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Digesting Gender: Gendered Foodways in Modern Chinese Literature, 1890s–1940s

Zhuo Feng

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DIGESTING GENDER: GENDERED FOODWAYS IN MODERN CHINESE
LITERATURE, 1890S–1940S

by

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DEDICATION

To Feng Guoding, Fan Yuxiang, Feng Ximin, and Paul

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I investigate Han Bangqing (1856–1894), Lao She (1899–1966), and Su Qing’s (1914–1982) works to study the literary representations of how people purchased, prepared, shared, and ate food in different social contexts allowing them to adapt to new gender norms. I contend that the intersection of food, gender and literature stages the process through which people reconciled different and sometimes conflicting gender norms through their everyday eating practices. When encountering new cooking and eating practices in these literary works, people reflect upon their past lives and, wittingly or unwittingly, begin to accept different gender norms, and modify their subjectivities. This all culminates in the process of “digestion,” which refers not only to the bodily function, but also how individuals internalize cultural norms through culinary and alimentary practices. These authors’ own personal conflicts with food and gender are reflected and negotiated in their writings about how characters establish gender relations by participating in various eating acts. The literary representations of everyday eating acts offer new ways to interrogate and revise how gender relations were imagined, and also shows a fluid understanding of gender in modern Chinese history.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When eating, people take food's nutritional value, digest and absorb it, and then excrete the rest. During this process, we also accept certain cultural norms, interpret and internalize them, and meanwhile refuse to follow others. The food we eat, the way we cook, and the company we keep while eating, helps us to establish bonds with different social groups, local cultures, histories, and traditions. Through cooking and eating, people transform "nature" into "culture." In this dissertation, I focus on how Chinese people, particularly new city migrants, shaped their understanding of gender and gender relations during late Qing and Republican periods through changes in cooking and eating practices. From the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, China experienced dramatic social and cultural changes. It transitioned from an agrarian to a developing capitalist society, while experiencing several foreign invasions and domestic rebellions.¹ Many people, who were formerly elites, businessmen or farmers in the countryside, moved to Beijing and Shanghai to escape violence or seek new opportunities. The different social settings, infrastructure, and customs in the city profoundly influenced how people prepared and consumed food. I analyze several modern Chinese literary works to study representations of how people purchased,

¹ These include The First Opium War (1839–1843), The Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), The Second Opium War (1856-1860), The First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and The Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901).

prepared, shared, and ate food in different social contexts allowing them to adapt to new gender norms. Specifically, I focus on how these literary works interacted with everyday life to inform people's subjectivities. In this dissertation, I focus on the gendered aspect of subjectivity, and I believe that these novels show that through the experiences of cooking and eating, the knowledge, feelings, and memories surrounding food and foodways, call people's previous understandings of gender into question. With the modification of subjectivity, the characters actively oppose or promote certain gender norms to direct their gender relations. The reason why I use the term subjectivity instead of identity is that subjectivity describes many different ways for individuals to understand themselves, their realities, and their relations to others and the world around them. Subjectivity captures the ambiguities in self, which is not neatly unified, but is always in the process of being formed according to people's experiences.

I select works in this time span from Han Bangqing 韓邦慶 (1856-1894), Lao She 老舍 (1899-1966) and Su Qing 蘇青 (1914-1982), who wrote novels, short stories and essays depicting how gender relations are codified through cooking and eating. During this transitional period, each of these authors was once a migrant to the modern city. They all experienced the tensions created by fast-changing and conflicting gender norms, each of these authors created their literary strategy to resolve these tensions by writing about how people establish and reinterpret gender relations through cooking and eating. I mainly study *Haishanghua liezhuan* 海上花列傳 (The Sing-song girls of Shanghai) (1894) by Han Banqing, *Luotuo xiangzi* 駱駝祥子 (Rickshaw boy) (1937) by Lao She, and *Jiehun shinian* 結婚十年 (Ten years of marriage) (1944) by Su Qing as windows into the complex interactions between food, gender, and literature in history. I contend that

the intersection of food, gender and literature stages the process through which people reconciled different and sometimes conflicting gender norms via their everyday eating practices. In these literary works, when encountering new cooking and eating practices, people reflect upon their past lives and, wittingly or unwittingly, begin to accept different gender norms, and modified their subjectivities. This all culminates in the process of “digestion,” which refers not only to the bodily function, but also to how individuals internalize cultural norms through culinary and alimentary practices. These authors’ own personal conflicts with food and gender are reflected and negotiated in their writings about how characters establish gender relations by participating in various eating acts. The literary representations of everyday eating acts offer ways to interrogate and revise how gender relations were imagined, and also shows a fluid understanding of gender in modern Chinese history.

The dissertation is organized in a chronological order centered on three major gendered cultural phenomena related to cooking and eating. I examine the late Qing novel *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* to discuss the relationships between courtesans and patrons in the banquet culture found in Shanghai’s foreign concessions. The novel’s depiction of daily banquets in courtesan houses reveals the conflicts between Confucian gender norms, elite taste and commercial culture in Shanghai’s foreign concessions. By describing how people negotiate between different gender norms in various culinary settings, I believe Han shows the process through which people’s various traditions merge together to form new gendered aesthetics in Shanghai’s urban culture. Then, I examine how men and women experience the pleasure of eating in Lao She’s essays, newspaper articles, autobiographies and novels, with a focus on the novel *Rickshaw Boy*.

Lao She's view of eating is related to his binary understanding of gender; however, this was challenged by China's development and valorization of capitalist work ethics. In *Rickshaw Boy*, women's indulgence in food is characterized as immoral and is related to libidinal desire—both of which ruin men's bodies and derail their productivity. Such gender discrimination has a long tradition in Chinese culture, but in this novel, Lao She combines it with discourses of scientific knowledge and revolution from the Republican period. This seemingly anticipates the cultural environment of Communist China where gender discrimination would be reinscribed. Finally, I study Su Qing's essays and novels, including her most famous work *Ten Years of Marriage* to explore her self-formation through writing to reinterpret her memories of food. She looks down upon her father's westernized eating manners, the eating rituals in the traditional patriarchal family after marriage, and the new eating style of the nuclear family in Shanghai during the war. Different eating experiences and her interpretations of them constantly contributed to the formation of her subjectivity, and finally through writing about these eating acts, she successfully created her own space as a popular female writer. Each of these authors has their own strategy to participate in discussions about food and gender, and their works reveal the changing gender norms from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century with the development of Chinese modernity: gender equality, capitalism, scientific discourses, the rise of the modern city, and Western influence.

In this introduction, I first contextualize eating and gender in Chinese history and culture as they pertain to my research. I then outline the methodology through which I explore literary representations of gender and eating. Then, I give a survey of research

about eating and gender in both food studies and Chinese food studies. I conclude by giving a summary of the contents of each chapter in this dissertation.

1.1 FOOD AND GENDER IN CHINESE CULTURAL TRADITION

In her “Theorizing Woman: *Funü, Guojia, Jiating* (Chinese women, Chinese state, Chinese family),” Tani E. Barlow explores the changes in imperial conceptions of gender in modern China by offering a genealogy of the word *funü* and discussing the relations between its meanings and Chinese social transformations from late imperial to Communist periods. She believes her argument is best expressed by T. Min-ha Trinh’s assertion that “woman as subject can only redefine while being defined by language” (T. Min-ha Trinh qtd. in Barlow 253). My dissertation also attempts to answer the question: how did gender norms change when Chinese society began to experience modernity? However, I disagree with Barlow and T. Min-ha Trinh. I believe it was everyday experiences that constantly redefined gender and language. In this section, I trace the origins of Confucianism to discuss the significance of cooking and eating in the formation of gendered ethical subjects in ancient China. From the perspective of food, my research can supplement Barlow’s argument to show a more complex picture of gender in Chinese culture.

In order to talk about food and gender, I first introduce New Confucian Philosopher Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–1995)’s analysis of the characteristics of Chinese traditional philosophy and then discuss how ancient philosophy influences people’s conception of gender. Mou believes that from the very beginning, Chinese philosophy was concerned with “human life” instead of objectively asserted knowledge about the world, which differs from Greek natural philosophy—the origin of Western

philosophy (16). Mou asserts that the legendary emperors, from Yao 堯 (2356 BC–2255 BC), Shun 舜 (2187 BC–2067 BC), and Yu 禹 (2123 BC–2025 BC) to the Kings of the Shang 商(1600 BC–1046 BC) and Zhou 周 (1046 BC–256 BC) dynasties founded Chinese philosophy with its principle concern being one’s self or internal world. Later, when Confucianism and Daoism adopted this approach, they both attempted to find the intersection between truth through human subjectivity (Mou 25). Thus, virtue was a significantly important topic for Chinese ancient philosophies, because virtue shaped people’s mind and formed their subjectivities by telling them how to live properly (Mou 16). When discussing virtue, instead of offering the conceptual definition, Chinese philosophy often provided concrete contexts of everyday life and discussed how people should practice virtue in these situations. Drawing on Mou, I believe that Confucianism discusses gender not based on the biological differences between the two sexes, but through instructing them to perform different gender roles in everyday scenarios so that they can lead fulfilling lives. That is not to say Confucianism denies the bodily differences between men and women; but that Confucianism is not as interested in defining men and women through biological factors as it is in producing gendered ethical subjects. As Michel Foucault discusses in *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* (1985), “A moral action tends toward its own accomplishment; but it also aims beyond the latter, to the establishing of a moral conduct that commits an individual, not only to other actions always in conformity with values and rules, but to a certain mode of being, a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject” (28). Through teaching people moral acts around food in everyday life, Confucianism aims to form ethical subjects, and

I explore this in the following paragraphs to argue that the reasons why gender plays an essential part in the formation of Confucian ethical subjects.

In the early Confucian classics, assigning women the moral responsibility to serve food is the beginning of gender segregation and this allows people to form gendered subjectivities. In one of the earliest Confucian classics, *Yi jing* 易經 (Book of changes) (Western Zhou 1122/1046 BC–771 BC), a harmonious “*jiaren gua*” 家人卦 (sign for family members) is “*wu you sui, zai zhong kui*” 無攸遂, 在中饋 (women do not go anywhere, they want and cook at home)² (*Zhouyi yi zhu* 131). By assigning women the role of serving food at home, the author promotes gender segregation and says that it promotes happiness within the family. In another early Confucian classic, *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of songs) (11th to 7th centuries BC) the authors offer a detailed picture about how happy the slave owner’s family is when everyone follows their roles. The daughter of this noble family “*wu fei wu yi, jiu shi shi yi*” 無非無儀, 唯酒食是議 (should not judge whether people are right or wrong and act in a dignified manner. She should only concern herself with wine and food)³ (*Shijing yi zhu* 287). Similar to the quote from the *Book of Changes*, this poem assigns women the role of serving food and ascribes gender roles in order to create a harmonious family. This poem offers rich details to depict the happy life of the noble family, whose success serves as a strong educational example for others to follow. Both Confucian classics convey the idea of gender segregation not only through a

² The translation of the *Book of Changes* is my own. I translate these ancient texts on my own because I am emphasizing a particular vocabulary pertaining to eating and sexuality. For an authoritative English translation of it see *The Yi King in The Sacred Books of China*, vol.16 (1882), translated by James Legge.

³ The translation of the *Book of Songs* is my own.

conceptual analysis about gender, but via instructing people on how to behave properly. When relating women to the consumption of food, women obtained a position of service within the family as bodies to be consumed. By assigning women the moral responsibility of serving food in the family, these two books also envision ethical subjectivities, for both men and women as good members of Confucian social order.

Later on, during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period 春秋戰國 (770 BC–221 BC), Confucianist scholars further developed their gender hierarchy by setting up the rites system in everyday life. For Confucianism, the system of rites can set up the ideal social order with two principles: “*zun zun*” 尊尊 (respect the respectful) and “*qin qin*” 親親 (be intimate with your family) (Mou 57). No matter the “*shi yi*” 十義⁴ (ten righteous things) in the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of rites) (475 BC–221 BC) or the “*wu lun*” 五倫⁵ (five basic moral relationships) in Mengzi 孟子 (Mencius) (372 BC–289 BC), these two principles are expressions of the ideal social order. In this Confucian social order, the relationship between husband and wife mirrors the relation between the ruler and his male officials. This social order was set up through rites in everyday life.

⁴ “父慈、子孝、兄良、弟弟、夫義、婦聽、長惠、幼順、君仁、臣忠” (Kindness is the responsibility of the father, filial duty is the responsibility of the son, gentleness is the responsibility of the elder brother, obedience is the responsibility of the younger brother, righteousness is the responsibility of the husband, submission is the responsibility of the wife; kindness is the responsibility of the elders, deference is the responsibility of the children, benevolence is the responsibility of the ruler, and loyalty is the responsibility of the minister) (*Liji yi zhu* 275). Translation is my own.

⁵ “父子有親，君臣有義，夫婦有別，長幼有序，朋友有信” (Between parents and children there is affection; between rulers and ministers, righteousness; between husband and wife, separate functions; between young and old, proper order; and between friends, faithfulness) (*Mengzi yi zhu* 112–113; *Mencius* 57).

Rites, “the Confucian generic name of norms,” provided rules that covered nearly all aspects of everyday life in order to regulate people’s behavior according to their social standings (Tang and Yue 4). The rite system regulated people’s everyday actions to produce ethical subjects according to the Confucian social order. Only in this sense, can we understand the reason why Kongzi 孔子 Confucius (551BC–479BC) values the rites of Zhou so much and worked his whole life to recover them. According to the *Book of Rites*, people created the ritual system through everyday eating acts: “fu li zhi chu, shi zhu yin shi 夫禮之初，始諸飲食” (the rites begin with drinking and eating)⁶ (*Liji yi zhu* 268). I believe it is first because eating food is one of the most pervasive everyday acts and also because food holds symbolic meanings that bridge everyday life with ancestral and religious ideals. Through the sacrifice, these rituals about cooking and eating held crucial positions within the Confucian ritual system to maintain the social order of the human world so that it could imitate the cosmological order.

Producing ethical subjects is an important target of the ritual system—not only to regulate people’s behaviors, but their minds, desires, and bodies. Appetite is deeply intertwined with sex, serving as the main danger that Confucianism seeks to manage through rites. The *Book of Rites* considers eating and sex to be the two basic desires, and offers an example about how rites regulate people’s bodily desires:

⁶ The translation of the *Book of Rites* is my own. I translate these ancient texts on my own because I am emphasizing a particular vocabulary pertaining to eating and sexuality. For authoritative English translation of the *Book of Rites* please see *The Li Ki* in *The Sacred Books of China*, vol. 27 (1885), translated by James Legge.

飲食男女，人之大慾存焉。死亡貧苦，人之大惡存焉。故欲、惡者，心之大端也。人藏其心，不可測度也。美惡皆在其心，不見其色也，欲一以窮之，捨禮何以哉？ (Liji yi zhu 275)

The things people greatly desire are comprehended in food and sexual pleasure, and those things they greatly dislike are understood in death and poverty. Thus, desires and aversions are the great elements in one's minds. But people keep them hidden in their minds, which cannot be guessed and inferred by other people. The desires and aversions, being in their minds, do not appear to other people, if it be wished to regulate them in one uniform way, how can it be done without the use of rites?

The reason why rituals can manage people's desires in all kinds of circumstances, I believe, is because through the practice of rituals people can learn virtues and form their ethical subjectivities to solve the conflict between desire and morality. As people constantly scrutinized, reevaluated, and corrected their behaviors according to the gendered rituals, they shaped their minds, disciplined their bodies, and formed their gendered moral subjectivities. As a result, they could control their own desires in various situations without supervision. Therefore, eating and sex work at the bodily level to shape people's subjectivities. In this way, Confucianism set up and maintained a social order that required people to discipline their bodies and minds as much as their behaviors.

Over the past millennium, Confucian classics were continually re-interpreted by elites, who wrote annotations, and by virtue of Confucianism's interactions with Daoism and Buddhism. As such, Chinese food culture, which includes various taboos, customs, and conventional language about cooking and eating, was constantly under the influence

of different cultures. The interactions between food and gender relations was unstable and occurred in a shifting manner over centuries to shape the different cultural and social meanings ascribed to men and women's bodies. One of the most important aspects of food and gender is how the Daoist concept *yin yang* 陰陽 became part of the Confucian gender hierarchy. *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (The yellow emperor's inner canon) (dates uncertain), a Han dynasty (202 BC– 220 AD) medical classic, which is also one of the most influential traditional Chinese medical texts, introduces a regimen that includes eating in moderation in every aspects of daily life to make *yin yang* in harmony (2–5). *Yin yang* originally referred to the dynamics through which opposite forces interact with and transform each other. This concept influenced Chinese traditional medical discourses to define men and women's bodies. *Yin yang* works to create order in people's bodies by producing a series of norms called *yangsheng* 養生 (nourishing life) (“Nutritional Governmentality” 16). Food and drinks were categorized as having “cooling and heating properties” to mirror the *yin yang* of gendered bodies (“Nutritional Governmentality” 13). For example, women were supposed to eat less cool food, especially during pregnancy and menstruation (Furth 100). Women's bodies also served as a sexual food that could provide men with nutritious *yin*. *Fang zhong shu* 房中術 (Arts of the bedchamber) were developed in order to let women's *yin* bodies nourish men's *yang* bodies through the art of sex (van Gulik 11). Although both genders needed to manage their desires, this bodily discipline could be harsher towards women because they were subordinated, and their bodies were regarded as dangerous, untampered, cold, weak and sensual. The ubiquitous customs and taboos of nourishing life ethics became common knowledge to shape people's gendered bodies. In this way, bodily harmony was gendered and weaved into

Confucianism's larger cosmology, which prioritizes harmony within the family, kingdom and heavens respectively.

Since at least the 1980s, many western scholars have criticized the assumption of an ahistorical and timeless Confucian tradition, which I will explore in the following sections. While it is accepted in academia that the interpretation of Confucian patriarchy was always in flux, we still should not ignore the legacies carried forward by this traditional culture. The “ten righteous things” from the *Book of Rites* can also be found in *San zi jing* 三字經 (The three character classics) (Song 宋 dynasty 960–1279), a beginner book for children written in the 13th century. This book rewrites the Confucian classics into mandatory readings for teaching little children many gendered rituals in everyday life and the reasoning behind them. A seventeenth century mandatory reading for women *Nü fan jie lu* 女范捷錄 (Sketch of a model for women) rewrites the sentence from the *Book of Rites* about how rites begin with food, and says the education of gender norms begins with teaching cooking and eating rituals according to gender: “正家之道，禮謹男女，養蒙之節，教始於飲食” (To manage the household, one must be cautious in managing gender relations. During the first learning period for these children, their education begins with eating and drinking)⁷ (*Nüsishu jizhu yizheng* 187). Children had to learn how to eat properly and conform to their gender roles. In this way, they learned to accept their hierarchical positions and create gender relations. The concept that shapes people's gendered bodies through everyday cooking and eating rituals was inherited from

⁷ The translation is my own.

earlier Confucian classics as a way to reproduce the gender hierarchy during the period of imperial rule.

Food, along with the actions, rituals and language surrounding it, has long been related with gender in China. It is not just from the conceptual debates between ancient Chinese philosophers that formed Chinese attitudes towards gender, but through the everyday acts that helped people form their gendered ethical subjectivities. Based on my discussion about the tradition of food and gender, I would like to examine Barlow's article "Theorizing Woman: *Funiü, Guojia, Jiating* (Chinese women, Chinese state, Chinese family)." She quotes from the eighteenth-century scholar Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀 (1696–1771) to explore how "*funiü*" signified female family members:

夫在家為女，出嫁為婦，生子為母。有賢女然後有賢婦，有賢婦然後有賢母，有賢母然後有賢子孫。(Chen 402)

When *fu* [persons, sages, women of rank] are in the *jia* [lineage unit] they are *nü* [female, woman, daughter]; when they marry, they are *fu* [wives], and when they bear children, they are *mu* [mothers]. [If you start with] a *xiannü* [virtuous unmarried female], then you will end up with a *xianfu* [virtuous wife]; if you have virtuous wives, you will end up with *xianmu* [virtuous mothers]. With virtuous mothers there will be virtuous descendants. (Barlow 255)

Barlow believes that Chen's text shows a prevalent syntactical habit during late imperial period that understands gender within socially assigned roles such as kinship, and "forecloses transcendent framing of female persons as generic women" (256). Besides the linguistic signs in Chen's text, I am also interested in the second part of the paragraph:

how can women transform from *fu* and *nü* to be *xianfu* (virtuous wife) and *xiannü* (virtuous unmarried female)? Based on what I have already discussed, I believe that the process of becoming *xian* (virtuous) happened through everyday activities such as cooking and eating. As the core of the ritual system, these actions function as the means through which people form their ethical subjectivities.

Barlow argues that *funü*/kinswomen was considered as a traditional gender concept when Republican intellectuals adopted the Western conception of sex, *nüxing*/woman, and the Chinese Communist Party later re-imposed this intellectual concept by resituating *funü*/women inside *guojia* (state) and *jiating* (family) referring the peasant women who were persecuted because of “feudalism” and labeling intellectual conceptions of gender as “bourgeois” (253–290). In this way, “modern *funü*/women thus provided a staging ground, offering the sexed bodies of peasant women as a space of modernization” (254). Based on Barlow’s argument, I want to ask when gendered Confucian tradition, which had been influential in China for centuries, gradually decreased in power, what did the repackaged forms of the traditional norms during the transitional periods look like, and how did they conflict with and inform new emerging norms? If food had been at the core of the Chinese traditional ritual system and moral education, did drastic changes in modern Chinese conceptions of gender relate to changes in everyday cooking and eating? Finally, Chen Hongmou reduces women’s identities to their position within the orthodox Confucian marriage system, while ignoring women who were outside the marriage system like prostitutes. When these deviant women were outside the kinship system, they were still under the influence of norms relating to food and gender. In my research, I also attempt to reveal the changes of these women’s lives,

their relationships and how modern society accommodated them within the new social order. My research about *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* focuses on how courtesans, women who were outside but nevertheless imitated the marriage system, promoted the banquet culture in modern Shanghai and made it into an urban high culture. In the chapter about Lao She, I discuss the how *yin yang* was repackaged through the capitalist work ethic to restrict the body through food and sex. In the chapter about Su Qing, I explore the transformation of traditional patriarchy in the family and how this domestic sphere is related to the public sphere via women's writing.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

I conceptualize cooking and eating as everyday experiences, which inform people's understandings of gender and gender relations. I explore this topic through literary representations, which demonstrate how individuals actively or passively participate in these experiences to form their gendered subjectivities. In his "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" (1961), Roland Barthes reads food as "not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior" (24). Barthes believes that when people prepare, serve and eat food, "this item of food sums up and transmits a situation, constitutes an information and signifies" (24). Drawing on Roland Barthes, I read food as experience, structured by many social and cultural factors such as economics, infrastructure, medicine, tradition, and linguistic significations. When individuals experience food, they experience it sensibly, mentally, and bodily, and people communicate through these experiences to digest the system of significations within a

given society. What I focus on is the aspects of gender in people's relationships involved with food. As I discussed in the previous section, food and gender have a unique connection through philosophy, rites, and people's nutritional ethics in Chinese history and culture. Therefore, I explore how this connection has been changing since China's transitional period to restructure the process of Chinese modernity in a gendered framework from the perspective of food.

Barthes believes that "an entire 'world' (social environment) is present in and signified by food" (26). He considers advertisements about food as a form of signification of food, and he argues that even though they are "technically the work of a particular group" they still reflect "the collective psychology" (27). I consider literary representations of food to be similar to food advertisements, as argued by Barthes, in that they are not merely a work of the author but that they also reveal the collective psychology and social environment at a given time. I connect Barthes's theorization to Charles Taylor's conception of social imaginaries to show how an author's experience of food and their writing experience intersect with each other in literature. The intersection between them shows how individuals creatively signify their personal practices into the collective social imaginaries. Developed by Charles Taylor, the concept "social imaginaries" refers to the "common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (23). Taylor believes that social imaginaries can show "how ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings" (23). He compares social theories with social imaginaries and asserts that social imaginaries can show the "largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world show up for us in the sense they have" (25). For Taylor,

imaginaries in a given society are constantly in the process of modification—“modern theory of moral order gradually transform social imaginaries” through social practices; in turn, the traditional social practices are often transformed by the new social imaginaries, and theory is given a particular shape in practice (28–29).

Drawing on Taylor, I consider literature as a common practice where the author’s words are interpreted by larger groups of readers. The reason why I study China’s transition to modernity through literary studies is because, as a social practice, literature has its unique power to modify social imaginaries: with their rich details, literary works offer new possibilities for readers to imagine the whole world around them without circumscription. That is to say, literature articulates norms, theories, and idealizations through the imagination of everyday life. Taylor believes that social imaginaries “often start off as theories,” and to supplement his theory, my research shows that literature can also be a source of transformation in new social imaginaries (24). Literary representations of food, eating, and cooking, by stimulating people’s bodies as well as minds, can thus allow readers to imagine new things and, in turn, modify the social imaginaries they share. I explore the new eating habits in modern China that express how gender relations were changing and also participated in the creation of new social imaginaries surrounding gender.

In this dissertation, I also emphasize the method of studying gender through gender relations. Throughout the twentieth century, scholarship on Chinese gender studies focuses mainly on women, with few scholars studying men’s issues. However in the twenty-first century, scholars began to take an interest in femininity, masculinity, and

same-sex relationships.⁸ On the one hand, I believe that gender obtains its meaning through gender relations, thus if we only focus on women's issues, it is hard to grasp the whole picture of gender. Thus, it is necessary to understand men's function in gender relations as well and study women's issues within a framework that examines the interaction between two sexes. On the other hand, I believe that in order to understand gender, more topics need to be explored in gender studies. In heterosexual gender relations, men and women's gender roles are also fluid and complex, but this has been long ignored. In this dissertation, the three authors' works I have chosen all feature moments where men and women play ambiguous gender roles, and through these moments we can expand our understanding of gender in modern China beyond the study of same-sex relationships.

My research is mainly under two theoretical frameworks: everydayness and poststructuralist approaches. My use of the everyday stems from Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), in which he examines how people experience and individualize mass culture and social institutions. While people actively consume and participate in them, individuals maintain a degree of agency via tactics—actions through which they negotiate and navigate these larger social phenomena. Since it is derived largely from Charles Baudelaire's *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863) and Walter

⁸ The major works studying masculinity includes *The Fragile Scholar: Power and Masculinity in Chinese Culture* (2004) written by Song Geng, *Theorising Chinese masculinity: Society and gender in China* (2002) written by Kam Louie and *Negotiating Masculinities in Late Imperial China* (2006) by Martin W. Huang. For sexuality studies, major works include *The libertine's Friend: Homosexuality and Masculinity in Late Imperial China* (2011) by Giovanni Vitiello, and *The Emerging Lesbian: Female Same-Sex Desire in Modern China* (2003) by Tze-lan D. Sang.

Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire, everydayness theory is often highly associated with European bourgeois life, focusing on actions such as walking in an urban setting or sitting in a café. While I think everydayness can be applied to Chinese culture as well, this requires everydayness theory to expand and adjust to different cultures.

There are three major scholarly works that applied everydayness to modern Chinese culture. Joan Judge applied everydayness theory in her research on early Republican China in several of her works, including *Republican Lens: Gender, Visuality, and Experience in the Early Chinese Periodical Press* (2015), "Everydayness as a Critical Category of gender Analysis: The Case of *Funü shibao*" (2012), and "Sinology, Feminist History, and Everydayness in the Early Republican Periodical Press" (2015). She believes that everydayness theory can help avoid the single and linear understanding of Chinese modernity. Also, everydayness can stage modernity within local conditions, thus it is helpful to explore specific historical transformations through everydayness.

Another major work that applies everydayness theory to modern China is Hanchao Lu's *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (1999). In this book, Lu argues that "the story of daily life in Shanghai is a tale of how the little people, in their own creative ways, lived through the gigantic changes in modern China" (296). He studies the life of the "urban poor" such as rickshaw pullers, street beggars, and the unemployed, and "petty urbanities" such as office workers, factory laborers and shop assistants in Republican Shanghai. Inspired by everydayness theory, Lu reads modern Shanghai through the ordinary's mundane life to from a "bottom-up" perspective to understand Chinese modernity. Besides these two major works, Leo Ou-fan Lee's *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China* (1999)

also applies everydayness theory. In this book, Lee argues that Western conceptions of everyday experience, such as *flâneurie*, were never very popular in modern Chinese literature (39). While there are solitary walkers depicted in Shanghai literature, they generally move with purpose towards a clearly defined goal (39–40). Thus, these ideas were largely viewed as occidentalist, and negatively portrayed in Chinese literary circles (Lee 40). Food enjoys an important cultural value in ordinary Chinese people's lives, but there's has not been any research done on Chinese food culture that employs theories of everydayness. Thus, my research contributes to not only China studies, but also everydayness theory.

I also take a poststructuralist approach in my research in the sense that I refuse to assign a static structure of oppressor and repressed to society. I feel that this ignores the complex, ambiguous, and dynamic parts of life. Instead, I am more interested in finding out how knowledge, discourses and meaning of gender were produced and how both men and women participated in them to form and modify their subjectivities in their ambiguous realities. Because of this approach I attach importance to close readings of literary works. I agree with Wenying Xu's defense of close reading in her book *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature*:

We have witnessed a large quantity of contemporary scholarship that treats literary texts as testing grounds for theories and political positions. It is not that these approaches are intrinsically inappropriate for studying literature; the disciplinary demand for theoretical rigor, however, tends to produce literary criticism that imposes theory and politics upon literature, or colonizes literature, if I may, forcing it to speak words and yield

meanings at the cost of its dismemberment... I want to advocate that a fair balance between theory and aesthetics can produce a happy union of sense and sensation, of writerly operation and readerly response, and I think that one of the significant ways to achieve this goal lies in the politically charged and theory-informed literary reading. (16–17)

I believe the reason why we should study literature along with other primary materials to understand history is because, different from theory and philosophy, literature argues by creatively portraying an imagined world. If we treat literature as evidence to prove certain theories, it will sacrifice the valuable details, complexity, and ambiguity that literature offers. This is the reason why in this dissertation I attach importance to closely reading literary works. In order to balance theory and close reading, I also adopt everydayness theory with a poststructuralist approach, both of which resist imposing schematic, homogenous overarching conclusions upon society.

In the following pages of this section I will review several major works in Chinese gender studies to contextualize my research within this larger field. First, since the 1980s to the twenty-first century, several scholars have attacked the simplistic narrative that Chinese women were the passive “victims” of Confucianist imperial China. Many works attempted to show women’s agency in Chinese history in the 80s, and by the 1990s, more publications focused on women and their resistance to power in Chinese history. Patricia Ebrey’s book *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (1993) explores Song women’s lives, especially their married lives. As many other scholars, Ebrey attempts to examine how much agency woman had to make their own decisions in life in spite of social and familial constraints. She refuses

to understand marriage as a coherent model. Instead, Ebrey's strategy is to view marriage as "a cultural framework encompassing a variety of partly contradictory and often ambiguous ideas and images," and she believe that "no matter what the legal and Confucian models might imply, families were contexts within which young and old, men and women, wives and concubines, negotiated their relations with one another, often pursuing different interests and thus coming into conflict"(8). The ambiguity and multiplicity of life makes it possible for women to have their own agency to negotiate between different roles and maneuver their own realities. Her emphasizes on the fragmented nature of and contradictions inherent to everyday life and national culture have inspired my own historical and literary inquiries. Meanwhile, the multiplicity of culture requires research that observes history from different angles. Similar to how Ebrey takes marriage as the cultural framework and families as its context to explore Sung women's lives, I take eating acts as situations in which men and women constantly shape their relationships and negotiated between different gender roles.

Dorothy Ko also aims to revise the narrative that sees women as victims of feudal Chinese society in her book *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, and in doing so, Ko focuses on women's culture in Jiangnan area during the seventeenth century. Ko attempts to show how "tradition can be harnessed to further untraditional goals" and women themselves pursue opportunities in the confined gender system (296). Ko not only criticized the concept of a timeless and unchangeable Confucian tradition, but also reveals the gap between the ideology and people's everyday practice. In *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, Ko specifically emphasizes the "negotiated boundaries"

between the gender based domestic sphere and public sphere for women (12). Under the influence of other scholars outside of sinology such as Joan Kelly and Pierre Bourdieu, Ko argues that “the inner/outer construct does not demarcate mutually exclusive social and symbolic spaces;” instead, the border of the domestic and public sphere is ambivalent and always in-flux (13). Since the construction of routines and rituals of women’s world “was a product of interactions with the prerogative, networks and enterprises of men,” therefore we cannot simply understand the gender relations as “domination” or “subjugation” (14). Ko’s work inspired me to explore whether literature bridges the gap between the Confucian doctrines and people’s everyday lives. Especially how literary representations of food, such as the banquets in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* and cooking in Su Qing’s works, show how the domestic sphere and public spheres overlap and influence each other.

In the twenty-first century, several scholars still challenged the images of victimized Chinese women prior to 1949 and emancipated after the revolution. Paul J. Bailey’s *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China* (2012) focuses on pre-twentieth century gender discourses on contemporary China to show a “more sophisticated, understanding of the continuities, dis-junctures and transformations in Chinese women’s lives and in gender discourse” (3). Bailey shows that in traditional China, the institutions of foot-binding and the outer/inner sex segregation were constantly changing instead of simply oppressing women. He also explores the formation of the narrative—women are the reason for China’s crisis—promoted by Western missionaries who wanted to train Chinese women as “model homemakers” (28). Chinese male and female reformers harness this narrative to educate women to be “worthy mothers” and

independent women to serve their country (28). This gender activism was challenged by gender conservatism before the May Fourth Movement and after being expressed more radically by the May Fourth Movement, was repressed by both the Communist Party and the Kuomintang. After 1949, women were more mobilized for the nation's sake: they were the important labor force while their reproduction became a public concern.

Bailey's argument is similar to Christina Kelley Gilmartin in *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women, Communist Politics, and Mass Movement In the early 2000s* (1995) that the Communist Party incorporated the patriarchal structures to distance women from political power. In the market economy, Bailey points out that women began to indulge in consumption and sexual discourses. The sexual norms were more relaxed while the traditional rhetoric that treated women as chaste heroines were revived. Bailey offers a good overview of discourses on gender in Chinese gender studies.

Second, my research, especially the chapter on Su Qing, benefits from research on Chinese female authors. Wendy Larson in *Women and Writing in Modern China* (1998) focuses on Chinese female writers, and instead of attempting to reveal women's agency, Larson more so concentrates on the gendered social and cultural environment for women writers in Republican China. She discusses the interplay and tension between *de* 德 (moral virtue) and *cai* 才 (literary talent), both of which have traditionally defined women in Chinese culture. She argues that female writing was considered subjective and lyrical, thus both conservative and progressive political ideologies attacked female writings. Neither *de* nor *cai* offered women writers a subject position in modern literary writings and intellectual circles. In her study of 1920s-30s women writers such as Xie Bingying 謝冰瑩 (1906–2000), Bing Xin 冰心 (1900–1999), Lu Yin 盧隱 (1899–1934),

and Ling Shuhua 凌叔華 (1904–1990), Larson argues that in these female writers' works, the female body is the main obstacle that keeps women from becoming modern. This argument contextualizes Su Qing's writings in the 1940s: Although she also depicts women's body as weak and sick, she does not present it as an obstacle that prevents women from participating in social activities; instead, women in her fiction enjoy bodily pleasures. Su Qing's unique subject position as a successful popular writer in the 1940s supplements Larson's argument that, because of the political pressures during this period, some literary historians defined Chinese literature as feminine, which weakened the position of women writers even more.

Third, my research also benefits from studies of gender and sexuality. Harriet Evans's *Women and Sexuality in China* (1996) is the first book study the Chinese women's sexuality in the 1950s and 1980s. Evans structures her study of sexuality within a Foucauldian framework to argue that the Chinese Communist Party utilized discourses on scientific knowledge to restrict women from enjoying sex, especially pre-marital sex, and linked women's sexuality with reproduction (3). She believes that although in the 1980s, because of the consumer-oriented environment, women had more freedom, they still have limited autonomy to enjoy sexual pleasure. Evans attributes women's sexual restrictions to the communist party's promotion of the official discourse; however, I also see this trend in Republican Chinese literature. This shows the possibility that not only the "scientific" official discourse from communist party confines and restricts women's sexuality, but also the discourses in everyday life which come from Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese traditional medicine, and the capitalist ideology that appeared with the development of China's modernity. Also, it is possible that the discourses about the

restrictions of women's sexuality in the 1980s are different from the 1950s, since these restrictions do not only come from the communist party, but also result from the re-emergence of capitalism in the 80s.

At last, I will take Lu Xun's 鲁迅 (1881-1936) short story "Zhufu" 祝福 (The New Year's sacrifice) (1924) as an example to show how, when analyzed from a food studies perspective, we can see a more complex picture of gender relations. This work is considered a famous example of female victimhood in imperial China. For example, Dorothy Ko uses this work to show how May Fourth authors portray "traditional Chinese women" as sheer victims under the oppression of Confucianism (2). This story focuses on an unnamed narrator who had been an advocate for the Hundreds Day's Reform (1898)—a failed attempt to reform the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912)—and goes back to his conservative hometown during New Year's Festival. Here he experiences the death of his uncle's former maid, Xianglin's wife 祥林嫂. She dies in poverty after being condemned by the villagers for marrying twice. The New Year's sacrifice rituals that are followed by every family in the town show a social imaginary that mixes superstition, religion and gender discrimination. The villagers imagine that offering food to ghosts and gods would make them bless their future; and that the moral stain of unvirtuous women like Xianglin's wife will pollute the sacrifice. Xianglin's wife, as a new migrant to the town, recognizes and gradually internalizes that social imaginary by participating in the sacrifice. She finds that the narrator—despite his education and reformist politics—also believes in the existence of hell. This information confirms the sacrificial practice's validity and contributes to her death.

The story is set within the framework of the political debate between the Reformists and the Conservatives, and it is an important literary work of the New Culture Movement. However, descriptions of food and eating in the story blur the political differences between the Reformists and Conservatives. While the narrator is a committed reformist, the local customs of his village still inform his social imaginary. As a result, when Xianglin's wife's inquiries about the spiritual world he only gives an ambiguous answer. Furthermore, he fails to ask about her death during the New Year's dinner for fear of breaking social taboos. This is compounded by the fact that the customs would have varied from village to village. In fact, there exists a discontinuity in the Confucian rituals themselves. Consequently, Xianglin's wife experiences the process of learning and internalizing the social imaginary expressed through the sacrificial rituals. Therefore, this short story demonstrates how literary representations can offer us the materials to analyze people's ambiguous views of reality beyond political debate. Moreover, in this story, if one simply considers how the local culture represses women, they will neglect the fact that the sacrifice also offers women power in the household. For this reason, Xianglin's wife actually feels marginalized because she loses the power to serve food. The narrator's aunt skillfully balances the moral risks and her economic gains in hiring Xianglin's wife because the maid works hard, even when the uncle disagrees; the daily cooking also allows Xianglin's wife to have a job outside her two forced marriages. It is a common phenomenon in many cultures that housework does not purely oppress women but also offers them opportunities to negotiate their gender roles.

By combining food studies, gender studies and literary studies, I intend to offer a new way to view Chinese gender studies, not only to reinterpret the past, but also in the

hope that historical awareness can allow scholars to identify the gender norms societies largely take for granted and thus deepen present understandings of gender relations.

1.3 GENDER IN FOOD STUDIES

In this section, I examine the research about gender issues in both Chinese food studies and other regional food studies to let my research speak with other scholarly works. Scholarship on gender and food culture has flourished since the 1960s. Anthropology was the first discipline to study gender relations via foodways. Since Claude Lévi-Strauss' "The Culinary Triangle" (1969), scholars have largely focused on the ways in which food and eating contributes to female oppression and agency. In this essay, Lévi-Strauss associates boiling food with women, and roasting food, men. In this way, he attempts to find a pattern of culinary acts within gender relations. Food studies scholar Amy Bentley in her study of gender hierarchy during the Second World War (1939–1945) draws on Lévi-Strauss to point out that red meat is associated with masculinity, while sugar is associated with femininity. Bentley also points out that during the war—even when the boundaries between public and private space were blurred—gender hierarchies were still maintained as women continued to work in the kitchen. Carole M. Counihan in her essay "Bread as World: Food Habits and Social Relations" (1984) shows how baking bread by women is a way to strengthen the community of Bosa, a town on the west coast of Sardinia. Counihan demonstrates that women's culinary acts, instead of repressing women, earn them a more interdependent relationship with men. In "Food, Power, and Female Identity in Contemporary Florence" (1988), Counihan further points out how before the 1950s, women, by harnessing their influence in the private realm, exacted more influence on society as a whole than women after

1950s who worked to gain more economic power but diminished their influence on family eating. Aïda Kanafani-Zahar in “‘Whoever Eats You Is No Longer Hungry, Whoever Sees You Becomes Humble’: Bread and Identity in Lebanon” (1997) also shows a similar process in Lebanon, when bread-making was industrialized, women lost their family status.

Besides the research mentioned above, some scholars have also concentrated on how food and eating shape people’s subjectivity. Sociologist Marjorie DeVault began to discuss how women participate in the formation of gender relations inside the family. She considers home as a work site for women, where they make decisions to feed other family members’ desires and adhere to the cultural requirements surrounding class and gender. In this way, women actively contribute to the realities of domestic life, and construct their own place within the family. Cultural studies scholar Deborah Lupton in *Food, the Body, and the Self* (1996) takes a post-structural approach to study how food and its related embodied sensations construct people’s subjectivity through early experiences of eating. I take inspiration from Lupton’s work that examines the formation of individuals’ identity, but further studies show how literature functions in this process of self-formation. Elspeth Probyn, in *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities* (2000), studies food and its representations in conjunction with sexuality to construct and refigure people’s identities and their relationships. Probyn’s work inspired me to study how eating and sex come together in modern Chinese literature. Probyn is more concerned with abnormal eating phenomena such as cannibalism and eating disorders, and my project is more focused on ordinary people’s everyday eating. There are many topics in this field about

gender and eating that need to be explored, and my dissertation can contribute to this growing field of research.

The reputation of Chinese food and the research of food studies in Chinese literature do not match. In Chinese food studies, the earliest food studies begin in the 1970s and most of the early works from anthropologists and historians introduce China's longstanding culinary traditions. One of the most important pioneering works is *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* (1977) edited by K. C. Chang that introduces Chinese food culture following the chronological order from the earliest dynasty Xia 夏 (dates uncertain) to modern China. The problem of writing one dynasty in each chapter is that the book does not reflect the continuity and comparison of different dynasties enough, particularly when different scholars write each chapter. Even though, it still offers much information about the long history of Chinese eating culture. This book inspires my research by describing the details of people's culinary and dietary habits, and these details are also pertinent to gender relations. For example, in the Qing chapter, Jonathan Spence, when discussing the service and distribution of food, talks about the flourishing corporate organizations that were popular among all social classes including the poor families' dinner club⁹ to wealthier merchants and officials' association *huiguan* 會館 (guild halls)¹⁰ for hometown foods (287). My question is whether the popularity of social organizations prepared late Qing courtesans to set up their own union and designed the rules of banquets in Shanghai foreign concession. Also, did the concept

⁹ According to Spence, a dinner club was formed by "small groups of poor families who would pool scarce resources so as to club together for an occasional dinner" (287).

¹⁰ *Huiguan* were formed by wealthier individuals. According to Spence, these were "powerful associations... composed of merchants and officials from the same province who now found themselves living far from their native place (287).

of guild halls psychologically make the clients of these courtesan houses in foreign concession build bonds with each other by sharing food and taste through daily banquets in that foreign social context? Spence also talks about the function of restaurants, inns, and cooks in not only distributing surviving sources but also gossip and stories to inspire many literary works. He specifically describes Yangzhou's floating boats in the eighteenth century, on which there were food that was ordered from famous restaurants and served with singing girls and prostitutes to their guests. My research shows that a continuity exists between the late Qing Shanghai courtesan houses and the floating boat culture in Yangzhou, both of which combined brought the pleasure of eating, sexuality, writing and reading in a commercial context. The culture in Shanghai courtesan houses became very commercial, meanwhile it preserved some aspects of elite culture in people's indulgence in the pleasure of eating and sex.

The two Republican China chapters of *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* also provide social alimentary evidence for my research on Lao She and Su Qing. In the chapter about southern China, E. N. Anderson, Jr. and Marja L. Anderson argues that “there is a basic congruence between maintaining bodily harmony, social harmony, and cosmological harmony, and that there are main goals of the medical, social, and religious behavioral systems” (367). For maintaining bodily harmony, people should find the “appropriate manipulation of ‘hot’ or ‘cold’ foods”¹¹ (Anderson 367). Social harmony means people eat with each other “as the most important concrete expressions of social bonds,” and they sacrifice in order to maintain the good

¹¹ In a previous section, I cited Swislocki's translation, “cooling” and “heating,” which differs slightly from E. N. Anderson, Jr. and Marja L. Anderson's.

relationship with gods (Anderson 367). As I discussed in the previous section, this function of eating existed in early Chinese history and Chinese traditional medical discourses and remained in modern China. My research about *Rickshaw Boy* shows it not only existed in Southern China, but also in the Northern part. As for how the early culinary discourses still influence modern China, the gender norms represented by these eating habits, also inhibited language, eating customs, and people's understanding of their bodies and their relations. *Food in Chinese Culture: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives* offers many historical details about people's cooking and eating, and they contextualize my research about late Qing to Republican China's literature with substantial historical materials.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, a few publications emerged focusing on food and gender. Judith Farquhar's *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-socialist China* (2002) was the first book length work study to unravel the relationship between food and sex in Chinese food studies. Isaac Yue's "Tasting the Lotus: Food, Drink and the Objectification of the Female Body in *Gold, Vase, and Plum Blossom*" also explores the relationship between the functions of food and sex in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) novel *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 (Gold, vase, and plum blossom) (1610). This article is published in the anthology *Scribes of Gastronomy: Representations of Food and Drink in Imperial Chinese Literature* (2013) edited by Isaac Yue and Siufu Tang that examines some important issues through 2000 years of Chinese imperial period. Yue concentrates on the relationship between food and sex, which are "similarly recognized as libidinal drives" (I. Yue 97). Isaac Yue argues that the interrelationship between food and sex, which was achieved in both "sexual language on eating," and the "physical manifestation

of the analogy,” to “effectively establishes the conception of the idea of gastronomic fulfilment and sexual satisfaction as a transferrable experience” (99–101). Isaac Yue finds that the association of food and sex has a long history in literature as a way to subjugate women, and this literary tradition can be traced back to pre-Qin 秦 (221 BC–207 BC) classics. He believes the novel not only acknowledges this tradition, but also “demonstrates an endeavor to dehumanize the female body through the concept of food, which is achieved in spite of its awareness of the sexual urge of women” (102). His reading is consonant with my research of *Rickshaw Boy*, in which the association of food and sex also functions as a way to subjugate women. However, compared to Yue’s reading of *Gold, Vase, and Plum Blossom*, my research shows a more complex relationship between food, sex and gender in Republican Chinese literature. Instead of “setting food up as a sort of weapon, through which men come to wield control over a woman’s sexuality” as seen in *Gold, Vase, and Plum Blossom*, *Rickshaw Boy* shows how women actively use food and sex as ways to manipulate and enjoy men’s body (I. Yue 103). Meanwhile, by condemning women who excessively enjoyed both eating and sexual pleasure, *Rickshaw Boy* continues the literary tradition of what Isaac Yue discusses in his article that “warns against the indulgence of excessiveness” in bodily pleasure to subjugate women (104). However, *Rickshaw Boy* applies this norm also to men in order to praise capitalist work ethics. Isaac Yue’s work shows how the literary tradition of food and sex expressed in the Ming fiction, which helps my research to participate in the discussion of this association of literature, food, and sex.

Interest in “hunger” in Chinese food studies has been popular since the 1990s. David Der-Wei Wang in his article “Three Hungry Women” concentrates on the hungry

women in the works of three female writers, Lu Ling 路翎 (1923–1994), Zhang Ailing 張愛玲 (1920–1995) and Chen Yingzhen 陳映真 (1937–2016). David Der-Wei Wang analyzes how the Chinese Communist Party separates the “spiritual food” and “physical food” and they promote the “hunger discourse” about “self-willed hunger as a physical testimony to ideological strength” (69). David Der-Wei Wang argues that these three writers “have achieved a special perspective from which to deal with the revolutionary discourse of modern China” and these works also reveal the writers own desire for “a better understanding of the metaphoric and metaphysic dimension of hunger as proffered by Chinese Marxist discourse” (73). David Der-Wei Wang inspired my research by putting the discussion of self-disciplined hunger and bodily desires into both the communist political context and Chinese neo-Confucian tradition.

Another influential books that focus on hunger in modern and contemporary Chinese literature is *The Mouth That Begg: Hunger, Cannibalism, and the politics of Eating in Modern China* (1999) written by Gang Yue. Gang Yue structured his book on the development of “alimentary discourse” in modern Chinese literature that he:

“focused on delineating a historical trilogy from cannibalism to hunger to cannibalism: from Lu Xun's allegory of the old human-eating China and Shen Congwen's 沈從文 (1902–1988) ‘modest proposal’ through the hunger narrative in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary writings to the post-1989 works on cannibalism and carnivorousism.” (3)

In this book, Gang Yue separates a section on women writers from 1930s to contemporary, including three mainland Chinese women writers, and three Taiwanese and American female writers. In this section, not only does he talk about hunger and

cannibalism, but he also discusses the issues of indigestion and overconsumption. One of the reasons why Gang Yue separates the section on female writers is because he sees “a clear pattern of incorporating the mother as a source of symbolic nourishment” in modern Chinese writers works, and “if male writers in modern China tend to associate food with the imaginary of the ‘mother,’ where does that leave women, themselves supposed to be or to become the ‘sources’ of nurturing?” (289–290). I think Gang Yue’s reading is in the same vein as late Qing scholars, like Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), who simplifies women to be the mother of the nation. However, in modern literature, even the works written by male writers still offer multiple ways of imagining women, such as the businesswoman in Han Bangqing’s *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* and the gluttonous woman in Lao She’s *Rickshaw Boy*. Specifically, Lao She, on the one hand, creates a series of female characters as faithful women who nurture men; on the other hand, he also creates a series of dangerous women characters who exhaust men. The deviant female figures keep dissolving Lao She’s ideal of women who sacrifice themselves, and the interactions between men and both of these two types of women reveal a more complex and anxious feeling about him towards the other gender. I think there are multiple threads about women in modern Chinese literature besides the allegory reading of women as the mother of the nation. Gang Yue studies female writers to look for alternative narratives about women, while I study some well-accepted novels from the late Qing to Republican periods—by reading from the perspective of food and eating, I intend to reveal a more complex understanding of gender relations that are hidden in history.

Since the end of twentieth century, the fetish of “old China” became a cultural phenomenon and many food businesses would sell this cultural concept by serving

traditional dishes in a mimicked cultural environment. There are two important works that use “nostalgia” as a strategy to discuss how people imagine their relationship with the world around them through regional food culture. Mark Swislocki in *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Urban Experience in Shanghai* (2013) develops the concept “culinary nostalgia”— “the recollection or purposive evocation of another time and place through food” (1). Swislocki discusses how Shanghai residents from the Ming dynasty to contemporary China through their nostalgia for regional food, from both Shanghai and their hometown, constructed their identity and their understanding of the world. Following Swislocki, Jin Feng in her book *Tasting Paradise on Earth: Jiangnan Foodways* (2019) focuses the Jiangnan regional food culture to show “how patterns of food consumption contribute to the making of individual and class identities within and surrounding Jiangnan food culture in the last two centuries of China’s history” (5). Feng’s book also discusses the gender inequality in gastronomic literature, culture and restaurant industry. Feng argues that “the male-dominated nation-building project generates contradictory gender practices and politics” (10). In late imperial China, cooking was traditionally considered feminine, but elite men marginalized women from writing gastronomic literature to show their gentry masculinity. In modern times, intellectuals “dismissed cooking as frivolous and peripheral to their project of Chinese modernization,” and meanwhile women “were called upon to participate in collective labor and political activism, which further distanced them from gastronomic culture” (10). Feng’s observation about women’s marginalized position in gastronomic culture further explains Gang Yue’s question why compared to male writers, modern female writers seem less interested in writing about

eating. Food preference is more stubborn than many other cultural choices for people, and the approach of “culinary nostalgia” shows how the flavor of food constantly shapes one’s cultural taste and their identity.

