Prostitution and Sexuality in Shanghai

A Social History, 1849–1949

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Christian Henriot
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Introduction:
Prostitution and Sexuality – a Historiographical Review

The study of prostitution provides a unique vantage point from which to observe society, even if the view that it offers might appear to be a singular one. Of all the so-called fringe groups, the prostitutes are closest to the point of linkage (the “interface” in today’s vernacular) between “respectable society” and its deviant communities. Prostitutes straddle the shifting boundary between the world of the castoffs and the society that rejects them or that they have rejected. Prostitution is of course also related to sexuality. And although historians have long neglected it or banned it from their works, sexuality is an essential dimension of human societies. As such, prostitution can furnish a unique and sometimes distorting mirror of both sexual behavior and its underlying sensibilities. Besides, the prostitutes’ world is eminently sensitive to economic and social change, to which it responds and adapts more speedily than do other groups in society. In the case of Shanghai, prostitution may serve as a barometer of the accelerated process of modernization that the city experienced between 1842 and 1949.

The idea for the present work came originally from a fascinating book, *Laboring Classes and Dangerous Classes*, by Louis Chevalier.¹ It was tempting to try and transpose Louis Chevalier’s thinking to the case of Shanghai. An earlier study that I had made of this city, based on a scrutiny of its press, had already opened a few windows into a rather special type of society and urban space. My reading of the Chinese sources made it clear that the notion of “dangerous classes” does not really correspond to the reality of Shanghai. However, it is by reference to this primary idea, although unrelated, that I conceived the idea of studying Shanghai’s “fringe” groups in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I very soon came up against an imbalance in my source materials. Although I had gathered large quantities of data on prostitution, I was unable to obtain equally varied and reliable materials on which to base a study of the other groups. Besides, it seemed that the milieu of prostitution might itself provide new insights into Chinese society. It was another work, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, by Alain Corbin, that converted me to this point of view.² Alain Corbin’s work is a superb example of the extent to which the histori-
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A critical approach to prostitution can make a vital contribution to an understanding of social change and the evolution of group sensibilities.

It appeared then that a monographic approach, limited to the city of Shanghai, was preferable to a vain attempt to deal with the entire phenomenon of "Chinese prostitution." In this attempt to penetrate the arcane realms of a singular world about which (notwithstanding what I have said earlier) the available information is often fragmentary, the fact of choosing one city alone made it easier to demarcate the world of prostitution, identify the individuals, groups, and institutions involved in this activity, and search for the documents and traces that they might have left behind. Besides, the city of Shanghai had the particular feature of being divided into three territories (the French and International Settlements and the area of the Chinese Municipality), each endowed with an autonomous organ of power (see Map 1). This division into three distinct jurisdictions and the lack of collaboration between the administrative structures and the police of the different parts of the city created a fertile breeding ground for all kinds of criminal activity. The growth of prostitution also benefited from this administratively polycentric character that hindered the adoption of common policies both for the repression of the criminals implicated in this activity and for the rescue of the prostitutes. The present study begins with the year 1849, at a time when prostitution, as practiced in a traditional Chinese city, had not yet experienced the effects of the Western presence. It ends in 1949, when the Chinese Communist Party took power in a metropolis that had long been part of the "other China" (M.-C. Bergère), a modern, cosmopolitan city open to the world.

My approach seeks to address two main questions. The first part of this work relates to the activity of prostitution itself and the hugely varied reality covered by the term. First of all, I have tried to identify the various forms of prostitution, from the kind practiced in the most notorious brothels to that of the upper-class houses, while trying at the same time to locate possible cases of interpenetration between the different levels and chart the pathways that linked the different categories of prostitutes. I have also tried to determine the extent to which there was a "hierarchy of prostitution" in Shanghai. Shanghai underwent tremendous changes during the period under study, and my aim has been to examine the effects of these changes on the world of the prostitutes and find out especially if any reclassification took place and, if so, in what form. Secondly, I have attempted to find out who the prostitutes were, how they came to prostitution, how they got out of it, and what their working and living conditions were. In particular, I have tried to compare the pictures and glimpses available in many contemporary studies and in the literature of the period with the reality as it might be apprehended through a cross-examination of the available sources. The third aspect, included in this general topic, relates to the organization of prostitution in the broad sense of the term. The question is how the huge
traffic in women supplied to the houses of prostitution was organized. What place did these women occupy in the urban space? How did the brothels function? What sort of clientele did they receive? How was what we might call the economy of sex constructed? Beyond the "prostitutional" reality, this approach might lead us to reflect on the place of women in Chinese society, the evolution of Shanghai's social structure, and the ways in which the Chinese relate to sexuality.

A good part of the work done by historians of prostitution in the West deals with (a) the different systems of control set up by government authorities with the support or cooperation of certain professional groups (such as doctors) or social groups and (b) the movements of opposition and resistance aroused by these systems. I was therefore curious about the place of prostitution in the public sphere in China and about the measures that might have been taken to manage prostitution, contain it, or repress it. The question was whether the Chinese and foreign authorities in China followed comparable or even coordinated policies in this field. Was there ever, as in the West, an intense public debate on this subject, and, if so, who were its protagonists? Was there any significant change in the attitudes of the different authorities of the city during the century under study? The first level of my study is therefore devoted to an examination of the institutions, authorities, and organizations involved in the "administeration of prostitution," the reasons for and the modalities of their action, the goals pursued, and the effects of the measures taken.

One clarification needs to be made regarding the scope of this research. Only Chinese female prostitutes have been taken into account. This means that two categories will not be studied here: foreign female prostitutes and homosexual prostitutes. They have been left out for two main reasons. At the time when I was conducting this research, the available documents on these aspects of prostitution in China were very incomplete and consisted of only secondhand sources. The materials I was then able to gather were far too disparate and vague. The situation regarding homosexual prostitution is even more difficult. This topic was a source of obvious embarrassment among the Chinese authorities as well as in Chinese society and among its elites. The silence on the subject is almost total even though the existence of this type of prostitution is proven. The second reason for leaving these two groups out is that they are not relevant to my general approach, which is centered on female prostitution in Chinese society. Homosexuals represented only a very minor and peripheral fringe group in prostitution and catered to a very specific demand. Western and Japanese prostitutes were visited by an almost exclusively foreign clientele even if an "opening out" to Chinese customers can be seen toward the end of the 1930s.

The way in which this book has been organized only partially corresponds to the two questions evoked above, which are present in varying degrees throughout the book. This short introduction reviewing the historiography of prostitution in China is followed by the first part, "The Courtesans: Prostitutes to the Elite and the Elite of the Prostitutes," dealing with the upper stratum of prostitutes. The first chapter seeks to draw a portrait of this group and focuses on its particular form of integration into local society, its highly formalistic modes of relationship with customers, and the reasons for its very sharp decline starting from about the end of the nineteenth century. The second chapter describes the different stages in the life of the courtesans, starting with their entry into the trade, as well as their religious practices and even their "civic" activities. It ends with an analysis of the culture (and its forms of expression) common to the elites who patronized these Chinese "hetairae."

Four chapters deal with common prostitution ("The Market of Prostitution and Mass Sexuality"), which included that of intermediate groups located on the edges of the world of the courtesans. The first chapter traces the evolution of the different forms of common prostitution between 1849 and 1949, a period that saw a real explosion in the number of prostitutes and their increasingly visible presence in the city. Apart from the "professionals," there were women whose jobs made for contact with male customers and who sometimes fell into prostitution. It is to these "auxiliary" groups of prostitutes that the second chapter is devoted. This chapter is followed by an essay seeking to identify prostitutes in the twentieth century and specify their numbers, geographical and social origins, and ultimate fate. Finally, this part ends with a study of the condition of the prostitute. I shall examine sexual practices for the light that they might shed on customer "demand" and sexual behavior; I shall also study one of the effects of this trade, namely the frightful ravages of venereal disease. These diseases were, however, only one aspect of the suffering endured by prostitutes. Violence, sometimes in extreme form, was their daily lot. This unavoidable aspect of the prostitutes' existence needs to be clearly brought out.

The geographical space of the world of prostitutes consisted of a series of concentric circles centered on the house of prostitution. The outermost circle included all the zones forming the reservoir from which came all the women to be found in the brothels of Shanghai. There were numerous ways of entering the trade, but the constant replenishment of the prostitutes' ranks relied on a vast traffic in women whose organization, while complex in appearance, actually masked an undeveloped mode of integration. The first chapter of the part entitled "The Space and Economy of Prostitution" therefore begins with a study of the many and varied channels by which women went into prostitution.

The intermediate concentric circle was that of the urban space. Shanghai underwent massive transformation. This meant that the places of prostitution had a certain unsettled character before they became almost permanently established in clearly demarcated areas. The second chapter of this
section is therefore devoted to the development of the geography of prostitution in relation to changes in the urban fabric. The last (or first) circle was naturally formed by the house of prostitution itself. I shall examine the organization and functioning of these houses, including their different categories of staff. Moreover, because money lies at the very heart of venal sexuality, I shall devote a chapter to the economic organization of the courtesans' houses as well as to the highly sophisticated forms of monetary circulation that characterized them.

Finally, the part entitled "Abortive Attempts to Regulate Prostitution in Shanghai" consists of four chapters on policies and modes of control of prostitution between 1869 and 1949. This section first of all plots the boundaries of the political and administrative machinery that was set up to try to lay down rules and constraints in a milieu that was particularly difficult to come to grips with. The chronological subdivisions mark the three great periods of regulationism in Shanghai and correspond to major stages in the development of prostitution in the city. One chapter is devoted to institutions for the uplift of prostitutes.

This history of prostitution in Shanghai in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has not been conceived as a history of women, particularly not as a history of the Chinese woman. This is not to say that I am uneasy with the concept, but the fact is that the term "women's history" leads to a dead end if it means looking at women as a separate object of the historical discourse. The following research seeks above all to examine the social history of a phenomenon of society - that is, prostitution - through the forms that it took in the particular context of the Chinese world. The concept of gender has offered a valuable tool of analysis because it enables women to be looked at in terms of the relationships between the sexes. The study of prostitution is specifically a field where the historian cannot reflect on women without being constantly reminded of the other sex even if, almost paradoxically, there is little evidence of the latter in the sources. The important work that has been done in "women's studies" has not always skirted the danger of raising such studies to the status of an independent field of historical knowledge. For my part, I have striven to avoid this obstacle and integrate the study of prostitution into a comprehensive historical examination of Chinese society.

Shanghai's reputation as the "Paris of Asia" deservedly went side by side with the title of "brothel of Asia." No local government, whether foreign or Chinese, was capable of stemming the phenomenon of prostitution and local government was even less capable of eradicating it. In May 1949, this city was taken by the Communist armies, which immediately condemned prostitution as one of the most degrading forms of female exploitation. Their violent rhetoric apart, the new authorities were faced with a formidable challenge: that of eliminating prostitution in a recalcitrant city where the women engaged in this activity could be counted in the tens of thousands. The "closure" effected between 1950 and 1958 formed an epilogue to the history of prostitution in Shanghai (although it was a temporary one, as can be seen from present-day developments). It led to the total disappearance of the sex trade but also to a tragic fate for the "liberated" prostitutes.

To the specialists of China, and especially to the historian, the study of prostitution might still appear to be a "minor" subject, an aside as it were in a historiographical discourse that has long dwelt chiefly on the great events (revolutions) and on certain social groups (such as the scholar-bureaucrats, the peasants, and to a lesser extent the merchants and the proletariat). A good part of the research on China has been overdetermined by the country's political history and especially the Communist Revolution. Attempts have been made to search ever further back into the past for the causes and modalities of the sudden collapse of a bimillenial empire and its passage to communism within the space of half a century. The following study forms part of a relatively new trend, that of Chinese urban history understood as the social history of the cities. The work done in the context of this trend has been presented elsewhere, and I shall now try to examine the current state of the historiography of prostitution in China.

The present study of prostitution seeks to add to our knowledge about the Chinese social fabric, especially in Shanghai, which has already been the subject of research covering almost the entire range of the social spectrum. The prostitutes in many ways formed a fringe world, and we might ask what extent research on this particular milieu might shed light on the general development of society. This study is an addition to a body of historical work on prostitution that is rich and varied, yet not abundant. It must be said that this work is the result of progress that did not come of its own accord, as Alain Corbin points out in the preface to the American edition of his book Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850. Prostitution and, more generally, sexuality were new fields that few historians had as yet touched upon. The historians had a demeaning view of the matter and were clearly uneasy about dealing with a topic that might seem to be anecdotal or indecent.

Historical work on prostitution in China is not wholly nonexistent, although it includes all sorts of studies that, strictly speaking, should not be placed in this category. Some of them might almost be regarded as "first-hand source material." However, it would be useful to briefly trace the different stages in the Western perception of prostitution in China since the nineteenth century. The subject is mentioned in general encyclopedic works on the history of world prostitution, such as those produced up to the beginning of the twentieth century. In these studies that attempt to describe prostitution and its forms in all societies, in some cases "since time immemorial," China and the Far East generally receive only a few pages that only highlight their authors' lack of knowledge and the strength of their
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prejudices. At best, they bring out only one dimension, that of the courtesans whom they compare to the hetaerae of classical Greece.\textsuperscript{10}

Although more modest in their ambitions, the articles written by Western physicians living or traveling in China have long been considered to be authoritative and have helped convey a singular and at times astonishing picture of prostitution in China. These documents are of little value. They are motley collections of experiences in the field, unverifiable quotations from Chinese documents (without the least attention to chronology), and moral considerations. This is material that is interesting more in what it tells us about its authors than in the picture that it gives of prostitution in China.\textsuperscript{11} During the same period, two travelers provided a slightly more precise view of a particular mode of prostitution, that of the “flower boats” of the Canton region. The first of these narratives is a rather amusing and superficial account of a brief escape in these boats.\textsuperscript{12} The second, although it bears the imprint of very deep prejudice, is a more methodical description of a world to which Westerners rarely had access. However, it merely touches on the reality of prostitution in China.\textsuperscript{13} In the nineteenth century, it was the white slave trade that gave rise to a fairly similar genre of works of low credibility, describing the fate of Western women in Asia.\textsuperscript{14} However, there is one book in which the author sought to encompass every aspect of sexual life in the Far East. The fact is that his work is based solely on indirect sources written in Western languages and focuses on only limited aspects of prostitution in China.\textsuperscript{15}

It is only in the work of Robert Van Gulik and Howard Levy that sexual topics and prostitution in China begin to be dealt with from an academic perspective, although these writers take very different approaches. Thirty years after its appearance, Sexual Life in Ancient China is still the only reference work on sexuality in Chinese society.\textsuperscript{16} It followed a limited edition of an annotated collection of erotic engravings from the Ming period (1368–1644).\textsuperscript{17} Van Gulik’s study is certainly a unique compendium that has been neither continued nor added to. This is so because of the quality of the research, carried out by a cultivated individual with a passionate interest in China, that led him to write even detective novels that he set in the world of the Empire and its mandarins.

Sexual Life supports the idea that sexuality was lived as a normal part of the life of individuals, who were free of any particular inhibition at least until the Song period (960–1279). The young in the upper classes were educated with the help of freely circulating “manuals” that gave a very positive view of sexuality. While, by the time of the Song, Neo-Confucianism had begun to throw a veil of puritanism over sexual life, it was the women who were its targets rather than the men. The latter continued to have access to information. Above all, they continued to live relatively unfettered lives that were distinguished, especially among the elites, by diligent attendance at the houses of courtesans. The women, on the contrary, especially among the elites, were the victims of a system whose purpose was to protect them (against the Mongol invaders) but actually led to their confinement. Finally, under the Qing (1644–1911), an atmosphere of prudishness gradually enveloped Chinese society and snuffed out the forms (the erotic and pornographic engravings, poetry and novels, manuals, erotic objets d’art, and the like) through which Chinese sexual culture had found expression.

Despite its great qualities, Van Gulik’s study has two limitations in regard to the subject of my study. First of all, prostitution takes up only a minor part of his work and is dealt with exclusively in relation to the status and role of the courtesans. This point nevertheless underlines the extent to which high-class prostitution was not only accepted within Chinese society but also integrated into the various essential aspects of social and political life. The courtesans had their acknowledged place in ceremonies, both private (such as marriages and anniversaries) and official. It will be seen that, while this status fell into rapid decline at the end of the nineteenth century, it had endured unchallenged up to the arrival of the Westerners. Van Gulik makes little mention of common prostitution, but the women who practiced it were apparently despised as much for their activities as for the fact that they had been forced into their trade, having been sentenced to it, most usually as part of a collective punishment inflicted on their male relatives (fathers, husbands, etc.). However, it is impossible to know how prostitution and prostitutes were regarded by the Chinese population in general.

The other limitation of Van Gulik’s work is the fact that it stops precisely at the end of the Ming period (1644). Thus, between his study and my research, there is a gulf of more three centuries for which practically nothing is known about the evolution of Chinese society in the matter of sexuality and prostitution. We cannot be satisfied merely with the notion that a shroud of puritanism was cast over the field of sexuality, smothering all forms of change and novel expression. A recent study, limited to the field of erotic art, shows that despite taboos and even repression, the Chinese continued to favor these forms of expression, even if they were obliged to be secretive about it.\textsuperscript{18} My own feeling, based on the study of prostitution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is that Chinese society (and men in particular) were subjected to a “social” inhibition of sexuality (which was entirely and strictly excluded from the public sphere). However, this did not mitigate against a positive perception of sexuality and of matters related to sexuality in the life of the individual and in his day-to-day experiences.

Another important part of the historiography of sexuality and prostitution in China consists of the works of Howard Levy, who dealt almost exclusively with the Tang (618–907) and Ming (1368–1644) periods, from which he translated several documents on the courtesans.\textsuperscript{19} Once again, the perspective is distorted by its exclusive focus on the upper stratum of
prostitutes. These documents are valuable in that they shed light on the way in which the Chinese elites perceived prostitution, or at least its most sophisticated stratum that they tried to depict. These writings convey an eminently favorable view that happens to correspond to Van Gulik’s observations. Howard Levy, however, did not seek to make a study of prostitution. All his efforts and interest were directed toward furnishing English translations of a part of this literature that otherwise would have remained inaccessible to Western readers. He appends notes and sometimes commentaries to his translations, but there is very little analysis. For equivalent or earlier periods, we might add Robert de Rotours’s translation of a classic from the Tang period (618–907) and Arthur Waley’s short article on the Qinglouji (The Green Bower Collection) from the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). These documents, in my view, complement Sexual Life in Ancient China in that they illustrate an aspect of the social habits of the Chinese before the Qing.

