Male Friendship in Ming China: An Introduction

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Abstract

This introduction provides a historical and theoretical context for the four articles on Ming male friendship. It reviews relevant scholarship and tries to show how the four articles contribute to a better appreciation of the complexities of friendship as it was theorized and practiced by Chinese males in Ming China.

Keywords

friendship, Ming dynasty, gender, Chinese masculinity, Confucianism

Friendship was an ambiguous concept in late imperial Chinese culture. In orthodox Confucianism, friendship was a relationship unsanctioned by the core Confucian values prioritizing state and family, and as such it was viewed with suspicion and often considered a potential threat. This is probably why among the so-called "five cardinal human relationships" (*wulun* 五倫; that is, those between ruler and minister, father and son, brothers, husband and wife, and friends), friendship was traditionally deemed the least essential. In household instructions (*jiaxun* 家訓; a genre of prescriptive literature very popular in late imperial China) friends, as family outsiders, were usually presented as a threat to domestic harmony.[1] In imperial political discourses, personal friendship was often considered a major element of factionalism (*pengdang* 朋黨) within the

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[1] The eighteenth-century novel *Qilu deng* 歧路燈 by Li Lüyuan 李綠園 (1707-90) was circulated for a long time in the form of hand-copied manuscript with a copy of the novelist's own "household instructions," *Jiaxun zhunyan* 家訓諄言 attached. This *jiaxun*-like novel is about the dire consequences a gentry family suffers after the son befriends wrong people. For a discussion of the novel as an elaborate fictionalized *jiaxun*, see Martin Huang, "*Xiaoshuo* as 'Family Instructions:' The Rhetoric of Didacticism in the Eighteenth-Century Chinese Novel, *Qilu deng*," *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* n.s. 30.1 (2000): 67-91.

imperial bureaucracy.[2] And yet for an educated male, who was supposed to distinguish himself by mastering Confucian learning, passing the government-sponsored examinations, and advancing a career in the bureaucratic world, networks of friends remained indispensable. Friends were equally if not more important for those excluded from the imperial bureaucracy since they were one of the main sources of help in finding career alternatives. The tension between suspicion toward and indispensability of friendship constitutes an intriguing paradox in Chinese social and cultural histories.

Ever since the establishment of the elaborate civil service examination system by the imperial government in the Tang dynasty (628-907) as the main and, later, virtually the sole avenue through which government officials were recruited, passing the examinations became one of the most important goals for almost all educated males in imperial China. For many, friendships and connections with peers (*tongxue* 同學 and *tongmen* 同門) cultivated when studying together in preparation for the examinations, bonds formed (*tongnian* 同年 or *tongbang* 同榜) when they passed the examinations in the same year, and their relationships with the chief examiners (*zuozhu* 座主) and co-examiners (*fangshi* 房師) became crucial factors in their future careers. The late Ming scholar-official and writer Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1624) complained that acquaintance based on studying under the same teacher or passing the examinations during the same year was not true friendship but relationship of convenience.[3] The seventeenth-century savant Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613-82) bitterly denounced the thousand-year-old examination system itself as one of the main sources of the rampant factionalism and nepotism that were corrupting social morality and undermining the proper functioning of the government.[4] Criticisms like these, though justified, also point to the absolute indispensability of "connections" in the careers and lives of late imperial Chinese men. Whether these connections could be considered friendships is a question worth further exploration.

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[2] See Zhu Ziyan 朱子彥 and Chen Shengmin 陳生民, *Pengdang zhengzhi yanjiu* 朋黨政治研究 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1992).
[3] Xie Zhaozhe, *Wu Zazu* 五雜組 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2001), "Shibu er" 事部二, 14:289-90.
[4] Gu Yanwu, "Shengyuan lun" 生員論, *Tinglin wenji* 亭林文集 (*Sibu congkan* ed.), 1:83.

To better understand the ambivalence and ambiguities associated with friendship in traditional Chinese culture, a brief look at its early history is in order. Historians of early Chinese culture have pointed out that the Chinese character *you* 友, usually considered the equivalent of the English word "friend," was actually a much broader concept referring to one's kinsmen within a lineage (*zuren* 族人) during the Western Zhou dynasty (eleventh century BCE-771 BCE), a time when human relationships were largely conceived of in terms of blood relations based on common ancestries rather than nuclear families, which had yet to take shape as the basic social units.[5] *You* as an ethical concept was understood to be "the brotherly way" (*youti zhi dao* 友悌之道; here "brothers" actually were one's kinsmen rather than male siblings within a nuclear family) as articulated in expressions such as "being nice to one's brother is *you*" (*shan xiongdi wei you* 善兄弟爲友).[6] "The brotherly way" constituted the central ethical precept regulating almost all important male human relations, including those between rulers and subjects and between fathers and sons. It was only during the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BCE) that *you*, with nuclear families emerging as the basic social units, began to denote friends, namely, males with common interests and aspirations (*tongzhi yue you* 同志曰友), who, however, were not one's family members.[7]

The early Warring States period (475-221 BCE) witnessed the formulation of the important Confucian ethical concept of *wulun* in Mencius (ca. 371-289 BCE), in which the relationships between father and son and between brothers became two different categories separated from that of *you*.[8] However, for Mencius, *you* still served as an important ethical model in his political theories: the ideal relationship between a

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[5] Zha Changguo 查昌國, "You yu liang Zhou junchen guanxi de yanbian" 友與兩周君臣關係的演變, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 5 (1998): 94-109. My brief account of the early history of *you* below is largely based on this essay. See also Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚, *Shang Zhou jiazu xingtai yanjiu* 商周家族型態研究 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1990), 306-11, and Wang Lihua 王利華, "Zhou Qin shehui bianqian yu 'you' de yanhua" 周秦社會變遷與'友'的衍化, *Jiangxi shehui kexue* 江西社會科學, 10 (2004): 48-53.

[6] Gu Pu 郭璞 and Xing Ping 邢昺, "Shixun" 釋訓, *Erya zhushu* 爾雅注疏 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 4:112.

[7] Xu Shen 許慎, *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, anno. Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 116.

[8] Wu Chengshi 吳承仕, "Wulun shuo zhi lishi guan" 五倫說之歷史觀, in Wu Chengshi, *Wu Chengshi wenlu* 吳承仕文錄 (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1984).

ruler and his ministers should be like that between two good friends.[9] Sometime before China was united under the rule of the Qin Empire, pragmatic legalist thinkers such as Han Fei 韓非 (ca. 280-ca. 233 BCE) began to emphasize the hierarchical distinctions between a ruler and his ministers by redefining the interests of *you* as "private and selfish" (*si* 私) and those of the ruler as "public and unselfish" (*gong* 公).[10] The precipitous decline of the status of *you* in early Chinese political theories as outlined above was in part caused by its gradual separation from kinship as well as politics. This separation arose with the emergence of the nuclear family as the basic social unit and the establishment of a centralized imperial government, whose effective rule depended on strict hierarchy and unconditional loyalty to the emperor. However, the separation process was never consistent or complete. The awareness of the different early overlapping conceptualizations of *you* and their inconsistencies should help us better appreciate the complexities of male friendship as it was theorized and practiced during the later historical periods. In terms of its political nature and ambiguity as a relationship, male friendship defies any attempt to categorize it as either "public" or "private."[11]

In traditional China, many men believed friendship was more or less a masculine relationship in that it was largely perceived to be a male privilege.[12] To have many male friends was often considered an important

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[9] Zha Changguo, "You yu Liang Zhou junchen," 105-6.

[10] Zha Changguo, "You yu Liang Zhou junchen," 108.

[11] Here I have in mind the long-standing controversies surrounding *pengdang* 朋黨 (factionalism) in the history of Chinese imperial politics and the attempts on the part of the scholar-officials, such as Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-72), to fan off accusations of factionalism by appealing to the concept of *junzi* 君子 (gentlemen) versus *xiaoren* 小人 (petty persons). Namely, groups of the like-minded formed by *junzi* were always for the sake of the Way (*dao* 道), representing the common interests of the public (*gong* 公) or "righteousness" (*yi* 義), whereas the factions formed by *xiaoren* were always motivated by "profit" (*li* 利), the personal interest of the selfish individual (*si* 私). For discussions of Ouyang xiu's famous theory of *junzi* versus *xiaoren* and the factional fighting in Song imperial politics, see Xiao Qingwei 蕭慶偉, *Bei Song xinjiu dangzheng yu wenxue* 北宋新舊黨爭與文學 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2001), especially, 34-7, and Shen Songqing 沈松勤, *Nan Song wenren yu dangzheng* 南宋文人與黨爭 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), especially, 269-85.

