

# **Late Ming Xizi Lake: The courtesan world in the landscape culture of the West Lake.**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The subject of the West Lake in the city of Hangzhou is currently being discussed in a growing number of historiographical works. (Von Eschenbach 2020, Duan 2020) Since the West Lake is a space that can be approached from multiple disciplinary areas, in the present article we will address an aspect of the West Lake that has received little attention. Starting from the tight correlation between the Lake and feminine identity, (Lee 2006, Ko 1997) we will focus on the analysis of the relationship that the landscape culture of the Lake had with the courtesan world. This identification of the West Lake with the feminine originates in a concept found in the very binomial used to designate landscape: shanshui 山水; it is well known that within the images linked to it the mountain is associated with the masculine principle yang and the river or water is associated with the female principle yin. Consequently, many lakeside sceneries in Chinese geography were associated with female spirits, such as the Dongting 洞庭 lake or the Xiaoxiang 瀟湘 river as well as the West Lake. The West Lake, because of its association with the feminine and because of its function as an imperial park for the Song emperors, was conceived as an effeminate space which, like the famous courtesan Xishi 西施 (around Fifth century B.C.), corrupted men's integrity. This image contributed to the fact that during the whole early Ming period the public works necessary for the maintenance of the Lake were completely neglected. Something similar happened also at the beginning of the Qing dynasty: the moral condemnation weighing on

the West Lake ensured that until the arrival of Kangxi reign the maintenance of the Lake would again be totally neglected.

But before we go any further, it is necessary that we define what we mean by “landscape culture.” Many authors of the field of landscape studies have given many definitions that tend to combine all cultural manifestations related to the concept of landscape (Berque 2009, Maderuelo 2005, Escande 2005). Thus, landscape culture is a cultural construction combining various human activities which in turn include different types of ethical, aesthetic and religious values, as well as specific manners of experiencing and transforming nature according to those same values. In China, the landscape culture comprised very different aspects and presented many layers that would often overlap. These layers offered ways to construct and experience the landscape that could be in complete contrast with one another. Such contradiction at times manifested itself in an open conflict, while at others it presented itself diluted within the inconsistencies that human societies hold without being conscious of them, be it on account of pure cynicism or by being subjected to all kinds of ideological and ethical inhibitors.

Therefore, within the great matrix comprised by the landscape culture, multiple social and cultural manifestation intermingle, configuring a truly complex polyphonic text. When we look at these concentric layers, we find that the courtesan world is in full contact with many of them. In a way, the dimension of the pleasure trade is integrated within the landscape culture, inasmuch as the latter is a mechanism which can either reinforce the values supporting such trade, or question the social system that supports it, or even turn it around. High-end luxury prostitution, or more euphemistically courtesan culture, was the tip of the iceberg of a merciless social system which condemned many women and men to an

unwelcome life (Zurndorfer 2011). It was rooted in the unyielding trade of human beings who were sold to brothels or as concubines due to the economic struggles of their families. It is true that the trade was subject to the code of law to prevent abuse; nonetheless, the mere existence of a law stating that kidnapping a woman to sell her on this market was a crime implies that those crimes were being committed (Jiang 2005). The fundamental causes of this human trade are to be found in a rampant social inequality regarding both class and economic status (Zurndorfer 2011, p. 206). Some historians point out (Hsieh 2008) that the human trade system nourishing prostitution and concubinage ultimately provided also a means of social mobility, because women coming from low social standing could often be integrated into high class families as concubines. If in the case of concubinage that would be to some extent true, in the case of prostitution this only adds more perversion to a system that built a pit in which many women were thrown, condemning them to one of the most ignoble lives from the standpoint of Ming China's morals, and then tried to wipe itself clean through the possibility of an honourable way out.

Here we shall focus especially on the relationship between the landscape culture and the courtesan world of the Late Ming. We shall see how the landscape culture operated in different ways regarding the world of the courtesans. On one hand it consolidated that world's values and it offered the spatial context within which, through typical landscape activities such as a visit to the gardens or a walk in the mountains, courtesans could exercise their profession while actively participating in cultural endeavours. Those occupations might or might not have a sexual dimension; in any case they were aimed at satisfying men through pleasure. On the other hand, though, it was within the landscape culture that those same values promoting the expansion of the courtesan world would eventually be questioned. Finally, we also find that through landscape activities certain high-end courtesans drew on

the landscape culture to turn around the values of their world, which they then used to attain their own goals of ascending within the cultural world. This last topic, that of the courtesan and high-class women agency and its association with the gardens, has been discussed in other research works, such as the significant and important work made by Alison Hardie (2007) and Sylvia Lee (2011, 2016). We believe that the study of the relation between the West Lake landscape culture and its courtesan world can be an important contribution in the field landscape studies in its relation with women studies in dynastic China.

In the Late Ming there were many centres which were famous because of their courtesan culture. Hangzhou and the Lake were among those famous centres, and while sites such as Yangzhou, Nanjing or Suzhou obtained great fame in this respect, none of them would reflect the same symmetrical equivalence between the landscape's identity and its fame as a courtesan centre; that is the reason why the West Lake turns out to be ideal to study the complexities between the landscape's identity and the courtesan world.

The primary sources we have used are travel journals, West Lake gazetteers, visual illustrations, poems and even fictional works written by literati, in addition to poems written by the famous courtesans who resided at the Lake. They all help us determine the different ways of experiencing the landscape culture of the West Lake in relation to the courtesans; on one hand as it was viewed by the literati and on the other as it was experienced and used by the courtesans themselves. As we shall see, in some cases there is an intense contrast between the masculine and the feminine vision.

The article is divided into three sections. The first examines the identification between Xishi 西施 (around Fifth century B.C.) and the West Lake. The figure of Xishi have been well studied by Milburn (2013), however in this article we focus in to analyse how that relation

reinforced the values of the courtesan world to the point that the West Lake itself came to be compared to a courtesan. Such a vision diverges from the way the feminine world made use of the metaphor Xishi-Lake, through which it acquired a dimension far removed from the image of the courtesan. The second section is dedicated to analysing how the courtesan culture was described, both on the visual and on the literary level, in a way that created an idyllic image of it. We shall see that the courtesan culture was perfectly integrated within the landscape culture, as is easily observed in the visual representations as well as in the literary descriptions of the landscape activities in which the courtesans participated. In contrast with that vision, we shall examine a tale by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646), entitled *Maiyou lang duzhan huakui* 賣油郎獨占花魁 (The Oil Seller Wins the Queen of Flowers), which shows us a different side to that world, and where the same idyllic activities presented to us by the previous sources acquire a sinister aura. The third and last section is dedicated to analysing how famous courtesans such as Liu Rushi and Wang Wei would use the values of the landscape culture of the Lake to display and assert their own interests within the cultural world of the Late Ming, thus establishing an image of the West Lake as a site hosting the ascent of specifically feminine cultural activities.