Historical works on prostitution in China are as yet very rare even if there has been some progress here in recent years. An early work (1929) by James H. Willey cannot go unmentioned. The author attempts to apply sociological analysis to the state of prostitution in China at the end of 1920s. He explains the “causes” of prostitution, its organization, and its various modes, as well as the attempts made by the authorities to control it. His conclusions are sometimes astonishing. For example, he suggests that prostitution was not very widespread in China and also that the courtesans were threatened in their status by the Chinese “new woman” or modern woman. If the courtesans did come under threat, it was not so much because of the very relative emancipation of the female population as because of the general change that Chinese society underwent and the growing commercialization of leisure activities. James H. Willey’s study suffers from two major weaknesses. First of all, the sheer scale of his subject actually means that his book is a patchwork of examples and pieces of collected information of unequal value about different cities in China. The other drawback is that the author uses only secondary sources, written in English, which singularly limit his possibilities of analyzing and understanding the phenomenon of prostitution in China.

Another historian, Sue Gronewold, has also studied prostitution in China from the opening to the West up to 1936. Although here again her approach appears to me to be far too ambitious, the author has striven to take a fresh look, illuminated by the methods of social sciences, a field that has been neglected by the historians of China. Sue Gronewold’s standpoint is set in the feminist perspective that has profoundly renewed the historical approach (and the approach in other disciplines) in the United States by reintroducing the notion of gender into the analysis and interpretation of social phenomena.

In Beautiful Merchandise, Sue Gronewold presents women above all as objects of transaction. Seen from this viewpoint, prostitution appears to be only one of many modes of traffic in women, such as marriage, the making over of adopted daughters, and the purchase of concubines. Naturally, the author does not place all these modes on the same level, although she emphasizes the continuum that exists between these forms of exchange. There is a reality here that, according to Gronewold, reflects the inferior status of women, which is related to the persistence of the conservative ideology of Confucianism, the absence of women in the public domain, and a lack of interest, and even complicity, on the part of the authorities. This interpretation is not unfounded. However, it appears to be excessive for two reasons. First of all, women were not the only victims of what was a real trade in human beings. Men and children also were objects of this active commerce of which we know neither the history nor the development. In the nineteenth century, it is clear that women formed the great majority of human beings sold in what was actually a slave market.

However, the reality needs to be set in historical perspective and fleshed out with an examination of the other factors that determined the nature of this market. The socioeconomic context is of essential importance, because the sale of women was conditioned by a type of demand that was very different from what it had been, for example, in the seventeenth century, when scurvy and slavery were still very much a reality. Secondly, prostitution cannot be likened to a mere extension of the other forms of transaction in women. It may shock Western sensibilities, but marriage as the de facto sale of a woman to her future husband was considered, even by the parties themselves, to be a normal given fact of social life. This was not questioned until the beginning of the twentieth century. However, in every period, the prospect of being made over as a prostitute was always lived as a fall from grace, a blemish that compromised a person’s future. For a family, the sale of a woman to a house of prostitution was generally the last resort in a critical situation.

The biggest weakness of Beautiful Merchandise lies not so much in the author’s approach as in the fragmentary and dubious character of the sources used. Sue Gronewold’s study is based solely on an analysis of Western-language sources. Chinese sources are quoted only when they exist in an English version. Some of the documents quoted (e.g., missionary literature and archives) are interesting and at times original, but it appears to be difficult to deal with a subject of social history of this magnitude without making use of the Chinese sources. The prostitutes do not reveal themselves of their own accord. The historian can study them only through “intermediaries” (the police, the legal profession, doctors, etc.). And yet these sources should be as close as possible to the milieu that they describe. In the case of China, the use of Western sources adds a cultural prism to the filter created by social barriers. Limited as she is by her sources, the author has pieced together a history of prostitution consisting of information
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gleaned from documents whose value is at times questionable. Her work therefore does not take account of the evolution of prostitution in China. Literary works, for example, are yoked to her purpose, even as sources of quantitative data. These serious gaps contribute to making Beautiful Merchandise an ahistorical work.

The history of prostitution in Shanghai has received contributions from two directions: on the one hand, from the Chinese historians, especially Sun Guoqun, and, on the other, from two Western historians, Renate Scherer (in an unpublished dissertation completed in 1983) and Gail Hershatter (in various overlapping articles and in her more recent book).21 In China, prostitution is not a subject deemed to be interesting or even truly respectable. The revival of the phenomenon in the past few years and the questions that it raises the relatively greater attention that is being paid to the study of this subject. They also explain the publication of a series of works that, inter alia, describe the process by which prostitution was eliminated after 1949.24 The research done to date falls within the perspective of anecdotal history, as can be seen from the titles published.25 These studies provide a static description of the state of prostitution in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Shanghai, and they lack any genuine issue-oriented analysis. Furthermore, these studies are often overlapping in their contents, even when they appear in the same volume.26

There is only one author, Sun Guoqun, who, in a little work on prostitution in Shanghai, has brought together all the characteristic features of Chinese works on prostitution — although the title, Jiu Shanghai changji mishiji (A Secret History of Prostitution in Old Shanghai), indicates that she has established a clear distance between herself and her work. Apart from its lack of any issue-oriented analysis, the work’s fundamental weakness lies in its total neglect of the archival documents. Sun Guoqun uses secondhand sources, often lifted without quotes and without any preliminary criticism and presented as a sort of compilation. The work seeks to bring out only the negative aspects of prostitution and demonstrate its features involving exploitation by the capitalists, the nationalist regime, and the authorities of the settlements. This leads the author at times to use catchphrases that are either (at best) factual inexactitudes or (at worst) falsifications of history. It is obvious that the Chinese political context imposes limits and directions on historical research, but, apart from this aspect of the matter, it would appear that, as far as prostitution is concerned, the force of prejudice has prevailed over the historical method.

Among works by Western historians, there is Renate Scherer’s thesis, which seeks to examine the “Chinese prostitional system” in the light of the case of Shanghai.27 In fact, the title of her thesis encompasses a field that is far broader than the one actually dealt with. Basically, the author draws up a sort of catalogue of prostitution in Shanghai, from its most sophisticated to its most wretched forms, without paying any notable atten-

Another section, forming the essential part of her research, is devoted solely to the courtesans and their modes of relationship with their customers. The author describes prostitution as an institution complementary to marriage, central to the social life of the elites, enabling men to fill the sentimental void enforced on them by the dominant values and the extreme formalism of social etiquette. The interpretation is on the whole accurate, but Renate Scherer describes only a very narrow segment of the world of prostitutes and provides a completely static view of it. Time does not seem to exist, and what is not clear is whether these courtesans continued to enjoy the same degree of social prestige between 1840 and 1949. The ahistorical nature of this study can be explained once again by the paucity of the sources used (about 30 Chinese works), which even the use of Western archives does not remedy.

Gail Hershatter’s work appears as one of the most ambitious attempts to examine the history of prostitution in the twentieth century. From her first published articles to her more recent book, the author has followed a fairly consistent thread, basing herself on a few central ideas about Shanghai prostitution.28 Gail Hershatter supports the view that there was a formal hierarchy of prostitutes, one that reflected social structure and demand, even if this hierarchy was partly imaginary. She considers this hierarchy to have had an impact on the actual structure of prostitution. She also describes the modes by which the girls were recruited. Women were the objects of a massive trade based on a regional distribution that, to some extent, determined their place and future in the milieu of prostitution. The entry of a woman into prostitution was often marked by a situation of crisis (possibly an economic or family crisis) or by acts of violence that wrenched her out of her original environment and removed her from its protection.

Another major point is the evolution of the market of prostitution in Shanghai in the first half of the twentieth century. Gail Hershatter states that, from a luxury market dominated by a small group of courtesans meeting the demand of the urban elites in the nineteenth century, it became a market providing sexual services to the growing number of unattached men belonging to the city’s working and business classes. The author also describes the condition of the prostitutes, the rules governing visits to courtesans, and the ways of getting out of the profession. In the development of prostitution, she perceives a deterioration in women’s living conditions while, at the same time, noting that they did not spend all their lives in this trade and that even the most underprivileged of them managed to maintain a certain degree of control over their existence.

Although Gail Hershatter’s analysis and interpretation of the structure and working of prostitution in Shanghai are sound in many respects, I must disagree on a number of points that mark a difference in terms of both historical knowledge and method. Gail Hershatter’s book can be

described as a study in the representations of prostitution by Republican-era writers and literati rather than as an attempt to provide a social history of this phenomenon. From her perspective, this distinction may not be relevant at all; but even for a historian familiar with a post-Foucault vision of history, it does seem necessary to distinguish between "representations" as a set of discourses — in the present case by Chinese writers on prostitution — and "representations" as a construct applying to all historical documents. I would argue that Chinese sources must be used with the utmost care, and, above all, I would emphasize the need to base research as far as possible on a close comparative study and analysis of the archives.

In relying on secondary sources alone, the historian runs the risk of mistaking what ultimately is merely a "discourse" on prostitution for a source of raw data. If we look at the issue of a "hierarchy" as delineated by Gail Hershatter, her reconstruction takes account of various categories of prostitutes that are not all located on the same chronological plane. The persistence of certain forms of appellation sometimes masks profound changes in the realities that they describe. This leads the author to set up a hierarchy that, by adopting the terms used to designate different "categories" of prostitutes in their immense variety, actually mixes up elements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and falsifies her perspective on the evolution of the market of prostitution throughout this period.

Contemporary historians dealing with the study of prostitution in China have all come up against the problem of sources. The following study is no exception to this rule, although it is based on a range of documents that have enabled intensive reflection on the history of the phenomenon of prostitution in Shanghai, from the middle of the nineteenth century up to 1949. Naturally, I am not trying to say that the historians who have looked at prostitution in Europe or in the United States have had an easy task. No historical topic lends itself willingly, and it is even more difficult when the groups being studied lie on the "fringes" of society. Nevertheless, it would seem to me that two major differences can be highlighted between the West and China as regards the study of prostitution. The first difference lies in the attention paid to this form of activity by all kinds of "authorities" in Western culture: the police, the judicial system, hospitals, citizens' leagues, religious organizations, and the like. This concern, which is an old one, is linked to particular ways of looking at sexuality, associated with notions of sin and fornication in Judeo-Christian civilization. Sex is seen to be a dirty thing; and prostitution, which makes a commerce of it, requires particular surveillance. The spread of venereal diseases, especially syphilis, has buttressed the tendency of the "authorities" to manage, regulate, and suppress prostitution.

I am aware at this point that I am making an arbitrary simplification of very complex phenomena. Yet these phenomena are underpinned by this constant factor, and nothing of the kind can be found in traditional Chinese culture where sexuality was felt and lived as something normal, conforming to the natural order. It is not possible, for the period being studied here, to rule out the effects of Neo-Confucianism and of an entire range of religious and popular literature seeking to "standardize" the behavior of individuals. This factor has thrown up a constant hurdle against my efforts to shed light, through the phenomenon of prostitution, on certain aspects of the sexuality of the Chinese. This said, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that in those predominant values that contribute to the shaping of social behavior, China has not known that dark anguish over sexuality that has been predominant in the West and that, therefore, China has not experienced that social or administrative "investing" of prostitution that is the hallmark of the societies belonging to Judeo-Christian culture.

The second difference of note lies in China's political and administrative organization and in the Chinese conception of the role of the state. Although known for its bureaucracy and its mandarinal system — whether deemed to be exemplary and autocratic (for a premodern state) or over-manned, corrupt, and inefficient (for a modern state) — China has never been endowed with a political and administrative machinery with which to exert the powers that would make it a despotic police state. In fact, the traditional Chinese state may be seen as a "minimal" state based on a limited bureaucracy and relying on the numerous linkages formed by the scholar and merchant elites within society. Its vocation was to regulate economic and social life while limiting direct action and leaving the responsibility for day-to-day management to the elites. Hence, before the 1911 revolution and the remodeling of institutions that followed, there never was any jurisdiction (such as the police or a judicial authority) comparable to the French law courts and constabulary. As a result, there never was that huge accumulation of archives generated elsewhere by these institutions, providing the material for the above-mentioned studies of prostitution in Europe and in the United States.

Finally, a word on the nature of the sources on which this study is based. Of the archives, I had envisaged two possible sources, namely, the law courts and the police. In fact, I did not succeed in consulting the judicial archives. However, I was allowed access to the police archives, albeit in very unequal fashion. It must be said that, whatever the materials consulted (those of the police in the settlements or of the Chinese police), my reading was neither exhaustive nor based on any rationale in the choice of material selected by sampling or by some other method. All that I could examine was what was given to me by the staff in charge of the archives, and I was unable to take any part in the search for files. It is from these documents that I have drawn the major part of my information. The French diplomatic archives, especially those of the consular station in Shanghai, shed light on an entire aspect of the municipal policy of the French Settlement on prostitution, especially the way in which it was regulated, and also on the institutional
background (the organization of the services, the role of the police, and 
links with other local authorities).

Another set of archives proved to be useful, although it would appear to 
be unrelated to the subject of prostitution in China. These were the archives 
of the League of Nations, which spent many years from the mid-1920s 
onward studying the problem of traffic in women and children, especially 
in the Far East. Two private organizations also left extensive archives. One 
was the Zhongguo furen jiuji zonghui (Anti-Kidnapping Society), which 
combated traffic in women from 1912 up to an unspecified date (at least up 
to 1941). The second group was less important but interesting all the same: 
the Sisters of Charity of the Good Shepherd from the city of Angers in 
France, who set up an establishment in Shanghai where they took in, among 
others, “repentant” prostitutes. Finally, although they cannot be counted as 
archives, I have made extensive use of the annual reports and published 
pamphlets of the other main rescue organization, the Door of Hope.\(^{30}\)

Apart from the archives, this study has made extensive use of the press, 
which is an indispensable source, not only because it partially fills in the 
gaps in the archives, but also because it gives a better account of the state 
of public opinion and of social evolution in Shanghai. I have carefully exam-
ined, among others, the English-language newspapers such as the North 
China Daily News and the North China Herald, which comprehensively 
covered the years 1850–1941, as well as the major national and local daily 
Shen Bao for the period 1872–1949. In addition, there are a large number 
of miscellaneous periodicals whose references, along with the reasons for 
their use, are given in the footnotes and in the bibliography. Apart from 
the articles, I have made abundant use, for the nineteenth century, of the etch-
ings and rare photographs published in the press or in other media. A part 
of this iconographic material, which is indispensable to an understanding 
of the reality of prostitution in Shanghai’s society of the period, will appear 
in the course of this book.

A third major field of investigation consists of the many works on 
prostitution, written in many very different genres by Chinese scholars and 
intellectuals. This category, especially for the nineteenth century, comprises 
memos and recollections of youth as well as collected “biographies” of 
courtesans. In the following century, when these modes of literature were 
no longer in fashion, there were on the contrary what the Chinese called 
“compasses of the world of gallantry” (piaoqie zhinan), namely works 
whose purpose was to inform readers about places of prostitution and the 
rules to be followed, especially with courtesans. Among works in the same 
vein that I have used, there are also the general guides to the city that 
almost always included a section on prostitution (dealing with places, 
categories, rates, etc.). Finally, to conclude on the main sources, my reading 
includes a portion of the vast number of novels, especially those from 
the turn of the century, written from a very specific viewpoint (as “dis-
courses” on prostitution). I have used them at times to illustrate an aspect 
of prostitution.

The above presentation is not intended to justify gaps or errors in this 
study. Historians of contemporary China have long known about the diffi-
culties that have to be faced in any attempt to consult the archives. These 
clarifications have been necessary to better define the context of my re-
search and illuminate its general direction. The issues and problems raised 
by the historiography of prostitution in the West were in my mind through-
out the quest and work of reflection that led to this book. Although I have 
drawn much inspiration from this Western historiography, the nature of the 
sources, the conditions of their accessibility, and above all the special place 
of prostitution in Chinese society and culture have led me to move away 
from it and try to chart a clear and consistent path through Shanghai’s 
“world of flowers.”
Part 1
The Courtesans: Prostitutes to the Elite and the Elite of the Prostitutes
1

The Courtesans from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Centuries: The End of a World

For nearly a century, the world of prostitution in Shanghai was dominated by the courtesans. The term "courtesans" covers several originally distinct categories. The evolution of this group, like that of the prostitutes as a whole, reflects the profound transformations of Chinese society, especially in Shanghai, from 1849 to 1949. This period saw a change from a society dominated by status to one dominated by money. The commercialization of the local economy, combined with the restructuring of the various social strata, typified by the emergence of the middle classes, led to the decline of the courtesans and fostered the emergence of forms of prostitution that were more diversified, even if they were also more homogeneous in their function. This chapter presents the milieu of the courtesans who, more closely than any other group, represent an essential dimension of Chinese sexual culture and its development. It will also strive to explore the reasons for the inevitable decline of this group and its assimilation into the ranks of ordinary prostitutes.

In the "world of flowers" in the nineteenth century, two groups of courtesans formed the apex of what a historian has misleadingly called the "hierarchy of prostitution." These courtesans indeed were patronized by male elite members of society, but also by a wider range of people not from the elites. Actually, the notion of a hierarchy corresponding to the social hierarchy is only partially true. Chinese society in this period was indeed more rigidly stratified than it would be in the following century. But this does not mean that it was a strictly ordered society in which all possibility of social mobility was ruled out. A great deal of research has shown that, on the contrary, there was a fairly high degree of fluidity as far as individuals were concerned, thanks to the existence of a special route open to all: the imperial examinations. This well-known point needs little explanation. That said, its consequence was the domination of society by a small stratum of scholar-administrators who, even if their ranks constantly received newcomers, never faced any threat to their power as a group. It was a stratum that possessed knowledge, power, and, although they did not have exclusive possession of it, money. Above all, the literati enjoyed status and prestige that no other social group shared or enjoyed in equal measure. Finally, it was
they who defined the forms of Chinese culture, if we take “culture” in the broad sense of the term.