Besides the works centering on Chinese culture and Chinese literature, there are several works in Asian food studies that also discuss food and gender. These works also inspired my research.¹² In *Eating Identity: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* (2008), Wenying Xu explores many gender issues. By reading the writings of seven Asian American authors, Xu argues for and explicates the relationship between “food, cooking, hunger, consumption, appetite, orality” and identities issues such as “race/ethnicity, gender, class, diaspora, and sexuality” (2). Xu, influenced by Slavoj Žižek and Benedict Anderson, sees alimentary pleasure as the material enjoyment that holds a highly symbolic value that is able to hold a community together. Xu’s studies food and identity in contemporary Asian American culture, which parallels my research about city migrants in late Qing and Republican China, for whom cooking and eating acts also helped them to imagine communities and share ethics and norms. Specifically, Xu’s chapter, centering on food and masculinity in Frank Chin’s works, creates an interesting conversation with my research. Both Asian American literature and literature during the late Qing and Republican periods reveals the anxiety of emasculation under the

¹² Also see *Reading Food in Modern Japanese Literature* by Tomoko Aoyama, in which Aoyama explores how the representations of food in modern Japanese literature tells us about relations. She not only cites the research about Chinese food studies, but also reveals some gender phenomenon that also appears in Chinese history. For example, women cook for the family, but men uphold and pursue the “absolute gastronomic values” and makes money through it (177–78).

embedded discourses of “cooking and violence, appetite and sexuality” as “Chin produces the narrative energy to achieve his project of re-masculinizing the Asian American male subject” (15). By comparison, late Qing and Republican authors also took cooking and eating as a way to re-masculinize male subjects when they were facing national crisis and foreign invasion: banquets in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* serve as the social connections to the sojourners in Shanghai foreign concessions to both create business opportunities and maintain elite cultural taste, and help them to create a masculine self-image; in Lao She’s works, masculinity reveals itself in self-control, specifically by depicting characters who refuse the lure of the enjoyment of eating and sexuality in the more capitalized society. All of these works reflect that how, after China experienced its emasculation, Chinese people, no matter whether they were living in the mainland or were members of a diaspora, attempt to create their new understandings of masculinity, which are different from the Confucian definition.

1.4 CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In Chapter Two, I examine literary representations of banquet culture in courtesan houses in the late Qing, with focus on the novel *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* about courtesans and their patrons’ lives in Shanghai. From the mid to late nineteenth century, Shanghai’s foreign concessions attracted many elites, businessmen, and country gentlemen as well as courtesans who were refuges from the Small Swords Rebellion (1853–1855) and Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864). Samuel Liang in “Where the Courtyard Meets the Street” (2008) discusses how the traditional residential and commercial spaces enclosed by walls were replaced by the open and visible foreign style two-story wooden houses (483–484). When the brothels were moved into the

concessions, the big brothels were gradually scattered among “*zhujia* 住家” (family style) courtesan houses, and rented rooms in the wooden houses. They set up business rules, which made it possible for women to run the courtesan business without much investment. Meanwhile, eating rituals such as *jiao ju* 叫局 (call courtesans), *dachawei* 打茶圍 (tea parties), and *jiao cai* 叫菜 (ordering dishes from restaurants) became the most important way for courtesan houses get their income.

The novel shows how people in Shanghai foreign concessions negotiate and digest the contradictory gender norms between traditional elite culture and the newly rising commercial culture through different banquets. In the novel, courtesans and their patrons attend banquets both at the enclosed private gardens which continues the elite esthetics, and courtesan houses which were the semi-public commercial space. These banquets, on the one hand, build cross-class relationships and allow people to picture themselves as members of the imagined community of Shanghai; on the other hand, they allow people to experience different modes of conceptualizing time, space and gender relations. The novel not only shows how people modify their subjectivities through serving and eating food, but also reveals how a new community aesthetic, which was inherited from the elite culture and influenced by commercial culture was formed. The new aesthetics in courtesan society admires people who use the business savvy to manage their relationships and meanwhile shows cultural tastes. Courtesans were recognized by both themselves and others as businesswomen. People admire the most successful courtesans not merely because of their artistic talent anymore, but also because of their ability to balance their business needs and fulfill their emotional and bodily desires.

Chapter Three turns to a discussion of one of the most dominant themes surrounding food and eating in Chinese culture: frugality and indulgence in food and sex. I focus on Lao She's novel *Rickshaw Boy*, in which Lao She describes Xiangzi 祥子, a new city migrant to Beijing who wants to become a good rickshaw boy, only to end up as a hopeless beggar. In the novel, the pursuit of wealth takes on a central role in city life. In the financial pressure of living in the city as a poor migrant, the protagonist, Xiangzi, adopts the capitalist work ethic to restrict himself from eating and having sex as a means to protect his body. Xiangzi links food and sex with health and combines them with capitalist discourse on self-control. Only when Xiangzi suppresses his appetite can he have a clean and strong body to pull the rickshaw and comply with nature. Traditional Chinese medical discourse on abstaining from eating and sex was intended to bring people closer to nature. This novel shows how this theory is used to support the capitalist value of wealth accumulation. Western medical terms and theories have been borrowed to prove the legitimacy of the Chinese traditional medical discourse on abstinence, revealing the interaction between traditional Chinese nutrition theory and their newly acquired belief in Western science. In the novel, the various eating discourses from the late Qing to Republican China entangle money, text, body and sex, serving as what Foucault calls "regimen" in *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* when discussing how people disciplined eat properly and behave ethically in Ancient Greece. The characters form their ethical selves by following this regimen.

Since the eating regimen is gendered, women are especially expected to restrict their bodily pleasure. This is evident with the female protagonist Huniu 虎妞, who runs the family business and likes to enjoy bodily pleasure. She is portrayed as weakening

Xiangzi's work ethic and polluting his body when she offers him food and sex. Eating has the same symbolic meaning as sex in many plotlines that depict Huniu's active pursuit of bodily enjoyment. Xiangzi's shame and disgust towards this gastral-sexuality reveals the more visceral and powerful influence of capitalism on him and his self-perception. Huniu represents a series of female villains, all of whom pursue their bodily desire in a masculine way in Lao She's works. Similar to how Huniu dies and loses her economic superiority after overeating during pregnancy, these characters are always portrayed as deviants who are punished and criticized by society. It may be related to Lao She's childhood when he lived with a formidable aunt who loved eating, and his mother who sacrificed herself for the family. His writings also reflect a social imaginary that requires women to discipline their dangerous bodily desires. The pursuit of food and sex as a means of fulfilling them is considered to make women lose their femininity. In Lao She's writing, male characters are often damaged by masculine carnal women. This stems from his own traumatic childhood, and China's long history of gendered social imaginaries.

Chapter Four focuses on cooking and eating in the context of childhood and the family from a woman's perspective. I focus on the female writer Su Qing, who is not only a writer but a public figure and businesswoman who ran her own publishing house and magazine. *Ten Years of Marriage*, her most famous work, is the first semi-autobiography in Republican China to openly record a woman's sexual fantasy. The female protagonist Su Huaiqing 蘇懷青 represents the author herself when she decides to divorce her husband and become a freelance writer after ten years of miserable married life. In her essays, novels, and semi-autobiography fiction, Su Qing writes from a

women's perspective about her childhood, school life and married life in both Ningbo and Shanghai. In Su Huaqing's parents-in-law's house in Ningbo, the culinary rituals such as *fengcha* 奉茶 (serving tea), and *zuo yuezi* 坐月子 (postpartum confinement) not only held practical value, but also possessed a symbolic meaning to maintain patriarchy within the family. Su Qing disagrees with and criticizes these rituals but shows a more ambiguous attitude after years of living in an extended family. As a result, she maintains the old hierarchical family eating rituals when she becomes the master of her own house. In these different settings, she negotiates her maternal role and the roles of wife and daughter-in-law. Eating keeps constructing and reconstructing her family relationships as she moves from the country to the city. It lies at the intersection of various discourses of cuisine, nutrition, medicine from both Chinese costumers and Western fashions.

In her writings, eating arouses a sensual response in people so that they can connect their past to the present. Like Marcel Proust (1871-1922) in *Swann's Way* (1913) who recalls all the joy he felt when as a child upon eating a madeleine cookie with tea. Su Qing relates her joyful memories of her childhood in the countryside with the food she ate during that time. Also, her childhood memories of enjoying eating serves as the ideal life that can locate her anxiety in her later life. Recollections of eating brings sadness and nostalgia to both Proust and Su Qing, because they represents the past that can never come back again, but for Su Qing, the recurrent memories represent a pure pleasure that serves as the foundation for her to challenge the existing social norms that were conveyed by different eating acts. She keeps revisiting and reinterpreting her eating memories and letting them continue to influence her subjectivity after she leaves her hometown. By virtue of this constant interaction with past and present, she forms her subjectivity as a

modern woman who has the right to enjoy her body. Her subjectivity as a cultural deviant begins to be established via food and is eventually formed through sexual liberation. Su Qing gained her fame as a female cultural icon because of her authentic descriptions of women's bodily struggles. Family and public spaces are linked with each other by writing about food and sex. Eating, sex and writing are all brought together in Su Qing's works and her life, which records the challenges women faced and the compromises they had to make in the social institutions of marriage and family via their free self-expression in the public sphere.

The development of modern cities and changing food cultures accordingly serve as the backdrop for all of these literary works. In *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, the foreign concessions in Shanghai allow the courtesan culture to develop without the restrictive laws of the Qing government, which forbade brothels. Foreign concessions have created a network of roads to make the delivery of food and circulation of courtesans between different banquet halls possible. The development of Shanghai offered the space for different cultural classes to get out of their original position and meet each other, and, in this way, they built a new community aesthetic to replace the more elite brothel culture. In the third chapter, *Rickshaw Boy* depicts the plight of poor migrants' in Beiping. For them, the city serves as a mysterious setting into which they struggle to fully integrate. In the fourth chapter, Shanghai offers the migrants new opportunities by dissolving the hierarchical family structure, but meanwhile the disturbing differences in eating culture create people's nostalgic feelings towards the past. These three authors' works speak to one another showing the discursive fields of food and gender in people's lives. Both men and women developed new professions,

shaped their gender relations and modified their subjectivities through cooking and eating acts. Together, these works show the different conflicts people faced, and give a complex picture of gender relations during this transitional period.

CHAPTER 2

EATING AND GENDER RELATIONS IN *THE SING-SONG GIRLS OF SHANGHAI*

The Shanghai courtesan hierarchy was initially comprised of: *shuyu*, *changsan*, and *yaoer*¹³. At the beginning of Tongzhi reign, *shuyu* and *changsan* were distinct with *shuyu* being higher than *changsan*. However, as time went on, the two became the same, as both were simply called *shuyu* and acted like regular prostitutes. Then, *changsan* rose to the highest status and now asked for three dollars¹⁴ per banquet call—as such, they all called themselves *xiansheng*.¹⁵

-Wang Shunu *The History of Chinese Prostitution*

From the 1860s to the 1870s, in the foreign concessions in Shanghai, a new courtesan culture that centered on banquets became influential as Shanghai was developing into a modern city. In this chapter, I study the courtesan novel *Haishanghua*

¹³ *Shuyu* 書寓 (storytellers' residences) referred to the highest courtesan for a long time, who would tell stories to the audience for a living, rather than eating or sleeping with their clients. *Changsan* 長三 (always three) refers to the new highest level of courtesan, who would charge three dollars for serving banquets or sleeping with a client for one night. *Yaoer* 幺二 (one-two) refers to the second-class of courtesan who would charge one dollar for a tea party, and two dollars for serving a banquet (Hershatter 43–44).

¹⁴ “Dollar” in this chapter refers to *yinyuan* 銀元 (Chinese silver dollars). It was the legal currency used before November 1935.

¹⁵ The name, “Sing-song girls,” is a homophone of *xiansheng* 先生 (master).

liezhuan 海上花列傳 (The Sing-song girls of Shanghai)¹⁶ (1894) written by Han Bangqing 韓邦慶 (1856–1894). I argue that eating practices such as banquets and tea parties were imagined in this novel as a way to bridge the elite culture and people's increasing commercial needs in the foreign concessions in Shanghai. In the novel, courtesans and patrons, through eating in different spaces, such as gardens and courtesan houses, encounter different social contexts with different gender norms and aesthetic preferences. The novel offers rich details on how people negotiate between contradictory gender norms and modify their subjectivities in the process. From reading this novel, I find that the Confucian literati cultural traditions interact with the high commercialized courtesan culture in Shanghai Foreign Concessions, and the new urban culture took on new social imaginaries about gender and gender relations that originated from the intersection of literati culture and business culture. In this Chapter, I discuss four aspects of courtesan culture to examine how eating bridges literati tradition and commercialized courtesan culture. First, I take the perspective of migrants to discuss how everyday eating practices in Shanghai make people accept the gender norms in courtesan society and help both wealthy literati and petty bourgeoisie establish bonds as members of the courtesan society. Second, I focus on different spaces in which people host banquets, and how elite private gardens and courtesan houses in alleyway houses shape people's gender relations through eating. Third, I concentrate on the successful courtesans who use Confucian women's virtues to do business. Fourth, I discuss how people balance their business and attachment in this new cultural environment.

¹⁶ Also translated as *Shanghai Flowers* or *Biographies of Flowers by the Seashore*.

The courtesan culture began during the Tang dynasty and was revived during the Ming and the late Qing (Wu 130). For a long time, courtesan culture was an important way for literati to socialize and enjoy leisure time. For both courtesans and literati alike, their artistic talents were their most important cultural capital, which made it possible for them to maintain a good reputation as public figures in the elite society. Dorothy Ko in her research on seventeenth-century courtesan society shows that some famous courtesans formed a transitory community in which they enjoyed the “most expressive and physical” mobility—they traveled around the country and maintained communication with famous elites and other women from elite families (252). However, this courtesan culture from the eighteenth to nineteenth century transformed gradually. Susan Mann in *Precious Records: Women in China’s Long Eighteenth Century* shows that courtesans, beginning in the late eighteenth century, in the lower Yangzi region were no longer able to participate as freely in elite aesthetic activities. Male patrons’ notes about the courtesans also reveal “a world where the boundaries of class and kinship were frayed by the market for commercial sex” (Mann 122). My research on *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* is a part of this big picture to explore the transformation of courtesan culture in the lower Yangzi area. Different from Ko and Mann’s research, I analyze literary representations, especially those pertaining to food, to understand the transformation of this cultural tradition. Courtesan literature, as a cultural product of courtesan society, opens a vital window to show how people, in courtesan society, changed their cultural tastes and altered their imaginaries about their relationships with each other and the world around them.

From the mid to late nineteenth century, many literati migrated to Shanghai and became professional writers, who published in newspapers, tabloids and literary journals. Life in courtesan houses was an important topic for these writings, and instead of focusing on famous courtesans and elites, these professional writers began to depict less affluent men and their relationships with courtesans. Their works not only circulated in literati circles but were read by ordinary people, in and outside of Shanghai. These works spread new cultural knowledge, moralities, and new imaginaries about modern life to a larger audience. Han was one of the Shanghai sojourners who migrated from Louxian 婁縣, Songjiang 松江 prefecture, a county near Shanghai. At an early age, he traveled to Beijing with his father, and achieved the rank of *xiucai* 秀才, the lowest literati degree. After failing the next level of Imperial Exam, he went to Shanghai and hang around in courtesan houses until he died (Hu Shi 3–4). In Shanghai, he founded the first literary magazine in China, *Haishang qishu* 海上奇書 (Shanghai marvels). In this semimonthly magazine, he published the first twenty-eight chapters of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* and selected stories from his collection of fantasy tales, *Taixian mangao* 太仙漫稿 (Taixian's drafts). Before the journal went out of business, it published fifteen issues in 1892. Two years later, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* was published in a book form with sixty-four chapters, and Han died that same year.

In *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, Han depicts a community in which businessmen, government officials, elites, courtesans, maids, and servants all participate to create a social network involving a lot of parties and banquets. Some of them are the gentry-literati of Shanghai and some are rural folks flocking to the city. The eating rules

that guarantee the business interests of the courtesan houses also require patrons from different cultural backgrounds to participate in each other's private, social, financial, and romantic affairs. In their interactions with each other through daily eating activities, they constantly shape their subjectivities to fit into the emerging commercialized urban culture. The novel does not focus on the macro social events, such as wars, migrations, foreign invasions, and urbanization, but through the micro ways of people's personal lives such as following or violating certain table manners. It shows how people re-interpret their cultural tastes, negotiate with contradictory gender norms, and reevaluate gender ethics in a drastically changing social contexts.

This chapter includes six sections. In the first section, I discuss the history of migration to Shanghai, the infrastructure of the foreign concessions, and the newly developed business rules in courtesan houses to contextualize the novel. In the second section "From Migrants to Shanghai Citizens," I discuss how migrants in the novel interrupt their old lifestyles, accept new gender norms that are very different from Confucian tradition and transform their subjectivities when they move to Shanghai. Then, in the third section "From Gardens to Courtesan Houses," I discuss how the infrastructure in foreign concessions shapes people's understandings of their relationships. The novel shows that modern urban life accommodates different gender norms, and how people negotiated cultural conflicts in their lives. In the fourth section, "From Feminine Virtue to Business Ethics," I discuss how men project their newly obtained business savvy in the city onto courtesans they admired, and how courtesan acted as business leaders within the courtesan industry. Nonetheless, they were still restricted by a retrenched normativity that was imposed by new types of business practices, but some courtesans in the novel were

able to skillfully use banquet rules to enjoy relative freedom. In the fifth section, “A Game of Love: Business and Romance,” I examine how eating can transform a room into public or private space depending on the context. I argue that courtesan houses have a dual function as it is where courtesans would pursue their private romantic desires and conduct the public business of their house.

2.1 BACKGROUND

In this section, I introduce the genesis of Shanghai courtesan culture, including the emergence, development, and transformation of this courtesan culture in the nineteenth century to contextualize *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were several brothels in old Shanghai county. With several wars between the Qing government and the *Taiping tianguo yundong* 太平天國運動 (Taiping rebellion) (1850–1864) rebels, many courtesan houses were forced to move to the foreign concessions in Shanghai for protection (*Haizou yeyou lu* 21). Under Western-style regulations, the courtesan houses in these concessions developed a series of commercialized and rules-based aesthetic culture, which made Shanghai the new center of courtesan culture in lower Yangzi area (*Haizou yeyou lu* 21). At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted from the Republican historian Wang Shunu’s 王書奴 (dates uncertain) description of the changes in courtesan hierarchy, when banquet courtesans, *changsans* 長三 (always-three), replaced the more artistic courtesans who were called *shuyu* 書寓 (storytellers’ residences). This signaled the rise of a new aesthetic in courtesan society.¹⁷

¹⁷ When I say courtesan society, I am referring to the people who live and work in courtesan houses. It also includes those who visit and have commercial agreements with the houses. Finally, it also refers to the people who participate passively through reading gossip and stories about the happenings of the houses.

The concessions' social settings, their westernized architecture, modern roads, the prosperity of their restaurants, and the many migrants who experienced the courtesan lifestyle for the first time, changed the fabric of Shanghai courtesan culture and allowed for the birth of a new aesthetic community. Through daily banquets and tea parties, this aesthetic community changed their members to be part of the urban social order that was gradually being established in Shanghai as it developed into a modern city. Han, who received a traditional elite education and lived in Shanghai courtesan houses as a surgeon for years, experienced this transformation and wrote about it (Hu Shi 3–4). Only when examined in light of these social changes, can we understand the endless banquets and tea parties with their rules and aesthetics depicted in the novel.

Shanghai prostitution appeared as early as the 1820s. In the Republican history book, *Shanghai xiao zhi* 上海小志 (A brief history of Shanghai) (1930), Hu Xianghan 胡祥翰 (dates uncertain) introduces the origin of Shanghai prostitution during the reign of Daoguang 道光 (1820–1850)¹⁸: “土人每以舟載女應客，此為滬妓之濫觴” (local people often took prostitutes in a boat to serve guests, and this was the beginning of Shanghai's prostitution)¹⁹ (36). According to Xu Ke 徐珂 (1869–1928), who wrote the unofficial history of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) in *Qing bai lei chao* 清稗類鈔 (Qing

¹⁸ Also see page 106 of *Ying ruan za zhi* 瀛壖雜誌 (Miscellany on Shanghai) (1875).

¹⁹ In this chapter, I use the word “courtesan” to refer to the more advanced prostitutes, who do not merely sell their bodies for money but either sell their artistic talent or companionship to offer the illusion of love to men. Accordingly, courtesan houses refer to the more advanced brothels for courtesans.

petty matters anthology) (1916), from 1850 to 1851, there were several brothels in the old city of Shanghai.²⁰ The rules in these brothels changed greatly during the 1870s:

妓院初有規則，至光、宣間而蕩然無存。客蒞院，妓侍坐，婢媪遙立，伺應對，後則嬉戲成風，諧謔雜作矣。(5164)

In the beginning, courtesan houses had rules. Around the reigns of Guangxu and Xuantong,²¹ these rules all disappeared. Originally, when a customer arrived in the courtesan house, the courtesan would sit and serve him, while the maids stood in the distance awaiting their orders. Later, it became popular for courtesans and costumers to exchange banter and socialize with one another.²²

From Xu's writing, we can see the atmosphere in brothels became more playful and jovial after the 1870s. This was in contrast to courtesan houses before the 1870s, which remained rather isolated and maintained a clear gender hierarchy. In these more elite houses, maids would keep distance from courtesans and clients to avoid participating in their personal affairs. Xu, born in 1869, had no chance to experience courtesan life before the 1870s, and his book, *Qing Petty Matters Anthology*, was based on a collection of unofficial history, literary notes and gossip. Thus, Xu's writing reflects a common understanding of how literati interpreted the cultural transformation in courtesan houses. Interestingly, although Xu argues that the rules in brothels gradually disappeared from

²⁰ During the reign of Kangxi 康熙 (1661–1722), the Qing government banned brothels that were run by the government, and prohibited officials from going to unlicensed brothels (S.Yao 142). The unlicensed brothels were still common in major cities (Xu 5149).

²¹ Guangxu's 光緒 reign was from 1875 to 1908 and Xuantong's 宣統 was from 1909 to 1912.

²² Translation is my own.

the 1870s, he introduces a variety of rules that began to appear since then. I will also discuss these rules in greater detail later on in this section. Xu's biased reading of prostitution's history shows how the literati were nostalgic about the waning elite culture and forced to accept the cultural transformation. I read the literati's understanding of and writings on courtesan life in a Gadamerian sense—that they were the result of constant negotiations between the literati culture and the more commercialized urban lifestyle in Shanghai.²³ The contradictions resulting from this can be found in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. Instead of a complete rupture, the new aesthetic in courtesan society was gradually established under the influence of the literati tradition.

One of the nation's pioneering reformists, Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–1897), wrote in his travelogue about Shanghai courtesan houses and provided a lot of details about the literati aesthetics of courtesan culture before the 1870s. In *Ying ruan za zhi* 瀛壖雜誌 (Miscellany on Shanghai) (1875), a collection of his writings before he left Shanghai in 1862, Wang praises the Zheng sisters who lived in the Old City of Shanghai as “所與往來者，皆雅流名士也。紈綺麤茵，不屑邀其一盼” (The people who came into contact with [the Zheng sisters] were all elegant people and famous elites. As for the rich but uncultivated people, the sisters refused to pay attention to them.) (108). In Wang's writing, he admires these courtesans for their artful aesthetics. In another travelogue, *Haizou yeyou lu* 海陬冶遊錄 (Omnium of licentiousness in Shanghai), Wang generally praises the courtesans' artistic prowess—wielding a mastery of dance, song, art and

²³ In *Truth and Method* (1960), Hans-Georg Gadamer writes, “understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated” (290).

poetry. He especially focuses on a courtesan named Liao Baoer 廖寶兒, whom he met in 1851, and describes her fine knowledge of horticulture, and taste for fine tea and incense (11). Wang Tao was particularly impressed by her strong desire to learn Luyu's 陸羽 *Cha jing* 茶經 (The classic of tea). He compares her to the famous Tang dynasty (618–907) horticulturist Song Danfu 宋單父, and tea expert Su Guang 蘇廣²⁴ (11). By idealizing courtesans in this way, elites affirmed their own affinity for the arts. The tasteful aesthetic found in his writing is typical of courtesan literature²⁵ before the 1870s where a courtesan's knowledge of the arts was the crucial standard by which she was judged. This echoes the tradition since the Ming dynasty where literati projected their artistic ideal onto courtesans they admired. In general, courtesan culture during this time continued to be a part of literati culture.

The expedited changes in Shanghai courtesan culture occurred as a result of a series of wars and battles around the old city of Shanghai during the 1850s and 1860s. As early as 1853, when *Xiaodaohui* 小刀會 (the Small Swords Society)²⁶ destroyed the old city of Shanghai, some brothels had to move to the foreign concessions (Hu 36). During the Taiping Rebellion, the Taiping army repeatedly clashed with the Qing Empire. Many brothels were forced to move into the foreign concessions in suburban Shanghai as a

²⁴The author of “*Shiliu tang pin*” 十六湯品 (Tasting sixteen types of tea) explains the difference between sixteen different kinds of water used to make tea.

²⁵ Lu Xun 魯迅 (1883–1936) in *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shilue* 中國小說史略 (A brief history of Chinese fiction) labels novels that depict courtesan life as “*xiaxie xiaoshuo*” 狹邪小說 (courtesan literature). However, in this dissertation, I use “courtesan literature” not only to refer to the novels, but also other genres such as essays, literary notes, guidebooks, manuals, *huapu* (flower albums), etc (206).

²⁶ A Fujian 福建 based secret society, which launched an uprising in 1853.

result of the violence in around the city (Xu 5162). In addition to the brothels, refugees from the surrounding areas also moved to the concessions for protection. “The population of the combined British and American Settlements jumped from 500 in 1853 to more than 20,000 in 1855” (Lu 33). By 1864, the rebellion had engulfed Suzhou 蘇州, Yangzhou 揚州, and other areas around Shanghai. Because of this, the population of the foreign concessions continued to grow rapidly. According to the authorities, *Shanghai gonggong zujie gongbujie* 上海公共租界工部局 (Shanghai municipal council),²⁷ from 1870 to 1895, the population of the concessions tripled to 240,995 residents, most of whom were Chinese (Xu and Qiu 12–13). With the population growth, the pleasure quarters continued to develop. From here on out, prostitution became a fixture of the city’s culture that was principally associated with the foreign concessions. Wang Shunu in *Zhongguo changji shi* 中國娼妓史 (The history of Chinese prostitution) describes the Shanghai pleasure quarter as, “上海青樓之盛，甲於天下。十里洋場，釵光鬢影，如過江之鯽” (The prosperity of Shanghai prostitution was the most notable in the world. All along the ten-mile length of the foreign concessions, the hairpins [of courtesans] glimmered like a school of fish passing through a river) (296). It was in fact the wars and political upheaval that created the conditions necessary for Shanghai’s courtesan culture to quickly develop.