## THE WEST LAKE AS XISHI

Ever since Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) (Fuller 1990, Wang 1982, p.430) made the famous comparison between the West Lake and Xishi during the Northern Song dynasty, the identification of the Lake with an erotic archetype became one of the multiple overlapping images that have accompanied it. The association between the West Lake and Xishi eventually became of a clearly negative nature. But the identification made by Su Shi was ambiguous and everything seems to point to a comparison which did not have a negative

connotation. The negative dimension of this binomial Xishi-West Lake, took root later, during Southern Song, and was expressed in its fullness during the Yuan and Ming periods. Although the negative dimension was also present in the Late Ming, in the context we will analyse how the Xishi associations have more in common with the erotic archetype. In many cases the image of the femme fatale is indeed inseparable from her erotic attributes, but that association was not always maintained and in certain periods the negative connotations were put aside. This is what would happen in the Late Ming period, when within the binomial Xishi-West Lake the dimension of the femme fatale tended to dissolve in that of the erotic archetype in the circles of eccentric literati in Hangzhou. However, the negative connotations remained present amongst in the views of the more orthodox Confucians (McDowall 2019). In this context, the sobriquet Xizi hu 西子湖 (Xizi was another of Xishi's names) would be used as a title for collections of poems and to name albums of paintings of the Lake. As most notable examples we could quote the work by Wang Ruqian, 汪汝謙 (1577-1655?), “Emerald collections on the Xizi Lake”, *Xizihu shicui yutan* 西子湖拾翠餘談, or the album of paintings and calligraphies titled “The eyebrows of the Xizi Lake” *Xizimei* 西子眉 by Bian Wenyu 卞文瑜 (1576-1655). In both cases the term used, Xizi, is a generic manner of referring to the West Lake. However, the second title, the one by Bian Wenyu, is worth mentioning. There was a tradition in Hangzhou that compared the West Lake with the eyebrows of a person, a comparison starting with the famous poem by Su Shi and quoted by Tian Rucheng – ‘In Hangzhou is the West Lake, as eyebrows are on the face of a person 杭州有西湖，如人之有眉目也’.<sup>1</sup> In his title, Bian Wenyu is unifying two famous tropes enunciated by Su Shi concerning the West Lake, so the eyebrows of Hangzhou become the eyebrows of Xishi as a personification of the West Lake. Thus, the

usage of this term to name the Lake continues a poetic tradition consisting in describing the Lake through terms referring to feminine beauty, which in the Late Ming would reach its fullest expression. The dissociation of the erotic archetype from its negative connotations is clearly a consequence of the changes in the courtesans' social conditions (we must not forget that Xishi was a courtesan) in the Late Ming, changes in turn linked to the modification of the role of women within society taking place at the time. The result of all those social changes was that, for certain groups of literati, going with courtesans and appreciating their talents in artistic and poetic activities became not only socially acceptable but widely cultivated. How the comparison of the West Lake with Xishi goes from being a simple metaphor to becoming openly incarnate in the figure of a courtesan becomes apparent in the following text by Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–1684):

若西湖則為曲中名妓，聲色俱麗，然倚門獻笑，人人得而媒褻之矣。人人得而媒褻，故人人得而艷羨；人人得而艷羨，故人人得而輕慢。<sup>2</sup>

West Lake, by contrast however, is a famous courtesan from the Singing Quarters, fair of both voice and visage. She leans against her doorway a meretricious smile playing across her lips. Everyone can be lustful toward her. Since everyone can have his way with her, everyone loves and desires her, and since everyone loves and desires her, she is an object of scorn.

The text forms part of the introduction to Zhang Dai's work *Xihu mengxun* 西湖夢尋 (The West Lake in my Dreams), where he compares the West Lake to two other famous lakes of China, the Mirror Lake Jianhu 鑒湖 and the Xiang Lake 湘湖. While the Xiang Lake is compared to a young virgin, and the Mirror Lake to a great public official's daughter, the West Lake seems to draw the short straw, since it represents nothing more than a mere

courtesan. As a matter of fact, what is at play here is a spiral of allusions that intermingle the inaccessibility of Jianhu and Xianghu, two lakes situated far from urban areas, with the accessibility of the West Lake as an urban public park of Hangzhou. In this context, while Jianhu and Xianghu are as unattainable as a young virgin or an official's daughter, the West Lake, being located close to the city, is available to anybody, precisely like a famous courtesan. We ought to underline, of course, that famous courtesans held the privilege of choosing with whom to associate, particularly in terms of the literary fame of those who aspired to their company. In my opinion, Zhang Dai was fully aware of the negative image of the West Lake in its dimension of erotic archetype, being considered the one of the causes of the fall of the Southern Song dynasty. That is why its public character serves here as an allusion to that erotic archetype, which ensures that the Lake will be mistreated by vulgar people who cannot appreciate its feminine beauty, and of course by "heinous" ministers of the past such as Jia Sidao 賈似道 (1213-1275), who despite having lived at the West Lake were never able to appreciate its true nature. (I am quoting from the final part of the text, which is not reproduced here) However crude and complex this comparison might be, it is also a perfect example of how the feminine dimension of the West Lake was conceived by the masculine imagination. The West Lake was similar to a courtesan, meaning a figure existing exclusively for the pleasure of men.

Nonetheless, Xizi's image was also used by women, in a completely opposite sense. In the following poem by Huang Yuanjie 黃媛介 (1620-1669), one of her few surviving works about the West Lake, we can see how the Lake acquires a dimension where all the characteristics linked to erotic pleasure and the femme fatale Xizi are transformed and take on an aspect thus far unknown:



湖上

西子湖頭千頃春，風光不屬去來人。

朝嵐夕靄誰收得，半在憑闌半釣綸。<sup>3</sup>

On the Lake

Spring has commenced on the thousand acres of the Xizi Lake,

The landscape does not belong to those who come and go.

Who receives the hazy dawns and its misty sunsets?

a solitary fishing woman, leaning on the railing.