Shanghai was not a city of literati. Well before 1840, it had been above all a commercial port where merchants formed the largest elite. Yet, there was also a community of literati that was associated with the various administrative bodies set up in the city (the xian [district], the administration, the circuit intendant [tikuai], the examinations, etc.) or had come from the surrounding smaller towns. The merchants themselves were eager, as elsewhere in China, to join this privileged group, whether through the purchase of titles or by proxy, by preparing their offspring for the imperial examinations. It was the scholar-administrators who set the tone and served as a model for the other social groups. Finally, it must be accepted that the opposition between merchants and literati was an artificial one, both socially and culturally. William Rowe’s work has conclusively demonstrated the fact that many passageways existed between the two groups. At the higher levels, they shared the same lifestyle, social habitus, and culture. In Shanghai, as in other cities in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the two groups had begun largely to merge with each other.

The predominant social tone in Shanghai changed rapidly under the effect of the opening to the West and of modernization, and it did so faster than elsewhere in China. This change was reflected in the world of prostitution, especially among the courtesans. At the risk of simplifying the picture, we might take up William Rowe’s idea that there was a specific corps of prostitutes for each major social group in the city. The reality, as we shall see, was slightly more complex and less clear-cut. And yet, there can be no doubt that clear divisions existed within each world. Members of the elites did not patronize the same places as did the poorer members of society, and the courtesans had no relations with their sisters working in the opium dens and lower-class brothel houses. This stratification came to be altered by the emergence of new social groups who were less educated than the literati and the wealthy merchant-patrons. These new groups, to be sure, were eager to flaunt the status that set them apart from the common people but nevertheless looked for the kind of easy sexual gratification that the courtesans did not necessarily provide. This change in behavior led to the disappearance of a refined form of entertainment for males that had become obsolete.

The Changing Nature of Courtesans and Prostitutes

Before 1821, according to Chinese sources, all activities of prostitution were conducted on boats moored along the Huangpu River. Afterward, the most sophisticated class of prostitutes, the courtesans, began to settle in the walled city with the rest of the population. None of the available documents uses any special name to designate the courtesans during this period. In fact, the term shuyu, which actually refers to the courtesan’s apartments or the place where stories are told or read, is said to have made an official appearance only in 1851 in Shanghai, following its use by a courtesan, Zhu Sulan, but it did not come into widespread use until 1860, when this class of courtesans established its predominant status in the world of prostitution. Strictly speaking, the courtesans were storytellers. By extension, the girls themselves came to be called shuyu. Of course, 1851 is an inaccurate date. By this name or another, the shuyu had existed before this time and were heirs to a long tradition of educated and even highly cultivated courtesans of the kind described in numerous works of the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties, some of which have been translated and commented upon by Western sinologists. The shuyu of Shanghai originated in Suzhou, the chief commercial metropolis of the Lower Yangzi area before 1821 and a center famed for the beauty of its women.

The shuyu defined themselves as artists whose vocation was to entertain their customers at festive occasions and banquets in the customer’s home, in the city’s traditional places of entertainment, or in their own apartments. In principle, they did not prostitute themselves: “they sell their art, not their body.” At any rate, it was impossible to purchase their favors or obtain them by means of simple presents. They provided company at banquets, served wine, and entertained customers with their songs. This was not an absolute rule, but, as with the Japanese geisha in the same period, a would-be customer had to court the courtesan in order to have his way with her. The shuyu of the early nineteenth century were therefore quite independent, again if the rare surviving accounts are to be believed. Wang Tao, best known as one of the earliest Chinese reformers, but less so as an assiduous customer of the houses of prostitution, reports that when a customer invited courtesans of an inferior rank – for example, a changsan – to a banquet or celebration, the shuyu would immediately set themselves apart in order to avoid mixing with the rest. If the customer invited the changsan to sit next to him, the shuyu would leave the table. Although Wang Tao’s text is difficult to date, it would seem that he is referring to the 1860s. This means that, at that time, there were at least two categories of courtesans, one of which, the shuyu, still sought to be distinguished from girls whom they considered to be prostitutes. The changsan later adopted the same discriminatory attitude toward the next lower ranking category of prostitutes, the yaoer. The customers of the courtesans patronized this category too, which means that the dividing line between the various categories became increasingly blurred in the course of time. The changsan would absolutely refrain from meeting a customer in a yaoer’s house except during one period of the year, at the chrysanthemum festival (juhuajie) that these houses organized in the autumn. However, the changsan did not sing at these festivities.

The shuyu formed a very small community (although no statistical data
are available on them). Wang Tao says that there were around 50 girls of great fame in Shanghai. Their total number can be estimated to have been 200 to 300 at most in the mid-nineteenth century and 400 around 1896. Strict rules governed entry into the profession. All candidates had to meet a certain number of qualifications that were examined once a year at a sort of festival. In the seventh lunar month (corresponding roughly to the month of August), all the male and female storytellers of the city met at the east gate. Each person had to sing a melody and recite a piece of opera. There could be no repetition. But only the last one to sing was required to repeat the same melodies as the first participant. This was one way to verify the range of each participant's repertory. Those who did not take part in the festival or were unable to meet these standards were not allowed to appear in the traditional music halls (shuchang). Later, the rules became less strict. Two categories were introduced: those who could play a full role—that is, both sing and perform opera—and those who could only sing. The purpose of the competition was to set limits on the number of courtesans.

The courtesans were trained from childhood by music teachers who, as masters of musical knowledge, had de facto control over entry into the profession. To open a shuyu house, a substantial sum of 30 taels (about one month's earnings) had to be paid to the musicians' guild (gongsuo). This practice seems to have disappeared around the years 1870–1880. Because the courtesans increasingly opted for pieces from the Peking opera instead of kunqu and even preferred to play the pipa, the role of the musicians declined. The shuyu appear therefore to have been originally closer to the storytellers (Wang Tao compares them to the women who used to tell tanci [storytelling, accompanied by an instrument] in bygone days) than to prostitutes. They were ladies of entertainment whom customers addressed by the respectful term of xiansheng (sir), which was normally reserved for males. Within their own community, this was a sign of social recognition. It goes without saying that, outside this context, in the street for example, this honorific term was not used. The changsan were called jiaoqiu, a term that was perhaps less distinguished but denoted respect.

It appears that there was always one or more groups of courtesans who were sexually more accessible than the shuyu. The emergence of other categories of courtesans cannot be easily dated, because there are no accounts for the period 1821–1850 that might serve as a reference and there is little more for the next period, 1850–1875, when the landscape of prostitution was transformed. The courtesans formed a community in which the shuyu emerged as first among equals. The other groups split up as a result of reclassification wrought by social change in Shanghai that created a "downward movement"—in other words, a trend toward a greater "sexualization" of the courtesans. These groups were designated by the amount of money that had to be paid for their services. This was so for the changsan,

whose name was derived from a piece in Chinese majiang (mah-jong) known as the "long three" or "double three," meaning that she would charge three yuan to go out on call (tangchui) with a customer and three yuan to spend the night with him. There were also the er'er (double-two), ersan (two-three), and yao'er (one-two) classes of women. The first two categories were ephemeral and were later assimilated into the changsan or the yao'er.

In the earliest documents—those of Wang Tao—the changsan were called changsan shuyu, which suggests that they belonged to the same community, but they were characterized by greater accessibility and a fixed tariff that did not exist among the "genuine" shuyu. This is also true for the yao'er, who were initially called pipa jiaoqiu to indicate the fact that they could only play the pipa (but possessed no theatrical repertory). What can we infer from this? The courtesans' customers, especially those who patronized the shuyu, did appreciate their artistic talents, but they also expected or hoped for sexual gratification, even if they had to go through a subtle game of seduction and courtship in order to obtain it. The fact was that they had to be patient, and, given the limited numbers of shuyu, success was far from certain. It was natural then that there should appear other categories of individuals who offered comparable artistic qualities but were at the same time more accessible.

At the beginning of the 1860s, the Taiping revolt brought a mass of people of urban origin to Shanghai, many of whom were well-off and cultivated. This population included many members of the gentry from Suzhou as well as many refugees who were not as highly educated and who attracted the interest of those courtesans who were not as selective as the shuyu. In purely economic terms, this large influx of population greatly increased the demand for courtesans at a time when their supply was limited. There were nearly 500 changsan around 1875. The girls who came into the profession at this time did not have the same qualifications as their predecessors, all the more so as many of them came in by force of circumstance. Many girls from good families got stranded in the houses of courtesans and of prostitution. In the 1860s, the distinction between shuyu and changsan still undoubtedly meant something. Then, gradually, a process of downward assimilation prevailed. From 1875 onward, the term shuyu, even if it was still used, was increasingly losing any real significance. Thereafter, there remained only one group of courtesans, the changsan, whose numbers increased considerably. Around 1918, there were 1,281 according to various sources.

A Portrait of the Courtesans

The following portrait of the courtesans in the nineteenth century relies on fragmentary sources, namely the "biographies" of courtesans written by
literati such as Wang Tao in the nineteenth century and Wang Jimen in the 1920s. Rather than being true biographies, they are actually personal reminiscences of encounters with courtesans, most usually describing their character, appearance, talents, and skills and particular episodes in their lives. This is an old literary genre in China, but one that is of little use to the historian. The details given in these biographies are presented in unmethodical fashion and are extremely sketchy. They reflect the subjectivity of their authors and, at a more fundamental level, the superficiality of the relations that the courtesans actually maintained with their customers. In fact, in most instances these “biographies” very usually do no more than relate an event that came to the author’s knowledge at a time when he himself patronized the courtesan in question or the milieu in general, or they recount rumors and anecdotes that were widespread among the community of courtesans.39

The sources therefore are rare, but explicit enough to provide a profile of the courtesans and bring a certain number of myths into question. In the first two books that he devoted to this topic, Haizou Yeyou Lu (The Tale of a Libertine at the Seaside) and Huaguojutan (A Chat about the Theatre of the Realm of Flowers), Wang Tao mentions altogether 155 women whom he patronized in varying degrees.30 I have methodically examined these memoirs for any information that might help identify the courtesans.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the courtesans formed several groups constituted according to regional origin. According to Wang Tao, who listed them in order of quality, there were courtesans from Suzhou, Nanjing, Yangzhou, Ningbo, Huzhou, Hubei, and Jiangxi. The diversity of provincial origins is without doubt a reflection of the heterogeneity of Shanghai’s population up to the beginning of the 1870s. Each group had its courtesans. Later on, although this heterogeneity remained, the Jiangsu-Zhejiang communities grew considerably while the other provincial groups became small minorities. Most of the regional groups of courtesans disappeared, and their place was taken by courtesans originating from Jiangsu and, secondarily, from Zhejiang.32 The largest group, that of women from Suzhou, ultimately came to supplant all its rivals and dominate the world of the shuyu.

In all Chinese cities, whatever the region (except perhaps in Guangdong), the world of prostitution was divided into regional groups, and it was almost always the women of southern Jiangsu who were to be found in the upper strata.33 In his memoirs, Wang Tao mentions the geographical origin of 106 courtesans, a key element of the identity of an individual in China. Wang is able to identify the native village of most of the women, but the fact that it is a village makes it paradoxically difficult for the historian to identify these places. My own incomplete reconstruction shows that 54 courtesans were born in Jiangsu. Among them, 16 came from the Suzhou area, 10 from Jiangnan (the south of the province), and 8 from Jiangbei (half of them from Yangzhou). Eight of the courtesans came from Zhejiang. The rest (7) originated in various parts of China (Guangdong, Hunan, Hubei, and South Shandong). Thirteen came from villages that I have been unable to locate. It can be assumed that these villages were located in nearby provinces (Jiangsu, Zhejiang); otherwise, Wang Tao would have noted the name of the province. These figures hardly have any statistical value. Yet they highlight the predominance of Jiangsu women in the world of courtesans, a predominance that was noted by every observer of the time. Even courtesans from other regions of China adopted the Suzhou dialect, whose mellifluous character was considered to have been an essential part of the success of its speakers.34 In Shanghai, only one “outsider” group of courtesans remained. They were the Cantonese established in three or four houses near Nanking Road around 1890, and later further to the north, in Hongkou, where the Cantonese population was concentrated.35

This predominance remained unchallenged well into the twentieth century and even became more pronounced. An author writing in the early 1920s noted that the shuyu group was composed exclusively of women originating from Suzhou.36 This statement is corroborated by a police report on applications by courtesans to set up shop in the French Concession in 1923.37 Eighty-two percent of these women came from Suzhou (see Table 1.1). By adding this figure to those originating from Shanghai, Wuxi, and Changzhou, we arrive at a total of 93% as the proportion of the courtesans who were natives of Jiangnan.

A majority of the courtesans were very young. Wang Tao mentions

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**Table 1.1. Origin by province of a group of 77 courtesans (1923)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suzhou</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changzhou</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ningbo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangzhou</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuxi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangzhou</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiaxing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Archives de la direction des services administratifs, French Concession, Archives municipales de Shanghai, Dossier 1934 25 MS 15542, “Maisons des chanteuses: demandes de licence” (1922–1924).
Table 1.2. Age structure of a sample of courtesans (nineteenth century)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>19</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ages (probably their ages when he knew them) of fifty-eight women (see Table 1.2).

The courtesans began their careers at a very early age and usually left quite soon, after five to ten years at most for those who were lucky enough to find a husband. We have confirmation here of a reality that is never mentioned in the Chinese sources: the great partiality of nineteenth-century Chinese men for “young sprouts.” The extreme youth of the courtesans was seen as something natural; and no author, in any period whatsoever, was outraged by it. This phenomenon was not as widespread after 1911, partly because of the penalties laid down in successive penal codes. Still, all that the youngest courtesans did was to provide company for customers at table. It was usually around the age of fifteen that they were deflowered. On the other hand (although there was no formal rule in the matter, and some famous courtesans were able to practice their craft well into their fifties), it was difficult for a courtesan to keep working after the age of twenty. By then, she would already be considered to be “old.” Wang Tao expresses this sentiment twice: “Although she was more than twenty years of age,” and “although she was already twenty years old.” It may be concluded from this that the twenty-year age limit was an almost physiological boundary beyond which a courtesan would be expected to find a husband. Otherwise, she ran the risk of losing her charm and beauty and seeing her house deserted by her customers (a condition in which, as Wang writes many times, “chen leng luo men qian” – the carriages seldom stop at her doorstep).

Wang Tao also sheds some light on a very little known dimension, namely, the social origin of the prostitutes. I have managed to retrieve information on only forty-two of them. The definition is often very vague. Twelve of these women came from “good families” (liangjia), two came from “great families,” eight came from “modest” (xiaojia) or poor families, six were adopted daughters (yangniu), and fourteen were daughters of persons belonging to the following categories: madam (one), peasant (three), fisherman (one), butcher (one), clerk (one), merchant (two), literati (five). If we exclude the literati and the “good families” (though this term does not exactly refer to a high socioeconomic level), this distribution gives the impression of a generally modest social background. This is not surprising in itself, but we shall see below that it challenges the traditional image of the courtesans qua learned women. The reasons for entry into prostitution are also given for forty women. Four were coerced into the trade by poverty, thirteen were sold to a madam or a courtesan (three of them by their own parents), fourteen were orphans, and one was the natural daughter of a madam. Of the others, three fell into prostitution after losing a husband, two after being kidnapped, one after being expelled by her parents, and two as a result of war. The general cause was undoubtedly poverty, whether as a lasting condition or the consequence of an accident. The death of parents, especially of the father, is frequently cited as a cause. Troubles associated with the Taiping rebellion are also mentioned eight times in relation to the death of parents. This tends to confirm the generally lowly origin of these girls, who appear to have been sold at a young age to a madam who took care of their training as courtesans.

Wang Tao is not very forthcoming about the talents and skills of the courtesans. Their physical appearance is always described in conventional language, with little variation on the same theme:

She was as beautiful as the morning dew, her skin glistened like the almond, her bones were light and her body could be held in one hand, her gait was like a willow tree in the wind.

Writers tended to focus on clothing more than on the person herself and expressed first of all their own subjective reaction, either as admires or as critics of the courtesans. It is simply impossible to know from such descriptions what any particular courtesan actually looked like and what distinguished her from another. Even the literature sheds only a little light on this aspect of the matter. With regard to their artistic skills, we learn from Wang Tao that nineteen of them were famous for their singing, playing the pipa (six), the Chinese lute (six), and the flute (two), singing and playing an instrument (two), telling tanci (two), and the art of hospitality (three). Wang Tao provides some rare though valuable clues to the courtesans’ level of education, which seems to have been fairly limited (see Table 1.3).

The vision of the well-educated courtesan is a myth that does not stand up to a close examination of the facts or to simple logic. Wang Tao gives us an idea of the reality as he perceived it in the nineteenth century. Wang Tao
Table 1.3. Educational level of a sample of 25 courtiers (nineteenth century)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Number in sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Able to read and write calligraphy</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to read poetry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to read</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to write poetry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to talk about poetry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to write letters</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some reading ability</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sources: Yu Baosheng (one of Wang Tao's pseudonyms), Haizou yeyou lu; Haizou yeyou fu lu; Haizou yeyou yula; Wang Tao, Songbin suohua.*

Specifically mentions a “literary” education for only 17 out of 155 courtiers. The others seem to have had a more superficial knowledge of Chinese writing. This is a very small proportion, even if we allow for the subjective and random nature of Wang Tao's selection. Did it conform to reality? Many more courtiers doubtless had a certain level of education, but that is not the point. Wang Tao recorded only those whose literary knowledge made an impression on him. We cannot deny the fact that few actually had any command of the written language (poetry and calligraphy). Most of them had only a rather elementary knowledge of Chinese characters that allowed them to read and write ordinary documents, such as letters. This is a far cry from the image of the learned courtisan, wittily engaging in intellectual games such as the improvising of poems, as described in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century novels or in travel accounts by Westerners and subsequently included by all those who wrote about the courtiers. In the following century, the level of education of prostitutes was extremely low, no matter what category they belonged to.

In fact, it is not surprising that the level should have been low even among the courtiers. Most came from families with modest incomes or even poor families and had therefore received no formal education. Only a minority, probably those from better-off families, could have received a more advanced education before joining the ranks of the courtiers. Raised from an early age by a madam, the girls were given lessons in singing, playing music, and performing opera. These were all skills directed toward making them professional entertainers, not intellectuals. The madams, who considered the girls as “money trees” (yaoqianshu), had no financial interest in having them receive a formal education from a private tutor, and they preferred to limit their investment to the minimum. “Within a few months, she had learned her art and could go around singing and serving at table.” Finally, given the early age at which the courtiers began to exercise their trade and the difficulties that they faced in learning the Chinese classical language, it was practically impossible for the vast majority of courtiers to have been learned women. More prosaically, they played the role of ladies of company, from whom customers expected wit and lively conversation, but above all entertainment— that is, singing and music. One of the first initiatives taken by a group of “ politicized” courtiers after 1911 was to set up a school to provide the girls with a way out through education.