²⁷ Since 1845 Shanghai began to set up foreign concessions for America, Great Britain, and France, these concessions regulated independently from the Qing government. The Small Swords Society destroyed Shanghai old county caused British, American and French foreign concessions agreed to manage the foreign concessions in Shanghai together by running the government Shanghai Municipal Council in 1854 (Xu and Qiu 26).

When moving to the foreign concessions, courtesan houses adapted their business model according to the new economic, social, cultural environment in the concessions. This shift is also confirmed by Wang Tao's *Omnium of Licentiousness in Shanghai*. Wang wrote the *fulu* 附錄 (appendix) of this book in 1878 after traveling for twenty-two years outside Shanghai. In this appendix, Wang describes that “前后風景迥殊，規模亦稍異，不獨倍盛于曩時為不同也” ([The courtesan industry in the foreign concessions in Shanghai] was very different not only because it was several times more prosperous than in the past, but also because the sights and establishments had changed, and their scale had changed as well) (21). This was a result of the new architectural styles, transportation system, and food services, all of which exacted a direct influence on courtesan society. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the impact of each of these developments on Shanghai's infrastructure.

First, the architecture in the foreign concessions restricted the development of big brothels but encouraged the spread of smaller courtesan houses. In the old city of Shanghai, there were ten big brothels called *tang* 堂, each of which housed thirty to forty courtesans (*Haizou yeyou lu* 1–2). There were also about three hundred houses located in the suburbs of the old city of Shanghai that employed one or two courtesans and imitated family life—these individual courtesan houses were called *zhujia* 住家 (family-like courtesan houses) (*Haizou yeyou lu* 1–2). When migrants moved to the foreign concessions in Shanghai, the alleyway house, a westernized architecture, offered living conditions ideal for *zhujia* style houses. In particular, this layout was ideal for the densely populated neighborhoods in the foreign concessions, and *zhujia* style houses became more popular as a result (Xu 5163). By 1875, courtesan houses were centered around two

streets, Si Malu 四馬路 (Fourth Avenue) and Baoshan Jie 寶善街 in the foreign concessions (Hu 36). Each of these houses exhibited a similar layout:

Passing through the front entrance (*shikumen*) there would be a small courtyard, or *tianjing* (literally “sky well,” referring to its well-like space), and next to it, the reception hall, or *ketang*. The two wings were used for different purposes, such as studies or bedrooms. Steep stairs at the back of the hall led to second-floor rooms; bright and spacious ones faced south (to the courtyard), and less desirable ones, called *tingzijian*, faced north (to the back alley). Behind the main structure was a service area that included a kitchen, a small backyard, storage, and a back entrance. (Liang 486)

About 8,740 houses were built in this style in the early 1860s (Liang 483). Unlike *sanheyuan* 三合院,²⁸ the traditional Shanghai-style home, these westernized wooden houses were commercialized from the beginning. During the Small Swords Society’s invasion of Shanghai, there was a debate among Westerners about whether or not Chinese people should be allowed to move into the foreign concessions. In the end, they agreed to allow them to reside there because Westerners realized that they could rent houses to Chinese residents for profit (Xu and Qiu 27). Compared to *sanheyuan*, which usually were built without a plan and gradually accumulated in different styles, the two-story alleyway houses were more uniform and economical. This is one of the reasons why this type of architecture was very common in the foreign concessions. This was the

²⁸ *Sanheyuan* was usually a house with three or five rooms and yards enclosed by low walls. Spontaneous additions to these houses were made as the family expanded, which eventually resulted in a town.

beginning of Shanghai's modern real estate market, and courtesan houses took advantage of this new opportunity. In turn, courtesans would lease the houses to run their businesses. As a result of their popularity, small courtesan houses allowed more women into the courtesan industry. The concertation of these family-like courtesan houses in the concessions also made different houses cooperate with each other like commercial guild and gave more authority to their shared rules and regulations.

Second, the expansion of Shanghai's restaurant scene made it possible for courtesan houses to transition from a sex-centered business to one centered on eating. In *Omnium of Licentiousness in Shanghai*, Wang Tao describes how only a few courtesan houses in the old city of Shanghai would offer food. For delicious food, he writes “豈能於此間求之哉?” (how can I pursue it [delicious food] in these places [courtesan houses])

(3). In the foreign concessions, family-style courtesan houses would finally provide services that created the illusion of a temporary home for clients by offering gourmet food and sexual gratification. In the foreign concessions in Shanghai, many restaurants offered various regional cuisines, which sought to accommodate people who came from all over China to trade with the rest of the world (Swislocki 76). These restaurants began to work closely with courtesan houses so that their clients could enjoy the pleasure of eating. In *Hu you meng ying* 滬遊夢影 (Shadows of Shanghai travels) (1893), Chi Zhizheng 池志徵 (dates uncertain) describes famous restaurants selling regional dishes from places such as Tianjin 天津, Suzhou 蘇州, and Guangdong 廣東 (126). Moreover, there were many Western restaurants jointly owned by foreign and Chinese investors. In these Western restaurants, banquets usually had many people eating together and they charged each person a fixed price (Ge 30). The pricing at these restaurants may have

inspired Chinese courtesan houses to begin to charge their guests a fixed amount of money per person per banquet. Among these restaurants Chi introduces is Ju Feng Yuan 聚豐園 (Garden of Plenty) on the Fourth Avenue, which sold Suzhou cuisine. This restaurant appears in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* several times,²⁹ and Chi considers it to be one of the city's most famous restaurants. He writes that, “雖門首肩輿層累迭積，而邀客招妓之紅箋使者猶絡繹於道，其盛可知矣” (Although sedans outside the door [of Garden of Plenty] waited outside in long lines, the servants with tickets to summon courtesans to serve the banquets formed an endless stream. From this scene you can see how prosperous this restaurant is) (158).

In *Hu you zaji* 滬游雜記 (Miscellaneous notes on visiting Shanghai) (1887), Ge Yuanxu 葛元煦 (dates uncertain) talks about how there were two restaurants that charged a lower tip when customers called courtesans to serve at their banquets, and this allowed these restaurants' businesses to grow rapidly and become more profitable (30). This detail shows how popular it was for courtesan houses to work closely with restaurants to serve banquets at this time allowing their businesses to grow in tandem. Restaurants would deliver food day and night to courtesan houses, while courtesans would also frequently answer banquet calls at restaurants. For example, restaurants established in Wu Malu 五馬路 (Fifth avenue), near the Fourth Avenue where the courtesan houses were centered, applied for special permits to sell food for 24 hours (G.Yao 10). Gradually courtesan houses transitioned away from a business mainly based on sexual pleasure. In

²⁹ In the novel, a courtesan Shen Xiaohong and Wang Liansheng order noodles from this restaurant, and I will discuss this scene later on in this chapter (*The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 32).

doing so, they made the banquets their central focus and means of income. I believe that to accommodate the large numbers of people coming in and out of the houses public transportation became an increasingly important part of the courtesan houses' business model.

The modern infrastructure in the foreign concessions provided more mobility to courtesans and their clients. From the 1860s, the Shanghai Municipal Council began to use stones, sand and cement to build roads (Ge 1–2). According to their report to the Qing government, there were eight major roads in the foreign concessions in 1870 (Xu and Qiu 87). *Shanghai xiangtu zhi* 上海鄉土志 (A gazetteer of the Shanghai region) (1907), a local gazetteer about Shanghai, compares the roads in the old city of Shanghai and the foreign concessions: “租界馬路四通，城內道途狹隘。租界異常清潔，車不揚塵，居之者幾以為樂土” (The concession's roads extended in all directions, while roads in the old city are narrow. In the concessions, roads are so clean that cars will pass by without even raising dust, so residents live happily there) (Li 68). Moreover, in 1866 the foreign concessions set up gas lighting along their roads, and, later on in 1893, a company run by the Municipal Council installed electronic lighting (Hu 9). Therefore, both courtesans, clients, and people who delivered food to courtesan houses could easily circulate during night. In *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, courtesans and clients could easily go to different restaurants to have banquets at night and have food delivered quickly from restaurants to courtesan houses. When catering banquets became one of the important sources of income for courtesan houses, their culture and hierarchy changed accordingly. This change in courtesan society reflects the tremendous social

transformations that Shanghai was experiencing—the emergence of middle-class urbanities during the city’s commercialization.

According to *The History of Prostitution in China*, at the beginning of Tongzhi 同治 reign (1861–1875), the courtesan hierarchy was still relatively stable with the artful *shuyu* (storytellers’ residences) remaining on top; however, things were beginning to change (208).³⁰ *Shuyu* courtesans were considered professional artists rather than prostitutes since they did not sell their bodies, so they were considered to be the most prominent type of courtesans. They were called *xiansheng* 先生, a title usually reserved for well-respected males. They had professional criteria that had to be met, such as an annual singing test, and only the women who passed the test could enjoy the title *shuyu*. Also, they were strictly separated from other courtesans and never served banquets. In the 1860s and the 1870s, when courtesan houses gradually moved to the concessions, the *shuyu* courtesans were initially very popular (S. Wang 208). “In the 1860s, the distinction between *shuyu* courtesans and *changsan* courtesans still corresponded to an actual difference in the status and roles of the two groups. After 1875, there was a downward trend that resulted in their *de facto* fusion and, even if the term *shuyu* was still in use, it carried less and less weight” (Wang Jimen qtd. in Henriot 138). They were eventually replaced by *changsan* who charged three dollars for serving banquets (S. Wang 208).³¹

³⁰ Also see page 37 of *Shanghai xiaozhi*, page 32 of *Hu you meng ying*, and page 298 of *Zhongguo changji shi*.

³¹ Christian Henriot in “From a Throne of Glory to a Seat of Ignominy: Shanghai Prostitution Revisited (1849–1949),” argues that “there existed indeed various strata in the world of prostitution that were distinguished by prestige, lifestyle, and economic level, as noted by Gail Hershatter. Nonetheless, there was not a rigid hierarchy” (133–134). I agree with Henriot, that the courtesan society was constantly changing, from a luxury market to a commercial entertainment field for little urbanists. Thus, the hierarchy

This mirrored the larger transition within the city and in the industry itself. After *changsans*'s victory in their competition with *shuyu*, they began to call themselves *xiansheng*.

Since *changsans* abandoned their identity as artists and became the more popular courtesan, they worked more and more like businesswomen, and the courtesan houses functioned as business units. Instead of the madams severely exploiting and controlling courtesans, courtesans, madams, and workers in the house worked as small entrepreneurs and they developed relationships like business partners. As professional businesswomen, they set up standardized rules to define the responsibilities of both courtesans and clients in the courtesan industry. These rules were shared by all parties who resided in and frequented the houses, serving as the commercial guild's set of norms. *Changsans*, as they were called, charged three dollars for *youjiu* 侑酒 (serving banquets) and also three dollars for *yedu* 夜度 (sleeping during night).³² Next was *yaoer* 幺二 (the one-two) who was lower than the *changsans* because she charged just one dollar for a tea-party and two dollars to be summoned to a banquet (Haishang Juewu Sheng 5–6). Until the 1930s, *piaojie zhina* 嫖界指南 (handbooks for brothelgoers) still talked about this in courtesan

of courtesans was also in constant flux, and we should not understand it as a rigid hierarchy. In this chapter, the hierarchy I discuss is more of a cultural concept. It served as a part of the social imaginary about courtesan community that was shared by many people in or outside of Shanghai. This concept was relatively stable until the beginning of Republican China and can be found in many guidebooks, and literary works. I am more interested in how literary representations depict the courtesan culture, than the actual lives of certain groups and individuals.

³² According to *LaoShanghai sanshinian jianwenlu* 老上海三十年見聞錄 (A record of my recent thirty-year experience in Shanghai), in 1898, the rice price suddenly increased to seven dollars per one hundred liters (1). By comparison, we can see how expensive the banquets were.

houses “客入其門，以擺檯面為第一要義” (when guests enter [the houses], holding banquets should be their first and most important responsibility) (Haishang Juewu Sheng 163). This shows how catering became the courtesan houses’ most important income and remained stable from the 1870s to the 1930s.

According to Haishang Juewu Sheng, the more traditional private activities in courtesan houses were replaced by tea parties and banquets attended by guests and their courtesans. Through these eating practices this community created a set of norms to instruct people how to behave while eating. These norms served as city’s “insider knowledge” that could be found in literary works and handbooks for brothelgoers. For a new customer, if he wanted to know a courtesan, he had to either be introduced by a friend who was familiar with her house or he needed to summon her to a banquet. After the first meeting, he could go to visit her house and hold a tea party. During the tea party, the house would offer free fruit, cake, and nuts. A famous courtesan would have to serve twenty to thirty banquets per night, so it was considered proper for the customer to visit her at an afternoon tea party to avoid conflicts with her responsibility to serve banquets (Haishang Juewu Sheng 23). After several tea parties, the customer would eventually have to host a banquet in the courtesan house. He also needed to invite enough friends to the banquet. There were two kinds of banquets, a mahjong party where courtesan houses would provide *hecai* 和菜 (a set dish) after the game. The other was a regular banquet where food was ordered from restaurants and the host needed to tip the house’s servants and maids (Haishang Juewu Sheng 42). If it was a regular banquet, the guests were not expected to pay for the food, but they needed to call their courtesans to serve the banquet. For patrons, who would have a long-standing relationship with a courtesan, the courtesan

house had different expectations and requirements. As a patron it was his responsibility to host enough banquets in the house: “the organization of banquets in the houses of courtesans was one of prerequisites for being recognized as a good (trustful) customer with whom the women would eventually share their bed (Henriot 449). These rules in courtesan houses became necessary knowledge for clients who had no experience in courtesan houses to navigate urban life, and also gave them more pressure to create a social circle with other guests. Thus, a social group developed around these banquets.

As money became more and more important, the literati aesthetics were still partially preserved in the business rules of courtesan houses. *Mianzi* 面子/*miankong* 面孔 (face) replaced cultural “taste” and became the key element in how people socialized. First, inherited from the literati tradition, in Shanghai’s foreign concessions people would visit courtesan houses not mainly for sex, but to establish a relationship with affection and attachment. As Christian Henriot in “Courtship, Sex and Money: the economics of courtesan houses in nineteenth and twentieth century Shanghai” states, “the houses of courtesans played a central role in the social life of the members of the male urban elites. While they drew the largest part of their income from non-sexual activities (gambling, dinners), they were also organized in such a way as to avoid an explicit link between money and sexuality in the courtesan/customer relationship” (443). The emphasis on eating instead of sex, on the one hand, made social settings in courtesan houses function as a business unit; on the other hand, this left some space for clients and courtesans to imagine love in their romantic relationships. In addition to being a business, courtesan culture in Shanghai’s foreign concessions remained part of male aesthetic leisure activities. Second, the business could run smoothly not only based on economic

calculations, but also because for both patrons and courtesan houses had to invest enough money in a proper way to show their cultural taste to maintain their reputation in courtesan society.³³ Paying money sometimes could not make courtesans and other clients respect them. They had to show they have the cultural knowledge to know the right moment to pay a proper amount of money. Meanwhile, they needed to behave in a cultivated way to make people at the banquets feel at ease and pleased. For courtesan houses, in order to maintain their prestigious position, they needed to display luxury furniture and let courtesans wear expensive clothes. They also needed to tip workers of a lower status, such as drivers, for bringing food. This set of banquet and tea party rules required people to recognize that courtesan houses, while running a business, also represented a high culture. Clients needed to maintain a good reputation so that they could invite enough friends to attend their banquets. Similarly, courtesans needed to be famous enough to attract clients. Clients earned their reputations not only because of their money, but also for their behavior, friend circles, and even their knowledge about the rules in courtesan houses. Compared to what I discussed previously about Wang Tao's

³³ The payment system was also based upon people's reputations within the courtesan industry. When customers summoned a courtesan to serve at a banquet, they needed only to write a *jupiao* 局票 (tickets for summoning courtesans). At the end of each season, courtesan houses would collect the tickets and give them to the customer so that they could settle their bills for the season (Haishang Juewu Sheng 62). Restaurants also kept records of the food they delivered to each house and the banquets served by courtesans in their restaurants. This payment method based on credit was easier for all parties to calculate and offer them more flowing money to expend their business. However, it could also be risky if clients or courtesan houses refused to pay. Only a community where people's reputations were as important as their check books could this payment method be enforced. "With the customers who were locally known members of the elite, the courtesans could play with their reputation by threatening to reveal the name of the debtors in the mosquito newspapers" (Henriot 45).

writing before the 1870s—that a virtuous courtesan would only socialize with famous and talented literati—courtesan houses, after the 1870s, still selected their customers based not only upon their financial status, but also upon the reputation of being a proper patron. This replaced one’s reputation of artistic talent and became the new aesthetic preference.

Literati writings reflected this aesthetic change in courtesan society. Unlike the main body of *Omnium of licentiousness in Shanghai*, in both the *fulu* and *yulu* 余錄 (literary appendices)³⁴ of *Omnium of licentiousness in Shanghai*, which were written after Wang Tao returned to Shanghai in 1882, he emphasizes courtesans’ fame over their artistic talent. He repeatedly uses the word *qiming* 齊名 (equally famous) to compare the most famous courtesans. Wang Tao’s writing about the new courtesan culture in the foreign concessions mirrored the transitions within the industry as a whole in the 1880s. Unlike Liao Baoer, who Wang was unable to find after she moved to another house, in the 1880s, the famous courtesans’ lives were written on and gossiped about by people in the courtesan society. For example, one courtesan named Zhou Wenbao 周文寶, who went back and forth between Jinling 金陵 and Shanghai several times and married a commander in He Fei 合肥, only to die the following year. Wang wrote Wenbao’s romantic relationships, marriage and death in great detail (*Haizou yeyou lu* 31). Nevertheless, there is no record of a personal relationship between Wang and Wenbao in the story. Wang’s writing style combines real and imagined events in depicting relationships between clients and courtesans. The gossip in courtesan society could be

³⁴ This word was used by Wang Tao to refer to another section he added on at the end of his initial literary notes on his life in Shanghai courtesan houses.

found in many literary notes, diary entries, courtesan novels, guidebooks, newspapers, and literary journals. Readers followed famous courtesans' life stories even if they were not their clients.

Moreover, formal competitions between courtesans, known as *huabang* 花榜 (list of flowers),³⁵ also encouraged literati to write literary works about courtesans. For example, the famous tabloid *Youxi Bao* 游戲報 (Amusement news) hosted several courtesan competitions: elites wrote poems and lyrics about their courtesans. These competitions could create fame for courtesans, and thus help them to make more money. Wang Tao was conscious about how his writing could enhance or detract from their fame: “滬上名姝，其冠絕一時者，皆邀月旦之評，而登諸花榜，一經品題，聲價十倍” (The famous courtesans in Shanghai, the best of them, are all criticized by elites. The one who get on the list of flowers, will earn ten times the reputation) (*Haizou yeyou lu* 31). Some courtesans invited elites to write a good essay about them and therefore gain fame too. In this way, courtesan literature, part of the traditional literati culture, became a part of the courtesan business. The literary activities via media promoted the new aesthetics in courtesan society and enhanced people's feelings of belonging to a community. Now, what were once relatively private romantic relationships in courtesan houses before the 1870s became a part of the public discourse. Keith McMahon in “Fleecing the Male Customer in Shanghai Brothels of the 1890s” explores how the male customers “[seek] self-definition” through their romantic relationships with courtesans, and “[found] pleasure in the aura of control that the prostitute exerts over him” (1). The

³⁵ The word “flowers” refers to courtesans.

change of taste in courtesans shows the changes in elite culture as well as people's understanding of gender relations.

The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai was written at the end of nineteenth century when the new courtesan culture was dominant. I read this novel in the context of the transformation of the courtesan culture. In this novel, the commercial aspects and literati culture are both reflected in people's different eating practices in courtesan society. They, consciously and unconsciously, negotiate between different, sometimes contradictory, gender norms, to fit into the polyphonic urban culture of Shanghai's foreign concessions. As a prominent example of courtesan literature, this novel is also a cultural product of the late Qing courtesan society. In comparison to preceding and subsequent courtesan literature, this novel shows how the aesthetics of courtesan culture have changed by the end of the nineteenth century. A surgeon in Shanghai, Han Bangqing also created the first literary journal and published this courtesan novel in it. Via writing he participated in the transformation of courtesan culture. Through reading this novel, I attempt to see how literati in Shanghai imagined this cultural transformation and to do a literary reading of the social imaginaries of that historical period.

2.2 FROM MIGRANTS TO SHANGHAI CITIZENS

In this section, I focus on Han's portrayal of new migrants to Shanghai in the novel. Specifically, I explore their trajectories through the different life tracks of the Zhao 趙 family. This reveals how migrants, through everyday eating practices, reinterpret their previous lives, shape and modify their subjectivities, and become members of the courtesan aesthetic community. A key concept I use to analyze this topic is the *aesthetic community*. This is a term developed by Robert Appelbaum in his study of early-modern

food culture. In his book *Aguecheek's Beef, Belch's Hiccup, and Other Gastronomic Interjections: Literature, Culture, and Food Among the Early Moderns* (2006), Appelbaum defines this term as “a convergence of networks of more or less voluntarily shared (and thereby symbolically asserted) sensations, feelings, and perceptions” (xiv). This combines with “Social regulations, economic conditions, and the commonalities of educated desire,” which encourage “the formation of [an] aesthetic community of a culture” (xiv).³⁶ In my study of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, I adopt this term to explain the shared sensations, feelings, norms, knowledge of courtesan business and cultural tastes in Shanghai courtesan society. I focus mainly on the aesthetics that are reflected in people’s eating practices, such as deciding what to eat, how to eat, who to eat with, and where to eat, along with the proper payment methods, language, and table manners. This aesthetics is what makes eating in courtesan houses such a pleasant and highly regarded cultural activity in the novel. I believe an aesthetic community is not fixed and unchangeable, but always in the process of modification, especially in a social context like the foreign concessions during late Qing where different cultures and traditions collided and colluded with each other. I am interested in how, through eating, people establish feelings of belonging to this community in the novel, and how they re-interpret their previous lifestyles, moral beliefs and cultural tastes when they establish a bond to this courtesan aesthetic community.

³⁶ In this work, Applebaum principally focuses on the works of William Shakespeare. He uses this term to express Shakespeare’s characters relatively uniform understanding of food culture, despite the diversified and even contradictory expressions of food as a concept in the bard’s works. Even though, his study is somewhat specific, Applebaum believes that aesthetic communities exist not only throughout the early modern period, but “in most any period” (xiv).

The novel begins with Zhao Puzhai 趙朴齋 coming from a small nearby town of Shanghai, and ends with the failure of his sister Zhao Erbao 趙二寶, who has already become a courtesan. When Puzhai first arrives in Shanghai, he immediately goes to the courtesan houses and falls in love with a courtesan. Since he cannot learn the courtesan culture quickly, he is refused by the community. After spending all of his money, he works as a rickshaw boy,³⁷ and then becomes a beggar. The time he spends among courtesans still changes him and makes him unable to return to his hometown. Later on, his mother, Hong Shi 洪氏, and sister, Erbao, come to Shanghai to find him. Unlike Puzhai's failure in courtesan society, Erbao quickly learns how to navigate the community rules and becomes a successful courtesan. However, she fails to fully master the courtesan business. She falls in love with and seeks to marry a rich patron, and this desire eventually leads her to financial ruin. Compared to Puzhai and Erbao's failures, their uncle Hong Shanqing 洪善卿 becomes a member of Shanghai's little urbanites, who, by socializing with wealthy elites in courtesan houses, gains business opportunities. The different outcomes represented by these characters demonstrate how migrants strived to find fame and fortune in Shanghai.

The Zhao family's transformation shows the different possibilities for migrants in the foreign concessions in Shanghai, and how eating functions to shape people's subjectivities and helps them become members of the courtesan aesthetic community. In the novel, the cultural differences between Shanghai and countryside are represented by

³⁷ This was a common profession for migrants to Chinese cities during this transitional period. I will discuss this profession in my discussion of Lao She's novel *Rickshaw Boy* in Chapter 3. This chapter is more concerned with migrants who become little urbanists. The following chapter will focus on the life of the urban poor.

different eating habits, including when to eat, how to eat, and what to eat. Drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of the encoding/decoding model of communication, I argue that, in everyday eating practices, the migrants actively decode the messages, both verbally and physically, from people with whom they eat in Shanghai courtesan houses. Through these daily eating activities, migrants learn, accept and imitate the courtesan culture. This allows them to become part of the aesthetic community in Shanghai courtesan houses. As was discussed in the last section, eating in courtesan houses was not only for pleasure, but an important way in which people's relationships were established. Through these tea parties and banquets in courtesan houses, the novel shows how new migrants question and re-interpret their previous lives, specifically, their understandings of gender and gender relations. In this process, they constantly construct their subjectivities.

By examining Puzhai's story, I discuss how eating culture, as part of the courtesan community aesthetics, separates the community's members from other city residents. Courtesan houses had their own schedule centered on night-time banquets. Courtesans would not get up until noon, and they usually ate their first meal in the early afternoon (Haishang Juewu Sheng 144–145). The time of eating is the first obstacle for Puzhai to fit into the courtesan society, because the time he gets up to eat follows his routine from the countryside:

睡到早晨六點鐘，樸齋已自起身，叫棧使舀水洗臉，想到街上去喫點心也好趁此白相相。看小村時，正鼾鼾的好困辰光。因把房門掩上，獨自走出寶善街，在石路口長源館裏喫了一碗廿八個錢的悶肉大面。(Haishanghua liezhuan 12)

At six the next morning, he was already up and called the hotel attendant for hot water to wash his face. He decided to go out for breakfast and take the opportunity to amuse himself a little. Xiaocun was still snoring away, so he closed the door and walked alone down Treasured Merit Street. He had a bowl of stewed pork noodles for twenty-eight copper coins at the Fountainhead Restaurant on the corner of Pebble Road.³⁸ (*The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 13)

In contrast, Puzhai's countryman Zhang Xiaocun 张小村, who has been in Shanghai longer, already changed his daily schedule to fit that of the courtesan houses. Different from new migrants like Puzhai, Xiaocun sleeps in late. Therefore, when Puzhai goes to the courtesan houses he arrives very early, which surprises the courtesans. From this detail we can see how the new banquet culture influences people's lives—not only for courtesans, but also patrons and people who work with courtesan houses who must change their life schedule. After this embarrassing experience, Puzhai, like Xiaocun, quickly abandons his habits from the countryside like getting up at sun rise and sleeping at sunset. This is the first step into the courtesan culture changed his body and mind.³⁹

³⁸ In this chapter, all English quotations from the novel are from Zhang Ailing's 張愛玲 (1920–1995) translation of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. The only thing I have changed are the characters' names. I maintain their Chinese names using pinyin to avoid confusion. I will not write the author and book information if it is a quotation from the novel. I provide both Chinese and English text for such quotations.

