Wixted, John Timothy, "The Poetry of Li Ch'ing-chao: A Woman Author and Women's Authorship," in *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, Pauline Yu, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 145-168. [Li Ch'ing-chao = Li Qingzhao 李清照]

The Poetry of Li Ch'ing-chao:
A Woman Author and Women's Authorship

John Timothy Wixted

The poetry of Li Ch'ing-chao (b. 1084)[1]—both her *tz'u* and *shih*—prompts fundamental questions when viewed from various twentieth-century Western perspectives, especially feminist ones. Is there a separate women's literary tradition in China? If so, what is her place in it? Has her corpus of writings been viewed as being specifically female, and has it been viewed differently by men and by women? Is there a distinct female consciousness operative in her writing as well as that of other women writers? In what sense, if any, might she be viewed as being a feminist? And finally, what light might analysis of her work shed on current Western theoretical debate about women's writing, which is often couched in universalist terms?

As for the question of whether there is a separate female literary tradition in China, this can be only partially addressed here. It is clear

1. Li Ch'ing-chao's date of birth follows Chiang Liang-fu, *Li-tai jen-wu nien-li t'ung-p'u* (1937; rpt., Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1974), p. 284, which is confirmed by Hsia Ch'eng-tao, *T'ang Sung tz'u lun-ts'ung* (Shanghai: Ku-tien shu-chü, 1956), pp. 190ff. The text followed in this article is Chung-hua shu-chü Shang-hai pien-chi-so, ed., *Li Ch'ing-chao chi* (Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1962).

Song lyrics (*tz'u*) by Li Ch'ing-chao are numbered sequentially as found in that text; page numbers follow, referring first to this 1962 edition, and then to vol. 1 of the *Ch'üan Sung tz'u*, ed. T'ang Kuei-chang (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1965) (hereafter cited as *CST*): e.g., "song lyric #1 (1962, p. 1; *CST*, p. 927)." Note that song lyrics numbered #45 and above are identified by the editors of the 1962 edition as being of doubtful attribution to Li Ch'ing-chao.

Shih poems by Li Ch'ing-chao are also numbered consecutively (#S-1 through #S-17) as they appear in the 1962 edition, page references being to the same work: e.g., "#S-1, p. 62." *Shih* fragments (#F-1 through #F-7) are similarly cited: e.g., "#F-1, p. 68."

that Li Ch'ing-chao, the granddaughter of a first-place examination candidate and the daughter of a literate mother as well as father, does not reveal in the extant writing reliably attributed to her any special awareness of works by earlier women writers:[2] Pan chieh-yü (48?–after 6 B.C.),[3] Pan Chao (45–ca. 117), Ts'ai Yen (fl. 200), Tso Fen (fl. 275), Hsieh Tao-yün (fl. 376), Li Yeh (fl. 756), Hsüeh T'ao (770–832), Yü Hsüan-chi (ca. 844–68), and Hua-jui fu-jen (10th cent.).[4]

It is true that one or two of Li Ch'ing-chao's poems are surprisingly similar to those of her Sung predecessor, Wei fu-jen (ca. 1040–1103);[5] but these similarities may only be coincidence, made all the more possible in a genre like *tz'u* where theme and language are so subject to convention.

If Li Ch'ing-chao did not look to earlier female writers as models, one might legitimately ask to what extent did Li Ch'ing-chao herself, along with her near contemporary Chu Shu-chen, become the *terminus a quo*,[6] if

2. "Conditions under which the writings of early medieval gentry women may to some extent have circulated, been collected, or anthologized but subsequently lost remain unclear. In the bibliographical sections of the T'ang and Sung dynastic histories, and in independent Sung bibliographies, at least seven collections of women's writings (all but one titled simply *Fu-jen chi*, "Collection of Writings by Women") are listed: two from the southern Sung [Six Dynasties], two each from the Liang and Sui, one from the later Wei, and one from T'ang. These collections have not survived." Maureen Robertson, "Voicing the Feminine: Construction of the Female Subject in the Lyric Poetry of Medieval and Late Imperial China," paper prepared for the Colloquium on Poetry and Women's Culture in Late Imperial China, University of California, Los Angeles, October 20, 1990, p. 17.

3. The titles *chieh-yü*, *chü-shih*, *fei*, *fu-jen*, and *tao-jen* are retained (unitalicized and lower-case) when citing names.

4. It is true that Li Ch'ing-chao's residence outside Chi-nan in Shantung was named after Hsieh Tao-yün, which reflects conscious association with the earlier writer (see the poem by Tung I cited below). Song lyric #53 (1962, p. 46; not in *CST*) also includes an allusion to Hsieh Tao-yün, but the poem is of doubtful attribution.

5. There is the use of the crab apple (*hai-t'ang*) in Wei fu-jen's song lyrics #2 and #13 (as numbered sequentially in *CST; CST*, pp. 268 and 269), later celebrated in Li Ch'ing-chao's song lyric #2 (1962, p. 1; *CST*, p. 927). Note the reduplication in Wei fu-jen's song lyric #1 (*CST*, p. 268)—*T'ing-yüan shen-shen shen chi-hsü*—found also in Li Ch'ing-chao's song lyrics #26 and #27 (1962, pp. 18 and 19; *CST*, pp. 929 and 933), as well as in a famous line by Ou-yang Hsiu (1007–72).

The dates of Wei fu-jen (and for Sun Tao-hsüan, cited below) follow Jen Jih-kao, *Sung-tai nü-tz'u-jen p'ing-shu* (Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1984), p. 33 (and p. 36). For Wei fu-jen, see also n. 54 below.

6. The dates for Chu Shu-chen are problematic. Jen Jih-kao has "ca. 1040–1103"; *Sung-tai nü-tz'u-jen p'ing-shu*, p. 32. T'an Cheng-pi has "fl. 1131"; *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh-chia ta-tz'u-tien* (Taipei: Hsiang-kang Shang-hai yin-shu-kuan, 1961), p. 675. And C. Bradford Langley states that "the most reliable evidence . . . places her in the Northern Sung

not for a tradition of separate female writing in China, at least for a tradition of female *tz'u* writing. My own reading of the poems by the fifty-nine writers in the *Ch'üan Sung tz'u* easily identified as being by women (fifty of whom postdate Li Ch'ing-chao),[7] as well as the five women writers included in the *Ch'üan Chin Yüan tz'u*, does not reveal any special awareness or actual emulation of Li Ch'ing-chao's *tz'u* by later women writers. Nor have I found any use of language by this group of writers that could be termed distinctively female.[8]

There is little critical reference to Li Ch'ing-chao being used as a model by women.[9] Chang Yen (fl. 1526) states that Chu Shu-chen modeled herself on (*tsu*) a specific poetic line by Li Ch'ing-chao.[10] In more general terms, Ch'en T'ing (fl. 1515) states, "Women *tz'u* writers of the past like Li Ch'ing-chao and Sun fu-jen [Sun Tao-hsüan (fl. 1131)] all had their collected writings circulate in the world. As Chu Shu-chen followed in their footsteps, it can be said that every generation has its worthies."[11] Ch'en Wei-sung (1625–82) says of the woman writer Hsü Ts'an (fl. 1653), "In her *tz'u* she looked upon Chu Shu-chen as a younger sister, and she was nurtured by Li Ch'ing-chao as one might be by an aunt."[12] And Yeh Shen-hsiang (Ch'ing dynasty) says in refer-

rather than the Southern"; "Chu Shu-chen," in *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. and comp. William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 334.

The dating is important, as some critics place Li Ch'ing-chao before Chu Shu-chen and would have her influencing Chu (e.g., Ch'en T'ing, cited immediately below), and others have it the other way around.