[12] This by no means suggests that in traditional China women did not pursue friendships or did not have friends. In fact, scholars of Chinese women history have demonstrated that female friendship played important roles in the lives of many women. See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chamber* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 203-9, 212-43, 266-74, 291-93, and Ellen Widmer, *The Beauty and the Book: Women and Fiction in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA:. Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 183-200.

badge of masculinity since it bespoke a man's ability to travel and meet other men outside his family and beyond his hometown, thus a manly accomplishment,[13] whereas a woman was required by Confucian norms to be confined within the boundary of the household. The domestic domain was largely gendered as feminine space, the outside world as masculine space.[14] There is a close affinity between the concept of *you* 友 (friends) and that of *you* 遊 (travel) as reflected in common expressions such as *jiaoyou* 交遊 (as a noun it means "friends and associates" and as a verb "socializing and making friends"). To make friends was to move beyond the compound of one's home and to travel afar.

In fact, tracing and identifying "friends and associates" (*jiaoyou kao* 交 遊考) have long been an important part of the biographical studies of many male historical figures. Few, however, have attempted to move beyond biographical facts towards a more sophisticated understanding of the complicated roles played by friendship in Chinese culture and society.[15] Even fewer have tried to look at those roles from the perspective of gender analysis.

In the field of Chinese studies, serious examination of men as gendered beings is just beginning to be attempted. Almost all the monographs on this subject were published in the new millennium. Among these studies,

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[13] Compare the remark by the famous scholar-official Wang Daokun 汪道昆 (1525-1593) that *da zhangfu dang you tianxia shi* 大丈夫當友天下士 (a true man should befriend all the gentlemen under Heaven), as stated in his essay "Ming gu Guangwei jiangjun qingche duwei jinyi wei zhihui qianshi Yin ci gong zhuang" 明故廣威將軍輕車都尉錦衣衛指揮僉事尹次公狀, Wang Daokun, *Taihan ji* 太函集 (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2004), 42:906. This matter is further discussed in my article in this issue.

[14] Compare Lisa Raphals's discussion of the bipolar concept of *neiwai* 內外 (the inner versus outer, or feminine versus masculine) in her *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 195-235. Of course, such Confucian gender norms of spatial boundaries were frequently violated, and there were many cases where a woman under certain circumstances traveled extensively and thus had the opportunity to befriend other women from other regions. However, a majority of female friendships were cultivated within family circles or through correspondences (two female friends might seldom see or never met each other). A comparison of male and female friendships is a very interesting issue, which is, however, beyond the scope of this introduction. See also Susan Mann, "Introduction: Forum on the Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture," *The American Historical Review* 106.5 (2000), 1600-14, and especially p.1612.

[15] The book by Hou Li 侯力 and Yang Xiaowen 楊曉文, *Sishi tonghuai:pengyou zhi qing yu jiaoyou zhi yi* 斯世同懷:朋友之情與交友之義 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1998), though containing useful information, is intended for general rather than scholarly audiences.

Kam Louie's *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Gender and Society in China* (2002) is probably the most ambitious.[16] Louie proposes a new paradigm based on the concepts of *wen* 文 (which he translates as "cultural attainment") and *wu* 武 (translated as "martial valor") as an alternative to the *yin-yang* model widely relied upon by scholars of Chinese gender studies. Thus he offers a conceptual framework within which the question of how masculinities are constructed in Chinese culture may be more fruitfully investigated. In comparison, other studies are more empirical in their approaches as well as more specific in their coverage. In her book *Masculinity Besieged? Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century* (2000),[17] Xueping Zhong examines male subjectivities and male anxiety in literature and films produced in post-Mao China, demonstrating how male intellectuals, marginalized by the state, tried to reassert their masculine identities. Song Geng's *Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (2004) focuses on the representation of *caizi* 才子 (usually translated as "talented scholar") in traditional fiction and drama.[18]

A central issue explored in both Paul Rouzer's *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early China* (2001) and my *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (2006) is the complicated roles assigned to the feminine "other" in the negotiating process of literati's gender identity in traditional China.[19] In our different ways, we attempt to answer the questions of why many male literati were inclined to present themselves as "women," and how such inclination contributed to their self-image as men. Rouzer explores the specific ways in which early Chinese male authors "wrote both about and as women." Focusing on the Ming-Qing period and drawing on diverse sources, I examine the gender implications of a series of masculine models in relation to the

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[16] Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Gender and Society in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[17] Xueping Zhong, *Masculinity Besieged? Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivities in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).
[18] Geng Song, *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).
[19] Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001) and my *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

feminine, such as *zhongchen* 忠臣 (royal minister), *shengren* 聖人 (sage), *yingxiong* 英雄 (hero), and *haohan* 好漢 (stalwart or strongman). In addition to these monographs, the volume edited by Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, titled *Chinese Femininities/Masculinities and Femininities: A Reader* (2002), contains several articles on Chinese masculinities, among which Matthew Sommer's "Dangerous Males, Vulnerable Males, and Polluted Males: The Regulation of Masculinity in Qing Dynasty Law" is the most relevant.[20] It examines how masculinity was conceptualized in Qing laws designed to regulate sexual behavior. The editors' introduction is very helpful in providing a detailed overview of the state of gender studies in this field.

Apparently absent in these studies of Chinese masculinities is any substantial effort to examine the important issue of male friendship. Our understanding of Chinese men's gender identity will remain incomplete if the issue of how they perceived and conducted themselves in relation to other men is not adequately explored. In a patriarchal society such as that of traditional China, masculinity was mostly likely a homosocial enactment: what mattered most to a man was the scrutiny and judgments of other men.

There are several exceptions to the general lack of scholarly articles on male friendship. Joseph McDermott's seminal article "Friendship and Its Friends in the Late Ming" is probably one of the earliest serious attempts to tackle this question.[21] The forum "The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture" published in *The American Historical Review* (2000) is a collaborative effort by several China scholars to examine three kinds of male bonding in China.[22] Norman Kutcher's "The Fifth Relationship:

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[20] Mathew Sommer, "Dangerous Males, Vulnerable Males and Polluted Males: The Regulation of Masculinity in Qing Dynasty Law," in Susan Brownell and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, eds., *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 67-88; see also Sommer's *Sex, Law, And Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 114-65. Mention should also be made of Zuyan Zhou's *Androgyny in Late Ming and Early Qing Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003); some may have reservations about the usefulness and historical validity of the concept of androgyny as Zhou has employed in the study.

[21] Joseph McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends in the Late Ming," in Zhongyang yanjiu yuan jindai shi yanjiu suo 中央研究院近代史研究所, ed., *Jinshi jiazu yu zhengzhi bijiao lishi lunwen ji* 近世家族與政治比較歷史論文 集 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan Jindai yanjiu suo, 1992), 67-96.

[22] Forum on "The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture," *The American Historical Review*, 106.5 (2000): 1600-66.

Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context" explores the deep anxiety over the dangers of friendship exhibited in Confucian discourses.[23] Adrian Davis's "Fraternity and Fratricide in Late Imperial China" focuses on the tensions among the male siblings within a family.[24] Lee McIsaac's "'Righteous Fraternities' and Honorable Men: Sworn Brotherhoods in Wartime Chongqing" examines male bonding in secret societies.[25] In her introduction to the forum, Susan Mann argues eloquently about the importance of the study of male bonding in Chinese history and culture. She characterizes the three articles in the forum as attempts to defamiliarize and reexamine Confucian norms governing human relationship in male culture.[26]

Among the three articles in the forum, Kutcher's "Fifth Relationship" is probably most directly related to our concerns here. In many ways, it is best to read this article in juxtaposition with McDermott's "Friendship and Its Friends in the Late Ming." The two address very different aspects of the Confucian conceptualizations of friendship, and the wide range of views they examine reminds us of a simple but very important fact: Confucianism was by no means a monolithic ideology, and our understanding of Chinese male friendship has to be carefully historicized. The period McDermott covers is more specific, namely, the last century of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), when friendship appears to have been granted unprecedented legitimacy in the writings of many influential Confucian thinkers and activists. He is interested in "those writings which see in the type of human relationship [friendship] a moral basis for criticizing Chinese imperial rule."[27] He detects in these writings "a realignment and expansion of traditional moral focuses away from the family and state during the last century of the Ming rule, as the moral attractions of friendship opened up new ways for neo-Confucians to criticize and change their political traditions."[28] These late Ming pro-

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[23] Norman Kutcher, "The Fifth Relationship: Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context," *The American Historical Review* 106.5 (2000): 1615-29.
[24] Adrian Davis, "Fraternity and Fratricide in Late Imperial China," *The American Historical Review*, 106.5 (2000): 1630-40.
[25] Lee McIsaac, "'Righteous Fraternities' and Honorable Men: Sworn Brotherhoods in Wartime Chongqing," *The American Historical Review* 106.5 (2000): 1641-55.
[26] See Mann, "Introduction," 1603.
[27] McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends," 68.
[28] McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends," 70.

moters of friendship tended to find their support in Mencius's ideal of a ruler-minister relationship based explicitly on the model of friendship while ignoring Han Fei's opposite view, the need to separate the private interests of a friend from the public interests of the state.