³⁹ Even the language *wuyu* 吳語 (Suzhou dialect) of this book shows that courtesan culture changed migrants' speaking habits. Since the Suzhou courtesan is considered as the best, later on all the courtesans claim that they come from Suzhou and speak Suzhou dialect to ask for a higher price. If a customer cannot understand Suzhou dialect, it is hard for them to communicate with courtesans. The fact that the novel is written in *wuyu* shows how daily life in courtesan houses influenced literature.

Besides deciding when to eat, where and what to eat are also indicative of people's social status and level of cultivation. While Puzhai does not mind eating cheap noodles by himself, his uncle takes him to restaurants and orders a *caikezi* 菜殼子 (set of dishes): “六個小碗” (six courses serve in small bowls), and “另外加一湯一碗” (with addition of a soup and a main course), as a casual meal (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 8; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 5). “May be common fare for Hong Shanqing, a successful urban entrepreneur, but not for Puzhai, who is repeatedly struck by the lavish meals eaten by the men in his uncle's social circles” (Swislocki 104). Puzhai's two eating experiences, first alone and second with his uncle, inform a sharp cultural difference between the eating culture in the city and the country.

Aside from when to eat and what dishes to order, table manners are another aspect of the cultural conflicts that migrants have to deal with. Courtesans were expected to have expensive decorations and elegant clothes to fulfill clients' high tastes and compel clients to spend money (*Haishang Juewu Sheng* 100). While courtesan culture as a high culture does not only relate to money, table manners and cultural taste also functioned as the standard by which a client's sophistication would be judged. People had to maintain a subtle politeness on the one hand, without making the intimate banquets too formal; while on the other hand, showing cultivated courtesy to others at the table. When Puzhai eats with people, he is unable to understand the cultural codes. Thus, he fails to perform properly at the first banquet that he hosts. First, he suggests calling a low-class prostitute, but Xiaocun immediately stops him. This is because summoning a low-class prostitute implies that Puzhai's has low taste and poor social status to the other clients. Then Puzhai continuously shows his simplicity and clumsiness in how he treats other guests.

第一道菜照例上的是魚翅，趙朴齋待要奉敬，大家攔說：“勤客氣，隨意好。”趙朴齋直遵命，只說得一聲“請”。(*Haishanghua liezhuan* 20)

The first course, as was the rule, was sharks' fin. Zhao Puzhai was just about to help serve everyone when they stopped him, saying, 'Don't stand on ceremony; best to be casual. Without much ado, he obeyed and just said "Help yourselves" once. (*The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 22)

At the beginning, Puzhai intends to serve people so that they can eat the dish formally. It is his own cultural background, which makes him follow such manners. When people try to stop him, he reads it as a signal to stop serving entirely. However, their gestures towards him are just a form of politeness. They hope that Puzhai will serve people in a less formal way, but Puzhai stops serving food, he only said once “Qing 請 (help yourselves)”. At his first hosted banquet, he does not have good table manners according to courtesan culture. Meanwhile he does not learn them quickly enough, and this causes his failure in courtesan society. After several awkward eating experiences, people refuse to invite Puzhai to banquets, and the chapter's title details his experiences “單拆單單嫖明受侮” (A lone whoremonger meets rough company) (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 92; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 108). He quickly spends all of his money and ruins his reputation in courtesan society, and without a job he cannot attain a little urbanite status in the city. From this plot, we can see that the aesthetics in courtesan houses are not completely commercialized— clients are willing to pay more money to access the prestigious culture in courtesan houses. This, in turn, reinforces their wealth and elite taste. Even though Puzhai hosts the banquets, people still look down upon him because of

his poor table manners. This scene does not mention the courtesans' attitudes towards Zhao, only the other customers' judgements of him. This shows that courtesan culture was maintained by all members of the aesthetic community.

Puzhai fails first because he imagines courtesan houses as places that offer sexual pleasure. Actually, the pleasure quarters were not merely for male sexual gratification, but also provided opportunities for both customers and courtesans alike to establish profitable relationships to gain financial support. As Mark Swislocki points out, Puzhai is the only one who eats alone at times in the whole novel (87). He does not understand that eating in courtesan houses is the way for people to maintain their social networks. Second, Puzhai lacks cultivation as a low-class countryman, and does not have the ability to quickly learn the cultural codes through his interactions with others in order to constantly revise his behavior. Every banquet and tea party are the opportunities for both courtesans and clients to present their cultural and financial capital. Zhang Xiaocun, who as a new migrant finds a job through the courtesan community, gives advice to Puzhai about the key to success in Shanghai:

「耐勿曉得。來裏上海場花，只要名氣做得響末就好。耐看仔場面浪幾個人，好像闊天闊地，其實搭倪也差勿多，不過名氣響仔點。要是無撥仔名氣，阿好做啥生意吸？就算耐屋裏向該好幾花家當來裏，也無用皖！耐看吳松橋，阿是個光身體？俚稍微有點名氣末，二三千洋錢手裏豁出豁進，無啥要緊。我是比勿得俚，價末要有啥用場，匯劃莊浪去，四五百洋錢也拿仔就是。耐陸裏曉得嘎！」樸齋道：「莊浪會拿仔末，原要還個皖。」小村道：「故末也要自家算計哉哩。生意

裏借轉點，碰著法有啥進益，補湊補湊未還脫哉。(Haishanghua liezhuan 92)

“There’s a lot you don’t know. In a place like Shanghai, once you’ve made a name for yourself, everything’s all right. These people whom you see socially seem to have money to throw away, but actually they’re not much different from you and me; they’re just better known. Without a name, there’s no way of doing business, not even if you have a lot of money at home. Look at Wu Songqiao; he’s quite penniless. But as he’s not entirely unknown, it’s nothing for him to see two or three thousand dollars come and go. As for me, I can’t compare with him, but if I go to the bank, four or five hundred is also mine to take. You just don’t know about things like that.”

“What’s taken from the bank has to be repaid, no?”

“That you have to figure out for yourself. You can borrow some from your business, or you may run into some opportunity and make a profit. A bit here, a bit there, and it’s paid up.” (*The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 109–110)

Xiaocun’s advice shows that in order to be successful in courtesan society, people should spend money and show their cultural taste to earn good reputations in the courtesan community. Cultural taste, in this situation, is a kind of capital too, that can be exchanged for financial capital in Shanghai. If one garnered a good reputation in this social circle, then they could easily get loans and do business. According to Xiaocun, the business interactions between people in courtesan houses were so numerous that people could

borrow money and quickly repay it. Xiaocun obviously imagines the aesthetic community in courtesan houses as a 上海場 (Shanghai field),⁴⁰ which makes the courtesan community a part of Shanghai's commercial market. When his countrymen, Zhang Xiaocun and Wu Songqiao, use tea parties and banquets to “*suanji*” 算計 (scheme against) wealthy people, Puzhai spends money to please his courtesan. This makes other clients and courtesans believe he is incompetent in business—to make a reputation in courtesan society and exchange that reputation for business opportunities.

By portraying how a migrant fails to join the aesthetic community, the novel shows how the courtesan society selects its members and expels others. Eating plays an important role in this process by offering a cultural space for people to learn the shared norms, rules, aesthetics and so on, as the standard to judge others. Both courtesans and patrons look down upon those who spend too freely, like Zhao Puzhai. People are expected to balance their finances, taste and emotions to spend the right amount of money at the right time and in the right way. However, for the expelled others/members, they are still changed by their experience of courtesan culture. After spending all his money, Puzhai still refuses to go back to his hometown. He becomes a rickshaw boy and then a beggar in order to stay in the city. Once he has already experienced courtesan life and learned the pleasure Shanghai has to offer, he can never go back to his past life. At the end of the novel, Puzhai finally becomes part of the courtesan community, not as a client, but as a servant in his sister's courtesan house. He is still awkward with table manners, but he actively treats other servants to make connections. Even the novel's

⁴⁰ This is a term, which refers to Shanghai as whole, encompassing its commercial, social and cultural scenes.

simplest character, Puzhai, eventually learns the social and cultural meaning of eating in courtesan society and considers the courtesan house's lifestyle and socialization as the new reality in life. His transformation occurs not because anyone directly tells him, but due to everyday eating experience with members of the courtesan aesthetic community.

Compared to Puzhai, Erbao quickly understands and accepts the culture in courtesan houses. This allows her to integrate herself into courtesan society right away. From Erbao's transformation, I explore how Shanghai's social setting and eating practices change new migrants' understandings of gender relations. Erbao comes to Shanghai with her neighbor Zhang Xiuying 張秀英, because she does not want to come to the "dangerous city" with her mother alone. As her mother Hong Shi said: "上海夷場浪，陌生場花，陸裏能夠去啲？……二寶，耐一個姑娘家，勿曾出歇門，到上海撥來拐子再拐得去仔末，那價呢？" (I don't know anything about the foreign settlements in Shanghai. How can I go there? ... Erbao, but you are a girl, and you've never been away from home. What would I do if in Shanghai a trafficker of women abducts you?) (*Haishanghai liezhuan* 200; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 236). This is the traditional view of rural people towards cities, that it is dangerous for women to leave their family—especially when going to the Westernized quarters of Shanghai. On their second day in Shanghai, they encounter Xiuying's *ganma*'s 乾媽 (godmother) son Shi Ruisheng 施瑞生, who has a lot of experience in Shanghai courtesan houses. Ruisheng takes them to Ming Yuan 明園 (Garden Ming) and the theatre the next day, and then comes back to their hotel room at night. When visiting in the garden and theater, they follow the customs of their friends and relatives from back home. However, when they talk and eat

in the hotel room, they begin to imitate how guests and courtesans interact during tea parties. Although the hotel is not a courtesan house, the two men, Puzhai and Ruisheng, who are familiar with courtesan life, make it feel as if it has the same atmosphere of a courtesan house:

洪氏聽是瑞生聲音，叫聲「大少爺」，讓坐致謝。二寶喊棧使沖茶。秀英將煙盤鋪在床上，點燈請瑞生吸鴉片煙。樸齋不上臺盤，遠遠地掩在一邊。洪氏乃道：「大少爺，難末真真對勿住，兩日天請仔倪好幾埭。明朝倪定歸要轉去哉。」瑞生急道：「勦去吧！無姆末總實概，上海難得來一埭，生來多白相兩日。」洪氏道：「勿瞞大少爺說，該搭棧房裏，四個人房飯錢要八百銅錢一日咾，開消忒大，早點轉去個好。」瑞生道：「勦緊個，我有法子，比來裏鄉下再要省點。」瑞生祇顧說話，簽子上燒的煙淋下許多，還不自覺。秀英看見，忙去上手躺下，接過簽子給他代燒。二寶向自己床下提串銅錢，暗地交與樸齋，叫買點心。樸齋接錢，去廚下討祇大碗，並不呼喚棧使，親往寶善街上去買。(Haishanghua liezhuan 207).

Mrs. Zhao could tell it was Shi by his voice. She greeted him and invited him to sit down, thanking him for his hospitality. Erbao called for the inn attendant to make tea, while Xiuying set the opium tray on the bed, lit the lamp, and invited Erbao to smoke. Puzhai, being socially awkward, kept in the background.

Shi said quickly, “You mustn’t, Mother. Don’t keep saying this. You rarely come to Shanghai, so naturally you should enjoy yourself for a few more days.”

“To be honest, Eldest Young Master, board and lodging for four in this inn cost eight hundred copper coins a day. Our expenses are too high. It’s best if we go soon,” said Mrs. Zhao.

That’s not a problem. I have an idea: you’ll find it more economical than living in the country,” said Shi. As he talked, the opium he was toasting started dripping. He did not notice it, but Xiuying saw and hastened to lie down on the other side of the divan, take the pick from him, and toast the opium for him.

Erbao took a string of copper coins from under her own bed, quietly handed it to Puzhai, and told him to buy some snacks. He went first to the kitchen to ask for a big bowl and, instead of calling for the inn attendant, went shopping himself on Treasured Merit Street. (*The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 245)

Puzhai distances himself from the conversation and lets Erbao and Xiuying, two unmarried girls, socialize with Ruisheng. In Confucian tradition, unmarried women should keep distance from young men; however, Puzhai has them behave as courtesans would while serving a patron. Moreover, instead of sitting together with Ruisheng as the only man in the family, Puzhai goes out to a restaurant to order food for him. Some courtesan houses are run by real families, where the son of the family works as a helper, known as *benjia* 本家 (family-member servant). Puzhai behaves more like a family-

member servant in a courtesan house, doing the work that the hotel servants should do. This scene obviously diverges from what would be considered proper in their hometown. For Puzhai, the brief courtesan house experience replaces his old traditions to let him spontaneously read this eating situation as a tea party in a courtesan house. Therefore, he quickly defines himself as a *benjia* helping to create the space for his sister and Ruisheng to develop a romantic relationship.

Their mother Hong Shi has no experience in courtesan houses. It is proper for her to call Ruisheng “*dashaoye* 大少爺” (young master). However, Ruisheng, as an experienced guest in courtesan houses, calls Hong Shi “*wumu* 無媿” (mother). This makes their relationship more like the mother and son-in-law relationship that usually appears in courtesan houses. Then, when Hong Shi complains about how expensive it is to stay in a hotel, Ruisheng immediately offers them a place to live. Following Ruisheng’s lead, the conversation becomes more and more similar to that of a madam and client talking about setting up a courtesan house. During their conversation, Xiuying sees that the opium Ruisheng is preparing is dropping on the floor. The day before, Puzhai had taught her how to smoke opium, a popular action performed in courtesan houses during tea parties. Because of this, she feels it is her responsibility to help Ruisheng prepare his pipe, as would a good host. Finally, Erbao asks Puzhai to go out to buy food from a restaurant as if they were hosting a tea party. People, in this scene, keep re-interpreting what is happening and revising their behavior based upon the reactions of others. Even though Erbao, Xiuying and Hong Shi, have no knowledge of courtesan society, Puzhai and Ruisheng immediately move to integrate them into it. Although this scene does not happen in a courtesan house, eating is a bridge to connect these people

with the courtesan culture. During this eating experience, everyone interprets and re-interprets the meaning of their acts and based on other people's reactions. Here, not only food itself, but the experience of eating food in this situation—the opium, the language, the food service, the appetite of eating at late night, and the memory of previous eating experiences in courtesan houses, gardens, and theaters—connect these groups of people with the courtesan culture and its gender norms. The given society of the foreign concessions in Shanghai and its modern values are all reflected and signified in this eating experience between the Zhao family and Ruisheng. Instead of following the gender norms in their hometown to keep distance between unmarried men and women, they naturally adopt more intimate relationships. The result of this dinner is that the next night, the girls, after discussing amongst themselves, decide to move into the house offered to them by Ruisheng. This scene shows how people change their understanding of gender relations through their interactions in everyday life rather than moral discipline—the mother who worried so much about sexual seduction in Shanghai, now happily consents to living in an unmarried man's house.

After moving to the new house, Erbao and Xiuying decide to sleep with Ruisheng within two days, after just two banquets. The house is located on the street where *changsans* houses are most prominent. They live like they would in a typical courtesan house—the girls take the two bedrooms upstairs as did courtesans, while the mother lives in the *tingzijian*,⁴¹ and Puzhai and another servant live downstairs. People eat dinner in one of the girls' bedrooms, and this was how courtesan houses were usually arranged.

⁴¹ According to Jingyi Zhang a *tingzijian* is “the small room above the kitchen in an alleyway house,” which would have “accommodated many Shanghai sojourners” (ii).

They order dishes from Garden of Plenty, the popular restaurant in courtesan society that I introduced in the previous section. During the first dinner in that house, suddenly, Xiuying asks Ruisheng to summon courtesans, and Erbao supports her idea. Ruisheng suggests that he hosts a banquet the next day with some friends and courtesans. Xiuying then makes a joke that “我也叫一個，就叫個趙二寶” (I’ll call one, too; I’ll call Erbao). Erbao refutes this saying “我趙二寶個名字倒勿曾有過歇，耐張秀英未有仔三四個哉。纔是時髦倌人，一道撥人家來浪叫出局” (There’s never been a courtesan with the name Erbao. Your case is different, though, for there’re three or four Xiuying, all fashionable courtesans who are called to parties all the time (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 212; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 250)). In these jokes, the two girls begin to reveal their fantasy that they could possibly become courtesans. In the countryside, these thoughts would have never come to them; however, now, as courtesans they think about it differently. The next day, they have a typical banquet with male guests and courtesans in their bedroom, and they also hire a maid who comes from another courtesan house to serve the banquet. Unsurprisingly, that night, they both have sex with Ruisheng. Since then Ruisheng regularly sleeps in the girls’ bedrooms and he gives them money to cover their living expenses. Although the novel does not give details about that night’s banquet, it is obvious the two girls practice how to be courtesans by serving the banquet even before they officially take on their new identities.

During these eating practices in Shanghai, the mother and the two girls obtain a new understanding of gender relations. This is the turning point in their transformation as they seek to break the gender code of their cultural background and change their behavior according to Shanghai’s context. Before Hong Shi comes to Shanghai, she begs her

neighbor to take care of her house for only several days, but when Hong Shanqing, Hong Shi's brother, knows from the other guests that his niece becomes a courtesan, he angrily comes to persuade Hong Shi to take the girls back home. Hong Shi says: “到仔鄉下，屋裏向大半年個柴、米、油、鹽一點點無撥，故末搭啥人去商量嘎？” (Once we get back home, we'll have no resources for the greater part of a year, no oil, salt, rice, or firewood. What can we turn to then?) (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 217; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 257). Even as a country woman, her life in Shanghai makes her feel that her previous country life would be impossible to relive. Her brief experience in Shanghai makes her re-interpret her life and come to the conclusion that she cannot go back to her hometown without remembering that she originally came to Shanghai to bring her son back home. From Erbao and Hong Shi's examples, we see how Shanghai courtesan culture reshapes people's subjectivities and their understandings of gender relations in everyday life. Through the Zhaos' story, Han shows how eating acts, such as tea parties, are one way in which people transformed their subjectivities. They find themselves unable to leave the city after experiencing a taste of urban culture.

In contrast to the Zhaos' failure, Puzhai's uncle Hong Shanqing shows a different possible outcome of migration. Shanqing is an old migrant who now owns a ginseng store. He has a regular courtesan, who is a *changsan*, and has a group of friends that includes a lottery store owner, other local gentries, itinerant merchants, and traveling officials. There was a constant flow of capital from declining wealthy families to the nouveau riche, and people like Shanqing take advantage of and build their wealth on this trend. His business in courtesan houses includes two parts. First, he works as an agent selling antiques for both the fading and rising groups. The second part of the business is

helping rich gentries to build relationships and negotiate with courtesans and their houses. In doing so, Shanqing earns money from both sides. In the novel, the rich gentries all have their petty bourgeois friends who help them maintain relationships with courtesan houses. Because of the different cultural and economic settings in the foreign concessions, in order to socialize at courtesan houses or to buy gifts from foreign shops, one requires the accumulation of enough cultural knowledge. This included speaking a foreign language and being familiar with the rules to conduct business; however, the servants of these elites lacked the cultivation to help their masters with their romantic relationships. The petty bourgeoisie were able to exploit this gap in knowledge and serve as the middlemen between rich gentries and courtesans.

In the novel, through banquets and tea parties, clients are able to establish reputations, and this reputation serves as the cultural capital, which could be exchanged for money, jobs, and business opportunities. These could then allow them to ascend the social ladder and interrupt the traditional social hierarchy. For example, Qi Yunsou 齊韻叟, a wealthy gentry, owned Yili Garden 一笠園. He would only invite other members of the wealthy gentry to attend banquets there. However, this class boundary is interrupted when Qi Yunsou begins to invite a small businessman, Chen Xiaoyun 陳小雲, to his garden. Like Hong Shanqing, Chen Xiaoyun helps the rich local gentries to manage their affairs in courtesan houses. When Qi Yunsou attends the funeral of Luo Yufu's 羅玉甫 courtesan, Chen Xiaoyun is there too to host the funeral. Qi Yunsou then invites every attendee of the funeral to a banquet, and he invites Chen Xiaoyun as well. During that banquet, both Xiaoyun and his courtesan, a changsan, try their best to please Yunsou. Since this banquet, Qi invites Chen Xiaoyun and his courtesan to his garden as regular

guests (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 339; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 385). In this scene, we can see how the banquets in courtesan houses serve as a social ladder for them to establish relationships with wealthy elites. This sequence represents a highpoint of the novel, where established and upstart classes come into contact with one another. As I stated earlier, I believe that the shared culture of the aesthetic community is revealed in its continued modification. When petty bourgeoisie cross the class boundary to socialize with elites, the business culture and literati culture also converge together and modify the shared values and taste in their aesthetic community.

As Zhang Ailing says, “《海上花》寫這麼这么一批人，上至官吏，下至店伙西崽，雖然不是一个圈子裡的人，都可能同桌吃花酒” (In *Haishang hua* there is a group of people as high as the government officials and as low as shop owners or employees of foreign companies; although they are not of the same class, they can possibly hold banquets at the same table) (“Guoyu *Haishanghua* yihouji” 294).⁴² In this novel, Han depicts an aesthetic community that shares a series of eating rules, cultural tastes, and gender norms. People from different social classes and regional areas bring their own tradition to this aesthetic community. From the Zhao family’s experience, we can see the different possibilities when migrants transform their identity as city residents and how they inform their subjectivities through everyday eating. These people’s stories create the cultural fabric of modern Shanghai.

The novel also shows how literati culture was transformed to become a part of the little urbanite culture as the old literati families began to decline. Through these changes, the courtesan culture gradually became representative of Shanghai’s urban high culture.

⁴² Translation is my own.

Han reveals his position in his critique of these characters: on the one hand, he criticizes Puzhai as simplistic; on the other hand, he does not admire migrants like Xiaocun who carefully calculate their benefits. Han has a more positive attitude towards the wealthy elites, and meanwhile lets them embrace the commercialized courtesan culture and preserve the graceful and generous aspects of literati culture in the courtesan business. Han weaves his own cultural preference into his writing, and shows how an elite, meanwhile a professional writer in Shanghai pursues a balance between literati tradition and modern commercial spirit.

Han's writing also contributes to the scholarly understanding of urban and rural areas in modern China. Hanchao Lu in *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (1999) discusses how a gulf appeared between urban and rural areas in the twentieth century. For a long time, China did not have "any clear-cut division [between] urban and rural settings... and Chinese cities did not possess a corporate identity, civic monuments, or 'citizens' that set the city apart from its surrounding rural areas" (4). Lu believes that there is a dramatic change in the urban-rural relationship in the twentieth century, specifically, in Shanghai, when "the urban-rural continuum was gradually replaced by an urban-rural gulf" (4). People abandoned their negative impressions of cities as "uninteresting or dangerous" and "came to think of them as superior to the countryside" (3). By reading *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, I argue that as early as the end of nineteenth century, people already began to change their feelings about urban culture. From the cultural transformation of several migrants, the novel shows how people change their view of the city from taking it to be "uninteresting or dangerous" to admiring it as a superior culture, especially the courtesan culture.

2.3 FROM GARDENS TO COURTESAN HOUSES

In this section, I explore how different spaces shape people's eating practices and gender relations in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. In the novel, the conflicts between different cultural tastes and gender norms revealed through people's eating in different geological spaces such as traditional gardens and courtesan houses.

As was introduced in the previous section, the infrastructure in Shanghai's foreign concessions was very different from the old city. The development of westernized two-story houses, also called alleyway houses, in the concessions, makes it possible for small courtesan houses to be popular. In his article "Where the Courtyard Meets the Street," *Samuel Y. Liang* explores how the alleyway houses radically reconfigured traditional residential and commercial spaces in the foreign concessions in Shanghai. Liang argues that spatial order represented the social hierarchy—when the alleyway house with "visibility and openness" replaced the traditional houses with walled gardens, "the borderline between the elite and the lower class was transgressed as well as redefined" (482). Liang comes from the perspective of architecture to discuss how social hierarchy has been interrupted in modern Shanghai, while *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* supplements his argument by describing people's activities in these different structures. In the novel, during banquets in courtesan houses and in traditional gardens, courtesans have different behaviors because these spaces restrict their behavior in different ways. These different eating practices in gardens and courtesan houses lead courtesans and patrons to have different understandings of their relationships. This novel offers a possible understanding of the process that how the new architecture disturbed the social hierarchy through people's behavior in their everyday life.

First, the novel reveals the reason why the banquets in courtesan houses can more easily help people from different social classes to form a community. In the novel, at banquets held in gardens, the host selected guests more carefully, based on their social class, family background or artistic talent. Only a few petty businessmen could possibly participate in such elite cultural activities. Since eating practices in courtesan houses were less choreographed, and guests invited more spontaneously, both wealthy elites and lower-class businessmen could eat at the same table in courtesan houses. The rising of small courtesan houses helps to make all classes of people sit together while eating. This would help people to create new bonds with those who came from other social classes and foster a sense of belonging. Therefore, in the novel, both wealthy gentry and new migrants, see themselves as part of the courtesan community.

Moreover, the novel shows how the popularity of alley-way courtesan houses increased the chances for people to participate in each other's relationships. As was introduced in the previous section, courtesan houses were mostly located in the alleyway houses around Fourth Avenue. The buildings in the streets were close to each other, so it was easy for people to see their neighbors through the windows. This unique architectural characteristic made it possible for people to eavesdrop on each other. There are several instances of people peeping on and overhearing one another in the novel. For example, when Ge Zhongying 葛仲英 comes to attend a banquet in Huang Cuifeng's house, he sees from Cuifeng's balcony another client, Hua Tiemei 華鐵眉, and his courtesan sitting together and drinking in their bedroom. In the distance, Zhongying and Tiemei are talking to each other, and Zhongying then invites Tiemei to attend the banquet in Cuifeng's house (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 357–358; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 410–

411). The city's infrastructure connects the bedroom to the other buildings and makes this ostensibly private drinking scene between Hua Tiemei and his courtesan a more public display. Because of the infrastructure in the concessions, they have more chances to become acquainted with strangers. In the novel, people are used to the urban setting and they are able to eat and drink naturally while knowing that they are being watched by others. As the rising of courtesan houses to become the most popular space for courtesan gatherings, courtesans and clients were able to redefine their interactions and relationships.