7. Or at least are listed in the *Ch'üan Sung tz'u* as postdating Li Ch'ing-chao. Note that Jen Jih-kao finds a total of ninety-six women *tz'u* writers in the Sung, not all of whose work is extant or included in *CST; Sung-tai nü-tz'u-jen p'ing-shu*, pp. 32–78.

8. Note that in their introduction the editors of the volume resulting from the 1982 conference Women and Literature in China state: "Considering that even in texts written by women in our own language we are hardly able to pinpoint traces of a women's language, our failure to tackle this issue may be more easily understood." Anna Gerstlacher et al., eds., *Women and Literature in China* (Bochum: Studienverlag Gerstlacher, 1985), p. ii.

9. Of course, this begs two complementary questions: whether Li Ch'ing-chao was used as a conscious or unconconscious model by women, without critics' or poets' stating she was being used; and whether or not a statement that someone has used Li Ch'ing-chao as a model is necessarily the case.

10. Ch'u Pin-chieh, Sun Ch'ung-en, and Jung Hsien-pin, eds., *Li Ch'ing-chao tzu-liao hui-pien* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1984), p. 40 (hereafter cited as *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*).

11. Ibid., p. 38.

12. Ibid., p. 72.

ence to another woman writer, "Chu Hsi-chen [dates uncertain] wished to succeed on the same level as [*chi-mei*] Li Ch'ing-chao."[13] Such statements are all couched in fairly general terms. There is virtually no discussion of any specific language of Li Ch'ing-chao's being used by later women writers, as there occasionally is about its use by men writers.

Li Ch'ing-chao is linked retrospectively with women writers who precede her. For example, Tung Fu-heng (fl. 1607) states, "Her expressions and strains outreverberate others' of her age, making her one with the group of Pan chieh-yü, Tso Fen, and Ts'ai Yen."[14] In a poem by Tung I (Ch'ing dynasty) she is yoked implicitly with Hsieh Tao-yün:

> In her postface she recalled past happiness,
> And growing old following military ships, crossed the Yangtze in hardship.
> Her fragrant chamber is wrongly compared with that of Ming fei—[15]
> Li Ch'ing-chao of Willow Catkins Spring.[16]

And in a context referring to her remarriage, Li Ch'ing-chao is compared unfavorably by Lang Ying (b. 1487) with another earlier woman writer: "Alas! How removed from Ts'ai Yen she is!"[17]

It is clear that Li Ch'ing-chao becomes the standard by which virtually all later women writers are measured. Of Wu Shu-chi (Northern Sung dynasty) it is stated:

> At her best, she is not inferior to Li Ch'ing-chao.[18]
>
> Huang Sheng (Sung Dynasty)

> People say she is not inferior to Li Ch'ing-chao, but in fact she does not measure up to Li Ch'ing-chao in warmth and classical elegance [*wen-ya*].[19]
>
> Lu Ch'ang (Ch'ing Dynasty)

13. Ibid., p. 100.
14. Ibid., p. 51.
15. Ming fei, i.e., Wang Chao-chün (a palace lady during the reign of Emperor Yüan of the Han [r. 49–33 B.C.]).
16. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 123. Willow Catkins Spring was Li Ch'ing-chao's home in Shantung. The name has associations with Hsieh Tao-yün, who was called a "willow catkins talent."
17. Ibid., p. 32. The circumstances of the remarriages of the two were different. Ts'ai Yen, who had been forced into her first marriage with a Hsiung-nu leader after being captured by "barbarians," married a Han Chinese after being released and returning to China.
18. Ibid., p. 20. Note the variation by Yeh Shen-hsiang (ibid., p. 99): "At her best, she does not surrender place to [i.e., is not in any way inferior to] Li Ch'ing-chao."
19. Ibid., p. 104.

> At her best, she is a match for Li Ch'ing-chao. Regrettably, no one knows about her.[20]
>
> Yüeh-lang tao-jen (Ch'ing dynasty)

Chou Ming (Ch'ing dynasty) compares Hsü Ts'an quite favorably with Li Ch'ing-chao:

> Hsü Ts'an is good at writing and well versed in both calligraphy and painting. In her *tz'u* she has succeeded in achieving a Northern Sung style, absolutely rejecting the habits of delicate complicatedness and frivolousness. Where she is stately, Li Ch'ing-chao should concede her position. Hsü Ts'an is the top-ranked one [female], and not only for this dynasty.[21]

And Li Ch'ing-chao is compared with both women and men *tz'u* writers by Ho Shang (fl. 1681):

> In *tz'u* writing, that which is difficult and beautiful is deemed well crafted, but in truth it does not approach the marvelousness of language of fundamental color [i.e., that which is true, basic, unadulterated, *pen-se*]. [One line each of the following five *tz'u* poets is then cited by way of example: Hsiao Shu-lan (dates uncertain), Wei fu-jen, Sun Kuang-hsien (d. 968), and Yen Jen (fl. 1200); the line cited for Li Ch'ing-chao is the third one in song lyric #46 (1962, p. 42; *CST*, p. 934), one of the poems whose attribution to her is doubtful.][22]

There is little premodern criticism by women regarding Li Ch'ing-chao, the following poem by Chang Hsien-ch'ing (late Ming dynasty) being exceptional:

> On Reading Li Ch'ing-chao's *Shu-yü chi*
> What talented woman has there been to compare with her?
> Polished jade and strung pearls—vessels well laden.
> As for "One more gracile than chrysanthemums,"[23]
> She is like a chrysanthemum at the end of autumn.[24]

Reference to a separate tradition of women's writing, one involving Li Ch'ing-chao, can perhaps be read into the following two statements, the first by Li P'an-lung (1514–70): "In terms of writing in a woman's voice [*hsieh ch'u fu-jen sheng-k'ou*], Li Ch'ing-chao, together with Chu

20. Ibid., p. 107.
21. Ibid., p. 90.
22. Ibid., p. 82. Note that the same lines are cited by T'ien T'ung-chih (Ch'ing dynasty), except that Wei fu-jen is omitted; ibid., p. 95.
23. Song lyric #18 (1962, p. 11; *CST*, p. 929).
24. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 64.

Shu-chen, dominates *tz'u* [literally, "dominates the flower of *tz'u*," *tz'u-hua*]."[25] And Chang Yen, who (as earlier noted) spoke of Chu Shu-chen's modeling herself on a line by Li Ch'ing-chao, added to that comment, "Could it be that there is a special secret [*hsin-fa*] that women pass on to each other?"[26] Li P'an-lung's comment can be taken to be a figure of speech, however, and Chang Yen's to be a rhetorical expression of praise. They do not constitute recognition of a separate tradition.

Criticism of women writers was generally not benign, as exemplified by the following comments of Tung Ku (fl. 1522):

> From the Han on, women capable of writing poetry and prose, like T'ang-shan fu-jen [a favorite concubine of Emperor Kao of the Han (r. 202–195 B.C.)] and Pan Chao, set down words to serve as moral instruction; their style being ancient and their learning correct, they were not easy to follow. Ts'ai Yen and Li Ch'ing-chao can be censured for having violated chastity [by having remarried].[27] Prostitutes like Hsüeh T'ao are not worthy of mention. Since Chu Shu-chen suffers from excess of sadness and disaffection, she too was not a good woman. And the wife of Tou T'ao [Chin dynasty] gave over to her emotions. Apart from these, there are not many to note.[28]

Ch'en Chi-ju (1558–1639) cites a woman who makes a statement that is construed as being a general criticism of a failing common to women *tz'u* writers:

> Meng Shu-ch'ing [fl. 1476] of Ts'ai-chou, the daughter of Assistant Instructor Meng Ch'eng, was skilled at writing poetry [*shih*]; her courtesy name was Ching-shan chü-shih. She once wrote a poem discussing Chu Shu-chen:
>
> > In writing poetry one must evolve from the embryo and transform one's temperament,[29]
> > Only when Buddhist priests' poetry is without the whiff of incense is its informing spirit [*ch'i*] fine.
>
> By the same token, it [Chu Shu-chen's writing, and that of women writers in general] should not have a powdered look to it. Chu Shu-chen did indeed suffer from the malady of commonness [vulgarity, *su*]. Li Ch'ing-chao could also be mentioned in this regard.[30]

More fundamentally critical is the following view expressed by a woman, one doubtless reflective of a more general societal attitude; it is related by Lu Yu (1125–1210): "When Sun fu-jen [Sun Tao-hsüan] was young, since she was quite bright, the wife of Chao Ming-ch'eng of Chien-k'ang, surnamed Li, who was famous for her writing [i.e., Li Ch'ing-chao], wished to instruct her. At the time the girl was only in her teens. But she declined, saying, 'Literature is not a proper pursuit for a woman.'"[31] Finally, a different critical standard operative for women is suggested by Hsü Ang-hsiao (Ch'ing dynasty): "In crafting this *tz'u* [i.e., song lyric #40; 1962, p. 31; *CST*, p. 932], Li Ch'ing-chao is original and graceful; but whereas each line is fine, a broader unity is lacking. Could it be that people of the past did not chastise her for it, excusing her because she was a woman?"[32]

Yet Li Ch'ing-chao is generally compared favorably not only with female authors but also with male ones. Yang Shen puts her on a par with Ch'in Kuan (1049–1100) and Huang T'ing-chien.[33] Wang Shyh-chen (1634–1711),[34] as well, speaks of Li Ch'ing-chao and Ch'in Kuan as being equally outstanding;[35] and he places her, together with Yen Shu (991–1055) (and/or Yen Chi-tao [11th cent.]), Ou-yang Hsiu, and Ch'in Kuan, as an exemplary author in his broader category of "literati *tz'u*" (*wen-jen chih tz'u*).[36] The *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu* editors pair her with different male authors: "Even though Li Ch'ing-chao was a woman, her poetic framework [*ko*] is lofty and refined.[37] She can justly be matched

25. Ibid., p. 38.
26. Ibid., p. 40.
27. Cf. the remarks of Lang Ying cited above.
28. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 40.
29. For discussion of the Huang T'ing-chien (1045–1105) expression, which this line is a variation of, see Adele Austin Rickett, "Method and Intuition: The Poetic Theories of Huang T'ing-chien," in *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*, ed. idem (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 109–15.
30. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, pp. 45–46. Note that the editors of this volume punctuate the text so as to make the final part of the citation all part of Meng Shu-ch'ing's poem, which does not work prosodically. Moreover, the final line could also be read, "Li Ch'ing-chao ought to have brought it up with her."
31. Ibid., p. 10. Compare the case of Han Yü-fu (12th cent.), a woman said by Lu Ch'ang to have studied with Li Ch'ing-chao; ibid., p. 104.
32. Ibid., p. 120.
33. Ibid., p. 35.
34. The romanization Wang Shyh-chen is used for the Ch'ing dynasty critic, and Wang Shih-chen for the Ming dynasty one (whose names would normally be romanized the same).
35. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 78.
36. Ibid.
37. Note the definition of the term *ko* made by Yoshikawa Kōjirō when explicating Kao Ch'i's (1336–74) use of it in his criticism: "*Ko* is the rhythmic feeling that derives from a poem's sound and meaning." *Five Hundred Years of Chinese Poetry, 1150–1650: The Chin, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties*, trans. John Timothy Wixted (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 113.

with Chou Pang-yen [1056–1121] and Liu Yung [987–1053]."[38] She is paired with Li Yü (937–78), albeit along clear gender lines, by Shen Ch'ien (1620–70): "Among males, Li Yü, and among females, Li Ch'ing-chao, are those who have ultimately captured the fundamental color [*pen-se*]."[39] Indeed, Li Ch'ing-chao is sometimes specifically spoken of as being superior to male authors:

> Among young ladies of the Sung, Li Ch'ing-chao stands out as a writer in her own right, one not inferior to Ch'in Kuan and Huang T'ing-chien. Not a single *tz'u* composition by her is poorly crafted. Where her writing is well tempered, she may wrest position from Wu Wen-ying [ca. 1200–ca. 1260], and regarding beauty of language she deserves to be classed with Lü T'ien-ju [Ming dynasty]. Not only does she look out over womankind, she also overwhelms the male world.[40]

Li Ch'ing-chao also influenced later men writers, Hsin Ch'i-chi (1140–1207) most obviously, but also Chu Tun-ju (1080/81–ca. 1175) and others.[41] However, her work simply becomes part of the ocean of material that later writers draw on.[42] Its language is not marked as female language. The male authors Li Ch'ing-chao is compared with

38. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 98.

39. Ibid., p. 69. For explication of the "fundamental color," see the Ho Shang citation above.

40. Ibid., p. 97; Li T'iao-yüan (fl. 1778). Yang Shen (1488–1559) finds a poem of hers better than one by Chou Pang-yen to the same tune; ibid., p. 33. (Yang Shen's attribution is wrong; the poem is in fact by Ch'in Kuan and not Chou Pang-yen. But his intended comparison of the two poets still holds.)

41. See the comments by Yang Shen and Hsü Shih-chün (fl. 1636) in ibid., pp. 35 and 61. For a poem by Hsin Ch'i-chi written "In Imitation of the Style of Li Ch'ing-chao," see ibid., p. 13. Hsin Ch'i-chi's use of Li Ch'ing-chao as a model seems to have created some anxiety in his admirers; Hu Ying-lin (1551–1602) felt prompted to write in Hsin's defense: "Hsin Ch'i-chi and Li Ch'ing-chao both took part in the general move south, the one not long after the other. Besides, both of them were crafters of *tz'u*. How can one say that Hsin robbed from [*p'iao*] Li?" (ibid., p. 43). (For pre-Sung passages criticizing plagiarism, including one by Han Yü [768–824] in which *p'iao* is used, see John Timothy Wixted, *Poems on Poetry: Literary Criticism by Yuan Hao-wen [1190–1257]*, [Calligraphy by Eugenia Y. Tu], Münchener ostasiatische Studien, no. 33 [Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982], pp. 302–3.)

Note also that Sung Lo (1634–1713) is quoted by Hsü Ch'iu (1636–1708) as saying that a *tz'u* to the tune "I-chien mei" by Tung I-ning (fl. 1666) is "extremely similar to [*k'u-ssu*]" Li Ch'ing-chao's song lyric #25 (1962, p. 16; *CST*, p. 928); *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 88.

42. The only exception to this I have noted concerns Shen Ch'ien (1620–70), who says that when young, he did not dare to write a poem following Li Ch'ing-chao's "Sheng-sheng man" (song lyric #40; 1962, p. 31; *CST*, p. 932) "for fear of being laughed at by women"; *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 69.

(or whom she is said to influence) are all *tz'u* writers; this is understandable, since it was her *tz'u* poetry that was exceptional. Still, inasmuch as the song lyric as a genre remained suspect, it is less surprising that a woman became viewed as one of its great practitioners.

In sum, Li Ch'ing-chao's poetry draws little on the writings of earlier women; nor do later women writers especially emulate her actual writing, even though many of the female authors who pre- and postdate her (regardless of the genre they were writing in) are retrospectively grouped together with her by later critics in the implicit class of "woman writer," for which Li Ch'ing-chao becomes the standard. From the material that is extant, there seems little evidence for a separate female literary tradition in China until the late imperial period, in terms of either lineation or language. Female authors are looked upon negatively by some critics; but Li Ch'ing-chao is compared favorably by other critics with the greatest *tz'u* poets, her work being acknowledged as having served as a model for male authors.