Whatever the weakness of the statistical data presented here, there is no reason to think that the examples chosen by Wang Tao—an active and assiduous patron of courtiers’ houses for more than four decades—present an excessively biased picture of reality. It is true that his writings offer an insufficiently clear view of Chinese courtiers at a time when Western influence was still small (from the dates given here and there in the texts, it can be inferred that these girls were active between 1860 and 1872), but they are one of the very rare direct testimonies available on this topic. The general impression given by these accounts is that the courtiers were a group of women who lived by selling sexual favors and that most of them were basically hardly better off than those who ended up in the common houses of prostitution. What made the difference in the paths that they took was circumstance, occasionally outstanding beauty or more simply luck.

Several authors, including Wang Tao himself, emphasized the decline in the level of education of the courtiers. A book published in 1891 stated that it was not easy to find courtiers who could sing and play an instrument, and it was even rarer to find girls who knew how to receive and treat their customers properly or who were able to write. One account in 1923 noted that ever fewer girls knew how to play the huqin (two-string violin), though a small minority was still able to handle the pipa (Chinese mandolin). The majority of them could only sing pieces from the Peking opera, which made for a noisy and not very refined ambiance when several courtiers happened to be in the same place. A short biography of a courtier published in 1926 notes that after losing both her parents at the age of thirteen, she had taken singing lessons arranged for her aunt. After a year, she had mastered thirty songs and was farmed out to a madam as a courtier. This apparent “decline in quality,” which was a perception that must be ascribed partly to nostalgia on the part of these authors for an idealized past, was also observed in the courtiers of Beijing at the turn of the century.
The fact, however, is that the available data on courtesans in the twentieth century is paradoxically much scantier than the admittedly limited information given by Wang Tao for the nineteenth century. This points to a greater homogenization of the different categories of prostitutes. The nature of the social demand changed and determined a different profile for the courtesans. Ironically, the demand for sexual services overshadowed the function of entertainment that had been the primary feature of this particular group of prostitutes up to the nineteenth century. Depending on their status, the courtesans enjoyed varying degrees of freedom and of control over their life. Yet, their capacity for autonomous action remained somewhat curtailed.

The Status of the Courtesans

The status of the courtesans depended on the circumstances in which they entered the trade. There was no correspondence between the socioeconomic condition of the women, which could be privileged, and their “legal” status, which, in most cases, was characterized by servitude.

Entry into the courtesans’ milieu came at an early age, as we have seen. This meant that it was very exceptional for the girls reduced to this condition to have entered it of their own accord. The courtesans came from families who had deliberately given them up to a madam or placed them as “adopted daughters” (yangniu) without really worrying about their fate. Sometimes, the girls had lost their families and were orphans or dependent on relatives (uncles or aunts) who had no wish to be burdened with additional mouths to feed. In a later chapter, I shall examine the question of the traffic in women in China. It will suffice here to note that in the nineteenth century and up to the 1920s, most of the courtesans came from the immense market in human beings during that period, namely, China.

Whether purchased or kidnapped, the young girls trained in the courtesans’ trade became de facto slaves of their madams. Ordinary prostitutes as well as courtesans were subjected to strict surveillance. They lost all freedom over their person and their goods. They could not go out without being accompanied by their madam or a maidservant. And the only outings allowed to them had to be within the ambit of their professional activity. Nor did the courtesans freely dispose of their earnings. The entire amount of a girl’s official earnings, if she was a “slave,” went into the madam’s pouch. All that the courtesan actually kept was the gifts that were directly given to her by her customers. Only the famous courtesans could ensure the favors of rich customers, obtain many gifts, and save enough money to escape from the madam’s clutches. Unlike other prostitutes, the courtesans could emancipate themselves, namely buy back their bodies (shushen), enfranchise themselves rather in the manner of slaves and recover their freedom from the madam. Jin Cai’e, a famous courtesan, herself the adopted daughter of a renowned prostitute, paid off her debt at the age of seventeen and set herself up in her own right.31 Yue Fang, another famous courtesan at the beginning of the 1890s, paid 2,000 taels for her freedom and then set herself up as an independent courtesan.32 The madam was able to “reinvest” the sum that she received in the purchase of another young girl, who may or may not have been trained, in order to turn her into a courtesan and live off her earnings. As a rule, a madam found it worthwhile after a few years to negotiate a girl’s departure, whether through self-enfranchisement or by marriage, because a courtesan’s career could not last forever. It was therefore necessary to ensure a turnover of staff in order to stay in the market. A proportion of the courtesans were hired. Some were mortgaged by their families for specified periods at the end of which they could, if they wished, remain in the trade. They were recruited by madams who paid them an agreed sum as well as a part of the earnings. These courtesans had greater freedom of movement and could leave the world of prostitution more easily.

Rules of Etiquette and Games of Seduction

The practice of patronizing courtesans was regulated by a sort of unspoken but strict code that applied both to the customers and to the girls, and the relationship entailed far more than a mere exchange of money or gifts. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, courtesans did not give themselves to the first comer, whatever his degree of wealth, and the customers themselves were certainly looking for something other than immediate gratification, which was easily available elsewhere. In this respect, the modes of relationship between the prostitutes and their customers quite clearly point to a form of culture that had no equivalent in the West, except perhaps in ancient Greece. They shed light on the state of Chinese society on the eve of the great upheaval caused by the intrusion of Westerners. They shed light especially on (a) the strict separation between the sexes, to which the world of the courtesans was an exception, and (b) the force of rituals, etiquette, and rules of reciprocity – related to ganging (sentiments) – among the Chinese elite. Although the construction of a subtle code was in itself the expression of a cultural form peculiar to China, it also responded to commercial considerations inasmuch as the services provided by courtesans, which were always paid for at the end of the season, were based on trust. This trust was obtained only at the end of an “initiatory” stage in which the courtesan and her madam could gauge the customer as candidate.

The first contact was an important step. A customer could not visit a cour-
tesan whom he did not know or even call her out (jiào jù). In order to make her acquaintance, he had to have her invited to a restaurant or to the theater by a friend who was already patronizing her. Only then, after having been personally introduced by this go-between, could the customer in turn invite the courtesan to come out with him. If he had no friend to offer his services, there remained the solution of going to a shuchang and asking a courtesan of his choice to sing a few melodies. When she had finished singing, the courtesan would go up to the men who had, so to speak, honored her and also given proof of means. After this first contact, she would agree to be called out.

This first stage clearly shows the importance given to face-to-face contact. Such contact was a constant in Chinese society, which was particularly marked by the culture of the go-between. Implicitly, the person who made the introductions was a guarantor for the two parties, and, as far as the courtesan was concerned, he was a guarantor of the new customer's status and solvency. Some people aspiring to become customers would mention a friend's name in his absence. The courtesans did not appreciate this style of behavior and cold-shouldered those who resorted to it. It would appear that from the 1920s onward, when the courtesans had become more like high-class prostitutes, the rules were less strict. For example, customers could consult a restaurant's register of invitations (tāngchái děngjùbù) and copy out a courtesan's name and address.49 Similarly, there were directories (huájié diānhuābù) that listed courtesans with their particulars, especially their phone numbers.50 All that had to be done then was to send a message or ask for the girl to be called out.

Starting with the first meeting, the courtesan embarked on a process in which she made an advance installment, so to speak, of her person and her talents. The customer had to invite her out to dinner in order to entertain his friends. In this way, he helped nurture a more trusting relationship. The first invitation was not recorded in any accounts. After two or three invitations, the customer was registered in the “book of outings,” and each invitation was written down and invoiced at the end of the season along with the customer’s other expenses. In the beginning, the courtesans kept their service to the minimum and left as soon as they had made an appearance, considering the invitation to be a chance call that would not necessarily be repeated. Thereafter, if the customer displayed his interest by successive invitations, they would take time to converse and dally with him and his guests.

After several regular invitations, the customer was permitted to go to the courtesan’s house. This was a sort of courtesy visit (da chàwèi) that cost nothing.51 The courtesan served tea and delicacies and offered a pipe. In a later period, the pipes were replaced by cigarettes. This visit, unlike invitations to go out, could be repeated only once or twice, after which the courtesan had to be “compensated “ (bàoxiào) for her work and hospitality.

Moreover, the visits had to be within certain times—that is, from the beginning of the afternoon to 6:00 P.M. Before this time, it was inconvenient because the women were either asleep or getting ready. Afterward, they were busy responding to the invitations to go out (tāngchái) that started coming in at that point.

The third and last step awaited by the courtesans was that of the huaōtuō. It is not at all easy to render this expression with its ambiguity. Huaōtuō literally means “flower chief.” It goes with a verb, zōu (to make), which does not have the meaning of “to become, to be, to embody” in Chinese but rather designates the facet of acting as in “to make a feast,” which corresponds to a reality: “to make a huaōtuō” is to organize a dinner or a gambling party. The expression therefore designates the maker and what is made. A huaōtuō was also a unit of account corresponding to either a meal or a gambling party. When a customer wished to be accepted as a “habitué” and win over a courtesan, he could not confine his gestures to “calls.” The houses earned most of their income from activities ancillary to prostitution, such as dinners and gambling, which brought in people and also helped them attract new customers.

If the customer met all these conditions, he might hope to sleep with the courtesan, who could then be sure of his interest in her. There was no fixed rate. The only constant expenditure lay in the inevitable tips to the house staff. This does not mean that the customer could limit himself to huaōtuō. He had to give the courtesans gifts in order to maintain their regard. At the same time, it was highly ill-advised to push for sexual relations with a courtesan by giving her money, especially by putting pressure through the madam, who would be generally less particular in these matters. Except in their descriptions of the shuyi in the nineteenth century who, it would seem, were not easily available sexually, it is likely that Chinese authors tended to idealize the condition of the courtesans and to downplay their increasing sexualization.

Up to the First World War, the chängshān were not simple prostitutes. However, the latitude that they could enjoy in the face of a determined customer and a madam who was mainly interested in money was probably very small. The relationship between these three actors consisted of a subtle game where each tried to use his or her power to draw the greatest advantage from the situation. One author writing around 1920 felt that about one or two dozen huaōtuō were necessary in order to be able to sleep with a courtesan, although another suggested that half a dozen was already a basis for claiming a night.56 The sentimental and even formal aspect totally disappeared. In 1940, one author said that girls were no longer interested in anything but money and that the rest was just play-acting.57 All the signs are that the chängshān then joined the populous ranks of the common prostitutes, even if they continued to receive a more selective type of customer.
The Courtesans in the Public Space: Being Called Out

Being called out (tangchái) corresponded to an essential activity of courtesans, both financially and for their reputation. The women never went out alone. They were always chaperoned either by a maid servant or by the madam herself. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, they sometimes also came with a musician. The well-known courtesans could have up to fifty to sixty outings in an evening, but a woman of average reputation could easily go on twenty to thirty outings. Because they stayed only for a very short time, a wealthy customer could call out about ten of them in the course of an evening. The outings began toward 6:00 P.M. and continued up till midnight, that is for six hours during which a courtesan enjoyed hardly any respite. The courtesans most in demand stayed with a customer for barely more than five minutes. This pace was possible only because the distances to be traveled were often very small. This was because the courtesans' houses, the restaurants, and the teahouses were concentrated within a defined perimeter in the foreign settlement that I have called "the golden circle of prostitution" (see Chapter 8).

It was impossible for a courtesan to refuse an invitation from an already-known customer. The atmosphere of the evening organized by the customer but also his reputation depended on her arrival. The absence of a courtesan whom he had invited would make him lose face before his friends, and this was a mistake to be avoided at all costs. Thus, whatever the circumstances and the weather, a courtesan had to respond to invitations post haste. Some customers were extremely sensitive. A minor delay could arouse their anger and lead them to insult a courtesan. A customer might also retaliate against a slight by having a nasty article printed in one of the small newspapers that reported the activities of these circles. The most irascible would even go to the house where the woman lived to protest and cause trouble or provoke a quarrel.

On their outings, the courtesans would travel in sedan chairs. Although the distances traveled were relatively small, their bound feet prevented them from any walking, apart from short spells in a park. Besides, they had to respond to several invitations in a single evening, especially the most famed courtesans. And then, the roads and alleys of Shanghai of the period were still mud roads. This ruled out walking on rainy days because the courtesans could not soil their fine clothes. Thus, the sedan chairs that could go anywhere (as rickshaws did later) proved to be the most rapid and convenient mode of transport. Each house generally had its own sedan chair and later its own rickshaw. In the evening, it was not rare to see a large number of these chairs around a big restaurant or a shuchang. Bystanders gathered around to admire these chairs and try to get a glimpse of the girls. The courtesans, who were inaccessible to the majority of the population, were part of the street scene, especially in the evening, when, before the introduction of gas and then electricity, most work came to a halt and was replaced by activity in a few lively areas concentrated in the same district. The sedan chairs gradually disappeared, first of all because of the introduction of a tax on these vehicles by the authorities of the International Settlement around 1915. To avoid paying this tax, the houses decided to have the women carried on men's backs. This practice, which was prohibited by the police as disreputable, is a significant indication of the way in which the standing of the courtesans declined. The sedan chairs were later replaced by rickshaws, which were more comfortable. The use of rickshaws became widespread after 1920.

The Leisure Space of the Urban Elites

The life of the courtesans was not limited to the confines of their establishments. Their activity extended considerably beyond this framework and hinged upon what I would call the "four cardinal points of the world of the courtesans." These four points, along with the courtesans' houses, formed the leisure space of the Chinese elites even if these elites did not enjoy a monopoly over them. These points can be assembled in pairs. One pair corresponded to entertainment and consisted of the shuchang and the theater, and the other pair corresponded to the pleasures of the table and consisted of the restaurants and the teahouses. Some of these institutions did not survive the "long nineteenth century" as places of entertainment for the elites. The shuchang disappeared while the theater became an ordinary place for performances, a place that was open to all and was more anonymous. The teahouses, which were numerous even in 1949, lost their status as places of recreation for the elites to the benefit of the coffee houses and open-air cafes (huayuan) opened by the amusement centers and the big stores. Only the restaurants, those inevitable centers of Chinese sociability, withstood the changes that came about in manners and customs.

The general trend that encompassed all these changes saw a shrinking of the space within which the courtesans moved. Paradoxically, as they grew to be "public girls," the courtesans became ever less present in the public places. The decline of this group and its gradual assimilation into the ranks of prostitutes (a process that was completed after 1920) was accompanied by a shrinking of the courtesans' role until it became limited to the sexual function. A revealing aspect of this trend is the fact that a new institution, the hotel, began to assume central importance in this period and replaced other places as aetrysting point between courtesans and their customers. These courtesans thereafter became mere "high-class call girls" whose company gave a certain social status to those who had the means to pay for them, but they were no longer the thread


that linked the different points of the leisure space of the elites. The culture in which they had participated no longer existed, having gone under with the collapse of the old regime and the disappearance of the traditional elites.

The "Shuchang": An Intermediate Space

The shuchang were big halls that provided music-hall shows in the Chinese musical tradition. They could receive up to a hundred spectators seated around a platform on which the courtesans were placed individually or in groups. The first establishment of this type is supposed to have opened in Shangcniu, a little lane off Fuzhou Road, at the beginning of the 1860s. Thereafter, they mushroomed very rapidly, always in the courtesans' district, and reached a high point in the years 1890–1892. The most famous shuchang were Tianlewo ("The Nest of Celestial Bliss"), Jiaolou ("The Pavilion of Relations"), Xiaoguangan, and a few others.65 Some remained at the end of the Qing Dynasty, but they were supplanted by amusement centers such as the Great World. The last shuchang closed in 1916.66 In 1919, a Shanghai guidebook stated that there were still sixteen of them, but, while the name had not changed, the reality no longer bore any relationship to the establishments of the past.67

Plate 1 gives an idea of what these establishments were like toward the end of the nineteenth century. At this time, the girls appeared alone, without musicians. They had already opted for the Peking opera and for ballads that they sang to the accompaniment of the ubiquitous pipa. In the illustration, the stage is a sort of richly decorated platform with a table around which the courtesans are seated. In the background, there is a group of maidservants who accompany the courtesans on all their trips. The maids who are attending to customers already known to the girl or to those who have asked her to sing a song are preparing their water pipes and conversing with them. The customers are seated around tables that provide a frame for the stage. Some are drinking while others are smoking the water pipe while listening to music.

The shuchang would invite three or four courtesans whose names, date, and time of presence were displayed outside on long strips of red paper.68 Later, it was in the press (the small newspapers or xiao bao) that the shuchang published lists of the women that it would be receiving.69 The price of entry was 0.20 to 0.70 yuan, depending on the number of girls present. In addition, the spectators paid only for the tea that they consumed, and they paid the courtesans for the songs that they had specially requested.70 The customers could ask a courtesan to sing one or more special melodies. This was one way of honoring her or making first contact for anyone who wished to be received at her house. Each song cost one yuan. When the girl had finished her turn, she could join the customer

outside and depart with him. A shuchang could also be requested to bring in a particular courtesan.71

The shuchang provided the musicians. The shuyu themselves did not have any qualified musicians with them, unlike the changsan. Very often, they accompanied themselves on an instrument.72 At the turn of every season (jie), the musicians would organize a show. The establishment was decorated with bouquets of real flowers and multicolored lanterns. Each courtesan invited a faithful customer, seated in the first row, who naturally had to request several songs. The girls received no part of the takings, which were shared between the musicians and the owner of the shuchang. The earnings from this show provided the musicians with their salary for the entire season.73 Every courtesan’s "turn to sing" was organized on the same lines. It began with ballads followed by a piece of opera and ended with songs.

In these establishments, the pieces played were originally melodies from
The theater (chuang) and kunqu, as well as ballads with instrumental accompaniment. It was fairly difficult to learn the kunqu. According to Wang Tao, this is why the girls went in for the Peking opera. Wang did not conceal his distaste for the latter: "the girls' necks turn red and their faces crimson"), preferring the softer strains of music from Changzhou and Suzhou. More prosaically, this was probably a fashion-related phenomenon leading in the 1870s to the growth of a craze for the Peking opera that persisted thereafter. The shuchang, along with the theater, the tea houses, and the brothels, were among the favored places of diversion for the scholars. Leisure activities took fairly limited forms in the Chinese cities, and in the shuchang the scholars found an atmosphere of friendship that was propitious to discussion and to listening to music, away from the rest of the populace.