Moving away from the "friendly" world of McDermott to Kutcher's "Fifth Relationship," we enter a rather hostile world where friendship was considered potentially subversive and therefore needed to be tightly controlled. According to Kutcher, friendship was deemed potentially dangerous by many Confucians because it was a relationship that offered possibilities for equality, thus posing a threat to the strictly hierarchical Confucian social order. The vastly different fates of friendship in these two very different worlds explored by McDermott and Kutcher underscore the complexities of the issue of male friendship in traditional China.

Kutcher is certainly right in emphasizing the general Confucian anxiety over friendship, although there are significant exceptions, especially during periods such as the late Ming. McDermott argues that some late Ming Confucian thinkers and activists such as Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550-1612) celebrated friendship precisely because they believed it to be less conducive to the kind of hierarchy inherent in the other four relationships.[29]

Both McDermott and Kutcher deal almost exclusively with friendship discourses in traditional China, whereas the question of how friendship was practiced during this period remains largely unexplored. This issue, however, is the focus of the art historian Craig Clunas's recent book *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470-1559*.[30] In this study Clunas reconstructs for us the intricate social networks surrounding the famous Ming calligrapher and painter, Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1479-1559), for whom the term "friends" could refer to a great variety of people: schoolmates, neighbors, fellow villagers, peers, superiors, teachers, pupils, patrons, clients, and even kinsmen. In fact, the mutability of Wen's concept of *you* often compels Clunas to place the term "friends" in quotation marks in discussing this scholar-official

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[29] McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends," 81-2. For a different reading of Gu Xiancheng's view, see my article in this volume.

[30] Craig Clunas, *Elegant Debts: The Social Art of Wen Zhengming, 1470-1559* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

artist's social networking, highlighting the significant gaps between the broadly conceived notion of *you* in Ming China and the much narrower concept of friendship in modern theories, which tend to emphasize intimacy, equality, and the private.[31] Here the observations made by Alan Bray, a historian of English male friendship, may be pertinent: "To the inhabitants of seventeenth-century England the 'friend' was readily a patron (or a client), a landlord, or creditor or debtor, someone who would use influence on your behalf, obtain a payment, or settle a dispute."[32] Elsewhere, Bray reminds us that "the principal difference between the friendship of the modern world and the friendship . . . in the traditional culture [is that in the latter] friendship was significant in a public sphere. In modern civil society friendship has not been perceived to be a public matter, or more precisely *ought* not to be so."[33] It appears that several centuries ago the English and Chinese conceptualizations of friendship were relatively close.[34] As "debts" in the title of Clunas's book suggests, in Ming China friendship was often conceived of in terms of a man's social obligations in his relationships with other men. A closely related issue, which Clunas examines at some length, is the role of gift exchange and reciprocity.[35] Having received a gift, one was socially obligated to return the favor in the form of another gift. Reciprocity, which was always an important component in Chinese conceptualization of friendship, is largely an act of fulfilling one's social obligations.[36]

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[31] For discussions of the rise of the modern concept of friendship in the West, see Alan Silver, "Friendship in Commercial Society: Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Modern Sociology," *The American Journal of Sociology* 96.6 (1990): 1475-1504, and Alan Silver, "Two Different Sorts of Commerce"—Friendship and Strangership in Civil Society," in Jeff Weinstraub and Krishan Kumar, eds., *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 43-74.

[32] Alan Bray and Michael Rey, "The Body of the Friend: Continuity and Change in Masculine Friendship in the Seventeenth Century," in Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen, eds., *English Masculinities 1660-1800* (London & New York, Longman, 1999), 65.

[33] Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 2. Bray's point on the public dimension of friendship in seventeenth-century England is certainly relevant to our study of friendship in late imperial China.

[34] For a discussion of the exchange of views on friendship between late Ming literati and some of the Italian Jesuits, see Giovanni Vitiello, "Exemplary Sodomites: Chivalry and Love in Late Ming Culture," *Nan Nü* 2.2 (2000): 207-57, and especially, 248-53.

[35] Clunas, *Elegant Debts*, 83-5 and 113-40.

[36] In his studies of the famous seventeenth-century thinker and calligrapher, Fu Shan 傅山, Bai Qianshen (白謙慎) has also explored the implications of the burden of social obligations on a literati artist. See his *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the*

An interesting topic McDermott, Kutcher, and Clunas all dwell on is the relationship between "friends" and one's family members and kinsmen. McDermott argues that the area of the Lower Yangzi delta of Ming China was particularly accommodating to the conditions and requirements of friendship because the region lacked a recent history of strong lineages,[37] a view shared by Clunas in his discussions of Wen Zhengming, who was from that locale.[38] Whether or not the structure of a strong lineage was necessarily less conducive to friendship is a complex question. As McDermott acknowledges, parts of Jiangxi, where the social structures were dominated by large lineages, also witnessed the popularity of literati clubs and the flourishing of gentry friendship.[39] I tend to believe that strong lineage might be a double-edged sword as far as friendship is concerned: It may prevent a man from cultivating friendships with others from other regions, but, at the same time, close relationships with the male members within the lineage might draw him away from the confined space of his own nuclear family, thus creating more spaces as well as more possibilities for relationships outside the immediate confines of the household. In fact, in the life of He Xinyin 何心隱 (1517-79), one of the great late Ming promoters of friendship discussed in McDermott's article, lineage and friendship did not appear to have been antagonistic at all. He Xinyin's unprecedented championing of friendship was closely related to his effort to built a utopian community based on lineage structure. For him, in breaking away from one's own *jia* 家 (nuclear family)—which he regarded as one of the main origins of human selfishness—the pull of the common interest of a lineage could be an important factor. This becomes especially significant if we recall that prior to the Spring and Autumn period, the concept of *you* referred to kinsmen within a lineage and could mean "fraternity" as articulated in the important concept of *xiaoyou* 孝友 (filiality and fraternity) in Confucian family ethics. Here *you* means "fraternity" rather than "friendship."

Seventeenth-Century China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003) and his Chinese book *Fu Shan de jiaowang he yingchou:yishu shehui shi de yixiang ge'an yanjiu* 傅山的交往和應酬:藝術社會史的一項個案研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2003).

[37] McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends," 71.

[38] Clunas, *Elegant Debts*, 51.

[39] McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends," 71.

Acknowledging the complex roles played by family in the Ming conceptualization of friendship, McDermott observes: "Family ties in the Lower Yangzi delta may have been less restrictive, family organization much simpler, and family obligations far fewer than in southern Anhui, Kiangsi, or Fukien. But, the individual male was born into and reared in a network of family ties that assured him of 'family friendships' rarely spoken of in the Ming accounts of friendship. These friendships were widely assumed by members of gentry families and constituted the bedrock for the 'social networks' we are only now beginning to understand."[40] Here the boundaries between an "achieved relationship" (friendship) and an "ascribed relationship" (kinship), as often drawn by modern anthropologists, become difficult to maintain.[41] As Clunas's discussion of Wen Zhengming's close friendship with Qian Tongai 錢同愛 (1475-1549) illustrates,[42] one of the most common ways of solidifying and authenticating a friendship between two adult males in late imperial China was having one's child marry the child of the other. Here the distinctions between "friendship" and "kinship" were meant to be overcome. The case of Wen Zhengming, which was by no means unique in late imperial China, is a poignant reminder that in studying the history of Chinese male friendship we have to be constantly mindful of our own historical bias, not to mention the substantial differences between theory and praxis even within a particular historical period.