The preponderance of criticism concerning Li Ch'ing-chao's writing has been positive. It is instructive, however, to look at the comments that are negative to see to what extent her being a female is injected into the discussion.[43] The earliest such comments come from Wang Cho (fl. 1162):

> Li Ch'ing-chao wrote "long and short lines" (*tz'u*), molding them so intricately to suit her will. They are light, skillful, sharp and original, with infinite moods and postures. The fantastically vulgar expressions of the back alleys and streets, whatever suited her mood, she would write down in her poetry. Since time immemorial among the lettered women of cultured families there had never been one so completely defiant of convention as Li Ch'ing-chao.[44]

Wei Chung-kung (Sung dynasty), commenting on Hua-jui fu-jen and Li Ch'ing-chao, states, "It has been said, the writing of exquisite lines definitely is not for women. Hua-jui fu-jen of Shu and Li Ch'ing-chao of recent times are especially famous. Each has *tz'u* and *yüeh-fu* that circulate in the world. But those that everyone likes and knows number only

43. Negative comments by Tung Ku and Hsü Ang-hsiao have been noted above.

44. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, pp. 4–5. Translation by Hsu Kai-yu, "The Poems of Li Ch'ing-chao (1084–1141)," *PMLA* 77 (1962):525. Cf. the translation of the latter part of the passage by Chung Ling: "She uses openly the lewd language of the streets. Since ancient times I have never known a woman writer from the gentry who was as shameless as she is." "Li Qingzhao: The Moulding of Her Spirit and Personality," in *Women and Literature in China*, ed. Anna Gerstlacher et al., p. 150.

one or two. They are not all fine."[45] Yang Wei-chen (1296–1370) makes a group out of Pan Chao, Li Ch'ing-chao, and Chu Shu-chen. They each may have a single poem or a single letter that moves people, he says; "But since they issue from a limited view and constricted intelligence, and are hampered by lowness of spirit and habit [i.e., are not cultivated], they do not accord with what is correct in individual temperament and feeling."[46] The remarks of P'ei Ch'ang (Ch'ing dynasty) are the most critical ones in *ad hominem* terms: "Li Ch'ing-chao, being very self-assured about her talent, looked down on everything. Her poetry is scarcely worth preserving. However, that a woman should be so outspoken [hyper-literally, 'should open such a big mouth,' *neng k'ai tz'u ta-k'ou*]—this is presumptuousness that need not be questioned and folly that is unequaled."[47] Finally, Chou Chih-ch'i (1782–1862), citing two earlier critics who praised Li Ch'ing-chao for her "Sheng-sheng man" poem (song lyric #40; 1962, p. 31; *CST*, p. 932), states, "Only Hsü Kao-lu [dates uncertain] of Hai-yen notes that she displays a considerable amount of vulgarity [*ts'ang-ch'i*] [in the piece]. He can be called a discerning critic."[48] Although there is a fair amount of additional negative comment about song lyric #40,[49] most criticism about the "lowness" or "vulgarity" of her writing seems to have been prompted by lines in only three of Li Ch'ing-chao's poems,[50] all of which are of questionable attribution. As some of the above quotations illustrate, not all of the negative comments about Li Ch'ing-chao make reference to her being a woman.

Many of the male writers and critics who comment on Li Ch'ing-chao's writing evince surprise that such good writing could come from a woman. They comment on how difficult it was for a woman to manage such an achievement:

> Such expression is hard for a woman to accomplish.[51]
> Hu Tzu (fl. 1147), in reference to song lyric #18 (1962, p. 11; *CST*, p. 929)

> To think that a woman can be as originally creative as this![52]
> Lo Ta-ching (fl. 1224), in reference to song lyric #40 (1962, p. 31; *CST*, p. 932)

45. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 17.
46. Ibid., p. 26.
47. Ibid., p. 87.
48. Ibid., p. 101.
49. E.g., by Hsü Ang-hsiao, as cited in ibid., p. 121.
50. Song lyrics #45, #46, and #48 (1962, pp. 42, 42, and 43; not in *CST*).
51. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 6.
52. Ibid., p. 21.

> That such creativity could come from a woman—how exceptional![53]
> Shen Chi-fei (Ming dynasty), in reference to the phrase cited in the next quotation

> Who would have expected that these four words, "[the] green [is] fat, [the] red thin," are those of a woman?
> Yüeh-lang tao-jen, in reference to song lyric #2 (1962, p. 1; *CST*, p. 927)

Such comments are not limited to Li Ch'ing-chao's *tz'u*. Indeed, it is in reference to the following *shih* poem by Li Ch'ing-chao, which had contemporary political implications, that Chu Hsi (1130–1200) writes in a combination of surprise and admiration, "Such expressions—how could they be written by a woman!"[54]

On History

The two Hans succeeded one another as one dynasty;
The new House [of Wang Mang (r. A.D. 9–27)] was like an excrescence.
It is for this reason that Hsi K'ang
Until his death denigrated the Yin and Chou.[55]

Good *shih* poems by women on political topics, if anything, evince greater surprise and admiration than do *tz'u* poems. As one scholar has noted: "If we consider the aesthetic function of literature written by Chinese women and that of literature written by Chinese men, we see that the former was not meant to have a wider sphere of impact than was [*sic*] the environment of its origin (family soro[r]ities, courtesans' circles and their friends), while the aesthetic function of the latter was intended to have a wide field of activity, to affect, if possible, the entire intellectual sphere of Chinese society."[56] Hsü Po-ling (late Ming dy-

53. Ibid., p. 46.
54. Ibid., p. 12. Chu Hsi (ibid.) also spoke of Li Ch'ing-chao as "one of only two literate [*neng-wen*] women of the dynasty," the other being Wei fu-jen, the wife of the prime minister Tseng Pu (1035–1107). This latter statement by Chu Hsi is a reformulation of the words by Chung Hung (469–518) in the *Shih-p'in*: "Li Ling [d. 74 B.C.] and Pan chieh-yü together spanned roughly a century; but discounting the woman, there was only one poet for the period." Ch'en Yen-chieh, *Shih-p'in chu* (1927 rpt., Taipei: K'ai-ming shu-chü, 1960), p. 2.
55. #S-10, p. 66. The precarious situation of the Sung vis-à-vis the Chin is said to be similar to the one Hsi K'ang (223–62) found himself in regarding the possible founding of a new dynasty; he criticized even the Yin and Chou for displacing, respectively, the Hsia and Yin dynasties.

Note additional translations of the poem by Liang Paitchin, *Oeuvres poétiques complètes de Li Qingzhao* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), p. 110; and Kenneth Rexroth and Chung Ling, *Li Ch'ing-chao: Complete Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1979), p. 66.
56. Marián Galik, "On the Literature Written by Chinese Women prior to 1917," *Asian and African Studies* (Bratislava) 15 (1979): 70.

nasty), speaking of the above poem, also states in befuddled admiration, "A woman could not write this!"[57] Two other *shih* poems by Li Ch'ing-chao written to match the rhymes of a composition by Chang Lei (1054–1114) elicit similar comments:[58] "That a woman should be placed among these authors [i.e., contemporary Sung poets who wrote *shih* on the same topic]—unless a person [i.e., Li Ch'ing-chao] has really profound thought, would that be at all possible" (from the *Ch'ing-po tsa-chih*, as cited by Wang Shyh-chen);[59] also, "Although the two poems are not fine pieces, it was no simple matter that they issued from a woman's hand; need one mention her truly exceptional works [i.e., her *tz'u* pieces]? Therefore, I have recorded them" (Wang Shyh-chen).[60]

As citations in the above sections suggest, Li Ch'ing-chao is seldom spoken of in premodern times in the way that most modern critics favor, as being quintessentially expressive of female sensitivity.[61] Yet one might legitimately ask about any corpus of material by a woman author: if read without authorial attribution by a reader versed in the tradition of the genre (something of an oxymoron), would the text be identified as being by a woman?[62] (And conversely, in how many instances would the writings of male authors, if read without attribution by such a reader, be taken to be written by women and to be expressive of a separate female consciousness?) Regardless of whether such a consciousness or sensitivity exists (and if it exists, whether it is limited to

57. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 63.