In the poem, both the West Lake and Xishi's figure acquire a different dimension. A dichotomy is established between a superficial West Lake, that is, the place destined to touristic consumption which Zhang Dai compared to the figure of a courtesan, and an inner Lake, the one of the deep sunsets and the foggy dawns, which remains in Huang's inner space. Only her, as the ideal image of the fisherman, has the leisure time to appreciate the Lake's dawns and sunsets. Thus, the Xizi Lake acquires an intimate dimension which completely reshapes the image of Xizi; the seductress and courtesan becomes a secluded companion to a lonely hermit woman, the only one who can experience the Lake true nature.

As we have seen, the archetype of Xizi as a courtesan symbolising the West Lake is used in a different way in the masculine context, where the erotic archetype becomes dissociated from the figure of the femme fatale and is infused with a poetic significance which cannot be

separated from its erotic connotations. The examples we have mentioned offer a suitable image of how, through the landscape culture, certain archetypes are constructed which justify the existence of the courtesan world. While it is true that those archetypes bestow on the courtesan lifestyle a positive value contrary to conventional morals, they still represent a support for a world designed exclusively to satisfy men's desires. In the poem by Huang Yuajie that we have just read, Xizi loses its erotic connotations to focus on other values, including a poetic dimension, that are far removed from the themes conceived by the masculine imagination.

## **COURTESAN LIFE IN THE WEST LAKE**

We shall now explore how the image of the erotic archetype is linked to an intense courtesan activity within the landscape culture of the West Lake. First, we shall examine the famous landscape sites of the Lake relating to that type of activity. We shall then see how both visual and literary representations show an intense connection between the landscape culture and courtesan activities. Lastly, we shall set out how the idealised representations coming from such sources offer a strong contrast to the fictional tale by Feng Menglong, which presents a harsher side to the courtesan world.

When we analyse what the visual sources show about the locations where the pleasure trade of the West Lake was concentrated, the intermediate area connecting the Gu hill 孤山 with the Su causeway stands out – more precisely, two sites among the Ten Views of the West Lake: Sudi quyuán 蘇堤麴院 (Su Causeway and Qu winery) and Sudi chunxiao 蘇堤春曉 (Spring dawn at Su causeway) (Fig. 1, 2, 3). The first was a favourable spot to look at and enjoy the fragrance of lotus flowers on the surface of the Lake in summer, the second to look at the rising sun. Tian Rucheng informs us that during the Southern Song dynasty those

places were full of establishments where dancers and singers remained all night.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, because of the problems with piracy, existing in Tian Rucheng's time, it is hardly conceivable that such entertainment could take place, at least not with the splendour we will find in later periods. Later, Zhang Dai describes how a governor called Liu Mengqian 劉夢謙 used to throw great parties for which he lit up the bridge with so many candles that their perfect reflection on the water could be seen from the opposite shore. As a consequence of those parties, Zhang Dai tells us, he was degraded from the court.<sup>5</sup> The fame of such places in relation to the culture of erotic pleasure reached a point that both in the local history *Xihu leichao* 西湖類鈔 (Classified notes on the West Lake) (hereafter, XHLCH) and in the *Hainei qiguan* 海內奇觀 (Marvellous views within the seas) (hereafter, HNQG) the illustrations of those sites present scenes that introduce us to the topic of courtesans. For instance, in the images representing the Sudi chunxiao scenery, we shall see that both in the XHLCH and in the HNQG it is shown as a scene where a literatus arrives mounted on a horse, accompanied by his servant. In the background stands a pavilion where a woman is waiting. The figure at the window is an explicit reference to the establishments of courtesans concentrated in that area. Since the XHLCH is an earlier text than the HNQG, the image in the XHLCH works as a model which in the HNQG becomes more dramatized. The other scene we mentioned, the one at Sudi Quyuan, is represented in the HNQG, with two literati walking toward some pavilions located in a garden overlooking the Lake.<sup>6</sup> Outside those pavilions we meet a couple of women sitting together. In this illustration it is clearly shown that the courtesan establishment which two literati are about to enter is designed to facilitate a view of the Lake. The first pavilion leads to a rectangular corridor *lang* 廊 designed for the contemplation of the garden as well as the Lake in general. Behind this structure another

pavilion is visible, opening its view to the contemplation of the open landscape of the Lake. So, the activities taking place in those courtesan gardens included the contemplation of the Lake and the consequent poetic endeavours. Nonetheless, the fact that such sites are illustrated in the HNQG, which was a sort of travel guide for groups of high-class literati, (Lin 2011, p.778) tells us that along with multiple visits to Buddhist temples, the admiration of sunsets and the pursuit of literary activities, entry into the houses of courtesans was one of the main reasons why one went to visit the Lake. In this context we see how the landscape culture of the Lake, in its visual as well as architectural expressions, was perfectly integrated around courtesan activities, apparently with no contradiction with the dominant Confucian ethical values, since such activities are widely displayed even in official works such as the XHLCH.

Another theme broadly shown by visual and written sources is that of the stroll among the Lake scenery in the company of courtesans. In other scenes of the ten views, two works introduce the presence of a courtesan in meetings held at famous sites of the Lake, specifically in the scenes of Huagang guanyu 花港观鱼 (Watching fish at flower cove) and of Pinghu qiuyue 平湖秋月 (Autumn moon over the serene lake) (Fig. 2,4,5,6 here). In the first one, what is shown is an excursion where the literati enjoy the company of a courtesan. The second is of a more romantic nature, on a boat in the middle of the Lake a couple enjoys the moonlight. These illustrations present us with the two types of excursions at the West Lake, strolling and boat trips. Let us focus on the first, the walks that literati took with courtesans. To that end, it is worth analyzing Wang Ruqian's account of his activities and excursions through the sights of the West Lake:

經風篁嶺，有游客挾妓唱西風桂子，和以紫鸞簫，裊裊雜松竹響。<sup>7</sup>

As we crossed Fenghuang ling [near the old Longjing temple 龍井寺], there were fellow sightseers arm-in-arm with courtesans who were singing of “The west breeze and the fragrance of the Osmanthus,” accompanied on the purple-phoenix flute, delicately mingled with the sound of the bamboo leaves and pines.

In the text a synesthetic relation is established between the sound of the courtesans’ chanting, the scent of the flowers and the sinuous landscape that seems to move along with the melody. As we see, we are presented here with an idyllic vision of pleasure, where the courtesans, through their music, craft the delight of the literati who are enjoying the landscape.