The Theater

In the nineteenth century, the theater was one of the places where courtesans frequently could be met. There was a close link between this milieu and that of the courtesans, as can be seen in a number of older writings. Actors and courtesans had long been relegated by law to the fringes of society. They belonged to the category of "mean people" (jianmin), a status that was officially lifted only in the eighteenth century. Apart from this discrimination dictated by the establishment, it was the art of music and rhetoric that brought these two groups together. Courtesans who did not manage to marry young sometimes ended up in a theatrical troupe. In the modern period, the link between the two groups was getting tenuous, but it was still solid at the beginning of the period being studied here. Spectators often invited a courtesan to keep them company for the space of a melody on the stage. The courtesans themselves were keen on the theater and attended it very regularly, especially when a famous actor was playing. Many a courtesan took a lover from among the actors.

There were about ten theaters in Shanghai. They performed mainly Peking opera and, to a lesser extent, kunqu. To understand the way in which courtesans organized their visits to their customers during a theatrical performance, we must of course discard images based on contemporary Western theater. Chinese theaters in the nineteenth century were rather like those of the eighteenth century in France, although they were more comfortable. Plate 2 is a faithful representation of such a theater. These establishments were actually similar to the shuchang, but they surpassed the shuchang in size and internal disposition. The organization of the hall, as shown, provided for greater conviviality and remarkable ease of exchange among the spectators, who sat in groups at round tables where they were served food and drink. They could thus follow the course of the play while discussing, judging, uttering exclamations, or complaining, depending on the talent of the troupe. It was more common for theatrical performances to take place in the daytime.

The courtesans could come and sit beside those who had sent for them without disturbing the performance. This was an opportunity for them to be seen and for the customer to make a public display of his social status, especially when the courtesan was famous. The girls generally did not stop by for more than one or two melodies. It was not uncommon for the most celebrated courtesans to go from one customer to another in the same theater, and one author claimed to have seen this happen six times in the course of the same evening. From time to time, there could be an incident of rivalry that arose when a spectator called over a courtesan who was with another member of the audience. When this happened, and depending on the financial means of the rivals, there would be a sort of tournament waged
with invitations that followed one another, with the courtesan going from one to the other as she received notes inviting her to come over. One courtesan is thus said to have made several dozens of trips in one evening, thereby earning the tidy sum of 2,000 yuan.90

Restaurants and Teahouses

In the mid-nineteenth century, and probably even before that, Shanghai had a large variety of restaurants offering all of China’s regional cuisines. It was possible to dine very late in the Cantonese restaurants, where it was customary to take a meal toward midnight.91 A customer could have a courtesan of his choice brought to the restaurant provided that he was known to her. In the beginning, a courier would be sent with a large piece of red paper that had no particular shape. Then, restaurants introduced little cards of red printed paper with the name and address of the establishment that customers filled in with the courtesan’s name and address. Each establishment (restaurant or theater) had an employee whose sole function was to carry the invitation cards to the courtesans’ houses. They were paid directly by the houses in proportion to the number of cards carried.92 Toward 1893, the courtesans’ houses adopted the same system when they invited customers to a particular occasion.93

When the courtesans were invited to accompany a few guests at a restaurant, they did not sing any pieces from the opera and came without musicians. The customer generally stated his wishes in advance on his card. The word pipa was enough to tell the courtesan what he wanted from her.94 The courtesans never took part in the meal, whether in restaurants or in their own establishments. They would remain seated behind the customers who had invited them and would offer them drinks in the Chinese fashion. They usually sang while the dishes were being served, and then they would invite the customers to a game of finger-guessing (catiquan).95 Each game consisted of five successive turns at the end of which the loser had to drink a glass of liquor. The courtesans drank only half a glass and often asked their maidservants to swallow the liquor for them.96

The teahouses were another much favored and convivial meetingplace, both in the towns and in the rural townships. They were the equivalent of the French bistros, vectors par excellence of popular culture and places for the exchange of information, places for friendly or professional meetings, or relaxation and diversion.97 There were famous houses such as Yidongtian, Songfengge, and Lisuitai in the north of the old city or again Qingliange in the International Settlement that provided an appropriate setting for inviting courtesans.98 These houses were richly decorated with etchings and works of calligraphy by well-known painters. The interior of Qingliange was furnished with black lacquered tables and seats covered with white linen cushions delicately interwoven with red thread.

When the teahouse moved to a new three-story building, the furniture was replaced by redwood chairs and marble tables. In 1884, the house employed waiters (who were then known as nianjianggum) and a number of vendors of several varieties of hot dumplings (diansin) who worked throughout the day.99

The presence of courtesans in these establishments made for a particularly lively atmosphere. Their constant coming and going was in addition to the bustling movements of waiters and vendors of all kinds. A visitor from outside remarked in 1891 that the scholars went to these establishments as much to take tea as for their atmosphere.100 Wang Tao observed that certain houses, located near the temple of the city god (Chenghuangmiao), had become havens for the courtesans who came there to take tea after burning incense before their guardian deity. It was an opportunity for them to be seen. The less sophisticated prostitutes were far more direct and solicited the exclusively male customers of the teahouses by making eyes at them.101 At the turn of the century, the teahouses were often places where prostitutes met and solicited customers.

Outings in the City

The courtesans liked to flaunt themselves outdoors. It was probably a way of escaping from their confinement in the restricted space of the house and the chamber, as well as an opportunity to attract the attention of new customers. The fact that they frequented certain places is hardly surprising. These places included the gardens attached to the temple of the city deity to which the courtesans went frequently. These gardens, known as the Western Gardens (xiyuan, today’s Yuyuan), were visited by the populace seeking to escape from Shanghai’s already congested habitat. The gardens also contained many pavilions that had been built or were occupied by certain merchant guilds for their daily meetings. There were also some very lively teahouses where the courtesans liked to enjoy the fresh air and chat. In the International Settlement, the Bund also became a very highly regarded place.

The courtesans and their customers always looked for places where they could find some greenery and escape from the overcrowding that characterized the old city. Thus, the Temple of Jing’ansi, located in the west of the city, which was still right in the country at the end of the century, attracted many walkers who came there to look at the hot springs. The Longhua pagoda in the southwest was also a place of peace and quiet. People traveled there by wheeled cars, by sedan chairs, and, for comfort and speed, by horse carriage, which by the end of the century became the mode of transport most commonly used by the elite for traveling in the city.102 An expedition of this kind counted as an invitation to go out (tangpia), requiring remuneration by the customer. It was also an occasion
Plate 3. Various modes of transportation in the old city about 1890.

for the girls to receive gifts (jewelry and money) that would escape the madam's vigilant eye.89

The arrival of Westerners created new locations and new opportunities for outings. The most important of them was the race course where every year, whatever the circumstances, there was a whole set of events connected with the horse races. Gradually, what had been an annual event became more frequent with the organization of races and betting, which drew large crowds. The well-to-do Chinese who went to the races, especially in the nineteenth century when this event was as yet highly elitist in character, were accompanied by the courtesans of whom they were the official customers. The more famous the girl in these circles, the greater was the advantage to the customer in terms of social prestige. And the courtesan herself boosted her position and aroused interest on the part of potential customers. The tradition of taking walks did not survive the shrinking of leisure space of the Chinese elites. No source mentions these outings after 1911.

The Chinese courtesans belonged to a cultural tradition and a social structure that did not withstand the onslaught of modernity. As in ancient Greece or modern Japan, the existence of a group of women especially devoted to the entertainment of male members of the elites—who enjoyed full freedom to have several wives and concubines in their homes—could be imagined only in a society characterized by a rigid separation of the sexes and a very restrictive definition of the role of women. China, unlike the West, continued to live in this mode until late into the nineteenth century. The opening of Shanghai to foreign trade, the slow but growing externalization of Chinese women, and changes in the composition of local society gradually undermined the status and role of the courtesans, to the benefit of a system in which there now existed only common prostitutes. This change was initiated very quickly under the combined effect of foreign influence and social upheaval caused by internal rebellion, but it reached completion only half a century later with the economic take-off of the city.

The fact that this transformation was gradual points to the profound entrenchment of the courtesans in the social habitus of the Chinese upper classes. Our image of this milieu is undoubtedly idealized, as I have tried to show in the first part of this chapter. Nevertheless, the fact that this reality differed from the representations that the literati made of it is ultimately of only relative importance. What matters above all is the discourse that was elaborated about this community. This discourse dominated the perception that the literati and the population in general had of the courtesans. The myth thus created permeated the collective consciousness to such a degree that the notion of the courtesan endured well after her actual disappearance in the twentieth century. I shall return to this point because it was decisive in the vision that might be had of the place of prostitution in China. The idealization of courtesans helped mask the contempt in which the Chinese elites actually held the common prostitute and therefore contributed to projecting a distorted image of the attitude of the Chinese toward prostitution.

In nineteenth-century Shanghai, courtesans enjoyed a socially recognized status that the poorest sections of the city’s population probably envied. The patronizing of courtesans was governed by relatively strict rules that emphasized the respect in which they were held by their customers. These were not mere rituals aimed at masking a squalid sex-for-money relationship. The men who went to these houses looked for something other than mere sexual gratification. The courtesans provided company, vivacity, and diversion in a context of relaxation and conviviality. The leisure space of the elites comprised the four cardinal points referred to earlier, and the courtesans’ house clearly represented the center or focal point of this leisure.

It was the only place where the merchants and literati found the peace and quiet as well as the intimacy in which to enjoy themselves among friends, in pleasant company. The most important events in an individual’s life—birthdays, success in examinations, business deals, and so on—were cele-
brated in these places. Patronizing a courtesan’s house was a normal part of social life for the Chinese urban elites, and it could be done on a regular and sometimes daily basis.

In Shanghai, there was a leisure space and a leisure time proper to the elites, and the courtesans were the Ariadne’s clew (i.e., the unifying thread) that unified this time and space. If we make an exception for women from the more popular classes, courtesans were the only women who moved in a male-dominated public space. We must keep in mind this particular structure of urban society in nineteenth-century China – which differed radically from that of cities in the West where women practiced various small crafts and trades that took them daily into the streets – to appreciate the very special role of courtesans. The kind of privileged status that resulted from this situation was undermined by the increasing entry of women into the labor market and the public space. Other modes of entertainment emerged that eliminated or modified the traditional places of leisure of the elites. The courtesans withdrew into their proper domain – their own houses – and went out only in order to entertain customers in restaurants. The movements of courtesans in the public space was limited to these brief “to-and-fro trips,” and this fact signaled the decline in their function. From being artists praised for their vivacity, talents, and sense of sociability, the courtesans saw their role drop to that of luxury prostitutes who could still be taken out publicly as objects of social status, but whose services were henceforth limited to the sexual domain.

2
Lives of Splendor and Wretchedness

The writings of the Chinese scholars convey a positive and much idealized – even mythical – image of the courtesans. Our perception of this group is thereby necessarily biased, all the more so as the sources, by their very silence, conceal a part of the reality that the scholars would not see. It is therefore through the prism of an exclusively male viewpoint that we must try to detect a more complex and less benign reality behind “the perfume and the powder.” To be sure, these hetaerae of traditional Chinese society had a higher social status than their sisters struggling in the opium dens and brothels of the Huangpu docks, and they enjoyed far better living conditions. And yet we have seen that in the nineteenth century many, if not most, of them lived in conditions of virtual (albeit gilded) servitude from which their only hope of escape was to buy their own freedom (and this was a privilege reserved for a minority) or be redeemed by a wealthy customer. In this chapter, I shall first of all touch on the condition of the courtesans and the essential stages in their careers and then explore a dimension peculiar to this milieu in China, the “culture of the courtesans” that was shared by the Chinese urban elites up to the First World War.

Keeping Up Appearances and the Illusion of Appearances

Beauty and elegance were two qualities that set the courtesans apart from most other women. It was their richly decorated robes that drew attention at first sight. The courtesans took extremely great care of their physical appearance, which was an essential attribute of their success. A critical view expressed at the end of the nineteenth century deemed them to be capable of little else but self-adornment. But further reflection would suggest that it is not really easy to get an idea of what a Chinese courtesan looked like at this time. The written testimony is often couched in a conventional language that does not give a full account of physical appearance in precise terms related to specific individuals. The Chinese scholars were very particularly fond of the subtle game of using literary quotations from ancient writings. These quotations were of course powerfully evocative in the minds of those who used them but are a source of frustration to the historian
seeking to "see" these courtesans and perceive changes, if any, both in their appearance and in the male perception of beauty. This may be the rational viewpoint of a Westerner; and perhaps it makes no sense to the aesthetic sensibility of the Chinese scholars, who were concerned with the "essence" of beauty rather than with its "externals." In their eyes, true beauty lay in the spirit (qí) that gave life to a woman and not in her external physical appearance.3

All that remain, therefore, apart from a few stray jottings, is the iconography. Unfortunately, the iconography is not really wide-ranging. The Chinese do not have the tradition of the portrait, which, in the West, has given us valuable sources for the study of dress, hairstyles, and so on. It is almost impossible, in Chinese art, to find the quasi-ethnographic curiosity of a painter like Toulouse-Lautrec, who was able to assemble both the externals and the atmosphere of the Parisian houses of vice in one and the same painting. There is one exception, although it is not comparable and is limited in time. It consists of the remarkable etchings published by the illustrative supplement (Dianshizhai huabao) of the newspaper Shen Bao.4 Nor did the introduction of photography into China make any major contribution toward this type of portraiture. A good number of photographs of courtesans can be found, but these were generally meant for self-advertisement. A courtesan would have her photograph taken in order to display it at home or present it to a good customer. Some courtesans had their visiting cards printed along with a photograph. Others were even more businesslike and put up their portraits for sale.5 These photographs showed the courtesans at their best, but in conventional attire. In this field, too, photography lacked the ethnographic eye that, in the West, has given us superb glimpses of the interior of brothels, the behavior of prostitutes and their customers, and so on.

It is hard for the Western sense of aesthetics to reconcile the excessively bland and impersonal image of the Chinese courtesans with the idea of beauty. Just like the Japanese geishas today, the Chinese courtesans plastered their faces with white rice powder. All that could be distinguished were the lips, painted with bright carmine red, and the eyebrows, which were shaven and then pencilled over with a black line. It would seem rather that the courtesans went in for uniformity of appearance. This also applies to height and size, which are never mentioned. In this respect, the variety that the nineteenth-century French brothels looked for in their prostitutes was not much favored in China. The very silence of the sources reveals a special kind of aesthetic sensibility that was little concerned with "appearances."

The clothing of the courtesans was flamboyant, according to the memoirs of the customers and the literary descriptions. They were made of luxurious materials (mostly silk) dyed in bright colors and delicately embroidered. The classic dress consisted of trousers and a succession of silken vests
and bodices covered with a very long tunic. Two written portraits depict courtesans who actually existed even if the description given of them is partly the product of the author's imagination:Zhang Shuyu was one of the four diamonds. ... She wore a coat padded with pale green silk gauze on a robe of the same material, but colored purple. Her tiny feet wore little boots of violet brocade.
Lu Lanfen came in walking with slow steps. She had on a pair of trousers and a tunic made of light white silk and wore pale blue boots. ... In her carefully combed hair, there was only one hairpin studded with emeralds while her chignon was adorned with a row of jasmine flowers.

It was only in the twentieth century that the courtesans began to wear dresses inspired by Western styles, such as the formless long dress with the split side that is still worn in Taiwan and Hong Kong today. At the beginning of the 1920s, there was a craze for men’s clothing, and it became particularly fashionable to wear a jacket over a dress. Fashions changed every year, even if it was only in the details. The influence of the couture on dress was great. It was they who innovated and gave the tone for fashions in women’s clothing. They were in the forefront, as they had been in the great cities of Jiangnan under the Ming dynasty. Their sense of novelty could take astonishing forms. At the beginning of the revolution, after 1911, there was a fashion for wearing trousers in the colors of the national flag (five horizontal red, yellow, blue, white, and black stripes) as a symbol of newfound liberty. There was no trace of mockery in this dress, which the courtesans wore as a way of expressing their patriotism. This fashion did not last more than a year, because the most “politically conscious” courtesans spread the word that this dress might be misunderstood, especially by foreigners.

The beauty of the Chinese courtesans drew constant praise from Chinese scholars, even if they couched their praise in conventional literary language. In these women who were professionals of diversion and amusement, they found qualities that were lacking in their wives, or at least more discreetly expressed: elegance and charm, a lively and mischievous nature, a sharp sense of repartee, and a spirit of independence that was socially forbidden to women of good standing. There can be no doubt that the Chinese elites had a regard for these women who enlivened their leisure activities and in whom they found real partners, even friends and lovers. But the relationship was unbalanced. The courtesans were basically consumer articles. They were a pool from which pretty concubines could be drawn. They were a group of women particularly exposed to social upheavals. The restructuring of the Chinese elites, which was marked by the disappearance of the scholar classes, removed the veneer of appearances to which the scholar culture had appended its seal, and it paved the way for a purely commercial and sexual relationship.

Defloration

Defloration sanctioned the entry of young girls into the world of prostitution. It was a crucial step for the party concerned, both physically and psychologically, because it was a sort of initiatory step. In the world of the courtesans, defloration was the equivalent of marriage for a girl from a good family. An interested customer first of all had to negotiate with the brothel madam. This was an arduous task, given that the occasion was unique and offered her a way to recover, at one stroke, a good portion of the money invested in the girl. Very often, it was the madam herself who picked out and encouraged a faithful and wealthy customer to avail himself of this “ privilege.” Defloration was accompanied by a set of rituals designed to make the experience more solemn and provide a semblance of marriage. These rituals also had the effect of masking the rather sordid nature of the role that the girl was being made to play and the very materialistic aspect of an operation whose importance, for the madam, was above all financial. The defloration took place around the age of fifteen or sixteen because Chinese girls often had their first menstrual periods at about this age.

On the appointed evening, the courtesan wore her best clothes and offered prayers before the altar of the household deity. The customer organized a banquet with friends before retiring to the room where two big red candles had been lit. On the next day, the employees and other courtesans of the house came to congratulate the girl and the customer. As it happened, this was also an opportunity for them to get some additional tips. From this day forward, the girl no longer wore the pigtail that set her apart from the other courtesans. The defloration itself was not limited to one night. The customer could come back three or four nights in succession or even for one or two weeks. This was a form of privilege designed to reinforce the quasi-nuptial character of this step.