Besides the descriptions of life in courtesan houses, the novel also portrays how banquets held in the garden are a part of the literati culture's influence on the courtesan business. In the novel, the different cultures represented by courtesan houses and gardens coexisted within courtesan society. The novel shows how the newly prominent banquet rules in courtesan houses cannot be practiced in gardens. For patrons, the cultural difference between banquets in the garden and banquets in courtesan houses is confusing, especially for the low-class ones who have no experience with literati culture. For example, the small businessman Chen Xiaoyun who knows Qi Yunsou by chance and is invited to Yi li garden for banquets, he is confused about how to pay for his courtesan when summoning her to the garden for days: “倅人叫到仔一笠園，幾日天住來浪，算幾花局嘎？” (When a courtesan is called to Yi li yuan for a stay of several days, how many party calls does it count as?) (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 344; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 394). His question shows the rupture between the literati activities in the garden, and commercialized rules in courtesan houses. As was introduced in the previous section, Wang Tao's literary notes records his relationship with a courtesan in the mid

nineteenth century. They live together like a married couple, without calculating the money he should pay for each meal. The novel shows that this more traditional relationship between courtesan and patron is still preserved in the gardens of the wealthy gentry. While, as a low-class businessman, Xiaoyun has never experienced such a relationship with his courtesan no matter how good of a relationship they have in the courtesan house. Different payment methods in courtesan houses and traditional gardens shows the differences in how courtesans are aesthetically viewed—a business transaction versus more intimate company.

For courtesans, because of the location and function of the garden, they could not follow the rules for serving banquets as usual. Courtesans were expected to wear special clothes, and refrain from eating—only to stand or sit behind the client who had summoned her and poured wine for him. These table manners are a way for courtesans to maintain their professional identity as businesswomen. When they change their behavior at the garden banquets, they change their identity and their understanding of gender relations. As a result, they begin to have different expectations towards their patrons too. As was introduced in the previous section, courtesan houses have very strict rules for courtesans to serve banquets, and this is a way to show that they are professional businesswomen. Normally, when serving banquets, courtesans were only allowed to stand or sit behind the customer who had summoned her to pour wine for him. They were not supposed to eat anything from the table, and this is to show they are professional to entertain their guests. Meanwhile, the novel also shows when courtesans eating in a traditional garden, this rule has been challenged as well as courtesans' professional identity. In the novel, the wealthy gentry, Qi Yunsou, invites people to his big garden Yi

li garden to celebrate *Qixi* 七夕 (Chinese valentines' day). As such, courtesans feel out of place and are unable to follow the rules they would normally use in courtesan houses.

The moment when Zhao Erbao attends her first banquet in the garden, she initially refuses to eat. Another courtesan Yao Wenjun 姚文君 who has been living in the garden for several days, persuades Erbao to eat:

姚文君夾了半祇醉蟹，且剝且喫，且向趙二寶道：「耐勿喫，無啥人來搭耐客氣，晚歇餓來浪。」蘇冠香笑著，執著相讓，夾塊排南，送過趙二寶面前。二寶纔也喫些。(Haishanghua liezhuan 273)

Yao Wenjun pick up half a crab marinated in wine, shell it, and eat it. As she ate, she said to Erbao, “If you don’t eat, nobody will serve you, and you’ll be hungry later on.”

Smiling, Su Guanxiang picked up a piece of pork belly with her own chopsticks and put it before Erbao. Only then did Erbao start eating. (The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai 320)

The reason Yao Wenjun tries to persuade Erbao is because if she does not eat, there will be no food later on—unlike courtesan houses, which can have restaurants deliver food anytime, the garden has no such convenient food service. Meanwhile, Qi Yunsou’s concubine, Su Guanxiang 蘇冠香, also persistently offers food to Erbao. Compared to courtesans and opera singers, concubines were seen as having a higher position; nevertheless, since a concubine has lost her independence as a professional woman,

people have less respect for her.⁴³ It is interesting that Su Guanxiang is continually persuading Erbao to eat, that is to get Erbao to give up the independence that comes with being a professional woman. Erbao eventually begins to eat and transforms herself from a businesswoman into a regular girl through eating.

In Yi li garden, both patrons and courtesans develop different preferences about women's virtues. In courtesan houses, courtesans frequently pretend to be *renjia ren* 人家 (family women) as a way to mask the business nature of their profession. Patrons also frequently play the game with courtesans like they are married couple. However, this is only a game to bring them more business. In courtesan houses, only the *shimao guanren* 時髦倌人 (popular courtesans) have a lot of business. While they visit Yi li garden, Erbao and other courtesans begin to really accept the gender norms as a family woman. They give up the idea of doing more business and begin to dream of finding true love as a family woman and marrying their patrons. In the novel, their transformation begins with the banquets. At the first banquet, some courtesans' behavior is not professional: Yao Wenjun goes to play on a boat in the lake, and Erbao begins to eat. If they are in courtesan houses, behave in this way, they would be criticized by their clients, but no one has negative reaction to them in the garden. For the next meal, the other courtesan sisters Lin Sufen 林素芬 and Lin Cuifen 林翠芬 “並肩連坐” (sat next to each other) and Erbao

⁴³ For example, when Su Guanxiang asks the actress Qi Guan 琪官 to sing at the banquet, Qi Guan does not want to and tries to excuse herself for being sick. Still, Guanxiang insists, and tells her that it is because of Qi Yunsou's order. Qi Guan reluctantly performs the task but looks unhappy. Qi Yunsou, even as the master of the household, expresses regret and apologizes to Qi Guan. As professional women, Qi Guan has the power to refuse Qi Yunsou's call, but in the garden setting Su Guanxiang is expected act as an obedient wife—upholding the Confucian female virtue.

even leaves the banquet because it is too crowded and hot. She goes out to chat with her friend Zhang Xiuying (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 278; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 326). Only some courtesans who are temporarily summoned to the dinner still follow their professional rules: “其餘後叫的局，有肯坐的，留著位置；不肯坐的，亦不相強” (Of the girls who had been summoned later, those who were willing to sit down at the tables had room made for them, while those who wouldn't could please themselves) (326). This scene shows how different spaces shape people's eating behavior.

There are three courtesans who dream of becoming a patron's wife. Except the courtesan Li Shufang 李淑芬, whose patron genuinely wants to marry her, the other two, Zhao Erbao and Zhou Shuangyu 周雙玉, are both led on by their patrons' fake promises while living in Yi li garden, and they both come to believe that they will marry them one day. From Erbao's behavior at the banquets in the garden, we can see how her understanding of her relationship with her patron Shi San 史三 transforms from a businesswomen's perspective to a family women's perspective. At the end of the novel, Erbao refuses to take money from him for serving banquets and promises him that she will not see any other customers. This is because her experience in the garden makes her believe that she can still marry him and be his first wife. She spends a lot of money to prepare her dowry, but Shi San never comes back. He has already married a girl from a respectable family. When Erbao knows the truth, she has already lost everything from her house. Zhang Ailing argues that Erbao and Shi San's time in Yili garden is necessary for the development of their relationship. If they had only stayed in courtesan houses, “她也還是不能完全進入他的世界” (she [Erbao] is not able to completely enter his [Shi

San's] world) ("Guoyu *Haishanghua* yihouji" 171). I agree with Zhang Ailing that for Erbao and Shi San the experience in the garden bridges their cultural differences. Nevertheless, I believe that if they do not go to live in the garden, Shi San can never penetrate Erbao's world, either, because she will not give up her professional attitude as a courtesan to fall in love with him. I argue that Erbao's lifestyle, specifically, the eating practices in the garden, makes her temporarily abandon her identity as a courtesan. She has the illusion that she can choose a different path from her life as an unmarried family girl. The walled garden offers an ostensibly serene literati world without the conflicts between love and business in courtesan houses, as well as the tensions between social classes. When both Erbao and Shi San leave the garden and come to the other side of the wall, they need to face these conflicts again. It was the conditions present in Shanghai during this period that led to Erbao's ambiguous understanding of her position in between the commercialized culture and Confucian feminine virtues.

Xiaojue Wang in "Han's Novel *The Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai* and Urbanity in Late Qing Shanghai" argues that Han places equal significance on the scenes in courtesan houses and the scenes in Yi li garden. She finds that this narrative discrepancy shows how "the old and the new confronted, competed with, and contested the modern" and Han's effort to "reshuffle ambivalent cultural and ethical values in a transitional age in China" (6-7). Based on her observation, I further argue that Han, by describing how the literati culture and the commercial culture interact and integrate with other, shows that he understands modern life as being polyphonic. On the one hand, literati adapted their aesthetic tastes, venturing outside of the gardens to participate in courtesan house banquets. On the other hand, people from lower backgrounds began to attend social

events held in their gardens. This shows how the boundaries between the gardens and houses were becoming less rigid. Liu Bannong 劉半農 in “讀海上花列傳” (reading *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*) criticizes the chapters about life in Yili garden, saying that Han “想把他的理想人物表出” (wants to depicts the ideal figures) and “自己得意的文學作品，插入書中” (the literary works upon which he prides himself for putting into the novel) (171). As a Republican scholar influenced by the May Fourth Movement, he can only see such literati aesthetics as remnants of the past and read Han’s writing about garden life as unrealistic. I hold that the depiction of the literati culture in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* is actually more nuanced. The novel shows the ambiguous moment when the literati culture was reshaping itself to integrate with the rising commercialization. Han’s writing relates to his own experience. Through writing about the coexistence of literati culture and commercialization of courtesan culture, he also mixes his background and as a former literati along with his professional writing career.

2.4 FROM FEMININE VIRTUE TO BUSINESS ETHICS

In *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, both courtesans and their clients agree with the concept that running courtesan houses is a business, and no matter *changsan* or regular prostitutes, both consider themselves to be businesswomen instead of artists. Meanwhile, although Confucian female virtue gradually lost its influence during late Qing Shanghai, the novel also shows how the language and eating rules of courtesan society still preserve the Confucian female virtue such as viewing women as dishes for male clients. In this section, I explore how courtesans negotiate between these contradictory gender norms and use banquet rules to earn the both financial and bodily interest.

There are many rules of banquets that objectify women as food. When courtesans arrived and began to perform, their madam would announce “*shang xiansheng*” 上先生 (serve the courtesan) (Han 20). “*Shang cai*” 上菜 (serving the dish) and “serving the courtesan” share the same verb, which implies that the courtesan is viewed as another course of the meal. In all courtesan houses and regular brothels, a series of elaborate eating rituals and puns that supported the idea of treating women’s bodies as food remained popular. These puns revealed a deep relationship between eating and sex in Shanghai courtesan tradition, where sexual pleasure and the pleasure of eating were mixed together. For clients, these metaphors served as erotic stimuli that objectified women’s bodies as food for men to enjoy, and reinforced feelings of male supremacy. These eating rituals prevented courtesans from enjoying the pleasure of eating, since they themselves were seen as delicate dishes to be enjoyed by male clients.

In the novel, the work ethic liberates women from this traditional role they played as courtesans. They played along with such misconceptions as a means of attracting and retaining more clients. Since their first priority was now ensuring the houses’ viability they had to perform as many banquet-calls as possible. As a result, they found male clients’ perceptions of them as dishes to be a useful tool to maximize their profits. With courtesans now acting as businesswomen, the rituals no longer bind them to the same extent. In fact, they are allowed to bend the rules so long as it brings their houses more money. Thus, when the clients employ sexual puns to joke about and reference courtesan’s bodies in a lewd fashion, courtesans choose to argue back if the client is not paying his due.

For example, the courtesan, Lu Xiubao 陸秀寶, manipulates Zhao Puzhai after he falls in love with her. Zhang Xiaocun, who sits beside them, says to Puzhai: “耐放來啲‘水餃子’勿吃，倒要吃‘饅頭’” (You should pass up the dumplings and go for the buns!)⁴⁴ (*Haishanghua liezhuan 7; The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai 7*). What Xiaocun says was a popular pun used in courtesan houses, which compared women’s bodies to food. Uttering these jokes is part of the banter and interplay between patrons and courtesans. Both Xiaocun and Xiubao are familiar with the pun, so Xiubao tells Puzhai: “耐勳去聽俚，俚來啲尋耐開心哉哩” (Don’t listen to him, he is making fun of you)⁴⁵ (*Haishanghua liezhuan 7; The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai 7*). Since Puzhai does not understand the pun, or its background, he loses Xiubao’s attention as well as his chance to flirt with her. Xiaocun, in saying this pun, suggests that he has had more extensive experience in courtesan houses than Puzhai. For men like Puzhai and Xiaocun, who come from the countryside, having knowledge of the unique courtesan culture in Shanghai shows their cosmopolitan identity as Shanghai residents.

It is interesting that Xiubao denies that she is the object of this metaphor by telling Puzhai that Xiaocun is making fun of him. She glares at Xiaocun and frowns: “耐相好未勿攀，說例會說得野啲” (You won’t get yourself a girl, but when it comes to wagging your tongue, yours tops, right?) (*Haishanghua liezhuan 7; The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai 7*). She points out that Xiaocun’s feeling of superiority over Puzhai is superficial, because he is unwilling to spend the money to get a courtesan. By denying

⁴⁴ Translation is my own.

⁴⁵ Translation is my own.

that her body is a kind of food, she steers the conversation in another direction, and also changes the power relation between the two men: “一句說得張小村沒趣起來，訕訕的起身去看鐘” (This [her words] dampened Zhang Xiaocun’s spirits. He got up sheepishly to look at the clock) (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 7; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 7).

Xiaocun is ashamed because he agrees with Xiubao’s judgement of him. While the eating rituals treated courtesans and food as two equivalent commodities, the courtesans showed their agency as businesswomen by playing along with the eating rituals and using them to their advantage. Financial motivation was the primary factor for a courtesan to determine whether she would react positively or negatively to a sexual pun. This makes Xiubao treat Zhang Xiaocun more severely because Puzhai is the one who pays her, and he has the potential to be her long-term patron.

When courtesans’ work ethic became indicative of their morality, it also became the new gender norms for restricting courtesans’ enjoyment of eating and sex for doing business. However, in the novel the most successful courtesans can both earn money for their houses and free them from the working restrictions. Zhao Erbao is a failed courtesan and at the end of the novel breaks down, both financially and emotionally, because of her romantic fantasies. She really believes that if she behaves as a virtuous woman by refusing to accept the money Shi pays for banquets, he will marry her. This is in stark contrast to Huang Cuifeng 黃翠鳳, the most successful courtesan in the novel, who is always clearly conscious about her identity as a businesswoman and use men’s fantasy of Confucian women virtue to do business. She presents herself as a loyal woman who makes more money off of her client, Luo Zifu 羅子富, by feeding into his fantasies of feminine virtue. Meanwhile, Cuifeng maintains her success by merely playing the role of

a faithful and loving wife. Initially, Luo Zifu is unsatisfied with Huang Cuifeng because when he calls her to the banquet she usually leaves early. However, she cultivates an image of herself as a virtuous woman who would rather die than give in to her wicked madam. Zifu hears the gossip about Cuifeng's attempted suicide in the face of an excessive beating from her madam. Within their social network, her action is interpreted positively. Clients believe her to be a brave woman who refuses to give in to her nefarious and controlling madam. However, in reality, her attempted suicide is staged. This was a common strategy used by courtesans to threaten their madams in the novel. From Cuifeng's story we can see how a very successful courtesan skillfully uses the banquet serving rules to create her image as a hostess in public in order to garner a good reputation and of course money.

The new rules compelled courtesans to service as many banquets as possible in a single night to maximize their houses' revenue. At these banquets, artistic performance was no longer necessary, and many courtesans only made several minutes of small talk before switching to another banquet. The novel shows that these rules offered courtesans more power and mobility. According to Michel de Certeau, tactics indicate the resistance to roles prescribed by existing hierarchies.⁴⁶ In the novel, the experienced courtesans always tactically exploit cultural forms in order to evade the pressure of doing business. In this way, they use their tactics to trick clients in order to balance their financial interests and emotional desires. Since the nature of eating rituals was to protect the economic interest of courtesan houses, when courtesans violated them in order to build

⁴⁶ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980).

the illusion of love for their clients and make more money, their violations are tolerated by the courtesan houses.

For example, Huang Cuifeng resists the idea that she should repress herself in service of this work ethic. After she tricks Luo Zifu into becoming her long-term patron, she continues to date her lover, Qian Zigang 錢子剛; meanwhile, she uses the eating rituals to her own advantage. On the first night, when they establish Huang and Luo's stable relationship, she still goes out because she has been summoned for several banquets, and later she uses the party calls as an excuse to secretly stay with the man she loves, Qian Zigang, who stays in another bedroom next to Zifu's room. Zifu cannot fall asleep because Cuifeng goes out to meet other men, and he could not stop her. If he stops her from seeing other clients, he has to assume all the expenses for her. Even if she agrees, he would not want to spend that much money on prostitution. Also, when Cuifeng goes to Mr. Qian's house to serve a mahjongg party, she stays longer to sleep with him. In this way, Zigang only pays for a mahjongg party, which is much cheaper than paying for sleeping with her. If the house knew they slept together, he would be required to give all the house's servants a generous tip. By bending the rules, Cuifeng is able to enjoy a night of passion with the man she loves and saves him money. Although the madam and maids in the courtesan house know about Cuifeng and Zigang's relationship, they need to think about her long-term business potential. They do not want to directly fight with Cuifeng, because they are afraid, she may use her tactics to harm the house's profit. Therefore, they can only urge her date's departure through other banquet calls.

Many historical documents from the Republican period talk about how courtesans starved themselves despite going to several banquets in one night. Since they were so

focused on adhering to the courtesan rituals and answering as many calls as possible, they were unable to eat for themselves. Han, in this novel, offers a different imagination of this phenomenon—he obviously believes that some courtesans could solve the tension created between their personal and professional concerns and take it as a chance to increase their bodily freedom. No matter literature or those historical documents written by male elites, should not be taken for granted as the real life of courtesans. I quote Gail Hershatter’s point of how to understand the relationship between courtesan’s real lives and historical documents here, and this can also explain my understanding of literature’s position in studying history:

The very rich historical record on prostitution, then, is not spoken in the voice of the prostitute. And the much-sought “voices of prostitutes themselves,” if we could hear them, would not be unmediated, either; their daily lives, struggles, and self-perception were surely constructed in part by these other voices and institutions. It is impossible, then, for even the most assiduous historian to apply the retrieval method of history making, where energetic digging in neglected documents can be made to yield up a formerly inaudible voice. The impossibility of such an enterprise, in fact, calls into question the retrieval model itself. It directs attention to the ways in which all historical records are products of a nexus of relationships that can be only dimly apprehended or guessed at across the enforced distance of time, by historians with their own localized preoccupations. (4)

Although Hershatter discusses historical documents, her point helped me to understand the model of using literature in my own research. Literary works like *The Sing-song Girls*

of Shanghai are also the products of “a nexus of relationships,” and I, from the perspective of eating, explore the gender relations shown in this novel. I cannot come to the conclusion that women increased their agency at the end of nineteenth century based on my reading of this novel, but I can see how a writer as Han stages how newly developed banquets rules make it possible for some women to refuse taking on Confucian female virtues and pursuing their bodily pleasure. I believe this reveals a part of social imaginaries at that time—people began to imagine that women could transgress Confucian gender norms to enjoy bodily pleasure and be successful in the business world.

2.5 A GAME OF LOVE: BUSINESS AND ROMANCE

In this section, I examine how the formal and informal eating activities in courtesan houses make people constantly revise and reinterpret the parameters of their relationships. As I discussed, courtesan houses shared a set of eating rules to guarantee their business such as rules for serving banquets, and tea parties. Besides these formal eating events, courtesans and the other workers also lived in courtesan houses and they needed to eat for themselves. These informal meals had a family-like atmosphere if compared to the formal banquets, and also different gender interactions. The houses erased the boundaries between living and commercial spaces—courtesans lived there, meanwhile it was the space for them to do business. In the novel, the eating practices create a boundary between the patron, courtesan, madam and maid to balance the public-commercial and private-residential needs. Both the formal and informal eating events encourage the dual aspects of courtesans and patrons’ relationships. While they understood their relationships with patrons as a business, they also played the role of a family member and became attached to each other. The art of being a successful

courtesan requires them to learn the skills necessary to balance the business of the house, their personal income, and emotional attachment to romantic relationships. Although this novel reflects many new gender norms that appear with the emergence of banquet culture in courtesan houses, it still continues the previous trend in courtesan literature where authors write people's love and affection towards one another.

Besides banquets and tea parties, courtesans would eat two meals a day; they ate *zhongfan* 中飯 (lunch) in the afternoon and *yefan* 夜飯 (dinner) with their madam at night before they went to serve banquets. When eating these two meals, courtesans and their madams usually ate together. Although they eat together as mother and daughter, they do not follow the Confucian eating rituals between family members, such as elderly people having better food, eating first, or having more respectful seating. When courtesans and their madams eat together, they have a more equal relationship like business partners who cooperated closely with each other. In the novel, these eating practices helped courtesans and their madams foster an emotional bond and shared sense of belonging to the house. Here, Huang Cuifeng, the most ruthless courtesan in the novel, gives a lot of advice to her madam Huang Erjie 黃二姐 about how to run her house successfully in the future so that Erjie could have a good life. Although Huang Erjie had severely beaten Cuifeng before, and fought with Cuifeng over money, they still have some emotional bonds besides their business relationship.

During informal eating experiences, courtesans and patrons could have more freedom to become more attached to one another. Courtesans were forbidden from eating with clients at formal banquets, but if a client was to become her patron, they could eat together outside of formal banquets. During these informal meals, patrons and courtesans

played the roles of husbands and wives, and the madam and maids played their family members. This family role play was another part of their professional performance, and courtesan houses served as the couple's "home" by offering both food and sex. This role play offered men the pleasure of living in a women's boudoir, so they were willing to pay more money to become a courtesan's patron. In the novel, when Luo Zifu, agrees to be Huang Cuifeng's patron he stays in her house overnight, and the next morning they eat together for the first time. In Cuifeng's bedroom, she accompanies Zifu to eat lunch as if she were his wife. Huang Jinfeng 黃金鳳, the younger courtesan in the same house, calls Zifu *jiefu* 姐夫 (brother-in-law) and comes to accompany him too. The madam Erjie plays the role of the mother, who "幫著讓菜" (invites him to eat various dishes)⁴⁷ and then leaves to give the young couple enough space to eat alone (63). When serving food, Huang Erjie emphasizes to Zifu that the food is homemade, and Zifu admires the food as: "自家燒， 倒比廚子好" (Home cooking is always better than restaurant food) (*Haishanghua liezhuan* 54; *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 63). How he admires the home-made food suggests his appreciation of the intimate family-like atmosphere. On the one hand, the preservation of a family atmosphere in courtesan houses satisfied customers' cultural affinities. Besides enjoying courtesans' professional services at banquets with their male friends, patrons could also enjoy the pleasure of living in a feminine world. The taste of homemade food was also a way to entice clients to spend more.

⁴⁷ Translation is my own. I disagree with the English translation "helps serve him."

When comparing these eating scenes to Wang Tao's writing of his life with Liao Baoer in the 1860s, we can see that Wang Tao lives with Baoer herself in her house, but in the novel, the patron faces a business unit, in which everyone has a clear responsibility to provide a service. The family atmosphere is not only provided by courtesans, but also other workers who play the roles of family members in the house. The business unit of the courtesan house keeps interfering with the romantic relationships between courtesans and patrons. As a result, patrons are not only attached to their courtesans, but the courtesan house as a whole. Therefore, the patron and courtesan need to negotiate not only between their own business and emotion, but also the house's business interests and their feelings both towards the house and to each other. From the novel's most touching story between Wang Liansheng 王蓮生 and Shen Xiaohong 沈小紅, we can see how the sense of loss is not only towards a romantic relationship, but also towards the loss of a family unit when their romantic relationship ends.

In Liansheng and Xiaohong's story, eating is one of their most significant bonds, and it makes the boundary between true love and imaginary romance more ambiguous. Their different meals together show how strongly they maintain their fragile love fantasy in both public banquets and private encounters. Once, Liansheng goes to visit Xiaohong after he stays with his new regular girl for three days. Xiaohong and the two maids in the house all argue about his prolonged disappearance, and finally Xiaohong and Liansheng are alone. In order to comfort Xiaohong, Liansheng asks the servant to order fried noodles with shrimp from Garden of Plenty for him, but actually it is a dish Xiaohong likes. When the dish is delivered, Xiaohong frowns and says:

“勿曉得為啥，厭酸得來，吃勿落。”蓮生道：“價末多少吃點。”小紅沒法，用小碟檢幾根來吃了，放下。蓮生也吃不多幾筷，即叫收下去。(Haishanghua liezhuan 28)

“I don't know why, but there's a sour taste in my mouth. I've got no appetite.”

[Liansheng replies,] “Have a little anyway.”

Reluctantly, she put a tiny amount on a small plate and ate it.

Liansheng, too, did not eat more than a few mouthfuls before he called to have the dish taken away. (*The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 32)

While eating together alone, Liansheng and Xiaohong stop acting in their own self-interest to enjoy their shared emotional bond. By ordering, Liansheng shows how much he knows about Xiaohong's eating habits and reminds her of just how many intimate moments they have shared. For Xiaohong, since she is still depending on him to cover all of the house's expenses, she is disturbed by his disappearance. Meanwhile, the fact that she cannot eat anything shows a deeper emotional reaction to Liansheng's potential betrayal. During this moment, their relationship goes beyond a simple business discussion.