In the following text by the literatus from Jiading Pu Fangliang 浦昉(倅) (1623) we find an encounter with a courtesan residing in Hangzhou. In the text the courtesan herself come to the literati in the whereabouts of a Lake guesthouse called Shiju 石居, where Pu and his companions were accommodated:

初二日，風日和暖，蓋小春氣候也。煮茗，脫山栗，肴酒雜陳，將作望湖計。適吳二娘遣小鬟來，言：“女郎不日東歸，欲與諸郎君言別”。二娘已冉冉至。乃命酒壯其行色。<sup>8</sup>

Second day: owing to the late autumn climate there was a warm breeze, and it was a sunny day. We prepared tea and peeled sweet-chestnuts, with an assortment of wine and cold meats, with the aim of contemplating [or viewing] the Lake [from above]. Right at that moment, Second Lady Wu sent a maid-servant who said: “Madame will be going back east [of Hangzhou] in the next few days, and would like to say farewell to you gentlemen.” After

that, Second Lady slowly arrived [or strolled in]. We immediately ordered wine to wish her bon voyage.

This text shows us how fluid tourist destination the Lake was. In the text we have just seen it is not clear what reasons the Second Lady Wu, who probably took that name from a previous famous courtesan of Hangzhou,<sup>9</sup> had to present her to the literati, yet, probably she was already acquainted with them. In any case, as we further read the journal of Pu, the same idyllic view of the courtesan life at the Lake is presented again.

These visual and written sources give an idyllic description of the pleasure surrounding the courtesan world at the West Lake from which, as we see, the moral criticism that could be expected from Confucian literati is completely absent. Undoubtedly, the social changes regarding women as well as the emergence of the *qing* aesthetic, which held as ideals the feminine figure and that of the poet and painter courtesan, contributed to the setting aside of ethical criteria based on Confucian puritanism. Nonetheless, the ideals of the *qing* aesthetic promoted values that introduced a different kind of criticism toward the courtesan world; such criticism would be more focussed on the cruelty that could take place in that world and on the difficult social situation in which women could find themselves. In this context we shall use the fictional work by Feng Menglong set in the courtesan environment of the West Lake, in order to see how through fiction criticism is established toward the workings of the courtesan world. Although fiction cannot be treated as a historical source in the strict sense, it can be analysed as an artistic manifestation critical toward that world, reflecting facts that most certainly could have happened in real life. The tale narrates a story set during the Song dynasty (Yang 2012, p.38-77). In it, Feng Menglong makes use of topics of the landscape culture of West Lake such as the paradigm West Lake – Xishi, the strolls on the

lake or the poetic meetings, to delve into the world of courtesans and show its dark aspect. The main character beauty, called Shen Yaoqin 莘瑶琴<sup>10</sup> is a twelve-year-old girl who is separated from her parents during the takeover of Kaifeng by the Jurchen and falls into the hands of an unscrupulous neighbour. The man, through deceit, takes her to Hangzhou and sells her to a brothel close to the West Lake. Feng explicitly notes that this was the usual process through which those little girls eventually became courtesans; a process, as we have seen, much cruder and more prosaic. Yet, the tale brings forward a basic fact that could happen; many women were certainly sold against their will, even though in many cases they might not express it openly. As we already know, the Ming code of law explicitly prohibited abduction, but what we are facing here, though, is a different kind of coercion involving a violence that is not physical but rather structural and psychological. Because in the case of women and young girls sold due to the economic struggle of their family, I seriously doubt that they would have the opportunity to choose otherwise, and if, as it is unlikely, they initially refused to be sold, filial piety worked as an element of coercion and psychological violence of great effect. Zurndorfer (2011 p.205) point out that filial piety was the subconscious defence mechanism that Ming society had to justify this human trade of concubines and prostitutes-courtesans and Feng Menglong's tale will clearly demonstrate this further on.

Yaoqin becomes a courtesan through deceit and when she realises her true situation it is already too late. With time and thanks to her talents she becomes the most famous and most coveted courtesan of the West Lake, with the sobriquet of "Queen of Flowers". While she takes part alongside men in all the cultural activities of the Lake, such as poetry, music and dance, she still cannot have sexual relations because her age imposes virginity. But when she turns 15, the age at which according to Feng Menglong courtesans were given to the client

who paid the most to lie with a virgin, she outright refuses. Madam Wang, the patroness of the brothel, devises a plot to make Yaoqin lose her virginity. Here the most interesting aspect relating to our main subject of discussion is that the plot is carried out through one of the most famous landscape activities of Hangzhou, a boat trip on the Lake leading to the Qiantang 錢塘 river to watch the tidal bore, a natural phenomenon that occurs in the river mouth in its closed bay. The water from the sea advances upstream against the current causing waves that can reach 9 meters high. This tidal bore of the Qiantang river was a famous touristic sight of Hangzhou landscape culture since the Tang dynasty. Thus, in order to get the girl completely drunk, during the journey they encourage her to play games in which the loser is obliged to ingest alcohol. Back home, the madam herself undresses an unconscious Yaoqin and delivers her to a client who has paid 330 silver pieces in advance, and he rapes her without qualms. After the incident, since Yaoqin still refuses to receive any client, she is pressured through arguments about filial piety: Madam Wang is now a mother to her and the unwillingness to help her gain money is inappropriate; the girl is also threatened with whipping and with the possibility of being sold to the first bidder if she continues to refuse to carry out her duties. Here we are presented with another plausible situation; corporal punishments and psychological violence could well be internal measures taken inside the brothels to keep discipline. Yaoqin finally agrees to start her career when she is convinced that she will be able to get out of the courtesan life if she becomes so famous that her high-end suitors will want to marry her, so that among them she will be able to choose the one who shows true love for her. Feng Menglong also describes the activities Yaoqin takes part in at the West Lake, such as boat trips on the Lake, poetry gatherings, visits to houses belonging to famous scholars. Perhaps the event we most wish to highlight with regard to the subject we are discussing is the abduction perpetrated by a Mr. Wu.



Angered by Yaoqin's rejection of him, he decides to force her to take a peculiar trip on the Lake. Mr. Wu, accompanied by numerous henchmen, kidnaps Yaoqin and drags her to a boat with which he takes her across the Lake to one of the islands, where he invites the girl to drink with him. Afterwards Yaoqin tries to kill herself by jumping from the boat, but Mr Wu stops her, also telling her that should she die he would only have to pay a fine. Finally, he takes away her shoes and the bandages from her feet and leaves her stranded on the shore of the Lake; such an act can be read as the ultimate humiliation, because lotus feet were one of the most important symbols of eroticism. Here, Feng Menglong offers us the antithesis of the pleasure trips we have seen in previous examples. He subverts one of the most important activities of the courtesan world at the West Lake, converting it into a nightmare. The Lake and its surroundings go from representing idyllic spaces to being the stage of crude violence and absolute humiliation.