The financial cost that the customer paid for such an experience could be fairly high. Although the information given by the sources, especially the literary ones, is often very general, it is possible to identify the amounts spent and put this partiality for virgins in perspective. For the 1870s, Wang Yao mentions two examples of customers, one of whom paid 300 taels while the other paid a “large sum” (zhongjin). Around 1920, one author estimated that a customer had to expect to pay 400 to 500 taels. This figure included the cost of a series of huaiou, gifts of jewelry and clothing for the girl and tips amounting to 80 to 100 yuan. Another author speaks of several hundred taels of yuan and a pair of gold bars. The cost also varied according to the girl’s fame: It could be 400 to 500 yuan for a courtesan of ordinary repute but 2,000 to 3,000 yuan for a celebrity.

The authors of works on prostitution assert that the “old hands” in the brothels abstained from the practice of defloration, which they left to the naïve or to novices. However, this is an assertion that dates from the 1920s
at a time when this practice was in fact tending to disappear and when it could not be guaranteed that the girl was truly virgin. Giving more emphasis to the idea that it represented, certain madams did of course try to vend the virginity of their charges to several customers in succession, using various artifacts to dress up the previous defloweration. By the end of the century, works on prostitution were warning customers about these practices, which, it must be said, are not exclusive to Chinese madams. Increasingly, the Shanghai guidebooks made it a point to ask potential customers to reject all such propositions, not out of any consideration for the concerned parties but in the name of business ethics: The madams were trying to sell adulterated merchandise.

The practice of defloweration tended to disappear, and, above all, it came to lose its symbolic significance. It no longer corresponded to the demand that, in the twentieth century, was first and foremost a sexual demand. The idea of virgin courtesans could be imagined in a context where there were customers to appreciate their artistic talents and their wit. With the growing treatment of this "discipline" of their sex and the introduction of art into something other than sexual objects. The supply of sexual services grew considerably, and the customers no longer felt any interest in defloweration, which did not appear to them to be a source of gratification. In 1940, one author stated the problem very cruelly when he compared virgin courtesans to fish in an aquarium: "good to look at but not to eat." He pointed out that very often it was homosexuals who patronized these girls. This gave them a social "alibi" while sparing them the need to engage in sexual relations.20

The Sexual Conduct of the Elites

Sexual conduct is a subject about which the Chinese were discreet in the nineteenth century, surprisingly so because there were no religious taboos attached to it as there were in the West. Here, there is a real gulf between the perceived view of very great freedom of expression on sexual matters, as in Van Gulik's description of ancient China up to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), and the weighty silence of the Qing, especially in the nineteenth century, which with which we are concerned. Van Gulik notes this change without really explaining it. He attributes it to the adoption of a prudish morality by the Manchu emperors, whose concern was to be seen by their new subjects as models of virtue.21 My own research on a far later period, at a time when this puritanical attitude became prevalent in Chinese society as a whole, does not make me think otherwise. They preferred to come in the small hours. If a girl had received a customer on the previous day, it was a very serious matter because the consequent mingling (of sperm) could be an essential cause of illness.22 Beyond the obvious risk of transmission of an infection, what motivated the author and shocked the Chinese mind was the fact that two men could follow each another with the same prostitute. This possibility
naturally formed part of the logic of prostitution; but it was something that was rejected by the elites, who had the illusion, in visiting the courtesans, of having a special relationship with one girl alone.

Within the courtesans’ houses, attitudes were rather reserved even under the warming effect of alcohol. Neither the etchings of the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century nor the literature of the period give any indication of any ostensibly ribald behavior (be it in attitude or in language). Bodies stayed out of contact; the courtesans remained seated, at a small distance behind their customers; and crudity had to be avoided in speech. It appears that it was acceptable to exchange glances or hold hands, but this was a boundary not to be crossed. In the 1920s, it is less certain that these rules of etiquette were followed, even in places that were more public than the courtesans’ houses. One newspaper reports an incident where a certain Fang tried to surreptitiously caress a courtesan he had invited by putting his hand into her sleeve. Although Fang was deemed to be lacking in manners, his behavior clearly points to a shift in the status of the courtesan to that of a high-class prostitute. Ten years earlier, a courtesan would never have accepted this type of advance.

The particular and highly selective mode by which these high-class prostitutes received visitors shielded them from excessively frequent sexual contact. There were no more than one or two good customers in a single season with whom they had physical relations. Given the times at which they were available, these relations had to be relatively spaced out. If a girl became pregnant, the madam would be able to determine the father’s identity. This is an indirect (and extremely tenuous) clue suggesting that it was infrequent for the courtesans to have sexual relations. Besides, these courtesans deliberately sought to avoid physical relations. In 1934, a guidebook warned potential customers against the forms of evasion practiced by the girls, who would pretend, for example, that they were having their menstrual periods when a customer became too demanding. This practice of evasion is a sign that the courtesans were facing greater demand from customers for sexual services. Before 1914 and to an even greater extent in the nineteenth century, they did not need to resort to these stratagems because the customers were more dependent on their relationship with the courtesans.

The question of venereal disease is completely avoided in the nineteenth-century sources. The apparently low frequency of sexual relationships between courtesans and their customers, along with the fact that they received a smaller number of men, probably shielded this category of prostitutes from repeated infection. However, it is also known that venereal disease was very widespread in nineteenth-century China. Thus, there is no reason to believe that the courtesans and their customers could have escaped this problem entirely. Yet, it does not seem to have caused any particular concern among the literati. Wang Tao, who wrote three works on the world of the courtesans, mentioned the topic of venereal disease only once when referring to a Chinese doctor who specialized in the treatment of such diseases. An author at the end of the century wrote in passing that girls who were sexually in great demand were often ill. It was only in the years following the First World War that cases of venereal sickness among courtesans were made public, usually in the small newspapers. The reports were sometimes in the category of rumor or even defamation. However, they show that no category of prostitutes was spared. In the 1930s, the problem of venereal disease was raised in very explicit fashion. The courtesans were no longer considered separately. Like their colleagues, they were seen as “the source and point of transmission of venereal diseases”.

The courtesans were also exposed to the risk of unwanted pregnancy. This aspect is only exceptionally touched on in the works or novels that dealt with prostitution. Once a girl announced that she was pregnant, the madam would seek to identify the father so that, if possible, she could try to extort money from him as compensation for time lost during the pregnancy. If the infant was a boy and the customer wanted to adopt it, the madam would naturally raise the stakes. However, if the customer refused to pay, the madam had no means of exerting pressure. One author mentioning this topic says that if two customers had slept with a girl in the same month, then the madam would begin by approaching the wealthier of the two. This information is anecdotal per se but confirms the fact that the courtesans slept with only a very small number of customers and that sexual relations were probably quite spaced out.

The risk of repeated pregnancy was a practically unavoidable reality. Given the absence of contraceptives, even of the makeshift kind used by French prostitutes, there can be no doubt that this was a problem that the courtesans had to face. The madams made the courtesans take medicines from the Chinese pharmacopoeia to prevent pregnancies. If these medicines failed (which was likely), they would use every means to make the girl abort through other medicines or even more brutal means. Although the written sources totally conceal this side of things, the iconographic documents frequently show the presence of children in the houses of courtesans (cf. Dianshizhai huabao). It was not rare for a courtesan to be herself the daughter of a courtesan. The total avoidance of this reality in the written sources, memoirs, and literature forms part of the same logic that led Chinese scholars to idealize the world of courtesans and retain only the positive aspects conforming to the image that they wished to give of this world and of themselves. Thus, “minor details” such as pregnancies, venereal disease, and the condition of the girls were wholly concealed.


Relationships of Affection and Love

The relationship between a courtesan and a customer had a special character that needs to be briefly evoked. It was based in part on purely material interest, but there can be no doubt that feelings also came into it. Naturally it is difficult, for want of direct testimony on the part of the courtesans, to apprise these two aspects of the relationship. All that I can do, therefore, is to infer the nature and quality of these liaisons from the modes of relationship of Shanghai's courtesans.

From the customer's point of view, establishing a relationship with a courtesan in the nineteenth century was not a simple matter of money: it entailed an operation of conquest and seduction. In the world of the courtesans, the members of the Chinese elite found a space in which they could set up "normal" contacts with women — that is, contacts that were unencumbered by the weighty code of Confucian etiquette with its strict regulation of relationships between men and women. Women of good family were in fact often recluse and had no contact with men outside their families. For these men, the quality of the marital relationship was often not the ideal because, in almost every case, the marriage would have been arranged. The ties between husband and wife were marked by a certain distance and a certain degree of formality, especially on social occasions.

With the courtesans, men could experience sensations and feelings that were not accepted outside this context. If they were intrigued by a courtesan to whom they had happened to meet by chance, and who was particularly renowned, they were required to play a subtle game in which seduction and remuneration were intermingled without the latter aspect being brought into the open. Customers were required, so to speak, to embark on a courtship in order to win a courtesan's favor. This was a unique experience made possible only in this context. Moreover, the highly informal atmosphere of these exchanges needs to be emphasized. The courtesans were women trained as "ladies of entertainment." They possessed a degree of culture. They knew how to entertain. They had a sense of repartee and could play a whole range of indoor games to enliven their customers' evenings.

Of course, this environment must not be idealized in the manner of the Chinese scholars. Yet their writings, however biased, bear testimony to a world where the relationships between men and women could attain a special intensity and a special quality. Wang Tao mentions a severe disappointment, and even suicide, on the part of men who had lost the courtesans that they patronized, either through death or because of marriage to a wealthier customer. The growing commercialization of this milieu and its sexualization very probably impaired the nature of the ties between the courtesans and their customers. It is also difficult to imagine that the courtesans could have stood up to the insistent demands of a determined customer. However, up to the 1940s, the customers were continually advised to be patient: the girls had to be courted and won over and not merely bought.26

From the courtesan's point of view, the relationship with the customer was not a simple matter of money either. First of all, there were barely more than one or two good customers with whom she had a close, and especially sexual, relationship. These customers practically provided for her upkeep by their regular and assiduous presence. The others only revolved around her world: they would invite her out, hold occasional dinners in her home, and so on. Not all the customers of the courtesans' houses were necessarily looking for sexual gratification. There were those who were looking more simply for a space of conviviality and diversion. Good customers were not permanent customers or those who did not stay for long. They changed over time, although the pace of the change could not be defined. It depended on the state of their fortune, their interest in the girl, and their patronizing of other houses. However, it must be emphasized that, at any given time, there was a limited number of customers who could offer the possibility of a more intense relationship. The courtesans also knew that there was only a limited amount of time available to them and that they had to find a husband in order to escape from their condition. The affective dimension was therefore not absent from their concerns even if other criteria (such as fortune and age) came into the equation.

The courtesan—customer relationship had an undoubtedly exclusive and almost conjugal character. A courtesan expected a certain degree of fidelity from a customer. If he began to visit another girl, this was an act of staying experienced as a form of betrayal that could provoke outbreaks of anger between the girls concerned or between the customer and the girls (the press frequently reported these cases).27 These altercations could sometimes take a very at times violent turn. Even for a permanent separation, the "compasses of the world of gallantry," those works designed to guide a man's first steps in the world of courtesans, recommended that sharp breaks should be avoided. It was preferable that the customer should reduce the frequency of his visits using the pretext of trips abroad, and so on.28 Where sentiment was lacking, what was at stake was of course money but also considerations of prestige. This aspect of the matter is clearly present in the sometimes violent reactions of the courtesans when a customer betrayed their trust.

This mode of relationship can be imagined only in a society where there was strict separation between the sexes and an almost absolute segregation of women, at least among the elites. As and when Chinese society (and, as far as we are concerned, Shanghai society) opened out, giving women increasingly wider scope for action in the public space, the courtesans began...
to lose their raison d'être. The process was slow because, despite change, no "sexual revolution" took place in China. The emergence of intermediate social strata, the development of new forms of venal sexuality, and the appearance of a different sensibility with regard to sex helped undermine the courtesan's function. Although it would be somewhat arbitrary to lay down precise chronological markers, it would seem to me that the main divide can be located at around 1914–1915. After that, for about ten years, the illusion of the existence of the "world of flowers" persisted, but it no longer corresponded to reality.

Although the relationships between a courtesan and one of her customers could be tinged with sentiment and even love, this was not generally the case. The courtesans who were independent of their madams therefore looked elsewhere for a genuine sentimental relationship. It was frequent for the changsan to take lovers, at least in the twentieth century. I have little information on this subject for the preceding period—the nineteenth century—where it is mentioned only once.43 This phenomenon could be attributed to the fact that a greater number of courtesans gained their freedom in the first and second decades of the century. A courtesan had to refrain from disclosing a love relationship because the customers would not be pleased to learn of it, especially if the other man was an actor. For it was in the world of the theater, which they patronized by profession and taste, that the courtesans most often found their lovers. There were affinities between the two worlds (a love of music, singing, the actor's play) that explain this mutual attraction. Both groups, actors and courtesans, led a fairly similar, essentially nocturnal, lifestyle and occupied a position somewhat on the fringes of society. Finally, and this is not a negligible point, the actors were often young, handsome, and full of life, which distinguished them from the girls' habitual customers.

It is difficult to assess the scale of this phenomenon was widespread. An author who gave a list in 1922 of thirty-eight courtesans having one or more lovers added that this figure represented only a small proportion of the real number.44 Indeed, he only listed the most famous courtesans, who led very independent lives. In reality, it was probably difficult to keep a love relationship hidden for long. The courtesans generally had little opportunity for regular contact with men outside the circle of their clientele. The close watch that the madam kept over them, the physical limits dictated by the fact that they had bound feet, and their fairly short working hours were all factors that worked against an independent existence. As for courtesans married actors or musicians. One of them was Lin Dajiu, a leading figure among the courtesans at the turn of the century. But her marriage to an actor was a sign of her failure. Once she had passed a certain age, a courtesan lost almost any chance of getting married to a scholar or merchant.

Marriage

Marriage was the second major step in a courtesan's life because it meant the possibility of making an honorable exit from their profession. As such, it was the object of intense preparation and festivities equivalent to those of a real marriage even if these festivities were limited to the courtesans' house. Wang Tao frequently mentions this topic and, more broadly, refers to love relationships between courtesans and customers. According to him, only two-thirds of the girls managed to get married, but he does not say what happened to the others.45 It must be emphasized at the outset that these were marriages in low key. The courtesans who married members of the gentry in this way never ascended to the rank of wife but only to the more modest one of concubine. Some of them could be only the unpretentious concubine of a rich merchant.

Just as in the case of elopement, a courtesan's marriage was preceded by negotiations between the customer and the madam, because everything depended on the madam who decided the fate of the girls in her charge. Because, as a rule, a madam had only one or two girls in her charge, she had to negotiate the best terms, because the girl's marriage would mean the end of her business, unless she could buy another courtesan. The customer would also sometimes seek guarantees. Certain customers sought to test the sincerity of their concubine-to-be so as to avert any risk of a subsequent flight with money and jewelry.46

Buying a courtesan her freedom was a particularly expensive operation for the customer. To the "body price" (shenjia) proper, which could amount to a considerable sum, there had to be added the costs of the ceremony and all various gifts and tips that were demanded in return for the courtesan's departure. On the financial aspects of the marriage, the sources are rather imaginative. In Huiqiao jiujin, Wang Tao explicitly mentions the cases of eleven courtesans who were purchased as concubines, and he gives their price as 1,000 taels. Clearly, these are nonrepresentative figures because it is difficult to imagine that there was a fixed rate or that the market remained steady to such an extent. Besides, Wang writes that in one case, after discussion, the price was set at 800 taels and that in another case, it was set at 1,500 taels, which was a considerable sum in the nineteenth century. The negotiations between the madam, the customer, and the courtesan were sometimes strenuous.47 In Songyin suoshuo, Wang Tao mentions Lu Daliu, who was repurchased for 2,000 taels, and Zhou Fenglin, who was repurchased for 8,000 or 9,000 taels. A reader's letter in the Shen Bao refers to the repurchase of Xiao Guizhu for 8,000 taels and of Wu Yue's for 10,000 taels.48 Wang Wenlin, a chief of general staff in 1920, repurchased the courtesan Ling Juxian for 5,000 yuan.49 There was an inflationary trend according to a 1923 guidebook, which indicates an average price of 7,000 to 8,000
yuan in that year. However, the most renowned courtesans were sometimes
taken for much greater sums: Bei Jin was bought for 10,000 yuan, and Guan
Fang was purchased for 20,000 yuan.44
In 1920, one source gives a more detailed account of the expenditure
involved. The customer paid the madam money in compensation for the
cost of educating and supporting the courtesan up to the time of her mar-
rriage. This was the price of her freedom, but it was also the form in which
the transaction for the marriage of any woman in China was conceived. The
parents were "indemnified" for their expenditure on education by the bride-
groom's family. The customer also had to pay off the girl's debts, if any.
Accessory expenditure included the purchase of a pair of silver food sticks
for the banquet, which was not returned. All categories of personnel took
advantage of this opportunity to obtain tips.45 To avoid this expenditure,
Yang Diguang, chief of staff of the Chinese Army, used the pretext of a
journey to take away the courtesan he was patronizing and make her his
concubine without paying any money to the madam. When he next passed
through Shanghai, the madam had his hotel room surrounded by a gang of
thugs. To get out of his predicament, Yang had to call for help from Du
Yuehsheng, the infamous boss of Shanghai's secret societies, and promise to
pay the madam 3,000 yuan.46
Almost all the ingredients of a traditional marriage can be found in
the organization of a courtesan's marriage ceremony. The customer would
invite his friends and acquaintances to a banquet. Because a courtesan
could not always receive large numbers of guests together in her house, she
would organize a banquet lasting several days. The ceremony was accom-
panied by religious rites, most usually in the presence of a Taoist priest.
The courtesan was visited by other girls who came to congratulate her, all
of which caused a constant flow of sedan chairs and rickshaws. The courte-
san's habitual customers also came to congratulate her. A courtesan's mar-
rriage was a major affair that created much excitement in the il Ross (lane)
on which the house was located. When everything was over, the customer
arranged for the courtesan to be fetched from her home to his house like
a young bride.
A marriage concluded in this way was not always a success. The husband
could become aloof from his new partner and seek his pleasure elsewhere.
The courtesans also found it difficult to adjust to their new mode of living,
where they were confined to a restricted area in the women's apartments,
having no contact with the outside world. Wu Peixiang, who married a "maid
from the countryside" (xiangzhen), soon got bored with the rural life and
returned to her former trade.47 In 1872, the Shen Bao recounted the story
of a courtesan who continued to see her former lover after getting married.
The husband got angry when he learned of this and threw the lover out.
The courtesan preferred to return to her former trade.48 Most usually,
the courtesan was badly received in her new family, especially by the wife who
saw her as a rival. The premature death of a husband often meant the rejec-
tion of a courtesan by the family, sometimes at an age when her beauty was
already a thing of the past.49
Despite all that, there was hardly any way out for courtesans other than
marriage, which alone could ensure a decent retirement. The inevitable
sequel to a courtesan's career was for her to be resold to a lower-class brothel
until, having become old and ugly, she would be reduced to beggary.
In one case, a courtesan who did not attract customers and bring in enough
money was resold by her madam for 200 yuan to another establishment,
very probably a lower-class brothel.50 Marriage, whatever the hardships
and sorrows that it brought to the courtesans, was actually their only salvation.
"The world of prostitution is an empty world," wrote Wang Tao in his last
work on prostitution; the courtesans had to leave that world before it was
too late.51
Leaving the Trade
A sword of Damocles was poised permanently over a courtesan's head: It
was the sword of old age and physical decline. Beauty was an essential
advantage, even for courtesans who had been able to develop other charms
less vulnerable to the ravages of time. Wang Tao frequently referred to the
fact that the courtesans, when they reached an "advanced age," would be
deserted by their customers for newcomers.52
Apart from marriage or entry into lower-class brothels, the courtesans had
hardly any choice except to turn to begging or to die. Death could also come
in the course of their working lives, through sickness or sometimes because of
profound disappointment. Wang Tao mentions five deaths, two of them
suicides and three from fatal illness. A fatal illness, generally appeared in
connection with a disappointment in love or a conflict with a madam over
the choice of a husband. The particular feature of these illnesses (the symp-
toms were lust, loss of appetite, and coldness in the body: "she was
affected by weakness, her hands were as cold as ice and could not be warmed
even when they were held tightly") was the speed with which they took
effect.53 The girl would succumb within a few months or even a few weeks or
days. Conversely, the death of the cause of the annoyance could produce a
miraculous effect and bring about the patient's almost immediate recov-
ery. These descriptions parallel the way in which women were depicted in
nineteenth-century European painting and literature.54
Suicide was very much present in reports about courtesans. In Wang Tao's
works, the suicides were always caused by a sentimental mishap. Often, it
was the courtesan's refusal to accept a marriage arranged by the madam
that pushed her to this act. One girl committed suicide in order to avoid
marrying some ordinary man when she would have preferred a scholar.55
Again, the death or sudden disappearance of a man she had in mind could
lead to suicide; the most common method of committing suicide was to swallow crude opium. This interpretation of the courtesan’s behavior might be questioned and seen as yet another way of mystifying the issue by reference to an idealized reality. But this was not at all the case, as can be seen from the press.