Xiaohong has to constantly negotiate between her own feelings and the house's financial needs through eating. When Liansheng finds out that Xiaohong has been having an affair with an actor—and that she was sleeping with him, not for money, but for her own pleasure—Liansheng beats her and ends their relationship. When Xiaohong learns that Liansheng will marry another courtesan, Zhang Huizhen 张惠贞, she becomes very upset. During their relationship, Xiaohong had refused Liansheng's proposals many

times, but never expected him to leave her; in fact, she had always believed he would remain her long-term patron. However, upon being summoned to a banquet celebrating Liansheng and Huizhen's wedding, she must attend:

這日初九，小紅氣的病了。不料敲過十二點鐘，來安送張局票，來叫小紅。叫至公館裏，說是酒局。阿珠叫住來安要問閒話，來安推說無工夫，急急跑去。小紅聽說叫局，又不敢不去，硬撐著起身梳洗，吃些點心，才去出局。(Haishanghua liezhuan 242)

The next day was the ninth. Xiaohong had fallen ill from pent-up anger. Unexpectedly, after the clock had struck noon, Talisman delivered a call chit summoning her to Huizhen's residence. He said it was a drinking party. Azhu tried to detain him to find out more, but he rushed off on the excuse that he was busy. Since it was a party call, Xiaohong dared not turn it down. She forced herself to get up and do her toilet and then had a little breakfast before she went to the party. (*The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 283)

Courtesans were required to answer each and every banquet call. If the courtesan was sick, or had to miss the banquet for any reason, she needed to ask another courtesan from the same house to go in her stead. If the house only had one courtesan, then she had to go regardless of her health or personal affairs. Xiaohong is known for her fierceness, and she frequently lashes out at Liansheng. However, in this circumstance, she dares not turn down the party call. Since Liansheng is her only long-term patron, she feels pressure to maintain his support; otherwise, the house will lose money and the servants will not earn enough dividends. Another source of pressure is that party guests would consider her

refusal to be unprofessional, despite her history with Liansheng. Throughout the banquet, the eating rituals are closely followed to ensure that Xiaohong's actions are strictly for business purposes. Here, the party call functions as a rule to maintain the transactional nature of a courtesan's relation to her client—surmounting her own emotions. Based on her interpretation of her actions and their consequences, she decides that she has no choice but to attend the banquet. By privileging the business demands of the courtesan business over their personal feelings, the author further cultivates their image as businesswomen. Later, she is repeatedly summoned by Liansheng for banquets after Liansheng marries Huizhen. At these banquets, both of them are able to put aside their complicated emotional conflicts and calmly perform their respective roles as courtesan and patron, and refrain from seeing each other in any informal situations. As such, their business relationship supersedes their emotional bond since Liansheng needs a courtesan to accompany him to banquets and Xiaohong needs the income to cover her expenses and sustain the house. Despite the intrigue surrounding Liansheng and Xiaohong's relationship, other courtesans, clients and servants remain unphased by the new parameters of their relationship.

After they break up, Xiaohong has been forced to move to a smaller place without a maiden after she loses Liansheng's financial support. When Xiaohong's maid Ah Zhu, who now works in this house, serves Liansheng during a tea party, Liansheng suddenly cries for his feelings of loss. This is one of the novel's most touching scenes:

阿珠裝好一口煙，蓮生吸到嘴裏，吸著槍中煙油，慌的爬起，吐在榻前痰盂內。阿珠忙將煙槍去打通條，雙玉遠遠地坐著，望巧因丟個眼色。巧因即向梳妝臺抽屜裏面取出一祇玻璃缸，內盛半缸山楂

脯，請王老爺、洪老爺用點。蓮生忽然感觸太息。阿珠通好煙槍，替蓮生把火，一面問道：「難小紅先生搭就是個娘來裏跟局？」蓮生點點頭。阿珠道：「價末大阿金出來仔，大姐也勿用？」蓮生又點點頭。阿珠道：「說要搬到小房子裏去哉呀，阿有價事？」蓮生說：「勿曉得。」

阿珠祇裝得兩口煙，蓮生便不吸了，忽然盤膝坐起，意思要吸水煙。巧囡送上水煙筒，蓮生接在手中，自吸一口，無端吊下兩點眼淚。阿珠不好根問。雙珠、雙玉面面相覷，也自默然。房內靜悄悄地，但聞四壁廂促織兒「唧唧」之聲，聒耳得緊。(Haishanghua liezhuan 412)

Ah Zhu placed the pellet in the pipe. When he started smoking, Liansheng sucked in the leftover opium gunk in the pipe. Scrambling up in a panic, he spat into the spittoon by the divan. Ah Zhu immediately took the pipe and cleaned it with a metal borer. Shuangyu, seated at a distance, signaled Qiaonan with her eyes, and Qiaonan took a large covered glass jar from a dressing table drawer. It contained crabapple preserves, which she offered to Mr. Wang and Mr. Hong. Something stirred in Liansheng's memory, and he sighed.

Having cleared out the pipe, Ah Zhu held it over the opium lamp for Liansheng to smoke, asking, "Is it true that at Maestro Xiaohong's, there's just her mother waiting on her at parties?"

Liansheng nodded.

“Not even a servant girl then, after Ah Jin left?”

Liansheng nodded again.

“It’s said she’ll be moving to a hideaway is that true?”

“I don’t know,” Liansheng said.

Ah Zhu had only filled the pipe for him twice when he had had enough. He sat up cross-legged, indicating he wanted the water pipe. Qiaonan fetched it. As he smoked, two teardrops ran down his face. Ah Zhu could not very well inquire into the matter. Shuangzhu and Shuangyu looked at each other in silence. It was so quiet in the room, all they heard were the crickets chirping. (*The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* 468)

This scene echoes the night Xiaohong and Liansheng ate fried noodles together. I argue that this moment shows Liansheng’s devastation and frustration in his romantic relationship with Xiaohong. Moreover, he shows even more complex feelings towards her house and the past they shared together in that house. As Xiaohong’s only patron for years, he helped her to set up a courtesan house—bought all the furniture, decorated the house, and bought all the expensive jewelry to make her become one of the most fashionable courtesans. After more than four years, with her, her family, and the maids, he also created a home for himself. When he knows that the maid, Ah Zhu, left Xiaohong, and sees her serving him in another courtesan’s house, it connects him with the previous memories in Xiaohong’s house, and also displays to him how impoverished Xiaohong is now. When Xiaohong is forced to leave that house because of him, he also loses his feelings of belonging to that home, and he and denies his own past.

When he accidentally ingests the opium, Ah Zhu immediately takes care of him. Meanwhile, the courtesan he visits, Shuangyu, “sits at a distance” and lets her maid Qiaonan offer him crabapple preserves after he ingests the opium. Shuangyu’s aloof and polite attitude is in contrast to Xiaohong’s fierce but intimate demeanor. Shuangyu will never scold or even beat him, because Shuangyu never had the deep attachment to him that he and Xiaohong share. With this deep understanding and attachment, Xiaohong does not worry about him abandoning her, but Shuangyu knows if she behaves badly, he will not summon her. Therefore, Liansheng suddenly “感觸太息” (sighed). Not only does Liansheng recall the memory in Xiaohong’s house, Ah Zhu does as well, since she suddenly asks about Xiaohong. The ingestion makes him become physical uncomfortable, and the scene and the conversation with Ah Zhu triggering a profound sense of loss in him. Thus, he cries. In the room, the courtesans Shuangyu and Shuangzhu “面面相覷” (look at each other in silence) because they do not understand him. Only Ah Zhu knows the reason why he cries, but she “不好根問” (could not very well inquire into the matter). This scene shows that the banquet culture, which requires maids and servants to also participate in patrons and courtesans’ romantic relationships, makes patrons attached not only to their courtesans, but to the house as a whole. Like Liansheng and Xiaohong, even if they both are not completely genuine, they have nevertheless formed an attachment to one another and their house. It is a business, but there is also real emotion behind their role play.

In *Fin-de-Siecle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (1997), David Der-wei Wang argues that in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, Han “showed that the most ambitious of all desires is the passionate pursuit of virtue, or

desire's self-denial" (92). Here, desire refers to "attempting to obtain what one does not have or yearning to be what one is not. And by virtue, he means "a sanctioned system of behavioral and conceptual norms that constrains desire within a given sociocultural closure" (92). He uses Xiaohong's example where she "seems to play the contradictory roles of adulterous mistress and jealous wife at the same time, Wang [Liansheng], in his turn, has unwittingly assumed the double part of cuckold and unfaithful husband" (94). He asked the question: "Is it love that makes both Wang and Shen behave so improperly? Or are their actions moves in a risky romantic game to which each party is a willing player?" (94). I agree with him that there are contradictions within Liansheng and Xiaohong's relationship; however, I do not think that their relationship should just be thought of as a romance or a love illusion. There is also the sense of belonging to the house, and the attachment they share after years of living together. The relationships between courtesans and patrons are never just that between two individuals—the people in the house participate as well. By describing the family atmosphere and the dual aspects of romantic relationships through eating practices in courtesan houses, the novel shows the complexities of courtesan life. Therefore, it is not Xiaohong's own desire that makes her want to be an "adulterous mistress and jealous wife" at the same time, but the virtues of the courtesan business that encourages her to live as an insatiable courtesan and a wife in the house at the same time. I disagree with David Der-wei Wang—not only were courtesans supposed to "fake virtues and [indulge] desires," but so were the customers and the servants. They all needed to strike a balance between their emotional needs and their business calculations. Even if the role-play is fake, the sentiments behind it may be real.

Samuel Y. Liang⁴⁸ holds that courtesan houses “merely masked their commercial nature, and a different set of gender roles, in which the courtesan challenged normative understandings of male and female” (377). This view simplifies the realities people faced. Based on my reading of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, there is space for *qing* 情 (sentiment) in courtesan business that happens through everyday eating. I believe the reason that *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* is a great literary work is because Han writes about people’s emotion in their business relationships but refrains from giving their actions a unified logic. Han exhibits much restraint in his writing and “[presents] an apparently transparent lens that neither adds to nor subtracts from the events that unfold” (Forges 83). Because of this restrained realistic writing style, Han avoids the stereotype of traditional *caizi jiaren* 才子佳人 (talented scholar and beautiful lady) writing style, or the latter on *heimu xiaoshuo* 黑幕小說 (scandal fiction) that only intended to reveal the dark side of the business culture. Instead, *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, depicted the complexities of quotidian life and the ambiguities of human existence. Zhang Ailing believes that the “極度經濟” (extreme restrained) writing style is the peak of the traditional Chinese novel (“Yi Hu Shizhi” 154). It shows “日常生活的況味” (the taste of quotidian life) and makes this novel “在時代與民族之外，完全是現代的，世界性的” (transcend the specific historical time and national traditions to thoroughly modern and international) (“Yi Hu Shizhi” 154). In this sense, we can understand the reason why the

⁴⁸ See his article, “Ephemeral Households, Marvelous Things: Business, Gender, and Material Culture in *Flowers of Shanghai*.”

May Forth writers such as Lu Xun 鲁迅 and Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) gave the novel high praise.

2.6 CONCLUSION

In *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, courtesan houses are convenient for surgeons, like Han, because the houses provided them with a temporary home where they could find food, shelter, and sexual gratification all while building business connections with other clients. Eating practices offer high and low-class members of Shanghai the chance to get together and allow them to build social networks. In this community, people admire the ability of spending money in a skillful way—at just the right time, with the right amount, and in a proper manner to look good in front of courtesans and other clients—this is a new standard, which replaced the artistic talent to judge people. This new courtesan culture centering on money, reputation, and taste shown in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* can also be seen in the later courtesan literature such as *Jiuwei gui* 九尾龜 (The nine-tailed turtle) (1910). These literary works show the transformation in courtesan society from a literati culture to an urban bourgeois culture. These changes in writing and social networking were precipitated by transformations in banquet eating rules, which created the conditions necessary for people to understand their social standing in a new way.

In the novel, the repeated dining scenes introduced hundreds of parallel stories of ordinary people for which the standard eating rituals provided an internal unity. In the preface of *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, Han refers to this narrative form as *chuancha zhi fa* 穿插之法 (fragmented narrative method) and claims that he has discovered a new way to write novels:

惟穿插、藏問之法，則為從來說部所未有。一波未平，一波又起，或竟接連起十餘波，忽東忽西，忽南忽北，隨手敘來並無一事完，全部並無一絲掛漏；閱之覺其背面無文字處尚有許多文字，雖未明明敘出，而可以意會得之：此穿插之法也。(Haishanghua liezhuan 2)

Only the method of interspersed and hidden questions is unprecedented in previous novels. After a wave of unrest, a wave of ups and downs, or even more than ten waves in succession, suddenly east and west, suddenly south and north, casually tells the story but nothing is finished, and no information is left. When people read, they will be able to tell that there are still many words that remain unsaid. Although they are not clearly stated, they still can be understood: This is the method of interspersion.⁴⁹

In defining his new style, Han uses the term “*bo* 波 (wave)” to describe the multiple narrative climaxes in the novel, each of which includes a different group of people with their own particular story line. Despite being entirely separate, Han considers them to be connected. He writes, “after a wave of unrest, a wave of ups and downs, or even more than ten waves in succession, suddenly east and west, suddenly north and south.” By discussing eating and gender in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, I have provided the social and cultural context of this narrative innovation. A convergence of different social classes within courtesan community in the concessions’ urban infrastructure created the

⁴⁹ The translation is my own.

conditions necessary for Han's literary advances. The short tea parties and simultaneous banquets facilitated the novel's fragmented nature. Courtesans and patrons alike were also accompanied by servants and maids since they moved through the city so frequently to meet different groups. This allowed for changes in people's perceptions of time as it pertained to courtesan life—from a linear arc to momentary lapses, like the waves Han describes. With so many interlocking stories, the novel becomes an amalgamation of fragmentary moments, which follow the short, independent conversations taking place at banquets. Han developed this narrative strategy in the novel to depict the increased fragmentation of modern life and culture.

Moreover, the novel shows that gender relations have indeed undergone have shifted and repackaged themselves according to the newly formed commercialized eating culture in Shanghai courtesan houses. Men not only accept courtesans as businesswomen, but also admire those who have the ability to be successful in this business. The pleasure male clients derived from their courtesans is not diminished by this fact; however, they could not bear to see these women take pleasure from a genuine romantic relationship with another man. Han also portrays how courtesans' business savvy liberates them from the confines of traditional perceptions of feminine virtue. While men no longer see courtesans as aesthetic decorations and respect them as professional businesswomen, this allows courtesans to partially escape the restrictions of Confucian female virtues, and makes people begin to accept and recognize women as free and autonomous subjects. However, courtesans now find themselves beholden to the new restriction as businesswomen. The tension between people's bodily pleasure, emotion, and business interests, requires them to calculate love as if they are counting money. I also believe that

the novel shows a new conception of gender through these changes in people's gender relations. As was introduced previously, *shuyu* (storytellers' residences), as female artists enjoyed the title "*xiansheng*," which usually refers to the respectful and knowledgeable male. When *changsan* (always three) replaced *shuyu*, they also inherited the title "*xiansheng*." The novel shows how courtesans live like businesswomen, and this enlarged the meaning of *xiansheng* to encompass not only the women with artistic talent, but professional businesswomen. Here, the novel demonstrates a more fluid understanding of gender that relates masculinity with business savvy during the late Qing period. In turn, these changing norms about gender and gender relations formed a crucial part of the social imaginary of modern Shanghai.

As David Der-wei Wang points out, *The Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai* shows a different possibility to read the beginning of Chinese modern literature. This writing style abandons the linear narratives typically found in *caizi jiaren* 才子佳人 (scholar-beauty) novels. Meanwhile, it inherited the tradition of Chinese realism to write about affection by depicting the material details, such as food and eating, of everyday life. By examining this novel through food studies and gender studies, I believe it gives us a view of the courtesan culture during the late Qing period—a view that goes beyond standard intellectual histories to focus on the transformations in everyday life how people reshaped their understandings of gender and selfhood.

CHAPTER 3

THE GLUTTONOUS DEVIANTS IN *RICKSHAW BOY*

If eating is a heavenly pattern, eating gourmet is human desire.

-Zhu Xi *Zhu Zi yu lei*

The influential Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹(1130–1200) from the Song dynasty distinguishes eating from the pleasure of eating gourmet food. In this way, he exemplifies the difference between heavenly patterns and human desire—with the latter needing to be controlled (224). He thus advocates for self-cultivation to elicit one’s original good nature. This self-cultivation is an important aspect of Confucianism and it combined with the Daoist concept of *yin/yang* and traditional Chinese medicine⁵⁰ to not only restrict peoples’ appetites, but also harshly restrict women from defining themselves and taking control of their own bodies. This thought was not only shared by scholars and elites but was influential in ordinary people’s everyday eating practices as common knowledge and everyday language.

In this chapter, I focus on Lao She 老舍⁵¹ (1899–1966), one of the most influential modern Chinese writers, and his novel *Luotuo xiangzi* 駱駝祥子 (Rickshaw

⁵⁰ As I mentioned in the Introduction, this is an important aspect of *yangsheng* 養生 (nourishing life), which entailed abstinence from bodily pleasure. *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (The yellow emperor’s inner canon) (dates uncertain) introduces a regimen that includes eating in moderation and governing sexual pleasure in every aspect of daily life (1–2).

⁵¹ Lao She was his penname, his given name was Shu Qingchun 舒慶春.

boy) (1937) to examine how the gendered restriction of eating in traditional Chinese culture is repackaged in a modern Chinese novel. Lao She was born during the late Qing in a Manchu family. He experienced the collapse of the Qing government (1644–1912), the Republican period and was also active after 1949. He had also studied Confucian classics at young age, and then went to teach and study in British and American universities (*Lao She zizhuan* 33 and 212). Lao She himself was under the influence of both Chinese traditional culture and western culture. In *Rickshaw Boy*, he also separates eating from the pleasure of eating, and relates it with traditional Confucian virtues, especially women's virtues. Meanwhile, in his novel *Rickshaw Boy*, regulating the pleasure of eating also serves as a way to adhere to the capitalist work ethic. Moreover, Lao She turns to western medicine to support the dangers of over-eating for women's bodies.

By studying the pleasure of eating in Lao She's works, I attempt to explore how the gendered bias towards people's bodies in traditional Chinese culture repackaged itself in the modern literary works, and how the gluttonous women who indulged in the pleasure of eating were regulated under both virtues prescribed to Chinese women and western ideology and knowledge. By referring to the pleasure of eating, I mean the pleasure that is taken from desiring, consuming and digesting food. I believe that Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy* shows the intersection of various discourses to control and discipline people's bodily pleasure. These capitalist and Confucian discourses, which instruct people to continually examine their bodies and daily eating regimens in order to maintain physical and moral health, appeared in the Republican period and continued to hold influence and evolve through the Cultural Revolution to the 1980s and in contemporary

China. I believe that the pleasure of eating, in this novel, becomes a point of intense discussion and a defining aspect of morality and subjectivity. The quotidian effects of these discursive evolutions are twofold: while they can cause gender roles to shift and become more fluid, they often work to perpetuate those of the previous era. The pleasure of eating both undermines and becomes part of gender norms. Literature, specifically the canonical literary works of one of the greatest modern Chinese authors, both shows how the discursive production of the pleasure of eating came to define gender relations in Republican China, and also participated in this discursive production.

Rickshaw Boy tells the story of the young man Xiangzi 祥子, who moves to the city Beiping⁵² from countryside, and becomes a rickshaw puller in the city. He works hard, constantly checking, resisting and struggling against his desire for bodily pleasure to save money in order to buy his own rickshaw. However, his newly acquired rickshaw is confiscated by soldiers, and then a police spy extorts all the money he was saving. Without money or hope, he surrenders to the rickshaw shed owner's daughter Huniu 虎妞, who seduces and threatens Xiangzi to marry her. During their marriage, Huniu keeps providing good food for him and hopes that he can stop pulling a rickshaw and start lending rickshaws for a living. However, Xiangzi insists on being a rickshaw puller. Later, Huniu dies, after giving birth, due to over-eating. After she dies, Xiangzi meets several women who are similar to Huniu, and gradually he abandons his determination to be an independent rickshaw puller. At the end of the novel, he degenerates into a beggar in the city. *Rickshaw Boy* combines expectations of prudence placed upon women, fluid

⁵² This refers to present-day Beijing 北京, which at the time was called Beiping 北平.

definitions of “masculine” and “feminine,” regulation of the pleasure of eating and sex, maintenance of the daily regimen, and a capitalist work ethic; all of which allows for the intersection of Confucian, medical and capitalist discourses in Lao She’s characterization of these deviant women.

This novel was first serialized in the magazine *Yuzhou feng* 宇宙風 (Cosmic wind), one year before the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), and five years after Japan’s invasion of Manchuria 滿洲. At that time, the global economic depression hit China. In China, “Capital was scarce, interest rates were up, urban workers unemployed, governments had problems collecting revenues” (Fairbank 9). Lao She, like his contemporaries, attempted to provide a solution to the social and economic crisis in his works. In *Rickshaw Boy*, he suggests that poor people could not survive by struggling alone, so they should work together to succeed. However, even though the urban poor, like Xiangzi, ally to change the society, they will not truly free their bodies⁵³, because their struggle is based on the repression of bodily pleasure by work. Compared to *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, Lao She’s novel problematizes the pleasure of eating so that it becomes the object of moral solicitude, rather than appreciating the aesthetic sentiment in eating practices. This reveals a shift in literary writing and reveals changes in social imaginaries.

⁵³ In an essay titled “*Li youren shu*” 勵友人書 (A letter to encourage friends) published on *She bao* 申報 (Shanghai News) in 1933, Lao She satirizes people who care about their bodily pleasure like eating and sexuality more than the fall of the nation. It shows that he consciously believes that the enjoyment of bodily pleasure is not proper in a time of national crisis.

I attempt to study *Rickshaw Boy* by contextualizing my reading of this novel within Lao She's larger oeuvre, especially his works about his life including several essays and two autobiographies. In the first section, I read Lao She's autobiographical works to explore how eating functions in the formation and development of his views on gender. I also explore a group of female characters in several of his novels who share similar characteristics with Huniu by indulging in bodily pleasure via eating. I believe that gender relations and the pleasure of eating are related to each other in Lao She's works. This originates from his childhood experiences and his attitudes towards his mother and his aunt. In the second section, I focus on how Xiangzi in *Rickshaw Boy* forms his ethical subjectivity through restricting himself from enjoying the pleasure of eating, and how the self-regulation of his body intersects with capitalist doctrine. In the third section, I explore the relationship between Huniu and Xiangzi and their different attitudes towards the pleasure of eating. In this way, I seek to investigate how Confucian women's virtues repackaged themselves within capitalist and western medical discourses to regulate women's bodies. I also see a fluid understanding towards gender in social imaginaries of the 1930s through Lao She's portrayal of Huniu. This is most prominent in the representation of deviant, gluttonous women who take on masculine traits to reverse and muddle gender binaries. I believe this modern view of gender enables this work to create a new deviant female character in modern Chinese literature.

The reason why I read *Rickshaw Boy* in this way is because I believe the intertextuality of Lao She's works can provide a more accurate understanding of how he forms and modifies his views about eating, gender and ethics. I agree with Roland Barthes' argument in "The Death of the Author," which warns against using authors'

intentions to understand their works. Indeed, the rich meaning of *Rickshaw Boy* goes beyond Lao She's authorial intent. However, I do see inter-textuality between *Rickshaw Boy* and Lao She's autobiography and other works. Here, I am not interested in Lao She's life, but in how he interpreted his life. I believe his interpretation provided a possible window to see how people imagined gender and eating in Republican China.

3.1 "GOOD WOMEN" AND "BAD WOMEN"

In this section, I explore Lao She's autobiographical works to discuss how he viewed several important female relatives from his childhood, and in his interpretation of these life experiences, how he relates his own views on gender to the pleasure of eating. In this way, I hope to contextualize my reading of *Rickshaw Boy*, not only as a novel, but as a work that represents the author's understanding of gender and gender relations.

In Lao She's essay "Wo de muqin" 我的母親 (My mother) (1943), he idealizes his mother, a housewife in a poor Manchu family as "*qinjian chengshi*" 勤儉誠實 (hardworking, thrifty, and honest) (326). Lao She describes how his mother brought him up after Lao She's father, a guardian for the Forbidden City, died during the Eight-Nation Alliance's invasion of Beijing when he was one year old ("Wo de muqin" 328). After his father's death, the family lost its only income, his mother began to wash and sew clothes for a living ("Wo de muqin" 327). Meanwhile, she does all the housework and maintains a clean and orderly household ("Wo de muqin" 327). In this essay, Lao She shows his deep love and attachment towards his mother. In his autobiographical novel "Zhenghongqi xia" 正紅旗下 (Beneath the red banner) (1961–1962; unfinished), Lao She offers more details to imagine his childhood life. In the narrator's poor family, food always causes anxiety within the family. They, especially the mother, carry through the

difficulties by skillfully living in a frugal way. For example, every month, when she gets their income, she sits on the bed to calculate every *tongqian* 铜钱 (copper coin) to pay back their debts and still cover their living expenses (“Zhenghongqi xia” 467–469).

In these works, Lao She relates women’s virtues with self-sacrifice for their families. Meanwhile, he attaches moral meaning to the frugal lifestyle, for not only women, but men as well. In this works, people’s bodies should be used for working, and this is not only for them to survive but also a way to live in an ethical way. His mother’s influence on him is not only revealed in his personality and lifestyle as he claims in his autobiography but is also reflected in his fiction. In *Rickshaw Boy*, there is a scene where Xiangzi repeatedly counts his coins one by one on his bed as he dreams of buying a rickshaw (*Luotuo xiangzi* 308). Like Lao She’s mother, Xiangzi leads a frugal life and represses his appetite as his ethic. Also, in the novel, *Xiao Fuzi* 小福子, the woman Xiangzi loves, diligently does all the housework for her father and younger brothers and, in order to feed the family, she sacrifices herself. The novel and the autobiographies interact each other to reveal Lao She’s understanding of gender, bodies, and eating.

In a comparison with the virtuous women in Lao She’s memory, there is a woman from his childhood who he detests—his aunt. In his aversion towards this aunt, the pleasure of eating plays an important role. She has a bad temper, is lazy, and loves eating delicious food (“Zhenghongqi xia” 452). Impoverished, this aunt lives in Lao She’s family home for free, while collecting her dead husband’s pension. For her, the body is not for working, but for enjoying pleasure. She treats Lao She’s mother as her maid because as the elder sister-in-law, she claims that according to Confucian patriarchy, the younger sister should obey the older one (“Wo de muqin” 327; “Zhenghongqi xia” 448).

This aunt, with her money and her gluttony, is the famous rich woman in the alley where they live (“Zhenghongqi xia” 452). In Lao She’s interpretation, enjoying the pleasure of eating, opposed to living a frugal lifestyle with unnecessary delicious food, is immoral. Meanwhile, she does not care how people look at her, or maintain a moral self-image, but comfortably takes advantage of others for her own bodily pleasure, is also the reason why Lao She detests her. In Lao She’s works, this aunt and her mother, set up a binary comparison, which reveals Lao She’s conception of women’s virtues. His mother, who became a widow when Lao She was one year old, diligently worked and frugally managed the household to support her four children and sister-in-law; while Lao She’s aunt took advantage of his mother’s sacrifice—secretly buying herself gourmet food for her own enjoyment.

Women who enjoy bodily pleasure can be found in many of Lao She’s works. In *Rickshaw Boy*, Huniu is a such a female character, who is similar to Lao She’s aunt as she keeps buying delicious snacks that their neighbors cannot afford and lives as the richest woman in the alley. Also, Huniu manipulates her neighbor Xiao Fuzi to do housework for her, because she does not want to tire her body. In all of Lao She’s works, Huniu is definitely the most extreme example of these gluttonous women—she even dies of over-eating. Others include the Second Mama *Er nainai* 二奶奶, who drinks heavily and abuses her daughter-in-law in *Gushu yiren* 鼓書藝人 (*The Drum Singer*), and Caizhu 彩珠 who spends all her frugal husband’s money on her own pleasure in “*Yifeng jiaxin*” — 封家信 (One family letter). In these works, Lao She repeatedly shows a harsh attitude towards these women who enjoy bodily desire, especially the pleasure they derive from

eating. This morality is not only applied to women, but to male characters as well, in his writing, he has a harsher attitude towards these gluttonous women.