58. #S-4, p. 63, and #S-5, p. 63. They were prompted by the recent discovery of an eighth-century monument celebrating the restoration of the T'ang court after the An Lu-shan Rebellion.

59. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 78.

60. Ibid., p. 76. Note the similar comments by Ch'en Hsi-lu (Ch'ing dynasty) about the *shih* fragment by Li Ch'ing-chao (#F-4, p. 69); *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 92. The same sort of comment can be found in reference to her famous postface to the *Chin-shih lu*: "In this piece, the expression of feeling is fine and exquisite; it does not at all seem to be expression emitting from a woman. The writing is truly delightful!" Chu Ta-shao (Ming dynasty), as cited in *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 42.

61. The examples among present-day writing on the poet, including Western-language discussion, are legion. For example, in a footnote appended to his translation of song lyric #56 (1962, p. 49; not in *CST*), James J. Y. Liu states: "This poem has also been attributed to Chou Pang-yen, but I am inclined to assign it to the poetess Li Ch'ing-chao, as the sentiments and sensibility seem particularly feminine." *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 51 n. 1.

62. Cf. the comment by Chung Ling concerning Li Ch'ing-chao's *shih* poetry: "In other words, a reader, versed in classical poetry, would have taken her *shi[h]* poems to have been written by a man, unless he was aware of the authorship." "Li Qingzhao: The Moulding," p. 159.

women, or whether all women necessarily have it), one item is clear: historically, most readers' expectations of Li Ch'ing-chao's work have been different precisely because it is identified as being by a woman.

Many *tz'u* by male authors have been praised for the understanding they are said to reveal of female psychology. Most such *tz'u*, as feminist critics would probably point out, tell us not of how women think or feel, but of how such male authors perceive women: how they think, or fancy, or would have it, that women think and feel.

The problem here is partly one of the genre and its conventional themes concerning women. What makes Li Ch'ing-chao different is that, as a woman, her writing is taken to be autobiographical in a more direct way than *tz'u* by male authors, specifically those written in the personas of women, possibly can be. In a word, Li Ch'ing-chao's *tz'u* are, in large measure, read as if they were *shih*: that is, as being revelatory of an experienced world. With only one exception I have noted so far, none of Li Ch'ing-chao's commentators even considers the possibility that the persona in any of her poems is fictive. That one exception, the critic Wang Fan, has written perceptively about many of Li Ch'ing-chao's *tz'u*, pointing out, for example, the two types of woman found, respectively, in song lyrics #3 (1962, p. 2; *CST*, p. 932) and #45 (1962, p. 42), both to the tune "Tien chiang ch'un":[63] the former represents the more helpless, listless sort of woman found in many *Hua-chien chi* poems; the latter presents a more spirited, playful, and seductive type of woman.[64] (There is nothing, of course, to preclude the autobiographical critic from finding different aspects of the poet's personality reflected in such different verses.)[65] The question highlights the porousness of the boundary between *shih* and *tz'u*, the latter having genre conventions that must have made authors, female as well as male, write in fictive guises. There has, of course, always been a thrust to read male authors' biographies into their *tz'u* poems as well: consider, for example, the supposed addressee of Wei Chuang's (836–910) "Yeh-chin men" *tz'u*,[66] the political (and other) circumstances read back into Li Yü's poems,[67] and

63. Wang Fan, *Li Ch'ing-chao yen-chiu ts'ung-kao* (Huhehot: Nei-Meng-ku jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1987), pp. 119–24.

64. There is the question of the reliability of the attribution of the latter poem to Li Ch'ing-chao.

65. And this is precisely what Wang Fan does in the majority of cases.

66. Song lyrics #23 and #24 (as numbered in John Timothy Wixted, *The Song-Poetry of Wei Chuang [836–910 A.D.]* [Calligraphy by Eugenia Y. Tu], Occasional Paper no. 12 [Tempe: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1979], pp. 64–67). She was said to be the poet's concubine, later appropriated by the ruler Wang Chien (r. 907–25).

67. Note Daniel Bryant's fun parody of the circularity inherent in this kind of ex-

the question of which female entertainers in Liu Yung's life are said to have inspired which poems.[68]

The received view concerning Li Ch'ing-chao's domestic life is that she and her husband were ideally suited to each other, sharing antiquarian interests. The earliest instance I find of their being portrayed as the ideal conjugal couple—in the comments of Lang Ying—however, dates from nearly four centuries after the two lived.[69] And the source for the view, Li Ch'ing-chao's postface to the *Chin-shih lu*, was written in 1134, five years after her husband had died and thirty years after the idyllic incidents it describes; also, the piece itself contains a strong countercurrent of suppressed discontent with the marriage as it evolved, reflected in the way Li Ch'ing-chao tells of her husband's developing mania for

plication; with slight modification it could well describe how Li Ch'ing-chao's poems are categorized and treated as biographical data.

Li Yü's lyrics can be divided into three (sometimes it is two, or even four) groups on the basis of their content, and these groups correspond to the major divisions of his life. That is, there are, to begin with, the carefree and exuberant poems of his youth, before he came to the throne, in which he celebrates the luxurious and unrestrained life that he enjoyed as a pampered prince. Then, there are the sadder poems of his middle period, when he was beset by the cares of state and afflicted by the successive deaths of his son, wife, and mother. Finally, there are the great lyrics of his last years in captivity, in which he pours out his homesickness and remorse. Of course we know that he was happy in his youth, for example, because we have those carefree and exuberant poems that he must have written then because that was when he was so carefree and exuberant, as the poems show . . . *Lyric Poets of the Southern T'ang: Feng Yen-ssu, 903–960, and Li Yü, 937–978* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), p. xxviii.

68. As James R. Hightower notes:

There is little excuse for reading most of his songs as autobiographical, but no need to deny their author's familiarity with the milieu that is their setting. . . . It can be assumed that his songs were written to be sung by professional entertainers, and after them by their hearers, as were most *tz'u* before Su Shih; they were not primarily a vehicle for the expression of the poet's private feelings. This means that it is more appropriate to deal with this corpus of song words directly, without continually appealing back to the person of the poet and his presumed circumstances. "The Songwriter Liu Yung," pt. 1, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41 (1981): 340–41.

69. Note also the reference to their happy marriage by Fu Chao-lun (Ch'ing dynasty); *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 142. Ting Shao-i (Ch'ing dynasty), however, looks at five marriages involving literary women and finds only one of them (not Li Ch'ing-chao's) ideal: "Good marriages like this [between Chao Te-lin and Wang fu-jen]—why is heaven so stingy about them?"; ibid., p. 129.

collecting artifacts.[70] If an autobiographical reading of her poems is maintained, she was clearly also unhappy when married.[71] One might also ask, if she and Chao Ming-ch'eng were such the loving couple, why was he so insensitive to her feelings of loss when he went away for extended periods to collect rubbings (a loss taken to be expressed in the poems she is said to have written at such times)? Furthermore, there is the story about song lyric #18 (1962, p. 11; *CST*, p. 929), the one with the famous lines: "How undeniably heartrending! / When the west wind stirs the blinds— / One more gracile than chrysanthemums." Chao Ming-ch'eng is said to have shut himself away to write fifty poems trying to match hers; when he presented his work mixed with hers to a friend to read, he was told that only three lines were exceptional: the ones by her, quoted above. If there is any basis to the story, one might find reflected in the incident additional pressures in their marriage.[72] Finally, reference to the difficulties members of her family are said to have had because she was their relative cannot be ascribed wholly to misogyny; Yeh Sheng (1420–74) says, "Wen-shu [her father] had the misfortune to have her as a daughter, and Te-fu [her husband] had the misfortune to have her as a wife."[73]

It is noteworthy that there is no reference in the poet's writing to the fact that she and her husband had no children. It is even more remarkable that none of her critics or commentators draws any conclusions from it: none criticizes her for it, in the few cases where it is noted,[74] in relation either to her marriage in general or to her roles of wife and potential mother.