In 1872, Yu Mei and her lover took their own lives because they were no longer able to live together. A young man who had a love affair with a courtesan found himself to be short of money, whereupon his father, a strict man, refused to help. The courtesan swallowed opium. The Shen Bao also reports the sad tale of a Hubei merchant who had met a courtesan named Jin Mei on a boat in the Pearl River delta (in Guangdong). They had a passionate love affair, but the merchant died shortly thereafter. When his family found evidence in his papers of the commitments he had made to the courtesan, they sought her out and gave her the sad news. Despite all the precautions of her entourage, Jin Mei committed suicide. The merchant’s family decided to buy them together. Sometimes, suicide resulted from an argument between two lovers, especially when the man suspected the courtesan of cheating on him. Suicide here provided post-mortem proof of the courtesan’s honesty.

The Courtesans and Politics

The world of prostitution formed a space and a community in which the principal activity was designed to divert customers, far from the serious topics that usually took up their time. Furthermore, the condition of the courtesans and, to an even greater extent, the condition of other prostitutes hardly allowed them any possibility of expressing their views on major national issues and organizing themselves to participate in these issues. There were exceptions, however, apart from the fact that the houses of prostitution could have involuntarily contributed to political action. The world of prostitution reacted to the major political and social crises of China in the twentieth century. The courtesans were in the forefront of spontaneous action forming part of broader collective movements. It was their level of political consciousness and knowledge, derived from their familiarity with the elites who were preoccupied with these problems, that explains their political stances, which shall be outlined here.

The courtesan’s sphere of action was twofold, encompassing the political and the humanitarian field. In their campaigns to encroach on China. In 1915, the twenty-one demands that placed strategic sectors of China’s economy and defense under Japanese control aroused a movement of mobilization. Several organizations began to set up a “national salvation fund” (jianguo chaishouhui). A courtesan from Shanghai, Zang Chunhe, then proposed that the money earned from invitations to go out (tang cepai) should be paid into this fund.

She published a declaration in the city’s newspapers that deserves to be quoted:

Although we [we] belong to the world of the green pavilions [the world of prostitution], we [we] too have families. If [we] have families, [we] should have a country, and our duty therefore is to support the country... There is a certain country that is demanding unfair privileges in order to turn our country into a second India or a second Korea. Although [we] are only prostitutes, [we] too are citizens (guomin yi fensu) and we have been greatly affected by this news. Our country cannot consider the possibility of war for lack of resources. There are courageous patriots who are proposing to set up a national salvation fund. [We] do not have the means to do as much but we would like to set aside half of the earnings from our outings for the national salvation fund... .

This appeal was heard, and other courtesans followed suit. In all, 300 yuan were paid into the fund. In the humanitarian field, the courtesans were shocked by the outcome of the Conference of Versailles in 1919. The huge wave of protests and patriotic mobilization provoked by the terms laid down at the conference are known. The courtesans made their contribution to the nationalist upsurge. On the 9th of May 1919, Lin Daiyu and ten other well-known chansang appealed to their colleagues to join in commemorating the day of national shame (guoqun jianian) by refusing to sing and by posting notices on doors of their establishments to explain their strike action. They also called on the people to buy only domestically produced goods. Jian Bing organized tea parties with political discussion in her establishment. Others, like Mino Lian, published messages in the press, demanding the resignation of the Peking government.

In the humanitarian field, it was during major natural catastrophes that the courtesans made individual and collective contributions to fund collection campaigns. In December 1920, twelve Cantonese prostitutes decided to hand over their day’s earnings (176 yuan) in aid of the drought-affected northern provinces. In March 1921, a group of courtesans led by Lin Daiyu met in a big Western-style restaurant. They decided to write a play describing the state of the drought-affected population. The piece was written in a few days. The play, which was planned to last for an entire season, called for about a hundred actors. After each song, the courtesans went into the audience to collect contributions. This was not the only case of mobilization for humanitarian purposes. A print in the Dianshi baihuabao, the Shen Ruo’s illustrated supplement, shows a courtesan handling over her earnings in order to aid the famine-hit populations of the same region in 1878–1879.

Political upheavals and crises also provided the circumstances for courtesans to become aware of their own condition and try to organize themselves. Even though these efforts were short-lived, the fact that they
occurred at specific periods is significant. The democratic spirit and the thrust toward emancipation that marked the 1911 revolution found an echo among the courtesans. In Shanghai, Zhu Ruchun came together with eight other changeas in 1912 to create an association designed to help girls get out of the prostitute's trade. This association, the "Circle for the Advancement of the Green Pavilions" (Qinglou jinhuatan), adopted a charter that was published in the press. The charter declared: "Under the republic, social classes will disappear. [We] have founded the Circle for the Advancement of the Green Pavilions by joining forces to foster education in order to create conditions for the rehabilitation [conglang] of the courtesans (yiij)]."

A school was opened under Liu Rushi's direction, using money collected at a special performance. The classes began in August with about fifty girls. However, many dropped out after a few months. The school had to close, for want of regular funds but also because of the particular lifestyle of the courtesans. In 1919, a similar initiative was launched by another courtesan, Jian Bing, in the wake of the May 4th movement. The school worked for four months before it closed. All of these attempts at providing an exit through education ended in failure. It was unrealistic to seek some sort of salvation given the circumstances under which most courtesans lived and worked. Furthermore, even if they were public figures in their own right, they could hardly be reached beyond the world to which they belonged.

The "Culture of the Courtesans": Window Dressing or Reality?

In the nineteenth century, and to some extent up to the First World War, the courtesans and their customers formed a sort of community governed by common codes and practices and a common language. There existed a particular form of culture, engendered by the practice of paying visits to courtesans. I shall present the constituent elements of this culture and examine its social significance and scope.

The "culture of the courtesans" was expressed above all in the composition, by scholars, of various pieces of writing dedicated to a girl in order to enchant her or celebrate a special day (New Year's, a birthday, and so on). The "parallel sentences" consisting of eight ideograms generally derived from a particular courtesan's name were the most widespread forms. Most were fairly humdrum, although they were based on a sound knowledge of classical literature. Not all, however, were innocent. Some included a touch of humor, while others included a critical judgment or even an element of teasing, although they were couched in elegant language with a double meaning that is impossible to render in English. Other forms of composition in the same vein included simple poems (ci) and various pieces of content offered to courtesans by their most assiduous, and on occasion most love-smitten, customers. This tradition, which is of limited interest to the historian, was swept away by developments in the twentieth century.

There was another genre affected by the customers of the courtesans: the writing of huabang, in which lists were drawn up of courtesans who excelled (huabang) in a particular field, such as music, singing, and so on. The "descriptions" of courtesans in these documents are limited to a sequence of a few ideograms composed by the author or taken from classical works. These lists would be made at the initiative of an assiduous customer who was well informed about this milieu and whose judgment could be taken as a reference. They were printed and circulated among the customers. This was a very old tradition because one work reports that a certain Shen from Songjiang (Jiangsu) had prepared a list as early as 1656. Some examples of this genre have been reproduced in various works. Wang Tao mentions one such list in the second collection of his work, probably dating from around the 1780s. The different sources give several dates: 1784, with twenty-three girls listed, 1878 with sixteen girls, 1882 with three girls, 1888 with sixteen, and 1890. Not much is known about this genre, of which no trace remains. One Chinese scholar writing in 1922 confessed that he himself did not know how the huabang of this period were produced.

After having practically fallen into disuse, the tradition of the huabang was revived at the end of the nineteenth century by a great champion of the courtesans' cause, the writer-journalist Li Boyuan (1867-1906). In 1896, Li organized the first "public" huabang in which the courtesans were selected according to opinions expressed by the customers. The newspaper founded by Li, the Youxibao (The Journal of Leisure), was used as a mailbox to collect these opinions. The courtesans were required to declare their candidacy "with a flourish" by publicly placing a tablet on the lines of an ancestor's tablet at the newspaper's offices. The girls were classified according to the titles of the degrees awarded to successful candidates in the metropolitan exams. A second competition was organized in the summer of 1897 and another in the winter. There were two categories in these competitions: beauty (yanbang) and artistic qualities (yiibang). A third category that did not correspond to any particular quality (huabang) was added in the next competition. This way of creating news was a means of sales promotion for these newspapers. It also served the interest of courtesans, whose business increased manifold when they were selected among the winners.

Although the Youxibao abandoned this practice after Li Boyuan's departure, the contest itself was maintained at the rate of practically one election a year, except in 1900 and 1901. Elections were organized by the other small journals interested in the world of courtesans, in 1902, 1903 (Huaitian ribao), 1904 (Yuxian ribao), and 1906. In 1906, there were even three elections organized by three rival newspapers (Tianhuobao, Cinghai yizhabao, and
Guohunbao). However, there seems to have been a loss of interest in this election, which did not occur again until 1909 when it was organized for the last time (by the Cajifengbao).

One author reports that, after the abolition of the traditional exams in 1905, the organization of the huabang lost its significance. This explanation appears to me to be doubtful.80 The link was fictitious, and the “electors” were enthusiastic about all about the respective merits of the courtesans. On the day that voting began for the first huabang, all the 5,000 voting slips printed were sold out before midday. Several thousands more had to be printed in order to satisfy customers who continued to flood in. The Youxiabo received more than two hundred letters from readers approving, criticizing, and vilifying its initiative and its choices.81 This indicates a definite interest. However, the huabang had an artificial character, with a tinge of favoritism and corruption, and this might have caused a loss of interest among the elites who patronized the courtesans. This loss of the initial enthusiasm probably also resulted from the decline in the status of the courtesans, who increasingly came to be seen as prostitutes. Besides, the years 1910–1911 were a period of intense political agitation that perhaps moved the elites away from these forms of superficial diversion. It was only in 1917 that this tradition was revived temporarily, although in another form.

In the winter of that year, the New World (Xin Shijie), one of Shanghai’s amusement centers, organized an election that resembled a beauty contest, although it involved only courtesans.82 However, unlike in the huabang of the past, most courtesans of some renown could receive ratings in this contest even if they only received consolation prizes. It was no longer the traditional examinations but Chinese political organization that was taken as the model. The New World elected the representatives of the Kingdom of Flowers (Huaguo), from its president (Huaguo Zongtong) to its deputies and senators with a good measure of ministers and vice ministers. There was a sufficient number of positions to satisfy a large number of courtesans. This was a parody of the Peking national government. As in real life, the vote was based on property qualifications. A customer could put in as many voting slips as he was willing to purchase for a courtesan.

The operation was a success and was repeated a year later. In March 1920, a British dairy company organized a similar election to the Kingdom of Perfumes (Xiangguo). The New World, which was having a dispute with this company, organized its third election a month later.83 However, neither of these elections accomplished anything. They were prestige operations that enhanced the image and status of the changsan, and, at the same time, they were business operations by virtue of the results they yielded for the successful candidates. This confirms the irreversible transformation of the condition of the courtesans and the change in the sensibility of the elites. It was possible to conceive of the huabang in the context of an elitist culture dominated by men of letters, not that of a society where money and the wish to consume took precedence over culture.

Wang Tao says that being ranked had the effect of making a girl immediately famous and of increasing her value tenfold. Conversely, those who were not selected saw it as a form of disgrace or discredit.84 In the twentieth century, the courtesans made good use of the fact that they had been selected in one or other of the “flower” elections by placing advertisements in the small newspapers.85 The Qin Lou became very busy when one of its inmates was elected “president” of the Kingdom of Perfumes (Xiangguo) in 1920. Every evening, its two courtesans had to reply to forty or fifty calls (tangchai). The “president’s” value grew tenfold, and this caused a dispute with the madam, who refused to increase the sum she was paying the girl for her services.86 Although these elections helped the courtesans find good matches, they nevertheless had to find a way to get married quickly because the glamour derived from their ranking did not last forever. Suzhen, who came first in a huabang in 1882, had her freedom purchased by a rice merchant for the modest sum of 200 taels.87

The development of new media, especially the press, contributed to making the world of courtesans a place of increasingly numerous and varied exchanges. It was at a very early date that Shanghai saw the birth of a press designed first of all for religious information produced by the missionaries and then for general information, namely, the spread of scientific and technical knowledge, and so on. A wide range of newspapers appeared. This phenomenon was linked especially to the political crises that shook China in this period.88 In the context of this development, small newspapers (xiao bao) were created. These were intended rather for mass readers and were sensational in nature. Some of these newspapers made it their specialty to report gossip from the world of courtesans.89 Li Boyuan founded the first newspaper of this type, the Zhinanbao (“The Guide”) in 1896. It did not last long but was followed, under the leadership of the same individual, by the Youxiabo (“The Journal of Leisure”), published from 1897 to 1910. Li Boyuan, however, left after three years to found a new paper, the Shijie Fanhuabao (“The [World’s] Splendors”), which he directed for five years.90

Li Boyuan had many imitators, as can be seen from the following incomplete list of small newspapers. Their titles generally left no doubt about their preferred field: Xiaolinbao (“The Forest of the Smile”), Huaguo Bao (“The Flower Kingdom”), Hua Shijie Mingbao (“The Voice of the Flower World”), Huaguo Ribao (“The Flower Kingdom Daily”), Huabao (“The Flowers”), Huahua Shijie (“The World of Flowers”), and so on. It was after the appearance of the Haishang Fanhuabao in 1901 that the phenomenon of small newspapers began to take off.91 I have found a few of them, covering very short periods, and they have given me an idea of the special role played by this press in the formation of a culture of courtesans. These
newspapers took the form of a single page printed on both sides in a rather unusual rectangular format with the text arranged in columns. The back page was taken up essentially by advertisements. It was the front page that published announcements, serials, stories, and various items of news about courtesans. They were generally published every three days. This press appears to have reached its high point between the turn of the century and 1920. All of Shanghai's amusement centers (Great World, New World, etc.) also launched their own newspapers. However, the transformation of the courtesans' milieu, along with the measures of prohibition taken by the International Settlement authorities, put an end to this form of activity. In 1926, there were still newspapers being published by the amusement centers, but their contents tended to reflect all the activities of these centers.

What appear to me to be significant are the types of exchanges that took place through this press. The courtesans made use of them when they wished to take revenge on a rival. Often, this took the form of rumors about the state of health (infection with venereal disease) of the person to be discredited or by an announcement of her marriage. Sometimes, a heated debate would break out between two courtesans and would last for several issues. Finally, the press could be a means to remind tardy payers to pay up. The method was unbeatable because the concerned parties were far too afraid of losing face if the press came to know that they were no longer able to pay their expenses. Thus, Zhang Shuyao announced that she would disclose the name of a customer who owed her money if he did not pay up within ten days. Three days later, she repeated the warning. The details given were precise enough for the concerned party to recognize himself without in any way enabling him to be identified by others. This practice points to the fact that the circle of those who patronized the courtesans was a restricted one, consisting of persons who more or less knew one another, at least by name.

The journalists who wrote in these newspapers reported all the little-tattle and incidents that gave spice to Shanghai's nightlife. Their favorite topics included disputes between courtesans, especially when one courtesan took a customer from another. Inasmuch as certain courtesans lived in the same house, it was not rare for serious conflicts to break out with insults, brawling, and the destruction of objects belonging to the rival, especially her external signboard. The customers also contributed to the columns of the newspapers. They frequently wrote poems, "parallel sentences," criticisms referring to a particular courtesan. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, one customer criticized a courtesan, Jin Hanxiang, in rather disagreeable terms for not having replied to an invitation to a restaurant and thus provoking the mockery of his friends. The affront that he had suffered explains his anger. Jin replied by the same channel, saying that she had actually responded to the invitation, even if she had been late. She criticized the customer for not having discussed matters with her before writing an article in the press. In 1926, one customer praised a girl with whom he claimed to have spent a wonderful night, while another asserted that she was still a virgin. A third confirmed the statement of the first customer and poked fun at the second one for having been hoodwinked. The authors always used pen names, which makes it impossible to identify them. In general, the articles written by the customers of the courtesans' houses tended to praise this institution. All these exchanges implied a good knowledge of the milieu.