To further complicate the matter, in traditional friendship discourses, the behaviors of a good friend, as McDermott has pointed out, are often valorized in terms of the common understanding of the obligations of family members.[43] For example, to show appreciation to one's friend is to treat him like one's own brother. The highest honor one could bestow on a friend who has done one a big favor (such as saving one's life or giving one a rare opportunity for great success) is to respect that friend as if he were one's own parent, as suggested in the phrase "parents who have given one the second chance of life" (*chongsheng fumu* 重生父母). That is, the appreciation of friendship is dependent on Confucian family

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[40] McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends," 92.
[41] David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.
[42] Clunas, *Elegant Debts*, 57.
[43] McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends," 91.

rhetoric for articulation, a fact that has fairly complicated implications. On the one hand, the tendency to promote friendship by appealing to the Confucian family model could sometimes be detrimental to the enterprise of friendship itself by allowing it to be co-opted as a friend becomes a family member. Kutcher observes this from a slightly different angle: "One way in which Confucians reinforced the hierarchy of friendship was by stressing that it should be modeled on the inherently hierarchical fraternal bond."[44] On the other hand, this close parallel and compatibility assumed between friendship and family relationships such as the fraternal bond were considered by some to have the potential to undermine the stability of the family. Alarmed by such potential, many conservative defenders of the Confucian family were concerned that when one treated a friend as a brother, the position of a real brother was likely to be usurped by a fake or fictive one, a scenario that posed serious threat to the core Confucian values that emphasized the interests of family and kinships. A frequent complaint about the dangers of friendship during the late Ming was that more and more men were pursuing friendship at the expense of their relationships with their male siblings (*bo gurou er zhong jiaoyou* 薄骨肉而重交友).[45] The Ming scholar-official Wu Linzheng 吳麟徵 (1593-1644) once cautioned: "If one treats his friends better than his brothers, this is like favoring the flower petals at the expense of the roots of the plant. One should never behave like this."[46] The controversial thinker Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602), for example, was accused of pursuing friendship with no regard for his family and kinsmen (*qi renlun* 棄人倫), and his eventual tragic death might be related to such accusations.[47]

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[44] Kutcher, "Fifth Relationship," 1622.

[45] "Fengsu" "風俗", in *Shuntian fuzhi* 順天府志 (Wanli ed.), 1.13b.

[46] Wu Lingzheng, *Jiajie yaoyan* 家誡要言, reprinted in *Zhijia geyan, Zeng 'Guang xianwen', Nüer jing: zhijia xiuyang geyan shizhong* 治家格言, 增廣賢文, 女兒經: 治家修養格言十種, anno. and intro. by Zhu Li 朱利 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1999), 10. The fragile fraternal bond is the subject of Adrian Davis's "Fraternity and Fratricide in Late Imperial China."

[47] Li Zhi, "Fu Deng Shiyang" 復鄧石陽, *Fenshu* 焚書, 10, in *Fenshu, Xu Fenshu* 焚書 續焚書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975). For a detailed discussion of the conflict between family obligation and devotion to friends in Li's life, see Martin Huang, "Passion for Friends: Li Zhi's Tragedy" (Paper presented at the Symposium on "Passion and Pleasure in Chinese Literature," The University of Chicago, May 27-28, 2006).

The paradox is that for friendship to thrive, a man had to free himself from the restrictive structure of the Confucian family, and yet, at the same time, the values of friendship could be appreciated only in terms of models based on this very Confucian institution. In other words, the value of a true friend could only be authenticated or articulated when that friend was accepted (at least symbolically) as a kinsman or a family member.

None of these scholars, McDermott, Kutcher, and Clunas, explores the question of male homosexual relationships.[48] Any serious study of male friendship has to come to grips with the intricate relations between the homosocial and the homosexual. In her classic study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick views male-male relationships as a continuum between the homosocial and the homosexual rather than simply a binary of straight/gay.[49] This model of a homosocial-homosexual continuum might also be useful in examining the male-male relationships in traditional China. While no one would characterize this continuum as seamless, the transition from the homosocial to the homosexual in a male-male relationship in traditional China could be quite drastic and sometimes even traumatic, given that almost all male homosexual relationships were explicitly hierarchical. The partner who played the passive role (the penetrated) was often "reduced" to being a "woman" and, accordingly, he was usually expected to behave like a woman, following the Confucian moral prescriptions for women.[50] Troubled by McDermott's reluctance to

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[48] For lack of a better term, I use terms such as "homosexual" with hesitation, fully aware of its inadequacy in discussing many cases of male bonding in traditional China. Scholars of Western sexual history have argued that "homosexual" was a concept "invented" when those involved in same-sex love were singled out and identified as members of a "third gender," a result of the increasingly strong homophobia in Europe beginning from the eighteenth century. In late imperial China, people with inclinations toward same-sex passion were never considered belonging to a "third gender," and there was no gender category of "homosexuals" in pre-twentieth-century China, as understood in its modern sense. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see my book *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*, 148-52.

[49] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

[50] I have explored the gender implications of what I have called "active and passive lovers" in same-sex relationships in my *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 176-205; see also Sommer, "Dangerous Males, Vulnerable Males, and Polluted Males."

include homoeroticism in his discussion of late Ming friendship by characterizing them as two separate strands, Giovanni Vitiello is one of the few who have attempted to discuss homoeroticism in the large context of homosociality in late Ming culture. In his recent article "Exemplary Sodomites: Chivalry and Love in Late Ming Culture," Vitiello is quite persuasive in contending that the late Ming "romantic ideology [*qing* 情 or love] provides the over-arching structure that allows a homosocial bond to become homosexual."[51] His discussions have shed light on the important question of the possible roles played by the late Ming cult of *qing* in the quick ascendance of the status of friendship during that period.[52] Some late Ming friendship enthusiasts did imitate the rhetoric of the promoters of *qing* despite the fact that friendship, as a topic of ethical discourse, was more likely to feel the constraining effect of Confucian orthodoxy, while the enterprise of *qing*, given literature as its main domain, often found itself in a more "friendly" environment. However, in celebrating the transformative power of *qing*, Vitiello, it seems to me, sometimes tends to ignore the heterosexual gender inequality almost always reproduced and sometimes even reinforced in many of these homoerotic relationships once a homosocial bond becomes homosexual. While sharing his view that McDermott might have been a bit too simplistic in refusing to see homosociality and homosexuality as integral parts of a continuum, I would hesitate to embrace the conclusion Vitiello reaches in his reading of the seventeenth-century collection of stories *Bian er chai* 弁而釵 (Cap and hairpin as well) that the homosocial and the homosexual "are here fully conflated categories."[53]

The four articles assembled here, originally presented at the panel on "Male Friendship in the Ming Dynasty" at the annual Conference of the Association for Asian Studies in San Francisco (April 6-9, 2006), are an effort of interdisciplinary collaboration among four scholars in the fields of history, musicology, and literary studies to explore how male friendship was theorized, practiced, and represented in Ming China.

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[51] Giovanni Vitiello, "Exemplary Sodomites," 232.

[52] *Qing*, which has been translated variably as "love," "passion," "feeling," is a loaded term in Chinese cultural history. For a discussion of late Ming revalorization of *qing*, see my book *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, 23-56.

[53] Vitiello, "Exemplary Sodomites," 234. I return to this matter in my comments on Joseph Lam's article in the issue.

Why Ming China? Besides the obvious reason that all four contributors to this volume are students of Ming culture, during the Ming dynasty (especially the last century of this dynasty) friendship appears to have been celebrated with unprecedented enthusiasm. Some of the boldest statements and most sophisticated theories of friendship were produced in this period, as McDermott and Vitiello have already demonstrated to a certain extent. The second half of the Ming dynasty saw an explosion of friendship discourses as well as the rise of a cult of friendship among many educated males.[54] Friendship became such an important issue during the late Ming that it was even once chosen as an essay topic in the civil service examinations.[55] As some of the contributors to this issue contend, the late Ming might be considered the golden age of Chinese male friendship.

From a chronological view, among the four articles in this theme issue, Anne Gerritsen's article deals with the earliest period, the Yuan-Ming transition in the late fourteenth century. She shows how friendship was practiced before the arrival of the golden age of friendship during the late Ming, a historical period the other three articles examine at considerable length. Among the three figures Gerritsen concentrates on, two were Yuan loyalist poets, Dai Liang 戴良 (1317-83) and Ding Henian 丁鶴年 (1335-1424). Their friendship seems to have been strengthened by their shared loyalty to the fallen Yuan dynasty despite their different ethnic backgrounds: Dai was a Han Chinese whereas Ding was of Central Asian origin. On the other hand, their shared loyalist sentiments apparently did not prevent them from befriending those who actively participated in the new regime, such as Wu Sidao 烏斯道 (fl. late fourteenth century). Gerritsen looks at how these three fourteenth-century literati became friends despite the ethnic and political divides among them. Both Dai and Wu wrote biographies of their friend Ding, celebrating his identity as a Confucian gentleman. Both authors demonstrated their readiness and ability to cultivate what Gerritsen calls "friendship over differences." For Dai and Wu, Ding, a

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[54] Compare my article in this issue and McDermott's discussions of several late Ming books devoted to the topic of friendship, such as *Guangyou lun* 廣友論, in his "Friendship and Its Friends."