From Feng Menglong's tale we can draw a list of vexations that could be perpetrated against courtesans with impunity. Courtesans could be kidnapped, harassed, raped, flogged in case of indiscipline, and their belongings could be stolen by the patrons of brothels and courtesan houses. Last but not least, should they take the case to justice, courtesans would always be at great disadvantage against their opponent. (Zurndorfer, 2011, p.205) Indeed, this tale is fictional and cannot be taken as a provider of historical facts, but we must keep in mind that all fiction, in order to be credible, needs to be coherent with the world it describes and in which it is inserted. Just as we know that many of the boat trips described in the tale were regular activities within the landscape culture of the Lake, all that Feng Menglong depicts about the world of the courtesans might be taken as a catalogue of the evil side of that world that was surely common knowledge during the Late Ming. It could be compared to the violence we see today in the multiple fictional works describing the world of drug traffickers;

while the stories in themselves are imaginary, the violence pertaining to the world they describe is not. For all this I think we can give credibility to the violent events depicted in the tale, not as something that literally took place but as a generic description of the dark side of the courtesan world. It might be asked why Feng Menglong should choose the West Lake as the location for his story about courtesans, when the city of Yangzhou was much more famous for its production of brothels and courtesans. The most likely answer is that the West Lake undoubtedly held the landscape qualities and the historic background that rendered it the most suitable for the story. Xishi, embodiment of the West Lake in its erotic aspect, as well as characters like Su Xiaoxiao 蘇小小 (479-502) and Feng Xiaoqing 馮小青 (1595-1612) (Widmer 1992, Berg 2013), were courtesans and concubines of great fame who were associated with a series of tragic love stories connected to emblematic sites of the West Lake. Hence, to set this story at the West Lake meant giving continuity to a long tradition of courtesan characters linked to the landscape of the Lake. Feng Menglong, though, brings a breath of fresh air to that long tradition by turning around the topic of tragic love, allowing Yaoqin to overcome her past through a final love story with a happy ending.

## **COURTESAN AGENCY BY THE WEST LAKE**

In the previous section we have mainly heard masculine voices describing, idealising or criticising the courtesan world through the landscape culture. In this section we shall investigate how the courtesans themselves would make use of the landscape culture of the Lake to achieve their own goals in the cultural sphere.

In this regard, the West Lake was the place where many of those women were able to earn a living by selling their poetry and paintings; we know that many of them dedicated collections of poems to the Lake, of which only a few survive, and also painted many landscape scenes

of the Lake, none of which has survived (Lee 2005). It is also necessary to take into account, as Xu Sufeng (2007, 2019) rightly underlines, the important role played by those men who supported the emergence of women in the cultural field, though many of them maintained an ambivalent attitude. For instance, it is well known that Wang Ruqian gave his support to both the poets that we shall speak about, both economically and by introducing them in the literary gatherings he held in his boat-gardens, in addition to helping them publish their work. Along with such “mixed” literary gatherings, we know that those women created their own literary circle expressly formed by women, and that they held many literary gatherings at the West Lake (Ko 1994). Yang Haihong (2016) explains very well how the theme of seclusion is used by the women of this period to break through the gender roles, self-defining and empowering themselves. According to Yang (2016), women of the Late Ming period had to justify their reasons for writing, regardless of whether they were high class wives or courtesans. In this context, the theme of seclusion and its adjustment to their needs would be of great usefulness. That is why each of the women we shall speak about, Liu Rushi and Wang Wei, would apply a different meaning to the topic of seclusion in order to empower herself and to define her own identity outside of what was coded by tradition. They would also use the image of the West Lake in accordance with those objectives, building an image of the Lake which was diverse and tailored to their interests and life circumstances.

Let us start by speaking of Liu Rushi, who would use the theme of seclusion profusely. Liu Rushi resided many times at the West Lake after her intense romance as the concubine of the Songjiang poet Chen Zilong 陳子龍 (1608-47). After being expelled from the Chen family she went back to her condition of courtesan and would become integrated into Wang Ruqian's circle in Hangzhou. She had known him since 1630, and she would have a romance

with him. Years later, in 1641 (Guo 2006), she would meet the literatus Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), who married her with ceremonies appropriate to a principal wife, something that was prohibited by the Ming code of law and would create an enormous scandal (Idema, Grant 2006). We retain a collection of poems by Liu Rushi dedicated to the West Lake titled *Hushangcao* 湖上草, which contains both poems about her romance with Qian Qianyi at the West Lake (Idema, Grant 2006, p.375) and about her previous life as a courtesan. From this collection of poems, it has to be noted that she dedicated about 14 poems to the Xiling 西泠 bridge, a site related to Su Xiaoxiao and the theme of the nostalgia for the lover who is far away. The fact that Liu Rushi used this theme so widely suggests the need to connect with one of the feminine topics associated with the Lake. Of the famous women that Liu Rushi mentions in this collection of poems,<sup>11</sup> we find that all were known for their legendary beauty, such as Su Xiaoxiao, Dong Jiaorao 董嬌饒 (a Mythical figure of great beauty), or Lu Nü 廬女 (Guo 2006). Of these three, both Su Xiaoxiao and Lu Nü were famous courtesans, and all of them are named in the poems dedicated to Xiling. Liu Rushi's strategy to get out of the courtesan life was the same as that of many other luxury courtesans, to marry a prestigious scholar and through that association to be able to dedicate herself to cultural activities from a more acceptable social standing. In that context, Su Xiaoxiao's figure suits perfectly her social position, because it shows how even while being a courtesan it is possible to hold dear the value of faithfulness to one's lover. The next figure to appear in the same poem, that of Dong Jiaorao, is linked to the topic of the apparent death of nature which is in fact always reborn. Lastly, Lu Nü, was a courtesan in the service of Cao Cao 曹操 (A.D.155-220) during the Wei dynasty of the Three Kingdoms period, who stood out especially for her musical virtuosity. After Cao Cao's death she was able to

marry, abandoning the courtesan life. The use of this last figure clearly shows Liu Rushi's intentions, given that she also was a courtesan who was virtuous in the arts and wanted to abandon that profession to start a life as a married woman.