The supposed remarriage of the poet is a different matter. Much ink has been spilled trying to deny that this apparently disastrous union took place.[75] Presumably, the remarriage of a widow carried little

70. Stephen Owen has written perceptively on this point; "The Sources of Memory," chapter 5 of *Remembrances: The Experience of the Past in Classical Chinese Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 80–98.

71. The modern critics Ch'eng Ch'ien-fan and Hsü Yu-fu note that even though she was most compatible with Chao Ming-ch'eng, there must have been a void in her life that she needed to fill; *Li Ch'ing-chao* (Kiangsu: Chiang-su jen-min ch'u-pan-she, 1982), p. 10.

72. The incident is recounted by I Shih-chen (early Ming dynasty), as cited in *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 28.

73. Ibid., p. 31. The comment is dismissed by Chang Yen (Ming dynasty) as being unworthy of mention; ibid., p. 40.

74. E.g., Chai Ch'i-nien (Southern Sung dynasty), as cited in ibid., p. 25.

75. There is an entire volume of reprinted essays devoted to the topic: Chu Ch'uan-yü, ed., *Li Ch'ing-chao kai-chia wen-t'i* (Taipei: T'ien-i ch'u-pan-she, 1982).

stigma at the time;[76] it is later critics who, applying their contemporary standards, were scandalized at the possibility that such a famous figure (by definition a good woman who could not have done such a thing) not only remarried but also divorced,[77] and they took pains to deny it.

As for the question in what sense if any might Li Ch'ing-chao be viewed, albeit anachronistically, as being a feminist, it is to the circumstances of her life and to both her *shih* poetry and prose writing that one must turn, not to her *tz'u*. She is famous for the lines addressed to her father-in-law, the New Laws–faction prime minister, requesting that her father, a conservative critic, be spared the current purge of anti–New Laws officials:

> Under the burning hand of authority, the heart turns cold;
> How much greater, the feelings of a daughter for her father.[78]

Although Li Ch'ing-chao's appeal proved of no avail, her lines do reveal an independence of spirit and a willingness to challenge authority both within the family circle and beyond it. Although only seventeen *shih* poems by her are extant,[79] many can be read to have direct political significance. It is through them that we know her hawkish views encouraging non-appeasement of the Chin. A couplet from one of these poems is revealing about the poet as woman, as a woman in society, and as a woman of affairs. It appears in one of two poems dedicated to important officials, old family acquaintances who are about to set off north as legates to sue for peace with the Chin:

> What do I, a widow living in humble circumstances, know?
> But it is with a missive written in an oath of blood that I beseech you.[80]

76. Ann Waltner, citing a 1980 unpublished paper by Patricia Ebrey, "Widows and the Structure of Society during the Sung," summarizes its findings as follows: "While remarriage was not seen as the preferred course of action for widows during the Sung, neither was it discouraged very strongly." "Widows and Remarriage in Ming and Early Qing China," in *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, ed. Richard W. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen (Youngstown, N.Y.: Philo Press, 1981), p. 129 n. 3.

77. Note the comments by Lang Ying and Tung Ku above.

78. These lines are poetic fragments (#F-1, p. 68, and #F-2, p. 68), taken by some critics to be from the same poem. The first is always cited in the context noted.

79. Nineteen by the count of some scholars, who split #S-7, p. 65, and #S-14, p. 67, into two; e.g., Wang Yen-t'i, *Shu-yü-chi chu* (Shantung: Shan-tung wen-i ch'u-pan-she, 1984), pp. 71–97.

80. #S-7, p. 65. "I beseech you" is a tentative rendering. The poem is translated by Liang Paitchin, *Oeuvres poétiques*, pp. 127–30; and by Rexroth and Chung, *Li Ch'ing-chao*, pp. 62–65.

The poet as woman is inscribed in the text. Is she here literally abasing herself as a woman? (Doubtful.) Is Li Ch'ing-chao simply employing a variation of the self-deprecatory language one might find in any such poem of political comment and implied exhortation? (Yes; but women would have an additional pool of such terms to draw on, to fit the expectations of potential readers and the more immediate male addressees of the poems.) There is the further possibility that, as with all such language of self-effacement, the expression is really an inverted expression of pride (of the sort, "I'm just a Hoosier, but . . ."), which can serve to gull those foolish enough to think less of the speaker because of the role being donned. (This is surely also the case here, given the forcefulness of the rest of the poem.) In view of the political advice offered later in the poem, the writer is also laying the rhetorical groundwork for that self-assertion.

Other non-*tz'u* writings by Li Ch'ing-chao also reveal her to be a strong-willed person. As a critic, she expresses independent judgment, presuming to point out the shortcomings of many famous male predecessors in the genre, including Liu Yung, Su Shih (1037–1101), Ch'in Kuan, and Huang T'ing-chien.[81] Additionally, her rhymeprose "Ta-ma fu" is more than a piece describing a gambling game; as Liang Paitchin notes, "Dans ce long poème, l'amour du jeu se fond avec celui de la patrie en péril. Personnages, événements, batailles: tout est évoqué pour faire sentir un coeur palpitant de révolte et d'indignation; tout est soutenu et animé par une pensée impérieuse dont l'inspiration est profonde, et la marche, rapide."[82] Even Li Ch'ing-chao's postface to the *Chin-shih lu* inspires praise for its presumed no-nonsense approach.[83]

81. As summarized by one modern scholar: "She was a keen literary critic, expressing appreciation of the contribution of Liu Yung to rhyme and rhythm but disapproving of his vulgarity, admiring the genius of Su Shih while noting the erratic strain in his compositions. She remarked that Ch'in Kuan stressed affectivity at the expense of daily realities of life, while Huang T'ing-chien emphasised these realities but made mistakes of composition." Julia Ching, "Li Ch'ing-chao," *Sung Biographies*, ed. Herbert Franke, Münchener ostasiatische Studien, no. 16 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976), 2:538.

82. Liang Paitchin, *Oeuvres poétiques*, p. 35; the *fu* is translated in ibid., pp. 143–48, as "Le Jeu de petits chevaux." In English translation, the quotation reads: "In this long poem, love of the game is found together with that of the fatherland in peril. Personages, events, battles: all is evoked to make felt a heart beating in revolt and indignation; all is sustained and animated by an imperious thought, the inspiration for which is profound, the pace rapid."

83. Mao Chin (1599–1659) (as cited in *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 59) argues: "At the end [of the *Shu-yü chi*] there is the postface to the *Chin-shih lu*, where one can glimpse the marvelousness of her prose. She was not only more stalwart than other gifted young

In sum, without the material available to us from these other sources, we would be hard-pressed to make out from Li Ch'ing-chao's *tz'u* alone the substantial figure she must have been.