[55] See Zhong Xing's 鍾惺 (1574-1625) lengthy examination essay on friendship, reprinted in his *Yinxiu xuan ji* 隱秀軒集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), 24.444-45.

man of different ethnicity, became "one of us" thanks to their shared cultural values and their common Confucian upbringing. Dai's biography of Ding is the portrait of a man of utter moral integrity. As its title suggests, this is a biography of a high-minded gentleman (*gaoshi zhuan* 高士傳). One of the qualities associated with his biographical subject that Dai admired most was his disinterest in officialdom and wealth, a quality not unrelated to their shared claim as Yuan loyalists, who staked their reputations on refusing to switch loyalty to another regime. In contrast, Wu's biography, as its title *Ding xiaozi zhuan* 丁孝子傳 (The biography of Ding, a filial son) clearly indicates, concentrates almost exclusively on Ding's filiality. As someone who might have felt vulnerable to the accusation of lacking moral integrity for serving in the new regime, Wu's exclusive focus on the more apolitical virtue of filiality was probably not an innocent decision. By "friendship over differences" Gerritsen does not mean that their differences disappeared as a result of their friendships but rather that they became friends despite the differences.

Furthermore, there are also differences within the friendships among the three. Because of their shared political stance, Ding appeared to be much closer to Dai than to Wu. There are more exchanges between Ding and Dai recorded in their extant collected writings. For example, Ding expressed his gratitude to Dai for writing his biography, while in several of his poems, Dai compared Ding to the famous Six-Dynasty recluse poet Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (ca. 365-427).

The comparative reading of the biographies of Ding by Dai and Wu helps us appreciate the relationships among the trio in terms of how the two authors reconstructed their images of a common friend. Gerritsen then turns to several pieces written by Ding and Wu on a painting by Dai Liang to see how the latter was in turn viewed by the other two. During the turbulent years of the violent Yuan-Ming transition, trying to remain loyal to the collapsing Yuan regime and to avoid being enlisted for service by the anti-Yuan forces, who were occupying his hometown, Dai was forced into exile. Traveling and sojourning in other regions, to alleviate his homesickness, Dai Liang always carried a painting of his hometown mountains, titled "Jiuling shanfang tu" 九靈山房圖 (A painting of the studio on the Jiuling mountains) and hung it in the bedrooms where he stayed during his exile. The painting became an important focus of exchanges between him and his friends, a mobile "site" where friendships

with people in different regions were initiated, consolidated, and inscribed as Dai invited them to write colophons on the painting or compose poems or essays using the painting as a topic. These friends included Yuan loyalists such as Ding Henian as well as people like Wu Sidao and Tang Zhichun 唐之淳 (1350-1401), who would later become an important official in the newly established Ming government.[56] The painting, as the site of literati friendships and cultural exchanges, served as a bridge over the political divide between Confucian loyalism and pragmatic political expediency. While the painting was an eloquent testimony to Dai Liang's determination to remain a Yuan loyalist, the diverse political orientations of the friends invited to interpret and celebrate it, ironically, point to the compromises Dai made to survive as a loyalist and the network of friendships he needed to remain culturally relevant in an age of rapid political change.[57] Thriving on commonality, friendship also means accepting differences.

At the beginning of this introduction, I pointed out the affinity between friendship and travel. In the late fourteenth century, many had to travel for a different purpose—to flee the raging war or escape pressures to change one's political allegiance. Such forced movement, ironically, also gave rise to more opportunities as well as new necessities of friendship. Substantial parts of the lives of Ding Henian and Dai Liang were spent in traveling and sojourning away from their hometowns, and the roles played by *you* (travel) in the formation of their networks of *you* (friends) cannot be overestimated.

Gerritsen points out that many educated Han Chinese males were deprived of opportunities to take the civil service examinations due to the policy of the Yuan government and the disruption of normalcy caused by the war. For many of them, friendship became an important means for performing their masculinity. Such appropriation of friendship would be attempted again in a somewhat different situation in the late Ming when many who did not succeed in the examinations began to

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[56] See the *nianpu* 年譜 attached to Dai Liang's *Jiuling shanfang ji* 九靈山房集 (*Siku quanshu* ed.; Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 10a-b.

[57] Compare Paul Ropp's comments on Gerritsen's presentation at the AAS panel: "It is my impression that quite a number of elite males maintained their personal friendships across political lines, because they all knew how fraught with danger any one choice could be, to serve or not to serve a new dynasty. No one could afford to be too self-righteous when all the moral choices were in one way or another ambiguous and potentially dangerous."

turn the pursuit of friendship into a career, a last resort to lay claim to membership in the cultural elite. This is the case of the commoner scholar, Gu Dashao 顧大韶 (b. 1576), whom I examine in my article in this issue.

Besides the exchange of poetry, another kind of writing these literati friends often exchanged among themselves was biographies of chaste women, most of which were authored by themselves. Such exchange took on added significance during a time when an old dynasty was being replaced, often violently, by a new one. Gerritsen notes that Ding Henian's elder sister, Yue'e 月娥, thanks to her choosing death over the possibility of being violated by the soldiers, was a subject (or an object) of celebration by male literati authors. Writing about Ding Henian's chaste sister became an important aspect of Wu Sidao's friendship with Ding despite their different political stances. The celebration of chaste women again would become an important part of the male literati's effort to come to terms with their deeply bruised male egos when manhood was often equated with nationhood during the violent Ming-Qing transition more than two hundred years later. In Wu Sidao's biography of Yue'e, we encounter few signs of anxiety or guilt over his decision to serve in the new regime, probably an "unchaste" act in the eyes of those more conscious of the Confucian virtue of political loyalty. By the time of the Ming-Qing transition in the mid-seventeenth century, such moral self-assurance, however, became much more difficult to maintain in male literati discourses on chaste women. Writing about these female "others" often became occasions of self-interrogation with regard to their own failures as male subjects of a conquered nation. Female chastity and political loyalism became inseparable.[58] After the fall of the Ming dynasty, "friendships over differences" formed between *yinmin* 遺民 (those who insisted on their allegiance to the already toppled monarchy) and *erchen* 貳臣 (collaborators who switched their allegiance to the new regime) continued to thrive, further complicating our understanding of male homosociality, which was conditioned and sometimes even distorted by political turmoil.[59]

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[58] This is an issue discussed extensively in the first four chapters of my book *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*, especially, 72-86.

[59] See Xie Zhengguang 謝正光, *Qingchu shiwen yu shiren jiaoyou kao* 清初詩文與士人交友考 (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2001).

While Gerritsen's study focuses on the exchanges among three friends in fourteenth-century China mainly in the form of writing poems, biographies, essays, colophons, Joseph Lam's explores music as the contact between men friends in his article "Music and Male Bonding in Ming China." Lam investigates how music served as a catalyst for male bonding in the last two centuries of the Ming dynasty. He proposes the broad term "musiking" to describe all the cultural activities associated with music.

The legend about Yu Boya 俞伯牙 refusing to play music after the death of his friend Zhong Ziqi 鍾子期 because he believed Zhong was the only one who could understand and appreciate his music was one of the most famous Chinese friendship stories. It gave currency to the term *zhiyin* 知音 (the one who really understands the sound/music, or soul mate). Compared with another equally popular term, *zhiji* 知己 (someone who really appreciates and knows one), originally used to describe the explicitly hierarchical relationship between a patron/master and his client/retainer,[60] *zhiyin* is more likely to refer to more egalitarian friendship , although the two terms are often interchangeable.[61] Indeed, as Lam suggests, in the legend of Yu Boya and Zhong Ziqi, friendship is situated "outside the institutional sites, such as the court, the home, and the entertainment quarters, where participants' interactions were defined by social-political hierarchies." However, this ancient legend of egalitarian friendship is mentioned at the beginning of his article as an ideal too high and too pure for later men to live up to, because, as Lam demonstrates subsequently, very few lived outside those institutional sites. Lam's last example about the passionate love affair between the literatus Qi 祁 and his catamite and their common devotion to music may, at first glance, come close to this ideal of *zhiyin*, but their sexual relationship turned out to be anything but egalitarian.