We will now focus on two poems which show how Liu Rushi appropriates the landscape of the Lake to express her veiled desire to abandon the courtesan life. Furthermore, in these poems we can chart a route of the way in which Liu Rushi participated in the culture of the Lake's landscape. In the two poems we speak of, the figure of Tao Yuanming and certain innuendos set the topic of seclusion as the main thematic axis. In the following poem, apart from the topic of seclusion which serves to frame the context, Liu Rushi makes use of the theme of the literati gathering. Specifically, the poem narrates a gathering in Feng Mengjiang's 馮夢將 Kuai Xuetang 快雪堂 (Garden of the Joyful Snowfall), where Liu Rushi, Feng and Qian Qianyi met (Guo 2006):

過孤山友人快雪堂

高秋居士隱柴桑。有客登臨過草堂。

黃蝶晴添花淡渺。青鳩啼斷月微茫。

松巖巢鵲翻幽果。童子移琴斂竹房。

我欲題詩嚮仲蔚。孤雲寂寂輞川莊。<sup>12</sup>

Visiting my friend's Garden of Delight after Snowfall on Gushan

In the late autumn the Hermit hides in Chaisang. [Birthplace of Tao Yuanming]

The guests ascend [the hill] to arrive at your hut.

Yellow and bright butterflies are confounded in the vague distance with flowers,

the chirp of the black doves sounds heartbreaking in the faint moonlight,

The hawks nesting on the pine-covered cliffs turns up hidden fruits' <sup>13</sup>

A servant bringing the qin zither bows before the bamboo room.

I wish to dedicate a poem to Zhong Yu,

solitary clouds quiet down in the Wangchuan villa.

The garden of the brief snowfall was built by Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 (1548-1606) (Feng Mengjiang's father) after his retirement from politics and was finished one year before his death in 1606. The poem establishes a kaleidoscopic web of allusions to the past in which we meet some of the great hermits in the history of Chinese literature, such as Tao Yuanming, Zhang Zhongyu (of the Jin dynasty) or Wang Wei and his villa on the Wang River. In the first verse we find a direct allusion to Tao Yuanming's birthplace, through which the garden is equated to the ideals of seclusion toward which Feng Mengzhen felt great admiration (Wei 2014, p.43); thus, Liu Rushi establishes a complicity with the garden's founder and expresses her own ideals that also found in Tao Yuanming an important reference point. This comparison immediately gives rise to the image of the Lands of the Immortals to which Tao Yuanming's figure was associated through his poem The Peach Blossom Spring, keeping in mind that this garden was intimately related to the sceneries and the West Lake and that it used quite profusely the concept of *jièjǐng* 藉景. The West Lake is thus transformed into the land of the immortals, an allusion which, on the other hand, was quite common. The second allusion to Zhang Zhongyu takes us again to the ideal of seclusion, the same as the allusion

to Wang Wei's villa in Wangchuan, another icon in painting, poetry and garden history. Even though the last allusions could be simply metaphors written out of courtesy toward Feng Mengjiang, in which he is compared to Zhang Zhongyu and his garden is compared to Wang Wei's villa, the continuous reference to figures that recall seclusion might be a veiled innuendo of her intention to leave the courtesan life because, as Yang Haihong (2016) notes, the same theme was used by courtesans such as Wang Wei (the Ming courtesan not the famous poet of the Tang dynasty) to indicate that she had left the life of the pleasure trade.

While in the previous poem Liu Rushi describes a gathering of literati in a private garden at the West Lake, in the next poem she describes the other essential activity through which the landscape of the Lake was enjoyed, the excursion on a boat, in this case with the objective of gathering watershield, a very popular activity in Jiangnan's lake areas. The gathering of watershield was carried out at the beginning of April and it was concentrated in the areas around the three small pagodas located at the centre of the Lake, very close to the Huxin si 湖心寺, as well as in the lotus plantations located around the three bridges of the Lake. According to Tian Rucheng, the habit was imported from the Xianghu lake 湘湖 situated in the nearby locality Xiaoshan 蕭山.<sup>14</sup>

#### 西湖采蓴

空川日暮夜雲層。 煙景無心問武陵

為有春風輕鶴浦。 緣尋秋味聞魚罾。

江籬自愛陶彭澤。 樽酒深思張季鷹。

更憶故人峯柳曲。 相思何處寄蓴冰。<sup>15</sup>

## Gathering Lotuses at the West Lake

Rivers are empty, the sun sets among layers of clouds.

In the misty landscape I have no mind to search for Wuling [the Peach Blossom spring].

In order to enjoy a spring breeze, we make light of the Wusong river

In order to search for the taste of autumn, we set hidden fishing nets

I empathise with Tao Yuanming and his retirement from Pengze.

I store the wine while I think deeply about Zhang Jiying.

I still remember the songs by my friend's songs of the hills and rivers [Feng Mao]

Thinking of him, where can I send these frozen watersheds?

In this poem we again find allusions to seclusion. The first is again, to Tao Yuanming when he renounced his official post in Pengze and decided to retire. The second is a reference to Zhang Han 張翰 (around 312) of the West Jin dynasty, who retired from politics declaring that he missed the lotus fruits of his birthplace in the Wu region. Although the tone of this poem is much more nostalgic than the previous one, here we find again the theme of the retirement from the profession of courtesan. The poem is directed in double meaning to, Shi Shaoxin 施紹莘 (1588-1640 approx) (who's artistic name was Feng Mao), a literatus from Jiading 嘉定, she met in Sheshan a little while before her idyll with Chen Zilong. Nonetheless, since it's not very clear what kind of relationship she had with Shi Shaoxin,



(Chen 2001, p. 97, Xu 2007, p.103) the implicit meaning of this allusion remains open. We can deduce that the poem expresses the melancholy and the void of loss; from its crepuscular onset about empty rivers and sunset, macrocosmic images in which the landscape of the Lake merges with that of her memories, to the foreground image of the fish swimming in the water, it takes her to the hermits of the past, who give way to the final verses, the memory of an interrupted friendship and the present at the West Lake, where she cannot find anyone with whom to share those fruits.

As we can see, Liu Rushi makes use of the images of male hermits' seclusion to express her desire to leave the courtesan life. Also, the figures of courtesans that she uses come into this game of creating a public character; Su Xiaoxiao's value of faithfulness and the hope of escaping into a respectable marriage are two values embedded in the Confucian tradition, which Liu Rushi uses in order to adapt them to her needs without openly and completely breaking with the traditional values she questions.