The questions addressed above that most intersect with current issues in Western feminist literary theory concern whether there is a separate female literary tradition in China and whether there is a separate and universal female consciousness that is manifested in women's writing.[84]

Western feminist critics are divided on the latter question. Some argue for "an identifiable, homogeneous, 'essential' female consciousness, literary tradition, or style."[85] Others argue against a distinct female sensitivity, biology, or realm.[86] (The problem with both approaches is that they start with *a priori* notions that, more often than not, fit the arguer's agenda for what is deemed desirable social change in the world of today. Seldom is either more than an assertion.) There is little in premodern Chinese writing by women to argue a case for a universal separate female consciousness.

As for the question of whether there is a separate female literary tradition in China, generalizations about the early *shih* tradition are difficult to make.[87] Nonetheless, as noted earlier, one would be hard-

women of her generation, she also straightforwardly wiped clean the stench of assorted Confucianists after the general move south; she returned upstream to the Wei and Chin."

84. Quite useful for their summaries of recent Western scholarship on feminist literary theory are Vincent B. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism from the Thirties to the Eighties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); and K. K. Ruthven, *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

85. Leitch, *American Literary Criticism*, p. 312 (referring to Patricia Meyer Spacks and others); see also p. 314. The image of the madwoman comes under this category. Found by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Grubar to be embodied in numerous nineteenth-century fictional characters, the figure "is usually in some sense the *author's* double, an image of her own" (*The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979], p. 78). The madwoman figure, especially in its "angel" manifestations, must be viewed as being culture-bound to the West. The madwoman is simply a variation (albeit a pernicious one) of the demonic image in the West of the poet as the maker, the one breathed into by gods (or muses), the possessed, and above all, the creator or demigod. There is no such tradition in premodern China, where all writing is viewed as being a patterning reflective and revelatory of a self-generating cosmos.

86. See Leitch, *American Literary Criticism*, pp. 312–13 and 324.

87. "The lack of adequate archival sources for medieval women's writings raises a serious doubt about our ability to generalize concerning women's literary culture in earlier China. Even the works of prominent and prolific women associated with the imperial

pressed to argue for a separate women's literary style in China, certainly in reference to the *tz'u* of Li Ch'ing-chao and other Sung female writers in the genre. Nor does there seem to be a tradition of sororal emulation of Li Ch'ing-chao among *tz'u* writers who postdate her.[88]

This is not to deny, as noted earlier, that women's writing has often been labeled and read by many male Chinese readers and critics as being different. Given the "alterity" that this labeling effects in women's writing, what is surprising in the Chinese tradition is how seriously the work of a Li Ch'ing-chao has been taken over the centuries. Apart from the likelihood that the very excellence of her writings compelled their being appreciated, two paradigms may be operative here other than the one of male versus female. One has already been mentioned: *tz'u* poetry itself is represented in the Chinese literary tradition as being something of the "distaff side" of *shih* poetry.[89] It may have been more acceptable to find a woman supreme in this "other" (and, on the whole, lesser) realm than in the world of *shih*. In this regard, however, it is striking to find Li Ch'ing-chao portrayed as the "great patriarch" of the genre. Beginning at the end of the Ming dynasty, the poet seems virtually to have been brought under the category of male author by many critics, given some of the more global labels attached to her. Thus, Wang Shih-chen (1526–90) calls her the "true [correct, standard] patriarch [*cheng-tsung*] of *tz'u*." (The same term is also applied to her by Hsü Shih-chün, who makes Hsin Ch'i-chi the "auxiliary patriarch" [*p'ang-tsung*] of the genre: "Besides these two, no one else occupies these positions.") Li Ch'ing-

court have been lost, except for a handful of pieces in a few instances. The tiny amount of extant poetry by gentry women that survives makes the study of their literary culture and the affinities of their poetry with both the Six Dynasties models and T'ang literati poetry particularly difficult, while the slightly better preservation of the works of courtesans, entertainers, and Taoist women may create a misleading profile for this period." Maureen Robertson, "Voicing the Feminine," p. 18.

88. One scholar has noted that women in seventeenth-century Kiangnan "formed a loose literary network, exchanged correspondence and encouraged one another's endeavors." Ellen Widmer, "The Epistolary World of Female Talent in Seventeenth-Century China," *Late Imperial China* 10, no. 2 (Dec. 1989): 2. Note also the discussions in this volume by Kang-i Sun Chang on Liu Shih (1618–64) and by Grace S. Fong on Ku T'ai-ch'ing (1799–1870s).

Compare the categorical assertion by Paul W. Kroll: "There *was* no discernible Chinese tradition of literature written either by or for women" (emphasis in original); ". . . Fair and Yet Not Fond," a review article of *Brocade River Poems: Selected Works of the Tang Dynasty Courtesan Xue Tao*, ed. and trans. Jeanne Larsen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108 (1988): 623.

89. Note the references to this in the chapters by Grace Fong and Pauline Yu in this volume.

chao is "the great patriarch [*ta-tsung*]" of *tz'u* both in the *Chi-nan fu-chih* and in the writings of Chou Lo (Ch'ing dynasty), and she is "a great patriarch" (*i ta-tsung*) of the genre for editors of the *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu chien-ming mu-lu*, as well as for Wu Ch'ung-yao (1810–63). Feng Chin-po (Ch'ing dynasty) makes Ch'in Kuan and Li Ch'ing-chao the "patriarchs" (*tsung*) of *tz'u*. And Liang Shao-jen (b. 1792) even makes her the "patriarch of Northern Sung *tz'u*."[90] Granted, the term *tsung* in such usage is largely metaphorical. It is nonetheless ironic, given the strongly pejorative tone with which the term "patriarchy" has been used in current Western feminist discourse.

Another paradigm probably operative is that of the culture and society of Han Chinese versus anything that does not approach the society wholly in its own dominant culturalist terms. The acceptance of writings by sinicized authors of non-Chinese origins—Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai (1189–1243), Kuan Yün-shih (1286–1324), and Na-lan Hsing-te (1655–85)—may provide a parallel typology. The writing of each of these "foreigners" has always been marked as being by an "other." But as long as that "other" fully accepts dominant Han Chinese cultural values, he or she can to a greater or lesser degree become an "inside outsider." Put in feminist terms, Li Ch'ing-chao for the most part accepts (or at least does not question in a threatening way) the dominant societal values of her time;[91] and this probably helped allow for the

90. *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, pp. 41, 60, 132, 133, 98, 137, 124, and 122. An image strikingly exceptional to those just cited is the one employed by Sung Ssu-ching (Ch'ing dynasty). In his preface to *Li-tai ming-yüan shih-tz'u* (An anthology of poetry by famous ladies through the dynasties), he refers to three earlier female writers, characterizing them in masculine terms, and then adds to the list "Li Ch'ing-chao, the high priestess [*ta-wu*] of the Chao-ruled Sung" (*LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 104).

91. In one of her *shih* poems, Li Ch'ing-chao does express the view, "May the Empress have many, many *sons* [*nan*]!" (#S-15, p. 68; cf. the translations by Liang Paitchin, *Oeuvres poétiques*, p. 113; and Rexroth and Chung, *Li Ch'ing-chao*, p. 68). This could be interpreted as a conventional wish, but one arguably also reflective of the poet's "victimization" by current societal values. (The role and status of the empress, however, may make for something of a special case here. Also, the verse was part of a group of poems that Li Ch'ing-chao wrote on behalf of a relative.)

Julia Kristeva (after citing a passage in the "Ta-ma fu," using the Liang Paitchin translation) summarizes her thoughts on Li Ch'ing-chao:

> An identification with men, an insistence on the values of the *literati*, a fascination with power and success: So be it. But there is also in Li Qingzhao a reminder of the political power of the (astonishingly accurate) written word, a defence of personal initiative against all orders. And all this in a musical, precise, and economical language that no translation can hope to reproduce. Li Qingzhao is the perfect example of the kind of excellence a woman can achieve on the condition that she

possibility that she be accepted as the superb practitioner of *tz'u* that she both was and, for the most part, was appreciated as being. She is still a "woman poet" for many, just as Na-lan Hsing-te is a "Manchu" one.[92]

> cease to live as a woman. *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), p. 93.