Lam begins his discussion of musiking and male bonding with the case of two sixteenth-century scholar-officials' intellectual friendship

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[60] Sima Qian 司馬遷, "Cike liezhuan" 刺客列傳, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972), vol. 8, 2519.

[61] For discussions of the early histories of these terms, see Eric Henry, "The Motif of Recognition in Early China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47 (1987): 5-30, and Paul Rouzer, "The Life of the Party: Theorizing Clients and Patrons in Early China," *Comparative Literature* 58.1 (2006): 59-69; see also my discussion of Gu Dashao's view on the differences between "friends" and "retainer/guest" in my article in this issue.

developed through their mutual interest in music theories, although such friendship was not purely intellectual as other more utilitarian factors probably played some role. It took Ji Ben 季本 (1485-1563) almost twenty-five years to have his book on music theory published because it took him that long to find someone who could really appreciate, as well as convince himself of, the merit of his music theory.

Compared with the case of Ji Ben, the role of musiking in the social life of Yan Cheng 嚴澂 (1547-1625) was even more important. Yan was reputed to be the founder of the famous and influential Yushan school of *qin* 琴 (seven-string zither) in Changshou 常熟 in what is now part of Jiangsu province. Like other literati clubs such as *shishe* 詩社 (poetry club), *qinshe* 琴社 (*qin* club) was another form of assembly where networks of literati friendship thrived, in this case, through participants' common love for music. Yan Cheng's impact as a leader of the Yushan school was enhanced by the fact that he came from a very prominent family and his father Yan Ne 嚴訥 (1511-84) was once the Grand Councilor during the Jiajing reign (1522-66). Yan Cheng and his musiking comrades "operated as a social and artistic group of elite men: in addition to socializing with one another, they played the same repertory of *qin* works, subscribed to the same aesthetics, and lived in the same Changshou area," pointing to the subtle relationships among musiking, male friendships, and local identities. Lam here raises a very important question about the roles played by "local identity" in a Chinese man's friendships with other men, an issue closely related to the implications of clan and lineage that I have previously touched on.

The last part of Lam's article is about musiking in same-sex love between an obsessed literati connoisseur of art, Qi Zhixiang 祁止祥 (*juren* 1627) and his catamite Ahbao 阿寶. Lam emphasizes the unique role played by musiking in the bonding between the two and the transgressive nature of their love, calling our attention to the emotional and erotic component of music as it helped shape the special bond between them. His discussion is based on an account by Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-ca. 1684), who, a connoisseur of art himself, also enjoyed the company of catamites, though probably not as obsessively as Qi. Significantly, Qi's love for Ahbao is largely presented in terms of literati connoisseurship. Zhang mentioned that Qi had a fixation on many things, including calligraphy, chess playing, and opera. When Zhang was

introduced to Ahbao by Qi, the way Zhang responded is revealing: "This is a fairy bird from the Western Paradise. Where did you get him?"[62] Here Ahbao was apparently admired as a pet or a piece of art, something collectable by a connoisseur.[63] No matter how passionate Qi was in his love for Ahbao (Qi gave up his money, property, and even his family for him), the latter remained a desired object, while Qi, as a desiring subject, was his "owner." Lam is certainly on firm ground when he characterizes their apparently unequal relationship as a kind of male bonding, although it should greatly complicate our understanding of friendship if we are to consider them friends.

This leads us to a central issue in the study of male-male sexual relationship in traditional China: Almost all the available evidence suggests such relationships were strictly hierarchical.[64] If we rely on the modern concept of friendship, where equality is one of its defining qualities, then the relationship between these male lovers could hardly be considered friendship. On the other hand, given that equality was not

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[62] Zhang Dai, "Qi Zhixiang pi" 祁止祥癖, in Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi Xihu mengxun* 陶庵夢憶西湖夢尋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 39.

[63] For discussions of literati and their relationships with male actors (often female impersonators) in terms of connoisseurship, see Sophie Volpp, "The Literary Consumption of Actors in Seventeenth-Century China," in Lydia Liu, Ellen Widmer, and Judith Zeitlin, eds., *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 153-83; Wu Cuncun, *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (London and New York: Routlege Curzon, 2004), especially, 116-58; and my book *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China*, 141-42.

[64] There might be some exceptions in a limited sense, where hierarchy does not receive much emphasis; see, for example, "Qingxia ji" 情俠記 from *Bian'er chai* and "Pan Wenzi qihe yuanyang zong" 潘文子契合鴛鴦塚 from *Shi diantou* 石點頭, two collections of stories produced during the seventeenth century. For discussions of these two stories, see Giovanni Vitiello, "Exemplary Sodomites," 228-37; for a different reading of *Bian er Chai*, see my book *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, 176-83. While both Vitiello and I have emphasized the strategy of *qing* adopted to legitimate "same sex love," I am much more hesitant than Vitiello in characterizing many cases of "male-male sexual passion" as relationships among equals. In her book *Homoerotic Sensibilities in Late Imperial China* (85-110), Wu Cuncun argues that the views on male-male sexual passion on the part of two other influential eighteenth-century literati figures, the poet Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-97) and the painter Zheng Xie 鄭燮 (1693-1765), were sometimes capable of challenging the "boundaries" between the penetrated and the penetrator. However, though less rigid, hierarchy is nevertheless an integral part of the kind of relationships practiced or envisioned by Yuan Mei and Zheng Xie, and, furthermore, their views were often expressed or presented for their intended shocking effect, thus calling attention by default to the overwhelming dominance of the more rigid "norms."

always regarded as a central element of friendship in traditional Chinese culture, we might want to avoid an either/or approach in examining the intricate relationship between the kind of male-bonding described here and what was usually considered friendship in traditional China.

Another case of male-male sexual love touched on by Lam should help us to better appreciate the gender implications of the bonding between Qi and Ahbao in terms of the possible distinctions between male friendship and male homosexual passion in traditional China. In a story titled "The Tower of Gathered Refinement" by Li Yu 李漁 (1611-71), two good friends, Jin Zhongyu and Liu Minshu, who are both married, share a catamite lover, Quan Ruxiu 權汝修. When Quan, out of loyalty to his two male lovers, refuses a relationship with the son of a powerful official, he is subjected to cruel revenge, castration by a eunuch. Before this tragedy, however, the three live in perfect harmony: Jin and Liu take turns sleeping with Quan. Instead of any jealousy between them, their friendship seems to have been strengthened precisely because of their common love. Or, in the words of the narrator, the "body" of the catamite becomes the physical site where the corporeal interactions between Jin and Liu are being enacted (budan cunian busheng, fanjie tawei lianluo xinghai zhi ju 不但醋念不生, 反借他爲聯絡形骸之具).[65] The story's deliberate juxtaposition of male friendship with male-male sexual passion highlights the assumed distinctions between these two kinds of male bonding, the former between two men who are more or less socially equal and the latter between two socially superior men and a younger man from a significantly lower social stratum. While emphasizing the good education both Jin and Liu received, the author does not say anything about Quan in this regard (we infer that he has little education). If this is a story about deep attachment among three male friends, the reader may wonder why there is no mention of any sexual relationship between Jin and Liu. The author's silence is revealing: we are supposed to conclude that their friendship involves absolutely no sex. If it did, the status of one of them, the passive partner or the penetrated, would have been lowered to that of a catamite. Consequently, the friendship between two men of equal social status (it is emphasized that they used to be *tongxue*) would have been turned into a hierarchical

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[65] Li Yu, "Cuiya lou" 萃雅樓, in *Shi'er lou* 十二樓; reprinted in *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1992), vol. 9, 130.

sexual relationship between a man and his "woman" (the penetrated).[66] In most cases, sex between two males either leads to inequality or deepens the inequality that already exists, thus replicating the rigid gender inequality in a heterosexual relationship, because a man who has been penetrated will be reduced to being a "woman" (having lost his original status as man). The castration Quan suffers at the hands of the eunuch takes on special symbolic meaning: once penetrated (penetration amounts to castration) he becomes a "woman." Although friendship between a man and a "woman" (or his "woman") is possible, such friendship has to be quite different from that between two males. Needless to say, male friendship is only possible between two men, while Quan is obviously no longer a man once he is penetrated (castrated).[67] A conclusion we can tentatively draw is that in traditional China friendship between two men in male-male sexual relationship was possible but in most cases substantially or qualitatively different from that between two males who were not sexually involved with each other. We should be mindful of these subtle differences in terms of their important gender and social implications.