Finally, we will analyse the "Buddhist courtesan" Wang Wei 王微 (1597-1647), who was also a friend of Liu Rushi (Ko 1994, p. 285) Wang Wei arrived at Hangzhou around 1618 and dwelled on the Gu hill, right beside the Kuaixue tang garden we mentioned above (Xu 2007, p.233). At her death, Wang Ruqian, who was one of her mentors, built a grave for her on the Xiling bridge, where both Su Xiaoxiao's and Feng Xiaoqing's graves were located (Xu 2007, p.93). Wang Wei was one of the most successful courtesans in building a public image as a poet, overturning her origins as a courtesan. In the three years between her two marriages, from 1662-1665, she was part of Wang Ruqian's circle at the Lake, and she made use of her strong Taoist and Buddhist devotion to define herself as an ascetic who uses no make-up and dresses humbly, devoting herself to travelling to famous mountains in search

of spiritual instruction. Wang Wei put an emphasis on not depending on physical beauty to develop her public character; on the contrary, she relied on values such as intelligence and asceticism. This image allowed her to move with fluidity in the circles of eccentric literati and also to befriend high class women who in ordinary circumstances would never engage with courtesans. Wang Wei wrote a collection of poems to the West Lake titled Hushang Qu 湖上曲; in the preface to the collection she tells us how the poems were a fruit of her friendship with Xiang Lanzhen 項蘭貞 (birth date around 1596) (Xu 2007, p.233 Ko 1997, p.285-290) who was also a poet and with whom she shared poetic gatherings at the Lake:

#### 湖上曲序

癸亥秋杪，病歸湖上，卜築葛洪嶺下，門掩飛泉，徑埋落葉，意迫然也。適黃茂仲偕細君孟畹，禮佛靈鷲，寓與予近，以輕舟就談至月上[...]醉後，與夫人偶咏竹枝詞，欲一變調，以洗靡靡，遂分韻爲湖上曲，約曉烟初醒，再叩蓬蘆。<sup>16</sup>

In the late fall of the year Gui Hai (1623), I was ill and went back to live at the shores of the Lake. I dwelled at the slopes of the Gehong ridge, my gate was enclosed by a waterfall and the path was buried under fallen petals. Incidentally, Huang Maozhong and his wife Mengwan (Xiang Lanzhen) came to visit the Lingjiu temple [Lingyin temple] and they stayed very close to where I was living. They took a small boat to come talk to me until the moon rose [...] after I was drunk, We chanted the “Bamboo branch songs” with Madam Huang. We wanted to change the tune to wash out its melancholia. Thus, we allotted rhymes to compose “Songs on the lake.” We agreed to meet at my place again early the following morning.

It is interesting to note how at the beginning of the text the portrait of her dwelling at the Lake is made through the elements that surround it, a springtime effusion of flowers and petals that flood the path leading to her house. The reference to the bamboo branch songs relates to a genre originating during the Tang dynasty in the Sichuan region, which was used to sing the theme of love between men and women. The literary critique that Wang Wei makes of this genre justifies the creation of the Lake poems collection, this time written by two women who do not require a masculine presence. As a matter of fact, the resolve to write a poem that would not depend on male culture for its references is very well illustrated in the following poem, which narrates precisely the poetic encounter with Xiang Lanzhen at the West Lake:

湖上次韻答黃夫人

去住湖邊別有緣，門前紅葉滿來船。

劉綱夫婦霞為骨，謝韞家庭雪作篇。

翠袖風前誰薄醉，黃楊樹底與參禪。

迴思飄渺伊人躋，祇隔鴛鴦南浦煙。<sup>17</sup>

At the Lake, answering to a poem by madame Huang with the same rhyme

Living at the Lake brought me the special fortune of being your friend.

The red leaves at my door filled your arriving skiff.

We spoke of the Liu Gang couple whose bones turned to sunset clouds

and of Xie Yun who composed a simile for snow.

Remember when we were drunk under the breeze and we practiced chan under the poplar trees?

Meditating time and again on where you are, I can only imagine you left and are now very far away.

In this text we see how in this meeting of women poets at West Lake takes shape based on a feminine vision that will not depend on the theme of unrequited love, but it will have its own autonomy through a thematic that revolves around the Taoist topic of seclusion and the chan meditation practice. Whereas Liu Rushi appropriated the topic of male seclusion and of courtesan figures incarnating the values respected by tradition, in Wang Wei the seclusion is playfully ascetic and completely feminine, since the figures of the past she refers to are mostly women who stood out for their strength, courage and intelligence.

The poem is about the poetic meeting, which since the famous gathering of Wang Xizhi in the Orchids Pavilion had been an essential element in the socio-cultural engineering of the literate class. As a matter of fact, the allusion to Xie Daoyun 谢道韞 (340-399), Wang Xizhi's daughter-in-law, places us in a literati meeting, but feminine. Xie Daoyun was famous for comparing falling snowflakes to willow floss, and she was one of her models of feminine talent in Chinese history; of superior intelligence for debates, she stood out for her courage and bravery when facing the rebellion of the pirate Sun En 孫恩 (died 402) in which her husband and children were murdered. Thanks to the courage she displayed trying to save one of her grandchildren, Sun En set her free, and she lived with the Wang family for the rest of her life. On the intellectual level, Xie Daoyun is related to the casual and light-hearted character of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and to the philosophical debates of the Xuanxue School. Furthermore, Xie Daoyun was an example of clear independence from the

feminine canon, because she enjoyed great freedom of movement with respect to her husband Wang Ningzhi 王凝之 (334-399), whom, on the other hand, Xie despised. (Xiao et al. 2007, p.359-363) The other reference we find is that of an immortal woman, Liu Gang 劉綱, spouse of the Taoist Fan Yunqiao 樊雲翹, characters related to ascetic seclusion and to the search for immortality on the Da Gang mountain 大崗山 in the Zhejiang province, in the poem Wang Wei specifically point out that the couple achieved Taoist transcendence through the metaphor “bones turned to sunset clouds”. Through these references, Wang Wei is defining herself, looking for, and this is important, feminine precedents that can define her without the need to appropriate the masculine archetypes of the literati culture. This is why in this poem we find the best example of how to create a feminine West Lake completely outside the masculine ideals of the courtesan at the service of pleasure that we analysed in previous sections. Furthermore, this poem gives voice to the meetings of women poets and painters happening at the Lake at this stage of the Late Ming, meetings which would be developed and expanded during the Qing dynasty.

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Figure 1, *Xihu leichao*, Woodblock print, Sudi chunxiao, After Hong Shangzhi 洪尚之 and Chen Hanmin 陳漢民 (ed) *Xihu Shengji* 西湖勝跡, (Hangzhou, Zhejiang Sheying Chubanshe, 1997): 18.

Figure 2, *Hainei qiguan*, Woodblock print, Sudi chunxiao, After Hong and Chen, *Xihu Shengji*, 23

Figure 3, *Hainei qiguan*, Woodblock print, Sudi Qu yuan, After Hong and Chen, *Xihu Shengji*, 37

Figure 4, *Xihu leichao*, Woodblock print, Pinghu qiuyue, After Hong and Chen, *Xihu Shengji*, 13.