Documents of another type helped sustain this particular form of culture: Tz'ih-chi, the "compasses of the world of gallantry" (pianzhi zhinan) and the many other guidebooks that followed. These "compasses" included a large number of works that were presented as literary works. These works, on the pretext of describing or even denouncing the world of courtesans, gave the reader all the rules and tricks needed to patronize this milieu without being taken for a peasant or a fool. This genre
contains many works of very unequal quality published up to the 1940s. Their effect was to help perpetuate standards that were probably less bold in reality and conceal the profound changes in the status of the courtesans. Even when they were outwardly aimed at denouncing the viles and tricks of the prostitutes and dissuading youth from patronizing their houses, these works actually imparted knowledge of all the ropes supposed to enable a neophyte to get the best out of a courtesan.6

The twentieth century saw the appearance of the first Shanghai guidebooks (zhinan) in Chinese. One of the classics, the Shanghai Zhanan ("Guide to Shanghai, A Chinese Directory to the Port"), appeared for the first time in 1909. It was published several times successively up to the 1930s. The market for guidebooks was naturally a very lucrative one given the very large number of visitors who came to Shanghai. Many works were therefore published by different authors, furnishing clear examples of reciprocal plagiarism. In addition, there were the guidebooks published in English, which were fewer in number and different in their contents. The Chinese guidebooks always had a part on prostitution, giving information, for example, on the location of the prostitution district, the various categories of prostitutes, the rules for visiting the elegant houses (of the courtesans), and the price scales. This information was given on the same basis as information on the different types and places of entertainment and leisure, transport, or local administration. They contain no moral discourse and no particular reservations apart from a few warnings about venereal disease. However, certain well-established works, like the Shanghai Zhanan or the guidebooks published in 1927 under the auspices of the Chinese municipal government—which officially banned prostitution—omit this category of information. The editions of the Shanghai Zhanan after 1924–1925 no longer speak of prostitution.

The life cycle of the courtesans was very short, even if some of them managed to keep themselves in the running for more than ten years. It is true that the cycle began "upstream," as soon as the girl was taken in hand by a madam who began to train her, first in the arts and then in the wiles indispensable to the courtesan's function. This was a step that I have only mentioned briefly in this study. This cycle then was punctuated with a few great moments, experiences similar to those of other women but lived in a far different context. I do not share the interpretation of some women historians who tend to liken prostitution to a variant of the trade in women within Chinese society. Such marriage in general was accompanied by a formal sexual transaction and that it set up a tie between two people who were otherwise unknown to each other without the least preparation is an incontestable fact. However, this union, whatever the conditions and effects on the concerned parties, was contracted in an enhancing, legitimate, and recognized framework. For the women who were forced to become courtesans, the same experiences, especially that of defloration, meant the irreparable loss of their integrity and set in motion a process of both social and psychological impairment. Even in the best of circumstances, namely when they got married, the courtesans could enter the house of their husband only by the back door.

The prostitute's existence was not necessarily an unhappy one. She enjoyed living conditions that would have been the envy of a majority of women in China. Apart from the common prostitutes who lived lives of great hardship, to one could dare suggest that the life of a peasant woman was more comfortable. In general, the prostitutes lacked nothing in material terms even if not all of them lived the same lives of ease. In the circles in which they moved, the courtesans were valued, praised, and admired. Better still, they were courted, and they received repeated attention from their customers. They were not exposed to the harsh and even brutal treatment meted out to their sisters in misery in the low-class brothels. In the nineteenth century, genuine love relationships could arise between a girl and a customer or, failing this, a lover of her own. And yet, their fate was ruled by precariousness, transitoriness, and illusion. They knew that the customaries and restrictions would not even give them a second glance later on if they made the mistake of staying too long in this profession.

The proportion of courtesans who managed to achieve their ends is not known and will never be known, even if marriage was indeed their main goal. The frequency with which courtesans were separated from their partners and returned to the trade would suggest that this solution did not always bring the desired serenity and security. It must be said that many courtesans quite simply never attained the married state. And these girls had certainly not found any alternative other than to pass into a lower category of a lower-level house, recycle themselves as procurers, join a theatrical troupe, or "descend into hell." However, such a view often leads commentators to false pity. The example of the prostitutes in the twentieth century shows that decline after their prime was not inevitable. Otherwise, we would have to accept the improbable idea that thousands or tens of thousands of women ended up on the pavement or in homes for beggars. All the research so far shows that prostitution was only a stage in a prostitute's life and that it was generally followed by reintegration into society.

Without putting an excessive gloss on matters, I would believe that most courtesans found a way to get out of prostitution, even if it was at the cost of social demotion. This chapter has also thrown light on the extraordinary proliferation of activities and initiatives that the world of courtesans provoked in particular. This variety of activities drew its source and strength from the existence within the Chinese elites of a very strong common culture and common habitus. The courtesans represented a sort of reserved space, with codes and a language that were shared by initiates alone. It is not surprising that the scholar's pronounced taste for word games should find expression here. Poetry, parallel sentences, and huabang were types of diversion among men of learning. All these writings were addressed as much to the
courtiers for whom they were composed as to the individuals who patronized this milieu as a whole. This frame of mind has no equivalent in the West, no matter what the period. Chinese society engendered the particular phenomenon of a "culture of courtiers" at the end of the nineteenth century. This culture resulted from the conjunction of a long tradition of intertwined relationships between the elites and the courtesans with the emergence, in a new environment (namely, the open port of Shanghai), of tools – the small newspapers – that fostered communications and the flow of information.

In my view, it would be futile to try to force this phenomenon into a framework of tradition or modernity. It was but a straw in the wind, an ephemeral and nostalgic movement corresponding to a final unconscious and involuntary burst of energy on the part of an elite that was already profoundly destructured and had reached the threshold of a more radical and even more brutal transformation. The unquestionable success of the huabang between 1897 and 1905 reflects a state of society that still had one foot in the past. However, the movement ran out of steam, enthusiasm waned, and indifference prevailed. Other, more immediate and more important factors might perhaps explain this growing lack of interest. The Chinese elites had other, more vital issues on their minds, such as reform, foreign encroachment, and the emergence of active political organizations and currents. However, the pressure was not yet strong enough to take the elites away from their preferred leisure activities.

The change was more fundamental. During the six decades that followed the opening of Shanghai to foreign trade, there was a major restructuring of the local elites to the detriment of the scholars and the benefit of the merchants. The commercialization of the economy grew apace, and the courtesans, like those in the other service professions, were drawn into this spiral that was to turn them into mere objects of consumption. The beauty contests organized between 1917 and 1920 can tell us a great deal here. It was no longer art or beauty that was judged as in the past. It was the wealthiest who won by throwing their yuan about. Although there was still some relation to the huabang, what the competition between the customers expressed was a concern with prestige and social status. This factor apart, the courtesans may be said to have fallen once and for all into the ranks of the prostitutes.
Notes

Introduction


3. The Chinese-administered parts of the city were not truly unified until 1927 when the Nationalists set up the municipal government of Shanghai; cf. Christian Henriot, Shanghai 1927-1937. Municipal Power, Locality, and Modernization, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1993.


14. See the introduction to Gustave Schlegel, Le vendeur d'huile qui seul possède la voix des mères, ou splendeurs et misères des courtesIVES chinoises, Paris, Leyden, Brill et Maesonneuve, 1877 and, by the same author, Histoire de la prostitution en Chine, Rouen, 1880.


Chapter 1


4. The circuit intendant was the civil servant in charge of the xian (district) or prefecture. In the big cities like Shanghai or Hankou, he became the de facto representative of State authority for the entire city, although his function could not be limited to that of a mayor. On the role and function of the circuit intendant in Shanghai, cf. Leung Yuen-Sang, The Shanghai Tungui Linkage Men in a Changing Society, 1843-1890, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1993.

5. There are many references to this figure in William T. Rowe, Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889, int. id., Hankow Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1955. To place the position of the circuit intendant in the context of the imperial administration, cf. Tung-tsu Ch'ao, Local Government in China under the Ch'ing, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1962; and John R. Watt, The District Magistrate in Late Imperial China, 1726-1860, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1989.


11. Xue Liyung, "Ming-Qing shili de Shanghai changji" ("Prostitutes in Shanghai in Ming-Qing Times"), in Jiu Shanghai de yun de chang, pp. 150-155; Ping Jinyu, "Jiu Shanghai de changji" ("Prostitutes in Old Shanghai"), in Jiu Shanghai de yun de chang, pp. 159-171; Xie Wayi, "Mingchou Shanghai changji yi pie" ("A Glance at Prostitution in Shanghai at the Beginning of the Republic"), in Jiu Shanghai de yun de chang, pp. 172-175; Zhao Zhiyun, "Zhejiang changji de chuan jingci - Huzhou" (A Charitable Organization Rescuing Prostitutes - the Door of Hope) in Jiu Shanghai de yun de chang, pp. 176-177.


of reform at the end of the Qing dynasty. This was the main theme of Paul Cohen’s work from which the unconventional aspects of Wang’s private life have been practically expunged. Wang came in 1848 to Shanghai, where his father was employed as a teacher. A year later, upon his father’s death, he became head of the family, having already won the title of zisi. In the following year, he lost his first wife. From then on until 1862, he worked as an editor for the London Missionary Society Press. Wang was suspected of having links with the Taiping and was forced to flee to Hong Kong, where he began to express his ideas on reform. It was only in 1884 that he returned permanently to Shanghai. He seems to have stayed there for brief spells in between. Wang was a regular customer of courtesans during all his life. This is not something exceptional. His diary reveals that he often went out courting with friends. In Shanghai, he was an ardent patron of these establishments, even when he returned at the age of fifty-five in 1884. His second wife tried to dissociate him from such activities, and she regularly sent an old servant to remind him of his duties. In a letter to a friend, he wrote at the age of 60: “All my life, I have been rather a Bohemian, fond of girls and wine, and even today I am always in the garden and other resorts here in Shanghai. This has always seemed to me a perfectly normal recreation and not the sort of thing a man has to hide from other people.” Paul Cohen, Between Tradition and Modernity, pp. 8, 13–15, 47, 181, 295.

14. Yu Baosheng (pseudonym of Wang Tao), Haiou yeyou fulu (Addenda to Tales of Libertinage at the Seaside), Shanghai, Hanwen yuanshui, 1929, p. 7; Wang Tao, Songbin songhua, p. 201.

15. I have made extensive use of Wang Tao’s writings for this period, especially Yu Baosheng, Haiou yeyou lu (“Tales of Libertinage at the Seaside”), Shanghai, Hanwen yuanshui, (1870) 1929; id., Haiou yeyou fulu, op. cit.; id., Haiou yeyou yulu (“Tales of Libertinage at the Seaside (continued)”), Shanghai, Hanwen yuanshui, 1929; Yu Baosheng, Huangjutang (“Chat on the [Theater of the] World of Flowers”), Shanghai, Hanwen yuanshui (1860). In the first volume of Haiou yeyou, all the years referred to are between 1846 and 1855. The second fulu, covers a wider range, from 1855 to 1878; however, most of the the years referred to are 1880–1883. For the last volume, yulu, covers the years 1864–1875. Huangjutang relates to the years 1890–1897.


23. Wang Tao, Songbin songhua, p. 201.


44. Gustaaf Schlegel, "Préface", Le vendeur d'huile qui seul possède la reine-des-beauté, ou Splendeur et misères des courtisanes chinoises, Paris/Leyden, Brill et Maisseneuve, 1877, pp. ix-x.


49. Hua Tao ("The Flowers"), 18 September 1926.


55. The expression da chawezi is untranslatable. It refers to the practice of taking tea around a table in the company of women or friends. To render it by "going on a round" would not accurately reflect the spirit of these visits.

56. Zhang Quan, Hao bu bu da dagaan ("An Overview of the Evils of Gambling and Whoring"). Shanghai, Quanhu chubao, 1920, I, p. 4; Shanghai lanrou zhinan, p. 5.

57. Haishang jiaewusheng (pseudonym), Jinji de shenghuo, pp. 130-131.

58. Shanghai shenmin zhinan, p. 4; Haishang jiaewusheng (pseudonym), Jinji de shenghuo, p. 22.

59. Chen Wen, Lao Shanghai san shi nian jianwen, pp. 72-74.

60. CL, Xiaolinhao ("A Thousand Smiles"), 6 July 1902.


64. I use this notion of "places of entertainment" deliberately in order to express the change that occurred in the behavior of the Chinese elites in their leisure activities from the First World War onward. There had been major changes since the arrival of the Westerners, but, in my view, the traditional forms of behavior endured. The date 1914-1915 is probably quite arbitrary: There was no clear-cut and sharp break in this continuous process of social transformation in Shanghai. However, rather than 1911, a date that is far too political and not very relevant as a milestone, I would choose 1914-1915 because it corresponds to the beginning of a fantastic leap forward in the local economy and to the emergence of new social classes that were the vectors of modernization. See Marie-Claire Bergere, The Golden Age of the Chinese Bourgeoisie, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

65. In 1919, a Shanghai guide listed 162 teahouses. Ten years later (in 1928), one writer was able to count no more than 68 of them. Shanghai zhinan, V, pp. 13-14. Wu Chenglan, Jiu Shanghai changqian jiulou ("The Taverns and Tea-Houses of Old Shanghai"), Shanghai, Huxiong shifan duzuo chubanhu, 1989, p. 12.

66. The others were Xiangan diylou, Haishang yipinlou, Longhua fuguilou, Panyiou, Pinyouhui, Chen Wenuo, Lao Shanghai san shi nian jianwen, p. 52.


68. Shanghai zhinan, V, p. 18.

69. Chi Zhicheng, "Hu you mengying lu" ("Notes and Sights from a Journey to Shanghai"), Dang'an yu lixi, no. 1, 1989, p. 2. This is a first hand account by a Chinese scholar settled in Taiwan, who recounted his experiences in Shanghai when he journeyed there in September 1891.

70. CL, Xiaolinhao ("A Thousand Smiles"), 2 April 1901. On the small newspapers, see note 57.


72. Shanghai lanrou zhinan, p. 4.


74. Shanghai lanrou zhinan, p. 5.


79. Wang Jimen, Shanghai liuxi nian lai huajie shi, p. 145. The story is probably exaggerated. It is difficult to see how the courtesans in question could have responded to the 670 invitations from two rivals in a course of a single theatrical performance.

80. Chi Zhicheng, "Hu you mengying lu," p. 3.


82. Haishang yeyou belian, III, p. 4; Wang Jimen, Shanghai liuxi nian lai huajie shi, p. 11.


85. Haishang yeyou belian, III, p. 6. These games could have unfortunate consequences for certain customers when they reached an advanced stage of intoxication or torpor, When a customer got drunk or drowsy, the courtesans would lightly shake a little silver box containing whole nutmeg seeds, causing a slight Bells of China at the Grand Loo Palace, and to the exchange of presents. Wu Chenglan, Jiu Shanghai changqian jiulou, pp. 58 and 60.

86. Wang Tao, Hazeou yeyou jiulou, I, p. 3.

87. Wu Chenglan, Jiu Shanghai changqian jiulou, pp. 27 and 31.

88. Chi Zhicheng, "Hu you mengying lu," p. 3.

89. Wang Tao, Hazeou yeyou jiulou, I, p. 3.
Chapter 2

1. The expression xiangfen, which I have interpreted as "perfume and powder," is a conventional term used to designate the courtesans in writings prior to the twentieth century. The courtesans and the prostitutes were always designated by metaphorical expressions. It was after 1914-1915 that the terms jinxi changfu (princess), and jinyuan (broidered) came into common use in references to the phenomenon of prostitution.


9. See the doctoral thesis by Ji-luen Tsao, “Remembering Suzhou: Urbanism in Late Imperial China,” University of California, 1992.


15. Yu Baochen (pseudonym of Wang Tao), Huaguo jutun, op. cit., I, pp. 2 and 5. In the 1880s, the annual salary of civil servants ranged from 33 to 180 taels. This mass, however, was supplemented by various sources that pushed the average income of officeholders to around 5,000 taels a year. At the Jiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai, a director earned a monthly salary of 200 taels, a chief accountant earned 80 taels, and a work inspector earned 26 taels. At the turn of the century, the ratio between the two was around 0.73 tael for one yuan. Chang Ching-ji, The Income of the Chinese Gentry, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1962, p. 42 and pp. 12-13; Christine Corne, Bât et entrepren en Chine aux XI è e - XX è e siècles. Le chantier naval de Jiangnan, 1865-1917, Paris, Argonement, 1997, pp. 32-33.


24. Hai shang yeyou belian, op. cit., IV, p. 7; SB 4 September 1872.


27. The year was divided into three four-month seasons marked out by these festivals: the New Year, the Dragon Festival (duanwuji), and the Mid-Autumn Festival (zhongqiuji).
43. Yu Baosheng [pseudonym of Wang Tao], Haqou jutan, op. cit., I, p. 2.
44. SR, 5 May 1872.
45. Wang Jiren, Shanghai liushi nian lai huajie shi, op. cit., p. 156.
46. Shanghai laonyou zhuan, op. cit., p. 33.
49. Wang Tao, Songbin suohua, op. cit., p. 121.
50. SR, 4 June 1872.
53. Wang Tao, Songbin suohua, op. cit., p. 119.
55. Wang Tao, Songbin suohua, op. cit., p. 119.
56. Yu Baosheng [pseudonym of Wang Tao], Haqou jutan, op. cit., I, pp. 6 and 20; SR, 24, 25, 26, and 27 March 1921.
58. Yu Baosheng [pseudonym of Wang Tao], Haqou jutan, op. cit., I, p. 11.
60. SR, 8 June 1872.
61. SR, 21 June 1872.
62. SR, 9 December 1873.
63. SR, 14 June 1872; 14 February 1899.
64. Wang Jiren, Shanghai liushi nian lai huajie shi, op. cit., p. 158.
65. SR, 10 May 1919.
67. SR, 29 December 1919.
68. SR, 24, 25, 27, and 28 March 1921.
69. Wang Jiren, Shanghai liushi nian lai huajie shi, op. cit., p. 156.
74. Wang Tao, Songbin suohua, op. cit., p. 118.
77. Wang Jiren, Shanghai liushi nian lai huajie shi, op. cit., p. 77.