The two papers described so far concentrate on friendship praxis. Kimberley Besio's article ushers us into the world of literary representation. She looks at changing representations of male friendship in several dramatic and fictional works from different historical periods in order to explore how such representations were shaped by literary conventions and historical contingencies. The literary texts she examines are different renderings of the famous story about the deep bond between Fan Juqing 范巨卿 and Zhang Yuanbo 張元伯, first recorded in two fifth-century texts: *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 and *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (In search of the supernatural). Fan and Zhang become close friends

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[66] See Mathew Sommer, "Dangerous Males, Vulnerable Males, and Polluted Males" and my book *Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China*, 176-205. In an idealized male-male sexual relationship in traditional China, the penetrated or the passive partner was often expected to behave like a "virtuous wife" in relation to his male lover as exemplified in some of Li Yu's stories and *Pian'er chai*. Here again, "Pan Zhiwen qihe yuanyang zhong" from the seventeenth-century collection of stories *Shi diantou*, which is about the passion between two *tongxue*, might be one of the relatively rare exceptions.
[67] In his reading of *Bian er chai* ("Exemplary Sodomites," 235-36), "equality" is a word Vitiello repeatedly uses to characterize this collection of homoerotic stories. Such characterization is, in my opinion, quite problematic, except in the case of the story "Qingxia ji."

when they are schoolmates studying in the National University. Before returning to their hometowns, Fan promises Zhang that he will visit him in two years. Two years later he shows up as promised and they pledge to meet again in another two years. Unfortunately, Zhang becomes ill, and before he dies, he insists to his family that Fan will attend his funeral. A thousand miles away, through a dream, Fan learns of Zhang's death as well as his dying wishes. He travels without stop to attend Zhang's funeral and plants a tree near Zhang's grave. A play based on this story was produced during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) under the title *Sisheng jiao Fan Zhang jishu* 死生交范張雞黍 (Friends in life and death, Fan and Zhang Chicken-Millet). The play basically follows the same plot line with one significant addition, a subplot about how Wang Zhonglüe 王仲略, a schoolmate of the two, tries to present someone else's essays as his own in order to get a high official position from the government. Consequently, the loyalty and honesty that characterized the two friends Fan and Zhang is now being contrasted with Wang Zhonglüe's dishonesty and betrayal of his friend. This contrast between true friendship and false friendship continues to receive attention in later dramatic versions of the story produced in the Ming. In the play, interestingly enough, the name of the official who finally commends Fan to the imperial government for his exemplary deeds is Diwu Lun 第五倫 (literally, the fifth relationship), reinforcing the play's central theme of friendship.[68]

However, the most radical rewriting of this story is found in the two versions of a Ming vernacular story, one partially extant from the sixteenth-century anthology titled *Liushi jia xiaoshuo* 六十家小說 (Sixty short stories), compiled by Hong Bian 洪楩 (fl. sixteenth century), the other in Feng Menglong's 馮夢龍 (1574-1646) *Yushi mingyan* 喻世明言 (Illustrative stories to instruct the world; also known as *Gujin xiaoshuo* 古今小說, Stories of old and new). As Besio notes, except for some verses, the two versions are basically the same. Here, instead of being fellow students in the imperial university, Fan and Zhang become close friends because Zhang has saved Fan's life after the latter becomes

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[68] Diwu Lun was the name of a historical figure (d. 85 A.D.), a high official from the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220). However, this fact does not necessarily alleviate the ironic effect of this name here.

seriously ill in an inn on his way to the capital. After a full recovery under Zhang's attentive care and before returning to their hometowns, Fan promises Zhang that he will visit him in two years. However, Fan has been so preoccupied with business that he does not recall his pledge until it is almost too late. Believing that the soul can travel much faster than the body, Fan commits suicide by slitting his throat so that his soul can reach Zhang on the day promised. In his encounter with Fan's soul, Zhang realizes what Fan has done and travels to Fan's hometown to attend his funeral. Then, moved by Fan's devotion, Zhang commits suicide in order to be buried next to his friend. As can be seen from this summary, the friendship between Fan and Zhang takes on a much more radical form (double suicides) and is much more intense, probably reflecting the heightened friendship fervor during the late Ming.

Zhang's saving Fan's life initiates a cycle of reciprocity. To show his gratitude, Fan pledges to visit Zhang and pays respect to Zhang's mother in two years. To reciprocate Fan's loyalty and his willingness to die rather than violate the trust of a friend, Zhang commits suicide in exactly the same manner, slitting his own throat, thus literally enacting the famous saying *wenjing jiao* 刎頸交 (a friendship so deep that one is willing to commit suicide by slitting one's own throat for the sake of his friend). Besio observes that this enhanced emphasis on reciprocity is unique to the Ming vernacular story, and Feng Menglong seems to be particularly interested in reciprocity. The suicides by both friends also dramatize the tension between friendship and family obligations, a conflict apparently not given much attention in the fifth-century texts nor in various dramatic rewritings. In the vernacular story, between his family (wife and children) and his friend, Fan chooses the latter, a choice repeated by his friend Zhang. Before his suicide, Fan repeatedly complains about his wife and children as burdens that have prevented him from doing what he really wants to do (studying and being with his friend). According to Fan, he is so busy making money as a merchant in order to provide for his family that he almost fails to keep his solemn pledge to Zhang, who has saved his life. In turn, when Zhang commits suicide for the sake of his friend, he obviously chooses to neglect his responsibility for his aging mother and his younger brother (although the fact that he has a brother should alleviate his guilt over being unfilial since his mother has another son to take care of her). Feeling uneasy about Zhang's choice, the story's narrator launches a careful apology for the seemingly unfilial act: "How

could Zhang neglect his own family members for the sake of a friend? This is all because Zhang feels in his heart so much the weight of loyalty and friendship (qi wei youpang qing gurou? Zhiyin shinyi po zhongchang 豈爲友朋輕骨肉?只因信義迫中腸),"[69] as if the author anticipates an accusation, common among some of his more conservative contemporaries, that it is wrong to consider friends more important than family. Another significant change in the Ming vernacular story that Besio notes is that instead of a scholar, Fan, though well-educated, is now a merchant, probably reflecting the rapid commercialization and the rising status of merchant class in late Ming society. Here the distinctions between scholars and merchants are not that significant. However, the story's attitude toward merchants is nevertheless ambivalent: on the one hand, Fan Juqing, as a merchant, is shown to be an exemplary friend in that he is willing to die to fulfill his pledge; on the other, Fan expresses regret that his pursuit of profits (doing business) has almost turned him into someone incapable of honoring his promise to a friend. The vernacular story seems to acknowledge the legitimacy of a merchant's claim of membership in the cultural elite, but, at the same time, it also betrays a deep anxiety over the possible erosion of the literati tradition of friendship under the pressure of commercialism prevalent during the late Ming.

Such anxiety over profit-seeking is also reflected in the author's deliberate decision to make sure that an act of selfless friendship is not rewarded with high office as Zhang was in the original fifth-century texts, as Besio has insightfully pointed out. However, all the renditions of the Fan-Zhang story are unanimous in their emphasis on the importance of a man's need to keep his word or a man's trustworthiness (*xin* 信), a key aspect of masculinity in traditional China.[70]

Mainly focusing on friendship discourses, my article "Male Friendship and *Jiangxue* (Philosophical Debates) in Sixteenth-Century China"

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[69] Feng Menglong, "Fan Juqing jishu shengsi jiao" 范巨卿雞黍生死交, in Feng Menglong's *Yushi mingyan* (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju), 243. Probably reflecting Feng Menglong's awareness of the tension between friendship and family obligations, this apology is absent in an earlier version of this vernacular story collected in *Liushi jia xiaoshuo* (dated approximately between 1541-1551), which is also known as *Qingping shantang huaben* 清平山堂話本; see the facsimile reprint (Beijing: Wenxue guji kanyin suo, 1987), 221.

