are truly shameless. Since their husbands fancy little feet, they tie their bindings even tighter, into three inches which they boast are like lotus petals. When they walk, it's like a willow branch swaying in the wind, which they think is so attractive. Leaning against the door hoping that their fates will be good, they make no effort to exert themselves but actually enjoy their lives; they willingly act as their husbands' slaves. Little do they imagine that men are in the habit of abandoning the old for the new, and why should having small feet make any difference? They will still go off and find another enchanting girl, forgetting all about the love you once shared. They spoil their concubines, buy young maids with whom they spend the day teasing and flirting. What's ridiculous is that she who knows how to flatter him the best has no chance to flatter him, but is instead abandoned, like a prisoner, behind closed doors that visitors seldom pass through. How sad it is to be subjected to such humiliation, but how can your little feet alleviate your worries?

"As for those men who are so infatuated with frequenting brothels that they forget all about home, it is unlikely you can keep them with your little feet. You might as well unbind them and be comfortable. Then when you walk, even if the road is difficult, you won't have to frown. You can also develop your physical strength through sport. Whereas now you are thin and frail and everything is difficult to do, you would be able to go out without having to ask men for help; you could pursue an education so you could support yourself; you could seek a living through handicraft work. You could teach in a school to make a living and getting into business and commerce would not be difficult either. Only when you succeed in living on your own can you become independent. Through independence, women's abilities and qualities will naturally improve. What's the use of a pair of pointy feet? One day, civilization will spread throughout

our land, and people will absolutely spurn little feet and regard them as a thing for animals."

When Jurui finished saying all this, everyone agreed at once. Vitality laughed like an oriole. "If I hadn't said that one thing to inspire such a response, how could we have ever had the pleasure of hearing your fluent, brilliant discussion, which has awakened me from my stupor, and made me truly admire you. I yearn to publicize your speech everywhere to enable all sisters in their inner chambers to wake up and cast aside those shameful customs of the past and engage in all manner of great deeds and cleanse their slavish hearts. Only when we've escaped this prison and have become accomplished in learning and careers will we know that women are not useless and that our independent spirits are equal to men. From now on, we will destroy the fortified walls of our suffering; why must we have daggers and spears to carry out reforms? Once we have attained education and skills we can all be independent and we won't have to worry about having anyone to rely on. How can today's swallows and sparrows compare with the phoenixes of the future? When the flowers of freedom blossom, civilization will flourish and we will rise up quickly in the world. Today I have awakened from a foolish dream, and I am determined to become independent. No matter how heavily I am weighed down by oppression, if I don't pursue my education, I would rather die." Everyone praised Vitality for being so heroic. From that moment, all the chronic ailments of the girls of the inner chambers were cured. Having made their decision, everyone was very happy.

But who would have thought that a maid was eavesdropping behind the wall?

[*The maid Hibiscus is so moved by what she has overheard that she decides to help the girls. First, she attempts to persuade Madame Bao to allow her daughter to go study abroad; when that fails, she resorts to her second plan: to steal some money and aid their escape in secret.*]

Chapter 6: Throwing off shackles, they travel courageously to Japan; Despising all abuses, they staunchly champion a grand scheme.

As I sit idle by the window, hundreds of emotions surge in me. Who has the determination to save the nation? Drinking my wine and slapping my thigh, I sigh in vain, for I have yet to master the art of the steel dagger. Saddened, my heroic spirit flags, and my grief for the nation is difficult to

control. I have wept ten thousand catties of tears; amid the wind, my regrets cannot be subdued.

The previous section told how the girls made their plan to escape while at the Bao residence. Now the eighth day of the fifth month had arrived. It was the birthday of the elderly Madame Bao, though as she was only visiting, she had no relatives or friends there to celebrate. Several guests stopped by, however, including Lady Zuo and her daughter, the Jiang girl, as well as Jurui of the Huang family. Needless to say, everyone made kowtows to show their respect, in addition to all those other elaborate formalities that are so tiring. Unity reported to her mother, "This morning I will go pray to Guanyin[30] to bless and protect you from illness." Madame Bao had always been a devout Buddhist, and seeing her daughter's good intentions, she nodded her head immediately in consent and ordered Hibiscus to escort her. Huang Jurui, Vitality, and Awaken all stood up and said they would go with her to visit the temple and that after they had a look around they would come right back. Then Unity took Little Jade's hand, saying, "Sister, come with us!" Little Jade accepted this command to go. Though Lady Liang looked angry, she didn't say a word. Lady Zuo did not want to make the girls unhappy, so she too was forced to agree. So, without waiting for any permission from their mothers, they all went out into the courtyard. Madame Bao instructed them, "Hurry back so we don't have to wait for you to begin the banquet." The young ladies all promised to return soon. Then they got in their sedan chairs and hurried away like the clouds.

When they reached the temple, they all got out of the sedan chairs and Hibiscus ordered the bearers to wait in front. When they went inside, they pretended to pray to the Bodhisattva, then went to have a look around the temple, since they didn't want the monks to follow. When they reached the back gates, they found Tutor Yu there with sedan chairs. Everyone instructed Hibiscus with a few words, and she wept as she bid them to take care of themselves. She watched them get into their sedan chairs, then waited there patiently until the sun went down before turning back. At home, naturally there was a massive uproar. After Madame Bao quizzed Hibiscus, she learned the details. Some angrily cursed the maid; others wept. But there was nothing that any of the parents could do.

It is said that the girls boarded the ship, which set sail after the whistle was sounded three times. They stood at the railing holding hands and

30. A popular bodhisattva usually portrayed in female form.

turned to look back at their distant homeland far away, engulfed in the evening clouds. Knowing each other so well, they chatted harmoniously. Facing the wind, they clapped their hands and chatted about their lives. The author can't help but be filled with joy at this image, though I have written of it poorly in plain language.

How great these girls' ambitions must have been to break through such barriers! They had gone 1000 *li* from home, and now they were traveling 10,000 *li* as fast as the wind. Everyone on board looked at them and thought, "The new learning will surely thrive. One day these girls will act as the bells of freedom and save the motherland."

2

Chen Xiefen

Chen Xiefen (1883–1923)

Like her more famous contemporary Qiu Jin, Chen Xiefen was one of the earliest women writers to use the newly emergent radical press as a platform from which to denounce the social oppression of women. Born in Hunan in 1883, Chen Xiefen was the eldest daughter of Chen Fan, a progressive intellectual who owned and edited the anti-Manchu paper *Subao* in Shanghai. With her father's encouragement, Chen Xiefen launched *The Women's Paper* in 1902, when