In looking for female feminist writers in China, it is useful to note the quasi-parallel provided by British women novelists writing from 1840 to the present. Elaine Showalter in her study of such authors, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), posits three periods—as summarized by Leitch, *American Literary Criticism*, pp. 312–13:

> The initial "Feminine phase," from 1840 to 1880, involved imitation by women novelists of the dominant tradition and internalization of its literary and social standards. The second "Feminist phase," from 1880 to 1920, entailed protest against prevailing modes and advocacy of minority values and rights. The final "Female phase," from 1920 onward, evidenced a turning inward in search of identity and a relaxation of dependency on opposition.

We may see some analogy in the work of Li Ch'ing-chao and other premodern women poets who imbue themselves with the dominant tradition and internalize its literary and social standards. Apart from exceptional comments such as the one by Yü Hsüan-chi regretting that, not being a male, she cannot take the civil service examinations,* protest by women writers does not occur until the late imperial period, becoming more pronounced in modern times with the introduction of Ibsen's Nora onto the scene (see Vera Schwarcz, "Ibsen's Nora: The Promise and the Trap," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 7.1 [Jan.–Mar. 1975]: 3–5). Showalter's third "Female phase" probably also then starts almost simultaneously, all three phases being in evidence at the same time in the twentieth century.

**Ch'üan T'ang shih* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1960), 804.9050; as translated by Jan Wilson Walls, "The Poetry of Yü Hsüan-chi: A Translation, Annotation, Commentary and Critique" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1972), p. 174:

> I resent the silken gown
> that subdues my poetry
> as I look up and envy in vain
> the names on the Honor Roll.

Yü Hsüan-chi is also famous for her lament, "A priceless treasure is easy to seek / but a man with a heart is hard to find." *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, 804.9047; translation by Walls, "The Poetry of Yü Hsüan-chi," p. 87.

Note also that in the *Fan-hua meng* by the woman writer Wang Yün (dates uncertain), "[t]he author precedes the play with a *tz'u* poem in which she clearly expresses her regret that unlike men, she cannot have a good career of her own." Sharon Shih-jiuan Hou, "Women's Literature," in *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. William H. Nienhauser, Jr., p. 192. (This article must be used with care. Note the many corrections provided by David R. Knechtges and Chang Taiping, "Notes on a Recent Handbook for Chinese Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 [1987]: 296–97.)

92. Along the same lines, it is no accident that Ch'ien Ch'ien-i's (1582–1664) mam-

The work in contemporary Western criticism perhaps most useful for examining *tz'u* in general, even more than the specific writings of Li Ch'ing-chao, is Lawrence Lipking's *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition.* One can argue that the figure of the abandoned woman (so central for Lipking), which in *shih* poetry can be traced back to the famous poem attributed to Pan chieh-yü about her fan (a symbol of her rejection), is *the* major topos of early *tz'u*. Much of the *Hua-chien chi* is simply a variation on the theme.[93] Although the topic is never *not* to be found in the corpus of any major *tz'u* writer, much of the development of the genre in Sung times can be traced in terms of its becoming only one of several topoi employed. *Tz'u* by Li Ch'ing-chao and Chu Shu-chen have traditionally had a special impact on readers because the authors, being women, are presumed to have been writing directly from their own experiences as "abandoned women."[94] Poems on the theme of the abandoned or jilted male—found especially in *tz'u* by Liu Yung, but also ambiguously present in many other *tz'u*, for example in those by Wei Chuang—although expressed with considerable feeling, do not engender the empathy that the writings by these women do, nor even the affect of poems written by men about abandoned women (other than the more conventional ones). There is, of course, an implied social dimension to all such readings. As the settings make clear, the women in such poems are literally cooped up or otherwise socially constrained; the men, even when heartbroken, are still free to move about in society. The accoutrements of the bedchamber become emblematic of a female condition; and even young female entertainers, as Liu Yung sardonically notes, have to make a living. So even if only two strata of female society are explicitly referred to in *tz'u*, their condition, by extrapolation, might be taken to stand for women in general.

Lawrence Lipking writes with considerable insight and sensitivity of the pervasiveness of the "abandoned woman" theme in Western writings by both men and women, and of the implications to its being embodied in the personas of Ariadne, Sappho, Sybil, and his own creation, Aristotle's Sister. The theme, he finds, can be understood in the

moth anthology of Ming dynasty *shih* poetry, *Lieh-ch'ao shih-chi*, has as its final catchall section the assembled poems of Buddhist priests, Taoist adepts, women, eunuchs, foreigners, and so on. They are all marginalized.

93. Interestingly, Li Ch'ing-chao is seldom mentioned together with Pan chieh-yü in the Chinese critical tradition. Both are mentioned by Yeh Shen-hsiang among a series of writers said to have been moved by personal circumstances to write; *LCC tzu-liao hui-pien*, p. 99.

94. The term is here applied in the broad sense used by Lipking.

following ways, which (to widely varying degrees) are potentially relevant to its Chinese manifestations. The abandoned woman can be read

- as a record of the oppression of women (in the terms noted in the preceding paragraph),
- as an emblem of all oppressed people (possible only through a forced reading of Chinese examples),
- as the instrument of religious love and yearning (although not applicable in the sense described by Lipking, the theme of personal rejection is linked with that of religious search or fulfillment in the poetry of Yü Hsüan-chi),[95]
- as the voice of repressed psychological fears (operative in many *tz'u* by women, to the extent one adopts a psychobiographical approach), and
- as the writing of the archetypal poet and figure of poetry (suggested, albeit in an attenuated way, by Li Ch'ing-chao's reference to her own writing in her *shih*).[96]

There has been a good deal of criticism of Lipking, part of it in reaction to the idea that the abandoned woman might serve as the archetype of the woman poet, part of it in reaction to the critic's being male. His work is invaluable for making an apparently limited theme far richer in implication than might otherwise be appreciated.

95. *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, 804.9049, 9050, and 9050–51; as translated by Walls, "The Poetry of Yü Hsüan-chi":

Disjoined, but not for long,
in the end I have found fulfillment;
I see the emptiness of rise and fall,
the meaning of True Mind. (p. 146)

We've been living on the same lane
but through the year we've [I've] had no call,
. . . .
The Taoist nature is colder than snow;
The Zen mind scoffs at gorgeous silks.
My steps have risen to the ends of the sky
where no roads reach down to the misty waves. (p. 151)

I set free my feelings,
cease resenting my heartless mate;
I nourish true nature,
toss off the waves of the bitter sea. (p. 179)

96. #S-1, p. 62; cf. the translations by Liang Paitchin, *Oeuvres poétiques*, p. 120 ("Moi, je m'isole, faisant des poèmes derrière la porte close"); and Rexroth and Chung, *Li Ch'ing-chao*, p. 55.

Early viewed as being an outstanding writer or woman writer, Li Ch'ing-chao became the standard by which virtually all female Chinese writers, and many male writers of song lyrics, were compared. Yet her writing did not greatly influence actual writing by later women, nor is there much evidence to argue for a separate tradition of *tz'u* writing by women in the Sung-Yüan period, in the sense of women consciously modeling themselves on earlier women as part of a separate stream of writing. The reception of Li Ch'ing-chao's work, however, provides important data for the study of images of women and views of female writing in China. Premodern critics in their comments often lump together various women authors, sometimes quite disparate ones, in a way that emphasizes their shared "otherness." At the same time, many critics seem to treat Li Ch'ing-chao as an exception—in effect, as a (female) male among males, even as a "patriarch" in the ("other") world of *tz'u*.