[70] Cf. McDermott's observation in "Friendship and Its Friends," 95: "Chinese writers have over the centuries preferred to define friendship in terms of the virtue of trust, not equality."

attempts to answer the question of how certain unique friendship practices shaped friendship theories during the sixteenth century. It examines possible reasons behind the quick ascendance of the status of friendship in the second half of the Ming dynasty, offering a quite different intellectual and cultural context for the "friendly world" McDermott previously explored. The commercialization of the Ming economy and the resultant enhanced social and geographical mobility created new needs as well as new possibilities for friendship: the blurring of traditional social boundaries (such as those between literati and merchants) tended to make Ming society relatively less hierarchical,[71] thus more conducive to the cultivation of friendship among different social groups (a fact also reflected in the Ming vernacular story of the bond between Fan and Zhang examined in Besio's article). The increasing sophistication of the contemporary communication systems (transportation, mailing, and so forth) afforded much easier access to people in distant areas and greatly expanded the social spaces beyond the family where male homosocial relationships were likely to have been cultivated. After all, a man's desire and ability to have many friends (*you*) are directly contingent upon his ability to travel (*you*) and opportunities for exchanges with other men. McDermott's contention that the increasing awareness of friendship was in part a result of "discontents within the family" is corroborated by my findings: Many friendship promoters emphasized the need to move beyond the confines of the family in order to spend more time with friends for the sake of spiritual enlightenment.[72] McDermott is certainly justified when he cautions that "it would be incorrect to conclude that the espousal of friendship ties often entailed the outright rejection of family ties." [73] However, at the same time, as my article demonstrates, it is also true that during the second half of the Ming dynasty more people were compelled to confront the consequences of the rising tension between these two kinds of ties.

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[71] For a study of the impact of commercialization of late imperial economy on Confucian ethics, see Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 441-579.

[72] McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends," 94.

[73] McDermott, "Friendship and Its Friends," 77.

A related phenomenon in sixteenth-century China was the proliferation of literati associations, not only *shishe* and *qinshe* but also *wenshe* 文社 (literary clubs or essay clubs) and *jianghui* 講會 (assemblies of philosophical debate). These helped to create many different social spaces relatively independent of state and family, the two most powerful institutions where friendship was most likely to be viewed with suspicion.[74] In these social groupings where hierarchy tended to be less emphasized, literati from low social strata (such as low examination degree holders) could find more opportunities to mingle and network with scholar-officials. Never before had many so-called commoner poets (*buyi shiren* 布衣詩人), such as Xie Zhen 謝榛 (1499-1579), Shen Mingchen 沈明臣 (fl. mid-sixteenth century), and Wang Zhideng 王穉登 (1535-1612), achieved prominence on the national literary scene. Besides their poetic skills, a common factor contributing to the reputation of many of these poets was their perceived devotion to their friends or loyalty to their former patrons/benefactors. They were widely admired for their chivalry: risking their own lives and careers to protect or rescue a friend in distress or defend the reputation of a former patron/benefactor now in disgrace. In fact, for these poets, friend-making became the most important part of their "career moves," and for many it literally became a career after the normal channel of career success via the civil service examination was proven to be beyond their reach.[75] For Xie Zhen, "poetic networking" (using his poetry to befriend important people and to seek patronage) simply became his livelihood, while

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[74] For studies of literati associations in late imperial China, see Xie Guozhen 謝國楨, *Ming Qing zhiji dangshe yongdong kao* 明清之際黨社運動考 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), Ono Kazuko 小野和子, *Minki tōsha kō : Tōrintō to Fukusha* 明季党社考:東林党と復社 (Kyōto: Dōhōsha Shuppan, 1996; Chinese edition, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005). Both of these studies focus on the close connections between late imperial politics and literati associations. The most comprehensive study on this topic to date is He Zongmei 何宗美, *Mingchu Qingmo wenren jieshe yanjiu* 明末清初文人結社研究 (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chubanshe, 2003); see also his more recent *Gong'an pai jieshe kaolun* 公安派結社考論 (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2005).

[75] See Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582-1664), "Xie shanren Zhen" 謝山人榛, "Shen Jishi Mingchen" 沈記室明臣, and "Wang Jiaoshu Zhideng" 王校書穉登, in Qian Qianyi, *Liechao shiren xiaozhuan* 列朝詩人小傳 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), 423-24, 496-97 and 481-82. For more detailed discussions of how these commoner poets used poetry as a vehicle for social networking to cultivate ties within the elite circles, see Zhang Dejian, 張德建, *Mingdai shanren wenxue yanjiu* 明代山人文學研究 (Changsha: Hu'nan renmin chubanshe, 2005), 133-70 and 210-32.

participation in poetry clubs was probably one of the most effective means of such networking.

Whereas popular literati clubs such as *shishe, qinshe,* and *wenshe* became the social domains where networks of literati friendship thrived, it was mainly through *jianghui* (assemblies of philosophical debate), I argue, that friendship achieved the kind of Confucian legitimacy that it had never been able to acquire before. *Jianghui* was popular among a different sector of the large literati community, with most of its participants being neo-Confucian thinkers and activists associated with the so-called School of Heart/Mind or Xinxue 心學 founded by Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1528). Compared with literati clubs such as *shishe, jianghui* was a much more "sacred" form of literati gathering, where, instead of leisured aesthetic activities such as poetry composition, the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment and Confucian sagehood was the central activity. Influenced by the practices of lecturing and debating in Buddhist monasteries, *jianghui* became a hotbed for semi-religious fellowships among many neo-Confucian scholars and activists. In this communal space where participants often lived together to debate and pursue Confucian moral learning, what was often emphasized was the absolute indispensability of friends in the process of moral self-cultivation.

In his discussion of Chinese male friendship, Kutcher deplores that neo-Confucians had drained the emotional content of friendship by insisting that friendship was only to serve the goals of the individual's learning of the Confucian way.[76] This might be true up to a point. However, such neo-Confucian rhetoric could also help to legitimize friendship, thus greatly elevating its status. In fact, this was exactly what many Ming neo-Confucians did in their promotion of friendship. One of their effective defense strategies was to contend that one could not achieve ultimate Confucian sagehood in isolation and without the help of like-minded friends. Never before in Confucian discourses had the indispensability of friendship been so eloquently argued. On the one hand, the "draining of emotional contents" might well be the price one had to pay to promote friendship during a time when the modern notion

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[76] Kutcher, "Fifth Relationship," 1620. By "neo-Confucians," Kutcher is mainly referring to people such as Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) from the Song Dynasty.

of friendship for the sake of friendship would have been simply inconceivable in the minds of many. On the other hand, emphasis on the moral efficacy of friendship did not necessarily lead to the draining of emotional content, as I try to show in my discussion of the late Ming scholar Gu Dashao. In his promotion of friendship, Gu Dashao, probably inadvertently, pushed the late Ming cult of friendship to its ultimate Confucian limits when he contended that friendship was an even more authentic relationship than that between father and son. One may wonder whether some of these late Ming figures were as radical in their social practices as in their rhetoric examined in my article, although it seems certain that the boldness and innovation exhibited in their friendship discourses was unprecedented. What qualifies the late Ming period as the golden age in the history of Chinese male friendship was not the fact that late Ming Chinese males were necessarily more friendly or more willing to make friends than those from other historical periods, but that their sheer eagerness to discourse on friendship and their bold and innovative rhetoric elevated friendship to a moral high ground that it had never occupied before.

There obviously are many important issues associated with male friendship that have not been discussed or fully explored in the articles assembled in this theme issue. For example, given the indispensable role played by poetry in the social lives of educated males and the enormous amount of poetry produced in late imperial China, a careful examination of the homosocial implications of poetry is essential to a better under-standing of male friendship in this period. Another important question is how a man's relationship with another man was conditioned by factors such as kinships and local identities. Also, we have largely confined our discussions to male friendships among elite members of the society (Lam briefly discusses the relationships between a literatus and his catamite), while homosocial bonds among the non-elite are certainly a question that deserves careful scrutiny. Although the issue of male friendship versus male-male sexual passion has been touched upon briefly by some of our contributors, far more studies are needed on this subject, especially since there are still many substantial gaps in our knowledge of the latter due in part to limited sources. So far almost all the available written sources tend to suggest that male-male sexual relationships in traditional China were strictly hierarchical. To what degree do these sources reflect

the historical reality as well as the selective nature of the strategies adopted by those who authored the sources? To answer such questions, we need to do more archival research and, at the same time, to be constantly aware of the mediated nature of all the sources as well as the possibilities of our own historical bias.[77] The study of male friendship requires diverse approaches and collaboration among scholars from different disciplines. It is our hope that this collaborative attempt can serve as a good start that will lead to more substantial and more con-textualized studies of Chinese male friendship in the near future.

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[77] For example, is it possible that a male-male sexual relationship appears even more uncomfortably hierarchical in our eyes because we are being confronted with the situation that a woman's subordination in a heterosexual relationship with a man, which we have long come to expect in a patriarchal society such as that of traditional China, is now being brought upon a man in a homosexual relationship with another man?