Figure 5, *Xihu leichao*, Woodblock print, Huagan guanyu, After Hong and Chen, *Xihu Shengji*, 14.

Figure 6, *Hainei qiguan*, Woodblock print, Pinghu qiuyue, After Hong and Chen, *Xihu Shengji*, 25

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<sup>1</sup> Tian Rucheng 田汝成, *Xihuyoulanzhi* 西湖游覽志, (hereafter, XHYLZH) (Beijing: Dongfang Chubanshe, 2012), 3. See Wang Ruqian 汪汝謙, *Xizihu shicui yutan* 西子湖拾翠餘談 in *Xihu wenxian jicheng di sance* 西湖文獻集成第三冊 *Mingdai zhi, Xihuxwenxian jicheng* 明代志 西湖文獻集成, ed. Wang, Guoping 王國平 (hereafter XHWXMDZH) (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe 2004), 1158-89. Bian Weyu's painting and calligraphy album has been published in Hangzhou Xihu bowuguan 杭州西湖博物館, ed. *Lidai xihu shuhua* 歷代西湖書畫集, (Hangzhou: Hangzhou Chubanshe, 2013), 54-61.

<sup>2</sup> Zhang Dai, *Xibumengxun* in XHWXMDZH, 843. Translation in Campbell, "Searching for the Ming, part one," in *China Heritage Project*, No. 28, December 2011 [http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=028\\_one.inc&issue=028](http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=028_one.inc&issue=028), last accessed 05 January 2021. I have modified the translation in the final part.

<sup>3</sup> "Hushang," in Yun Zhu 惲珠 (1771-1833), *Guo chao gui xiu zheng shi ji* 國朝閨秀正始集 (1831), 1.17b in Grace Fong, Ming Qing Women's Writings Database 明清婦女著, (<http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/mingqing/>.) last accessed 15 June 2019

<sup>4</sup> "After the capital moved to the south, the causeway became a market, with crowds of singers and dancers, galloping horses and roaming boats, never ceasing throughout the night." [I don't think the horses and boats are a matter of how people got there but what they did when there.] 南渡后，提成市，歌舞叢之，走馬游船，達旦不息 XHYLZH, 20. The text has its visual counterpart in the painting Scenic Attractions of West Lake 西湖清趣圖 in the Freer Gallery. In the section 25 we can clearly distinguish

<sup>5</sup> XHMX, 901. This story resembles one quoted by Tian Rucheng about the parties celebrated the by Jia Sidao and praised by Lizong 理宗 (1205-1264), Jia Sidao unlike Liu Mengqian instead of being demoted, was promoted. Tian Rucheng 田汝成, *Xihu youlanzhiyu* 西湖游覽志餘 (hereafter XHYLZHY), (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), 70.

<sup>6</sup> Though these were the sites we found on a visual level, houses of courtesans and brothels were spread throughout the Lake area. XHYLZH, 110.

<sup>7</sup> Wang Ruqian, 西子湖拾翠餘談, 虎林西山諸勝 in XHWXMDZH, juanzhong, 1167. Fenghuangling is located near the old Longjing temple 龍井寺.

<sup>8</sup> Pu Fangliang, 浦昉(倅): *You mingshenghu riji* 游明聖湖日記 in XHWXMDZH. 1135.

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<sup>9</sup> Yang Shen, *Sheng'an shihua* 昇庵詩話, juan 4 entry 120.  
<https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=286898&searchu=%E5%90%B3%E4%BA%8C%E5%A8%98> Last Access 15-12-2021.

<sup>10</sup> Feng Menglong introduces a poem in which he compares Yaoqin's beauty with that of Xishi which, as we have seen, was a common allusion in Late Ming and which converts Yaoqin into the incarnation of the West Lake and into a sort of avatar of Xishi:

常把西湖比西子，就是西子比他，也还不如。

“The West Lake is often compared to Xishi

But even Xishi was no way her equal.”

See Feng Menglong, 馮夢龍, *Jingu qiguan* 今古奇觀, *Maiyou lang duzhan huakui* 賣油郎獨占花魁, juan 30, entry 32. <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=223561&remap=gb>. The translation is from Yang, Yang, “Stories,” 43.

<sup>11</sup> Liu Rushi 柳如是 *Hushang cao* 湖上草 (hereafter HSHC) in *Qingdai shiwenji huibian ce* 4 清代詩文集彙編冊 4, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2010). 290: a,b.

<sup>12</sup> HSHC, 291: a.

<sup>13</sup> She refers to the rock composition present in one of the spaces of the garden *Qingyan ju* 青巖居: 啟北扉則巖石亂松青翠溢目. “When opening the north door, the scenery is filled with a cave of rocks merged with fresh, green pines”. In Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 *Jielu gushanji* “結廬孤山記” in Liu Yuanyuan 劉源源, “Suishen de leyuan: Wanming wenren Feng Mengzhen de yuanlin shijie 隨身的樂園: 晚明文人馮夢禎的園林世界” *Fengjing yuanlin lishi* (2015): 91. Wang Wei also wrote a poem in this garden which she dedicates to Wang Furen who, as Xu Sunfeng notes, was probably Feng Mengjiang's spouse. We also know that Huang Yuanjie dedicated a painting to Feng Furen as well. Xu, “Lotus”, 226-229.

<sup>14</sup> Tian Rucheng 田汝成, *Xihu youlan zhi yu* 西湖游覽志餘, juan 24 reprinted in *Qinding Sikuquanshu* 欽定四庫全書 (1792); we have relied on the online version of the *Chinese Text Project*, juan 48, entry 47. <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=595638&remap=gb#p48>

<sup>15</sup> HSHC, 291: b.

<sup>16</sup> Wang Wei, *Hushang qu xu* 湖上曲序, in Jiang Yuanzuo 江元祚, comp., *Xu Yutai wenyuan* 續玉臺文苑 (1632), reprinted in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu jibu* 四庫全書存目叢書集部, vol. 375: 476. In the second part of the text, from the ellipsis we have used Xu Sufeng's translation slightly modified. Xu, “Lotus flowers,” 224.

<sup>17</sup> Wang Wei 王微, *Hushang ci yunda Huangfuren* 湖上次韻答黃夫人, in Yun Zhu 惲珠 comp., *Guo chao gui xiu zheng shi ji* 國朝閨秀正始集 (1831), 16: a,b, in Grace Fong, *Ming Qing Women's Writings Database* 明清婦女著作, <http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/mingqing/>.