By reading these works about Lao She's own life, I attempt to contextualize my reading of *Rickshaw Boy* in both Lao She's life span, and all of his works. I believe these works speak to one another and contextualize Lao She's standard of judging "good women" and "bad women." I believe *Rickshaw Boy* contains Lao She's views on gender and shows how these views relate to his ambiguous understanding of capitalist development in Chinese society during the Republican period. In this context, people are not only judged by Confucian virtues, but also by capitalist work ethics. This is especially true of women because when capitalist society offers them more freedom from Confucian repression, the modern scientific knowledge serves as a new form of knowledge production to discipline their appetites and sexual desire even more harshly.

3.2 FOOD AND WORK ETHIC FOR A RICKSHAW PULLER

In this section, I begin to explore *Rickshaw Boy*. I believe, how Xiangzi restricts himself from enjoying the pleasure of eating is not for his dream of buying a rickshaw, but for his moral judgement towards himself. Fasting is a way for him to construct his masculinity, and within the novel's capitalist society Lao She defines fasting as being related to the capitalist work ethic. I believe Lao She projects his admiration of hard work and frugality onto Xiangzi, and this shows how the morals to restrict the body in Chinese tradition find its new way to regulate people's bodies in a modern literary work.

Fredric Jameson in "Literary Innovation and Modes of Production: A Commentary" points out that the conflict between the Xiangzi's pre-modern fetish about rickshaws with the rationality of capitalism, which instructs one to pursue maximum

profit in modern times. Jameson believes that this novel superimposes two distinct narrative paradigms: the outer form of the novel is about the pursuit of money of the first stage of capitalism; while the inner narrative form of the novel is a pre-modern dominant style, revealed in Xiangzi's passion for an object like the rickshaw (67). Different from the works of the realist novelists like Balzac and Dickens, as well as the naturalist novelist Zola, Xiangzi merely desires to be good rickshaw puller but lacks interest in the possibility of becoming a rickshaw manager to earn more money. Jameson reads Xiangzi's contradictory attitude towards money as a consequence of his "pre-capitalist view of money as hoard or treasure," a view is far from the accumulation of financial capital (69). I agree with Jameson's observation, and furthermore I believe that Xiangzi saving money to buy the rickshaw is also morally necessary for him to restrict his body and work hard. From reading Lao She's autobiography, as I discussed in last section, I argue that Lao She projects his Confucian pre-modern fetish about labor and frugally onto Xiangzi, and these moral values conflict with the setting of a capitalist society. I believe that the conflicts between two narrative paradigms show how Lao She, a modern writer who received both Confucianist education and western influence, negotiated between these two different ideologies.

In the novel, Lao She sets up Beiping as a major site of capitalist enterprise in China where the economy is placed at the center of people's lives.⁵⁴ Here, he shows that even house maids begin to loan money to the poor with a high interest rate:

⁵⁴ This is not to say that Chinese society was completely capitalist; however, Lao She was influenced by capitalist discourses, which leads him to portray Beiping as being capitalist.

資本有大小，主義是一樣，因為這是資本主義的社會，像一個極細極大的篩子，一點一點的從上面往下篩錢，越往下錢越少；同時，也往下篩主義，可是上下一邊兒多，因為主義不像錢那樣怕篩眼小，它是無形體的，隨便由什麼極小的孔中也能溜下來。(Luotuo Xiangzi 293)

The amount could be great, it could be small, but the doctrine did not vary, because they lived in a capitalist society. It was like pouring money into a big sieve with tiny holes: as the money sifts down, little by little, less gets through. At the same time, the doctrine also sits down through the sieve, but there is always as much at the top as there is at the bottom, because a doctrine, unlike money, is nonphysical and shapeless; it can slip through no matter how small the holes. (*Rickshaw Boy* 87)

The capitalist doctrine inspires even a house maid to run her business, as keenly as a bank manager, she leverages her small quantity of capital without having mercy on her impoverished customers. Now, those who are shrewd with money are considered to have the greatest ability to navigate the modern city.

Xiangzi is a former peasant who lost his parents and his land, so he moved to capitalist Beijing when he was eighteen years old. As a country boy, he has no assets to invest or abilities to offer. Thus, he believes that being a rickshaw boy will allow him to survive in the city, because he has a strong body. He believes that, by working the rickshaw, he can then afford food. “有自己的力氣與洋車，睜開眼就可以有飯吃。” (“Relying on his strength and his own rickshaw, he will have food to eat every time when he is awake”) (*Luotuo Xiangzi* 228; *Rickshaw Boy* 5). The novel emphasizes Xiangzi’s big body and his narcissistic love towards his body:

他計畫著怎樣殺進他的腰去，好更顯出他的鐵扇面似的胸，與直硬的背；扭頭看看自己的肩，多麼寬，多麼威嚴！殺好了腰，再穿上肥腿的白褲，褲腳用雞腸子帶兒繫住，露出那對“出號”的大腳！是的，他無疑的可以成為最出色的車夫。(Luotuo xiangzi 229)

He decided to tighten his belt as far as it would go to show off his hard chest muscles and powerful, straight back. He looked down at his shoulders, broad and impressive. After fixing his belt, he'd put on a pair of baggy white trousers and tie them at the ankles with a band made of chicken intestines, to call attention to his large feet. Yes, he was going to be the finest rickshaw man in town. (*Rickshaw Boy* 6)

In the novel, pulling rickshaw is not only a job, but also an opportunity to display the strength of the male body. Customers choose those rickshaw pullers with the youngest, strongest bodies, and when the pullers begin to run, they compete with each other's running posture (*Luotuo xiangzi* 225–227). Among these pullers, they have a hierarchy based on how strong their bodies are. Xiangzi especially take pride in his body. As the strongest one, he wants his movements to look beautiful, instead of running in an economic way to save his strength. He needs other people to recognize how strong and healthy he is.

Considering his heavy work and his narcissistic view of his strong body, he has an ambiguous attitude towards eating. He eats bad food or does not eat at all in order to save money to buy his rickshaw:

從風裡雨裡的咬牙，從飯裡茶裡的自苦，才賺出那輛車。那輛車是他的一切掙扎與困苦的總結果與報酬，像身經百戰的武士的一顆徽章。

(*Luotuo Xiangzi* 228)

By gritting his teeth through wind and rain and scrimping on food and tea, he finally put enough aside to buy it, a tangible reward for his struggles and his suffering, like a medal for valor. (*Rickshaw Boy* 4)

He sets “Gritting his teeth” and “scrimping on food and tea” as two ways for him to buy his own rickshaw—one implies working hard, and the other fasting. Working hard and eating little food can be two ways to save money, but for Xiangzi, they are not isolated acts. When he restricts his appetite, sometimes also the sexual desires, he feels his body is clean, healthy and strong (*Luotuo xiangzi* 375). Food here does not only refer to the object of eating but represents all his bodily desires. Xiangzi offers the repression of bodily desire a moral meaning in that it is as important as working hard. Eating for work is acceptable for him, but he considers eating for pleasure to be immoral.

I believe that the relationship between his body, food, and the rickshaw shows a complex psychological structure for Xiangzi. His obsession with his own rickshaw and his dietary restrictions are not isolated acts but are part of his self-formation as an ethical subject. Jameson keenly points out that “the rickshaw functions most intensely as a virtual extension of Xiangzi’s own body, an object with which he lives in virtual symbiosis, which heightens and increases his energies, and in tandem with which he feels most alive and approximates most nearly some ideal self” (68). Drawing on Jameson, I further read the relationship between Xiangzi’s body with his morality about controlling his body. The rickshaw does not like a human being, who has bodily desires and needs.

In this sense, I agree with Jameson that the rickshaw is the ideal body for Xiangzi. If food represents the pleasures that lure Xiangzi's body, then the rickshaw, an instrument of labor, stands for hard work and discipline. Xiangzi represses his bodily desire to such a degree that he can feel his body only when he is pulling the rickshaw, so owning his own rickshaw indicates ownership of his own body. His belief in his body becomes intertwined with his obsession with the rickshaw: “他老想著遠遠的一輛車，可以使他自由，獨立，像自己手腳的那麼一輛車。” (He always thinks about a rickshaw in distance, that can make him free, independent, a rickshaw like his hands and his feet) (*Luotuo Xiangzi* 228; *Rickshaw Boy* 4). Different from his economic/financial target to get a rickshaw, the rickshaw is a form of art for him. The tension between Xiangzi's iron-will of working, his obsession with his own rickshaw and his bodily desires towards food, later in this novel make it possible for Huniu to seduce him.

I believe, in *Xiangzi*, Lao She explores themes similar to those in his autobiographical works, in which he considers people who use their body for work and restrict their bodily needs to be moral figures. However, with the novel's capitalist Beijing setting, the picture becomes more complex. When Xiangzi restricts his bodily needs for his work in a capitalist society, he does not only does adhere to the Confucian value of restricting oneself to live a frugal life, he also refers to the purpose of accumulating capital. In this way, he establishes his relation to the capitalist doctrine. In response to Jameson's observation of two narrative forms in this novel, I believe the overlaying of the two narrative forms shows how Lao She, as a modern writer who grew up in a traditional late Qing family, negotiated between these two different ideologies. We see how traditional ethical codes advocating for the suppression of desire still exists,

but in an altered form. Xiangzi's fetish about having his rickshaws and his work ethic, are driven by both the capitalist doctrine and Confucianist self-restriction. Both pre-modern and modern ethics surrounding work influence Xiangzi's dietary abstinence.

Although he successively forms his subjectivity by actively disciplining his body through the everyday practice of working and bodily abstinence, there is no hope for rickshaw boys, who are the lowest class in this capitalist society. Lao She describes him as "a good ghost in the hell" (*Luotuo Xiangzi* 228; *Rickshaw Boy* 5). The society, in the novel, places the worker in an impossible position where no matter how hard they work they'll never get ahead. When Xiangzi meets a starving old man and his grandson, who own their own rickshaw, he realizes that owning a rickshaw might not help him make a living, but he continues to slave away in pursuit of his goal. As I discuss above, at the beginning, Xiangzi believes that by working the rickshaw he will be able to afford food. However, his target shifts when his subject is modified by his self-discipline. Examining and controlling his eating, even without the purpose of accumulating wealth, holds a particular moral meaning for him, which is more important than having enough food to eat. Although the novel's Beijing setting is not a truly capitalist society, Lao She still shows the changing normative notions with the development of a capitalist economy, and how they interact with traditional Confucian morality during the Republican period.

3.3 GLUTTONY, WOMEN AND MASCULINITY

In this section, I focus on Xiangzi's relationship with Huniu, and discuss how eating functions to make her become a deviant woman. I believe that in *Rickshaw Boy*, Huniu, as a gluttonous female character, reflects changes in the social system where women were active consumers of food, rather than food to be eaten. If compared to the

last chapter, women were not only imagined as businesswomen, but also as individuals who actively indulged in bodily pleasure.

Huniu's name means the voracious tigress in a woman's body, who will eat other animals or human beings. Xiangzi's nickname *Luotuo* 駱駝, which means camel—one source of food for tigers—shows the power relation between them. Lao She defines her as being masculine:

她也長得虎頭虎腦, 因此嚇住了男人, 幫助父親辦事是把好手, 可是沒人敢娶她作太太。她什麼都和男人壹樣, 連罵人也有男人的爽快, 有時候更多壹些花樣。 (*Luotuo xiangzi* 258)

Huniu-Tiger Girl. She, too, looked like a tiger, which scared off all the men, but she was a great help to her father; she just couldn't find a man willing to marry her. In fact, she might as well have been a man, the way she cursed and carried on, and that was only the beginning. (*Rickshaw Boy* 43)

Compared to Xiangzi, Huniu eats. She eats from the first scene—in her own words, she treats herself to food and drink for hard work (*Rickshaw Boy* 64). She also keeps inviting Xiangzi to eat with her.⁵⁵ Even when she realizes her father will not support her in her marriage, which means she will run out of money soon, she still says “she wants to enjoy life,” because “one day the money would run out, but no one lives forever” (*Rickshaw Boy* 201).

⁵⁵ In the movie *Rickshaw Boy*, which was a very popular movie shot in the 80s, Huniu is eating from the first scene too.

Huniu always persuades Xiangzi to eat with her, because she likes Xiangzi. One night, after Xiangzi fails in his dream of buying a rickshaw again and goes back to the rickshaw shed, he is hungry as usual, and she is enjoying the food when he arrives:

幾個還不甚熟的白梨, 皮兒還發青。一把酒壺, 三個白磁酒盅。一個頭號大盤子, 擺著半只醬雞, 和些熏肝醬肚之類的吃食。(Luotuo xiangzi 275)

A pair of not quite ripe white pears lay on a table. Next to them were a decanter of liquor and three white porcelain cups. Finally, there was a large platter with half a stewed chicken, pieces of smoked liver, and some tripe. (*Rickshaw Boy* 64)

Huniu not only invites Xiangzi to her room, she also invites him to eat with her. At beginning, Xiangzi refuses to eat with her, but she forces him to eat and drink with her by cursing him “[If you don’t drink,] then get the hell out of here! Don’t you know when someone’s being nice to you, you dumb camel?” (*Rickshaw Boy* 64). The wine and the smell of meat relax him and make him feel that her body has a special charm that night. She jokes around and tries to get him to eat and drink. Eventually, his desire for both food and sex are unleashed. His excitement reveals the irrationality hidden behind his rationality. The series of accidents, which shape Xiangzi’s entire subsequent life, is not merely determined by chance, but also by Xiangzi’s hidden desire for bodily pleasure.

Lydia Liu in *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity--China, 1900-1937* (1995) points out that Huniu’s seduction, “significantly changes Xiangzi’s self-perception by dint of transforming his body into something he can no longer contemplate with full self-assurance. The seduction forces him to confront the

unknown and the uncontrollable in himself” (120). I believe, it is not only sexuality, but that his appetite and the pleasure of eating are also part of Xiangzi’s hidden desire, which lures him into Huniu’s arms that night. After that night, Huniu pretends she is pregnant to force Xiangzi to marry her. In their marriage, the tension between eating, sex, and labor appears again and again.

As a result of her marriage with Xiangzi, Huniu loses her job, her family and her stable life. They move to the best room in a poor *dazayuan* 大雜院 (residential compound) and begin to live on her savings. In there, Huniu keeps offering Xiangzi food to invite him to sleep with, which weakens his resolve.

虎鈕已把午飯作好：饅的饅頭，熬白菜加肉丸子，壹碟虎皮凍，壹碟醬蘿蔔。別的都已擺好，只有白菜還在火上煨著，發出些極美的香味。

(*Luotuo Xiangzi* 366)

Huniu was preparing a lunch of steamed buns, cabbage with meatballs, and platters with jellied pork skin and pickled turnips. Everything was on the table except the cabbage, which still simmered on the stove and gave off a tempting aroma. (*Rickshaw Boy* 179)

A wife cooking for the family is a necessary good deed. However, Xiangzi has an ambivalent impression of Huniu and their home. On the one hand, Xiangzi feels that this home is lovely because of the warmth and the smell of good food. On the other hand, he does not enjoy the pleasure of eating: “It was better food than he was used to... and yet something was missing—it didn’t bring as much pleasure as the food he wolfed down most of the time, and it didn’t raise a sweat” (*Rickshaw Boy* 180). He reads Huniu’s enjoyment of food as her default morality: “他是窮小子出身，曉得什麼叫困苦。他不

願吃那些零七八碎的東西,可惜那些錢。(He knew what it was like to suffer and have no appetite for the expensive food she brought home) (*Luotuo Xiangzi* 372; *Rickshaw Boy* 187). Here, living in poverty, the frugal life is not an only a living condition, but a morality that makes Xiangzi proud of himself. This, again, recalls Lao She's admiration of his mother.

Xiangzi wants to go out to pull his rickshaw, but Huniu shows a capitalist business savvy by suggesting that he buy several rickshaws and rent them out for money. Xiangzi disagrees with her, and believes that by giving him food, she destroys his determination to fast in order to occupy his body for her sexual desire. “她不許他去拉車,而每天好菜好飯的養著他,正好象養肥了牛好往外擠牛奶!他完全變成了她的玩藝兒”(She was plying him with good food to keep his mind off going out to pull a rickshaw, like fattening up a cow to get more milk. He was little more than her plaything) (*Luotuo Xiangzi* 372; *Rickshaw Boy* 187). Xiangzi's anxiety towards good food, her sexual desire and her capitalist knowledge, come together, and form his critique of her as a woman:

她也是既舊又新的壹個什麼奇怪的東西,是姑娘,也是娘們;象女的,又象男的;象人,又象什麼兇惡的走獸!這個走獸,穿著紅襖,已經捉到他,還預備著細細的收拾他。誰都能收拾他,這個走獸特別的厲害,要壹刻不離的守著他,向他瞪眼,向他發笑,而且能緊緊的抱住他,把他所有的力量吸盡。(Luotuo xiangzi 363)

She is a strange object, old and yet new. She was a girl, and she was also a woman; she was female, but she looked male; human yet a bit like a wild

beast, a beast in a red dress that already had him in its grasp and was getting ready to dispose of him. This beast was especially savage and never let him out of its sight, staring at him, laughing at him, perfectly capable of getting him in a bear hug and sucking out every ounce of his strength. (*Rickshaw Boy* 175–176)

His ambivalent feeling shows an uncanny fear towards Huniu and her food. Since Huniu does not fit the femininity defined by Xiangzi, Xiangzi imagines her as an animal, a voracious demon, who is ready to devour him. Xiangzi emphasizes his fear and anxiety that she could eat him. The fear is so strong that “he didn’t dare look at her” (*Rickshaw Boy* 175). Eating has the same symbolic meaning as sex in many plots in the novel that depict Huniu’s active pursuit of bodily pleasure. Xiangzi describes himself as a plaything for Huniu when she offers him food to enjoy his body.

Xiangzi’s anxiety echoes the millennia-old anxiety towards the female body in male-written history. For example, in the Qing collection of classic Chinese stories *Liao zhai zhi yi* 聊齋誌異 (Strange stories from a Chinese studio) (1740), the female figures, whose bodies are often occupied by fox spirits, have the air of *yin*. They seduce men and consume men’s bodies to maintain their own lives. Similar to *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, *Rickshaw Boy* also reveals men’s anxiety that the female—the *yin* body—may devour the male bodies via sex. Xiangzi feels that his body is weakened when he is in bed with Huniu, that she is “perfectly capable of getting him in a bear hug and sucking out every ounce of his strength” (*Rickshaw Boy* 175). In doing so, he projects all his moral judgments of her onto his anxieties about his health:

他看見過：街上的一條瘦老的母狗，當跑腿的時候，也選個肥壯的男狗。想起這個，他不但是厭惡這種生活，而且為自己擔心。他曉得一個賣力氣的漢子應當怎樣保護身體，身體是一切。假若這麼活下去，他會有一天成為一個幹骨頭架子，還是這麼大，而膛兒裏全是空的。

(*Luotuo xiangzi* 373)

Out on the street, he'd seen a scrawny old bitch set her sights on a strong, well-fed male when she needed a lackey. He not only hated this life but also was worried about what he was becoming. A man who sold his muscle had to keep fit at all costs; good health was everything, and at this rate, one day he would be reduced to skin and bones, an empty hulk. The thought made him shudder. (*Rickshaw Boy* 187)

Xiangzi's worrying reveals the gendered common knowledge in Chinese culture that greedy women consume men's bodies to make them weak.⁵⁶ Xiangzi believes that the food and sex offered by Huniu pollute and consume his body. He states that "his body feels unclean" to describe his misgivings about their sexual relationship (*Rickshaw Boy* 69). Here, Xiangzi relates his anxiety towards women's body, sex and health to work ethics. He believes that only hard work is good for a man's health. Therefore, "out all day running, he'd return home at night and sleep like a baby, dead to the world" (*Rickshaw*

⁵⁶ The sexual *fang zhong shu* 房中術 (Arts of the bedchamber), a branch of traditional Chinese medicine, further promotes that intercourse with women is a battle that, if won, may strengthen men's vital powers in order to attain longer lives. On the other hand, if the man were to lose this battle, the woman may rob him of his precious *yang* essence, and cause weakness and even death. Males treat female bodies—particularly young female virgins' bodies, which are considered to have the mysterious substance of "original femininity"—as the provider of yin essence to nourish their bodies (van Gulik 11).

Boy 187). Work is the solution for him to diminish the influence of and run away from Huniu's food and body.

What is worth paying attention to is that Huniu shows a female masculinity which is different from other female figures in Chinese literary history. For example, in *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*, a typical fox spirit pretends to follow women's virtues in order to seduce men. With the decline of Confucianism, as well as the development of capitalism, women gained more opportunities to behave in ways historically considered to be more masculine. Huniu is a modern woman, who plays an important role in running her father's rickshaw shed, which allows her to win the other rickshaw pullers' respect. She is not obedient to her father, and she freely has sex with men. She chooses her own love relationship with Xiangzi and arranges her own wedding.

In Xiangzi's marriage with Huniu, his "male masculinity" has to compete with Huniu's "female masculinity,"⁵⁷ and this competition centers on their daily meals. The novel highlights the beauty of his extraordinarily strong body as the source of his masculinity. However, Huniu, who has money to buy him the rickshaw, can control his body and force him to sleep with her. By internalizing objects outside of one's body, eating usually shows the power to invade the inside; however, Huniu offers Xiangzi nourishment to change him into her sexual food, which flips eating's conventional power relation. Men's strong bodies have been celebrated and offered men justification for their higher gender status. Masculine working-class men using their strong bodies to make a reputation was a tradition in Chinese literature. For example, in the Ming novel *Shui hu*

⁵⁷ See Jack Halberstam's book *Female Masculinity* (1998).

zhuan 水滸傳 (Water margin) (early seventeenth century), who are well respected as a men due to their strong bodies. In contrast, *Rickshaw Boy* shows the process of redefining Chinese masculinity as it had been commodified by capitalist values. The representation of Huniu exemplifies a new-rising uncertainty that allows people to question fixed gender definitions. On one hand, Lao She's critique of Huniu's masculinity reflects a fixed understanding of gender within social imaginaries at that time, which views femininity as physical attractiveness and obedience to men; while, on the other, it exemplifies a rising uncertainty about the gender binary and allows people to question its rigidity.

After becoming pregnant, Huniu begins to binge eat and pamper herself by staying in a room filled with food: "Huniu snacked between meals, increasing the girth around her middle. She felt she mustn't deny herself the treats she deserved" (*Rickshaw Boy* 232). Later, she eats to such an extreme that her pleasure is replaced by suffering, but in order to satisfy her appetite she refuses to stop.

到過新年的時候，她的主意就更多了。她自己動不了窩，便派小福子壹趟八趟的去買東西。她恨自己出不去，又疼愛自己而不肯出去，不出去又憋悶的慌，所以只好多買些東西來看著還舒服些……及至把東西作好，她壹吃便是兩三大碗。吃完，又沒有運動，她撐得慌，抱著肚子壹定說是犯了胎氣! (*Luotuo xiangzi* 408)

Huniu got more demanding as New Year's approached. Since her movements were restricted, Fuzi was sent out to buy things for her.

However much she hated being stuck in the house, she pampered herself

too much to go outside. She was bored to tears, and her only recourse was to treat herself to the things she liked... she prepared whatever it was and ate two or three large bowlfuls. Then, when she was finished, she'd sit there, bloated and complaining that it was a problem with her pregnancy.

(Rickshaw Boy 231)

Her excessive appetite makes her “no longer look human” (*Rickshaw Boy* 232). The more she eats, the more she loses her humanity. Therefore, her suffering justifies Xiangzi's resistance to bodily pleasure. Xiangzi's dietary abstinence aims to prevent excess—he does not completely refuse the pleasure of eating, but controls it to a certain extent, which enables him to work.

Then, when Huniu uses up all her money and dies from a hard birth. Lydia Liu argues that Huniu “is a distorted mirror-image of masculinity (money, status, sexual desire) produced by the same forces that condemn her for deviating from the ideal of femininity. Her death in childbirth—a very feminine death—is perhaps an ironic punishment for violating the gender codes of her society” (122). Drawing on Liu, I further argue that Huniu's death not only punishment for her sexual desire, but also for her gluttonous appetite and for enjoying the pleasure of eating. Huniu's death as a result of over-eating reveals Lao She's anxiety towards the deviant women, who because of their business talent succeed in the capitalist society and enjoy bodily pleasure. Women should not only restrict their sexual desire, but also, in their everyday eating they should restrict their appetite.

Not only does Xiangzi believe eating expensive food without working is harmful to her health, all the other characters, the midwife, the neighbor Xiao Fuzi, and the narrator,

take it for granted that over-eating is the reason for her hard delivery. No one provides the opinion that nutritious food can be good for a pregnant woman.

收生婆又來到, 給祥子壹點暗示, 恐怕要難產。虎鈕的歲數, 這又是頭胎, 平日缺乏運動, 而胎又很大, 因為孕期裏貪吃油膩; 這幾項合起來, 打算順順當當的生產是希望不到的。況且壹向沒經過醫生檢查過, 胎的部位並沒有矯正過; 收生婆沒有這份手術, 可是會說: 就怕是橫生逆產呀! (*Luotuo xiangzi* 410)

When the midwife arrived this time, she hinted to Xiangzi that owing to the mother's age and the facts that this would be her first child, that she had been sedentary for so long, that the fetus was especially large, and that she had eaten far too much greasy, fatty food, it was likely to be a difficult birth. Those factors eliminated any hope that things would go smoothly. She had not seen a doctor, who would have helped her correct the position of the fetus, and the midwife lacked the skill to do that. But she knew enough to say, "I'm afraid we might be in for a tough time. (*Rickshaw Boy* 232).

Here, "doctor" refers to the doctor who has been trained in Western medicine and works in a modern hospital. The maid and Xiangzi both believe Western medicine is more authoritative. This plot mirrors how Chinese people were beginning to turn away from traditional medicine.

In Lao She's short story "*Bao sun* 抱孫" (Having a grandson) (1933), he compares traditional Chinese medicine and western medicine in a more dramatic way.

The mother and mother-in-law keep feeding their pregnant daughter, which causes her labor to be difficult. When they go to the western-style hospital for help, the family delays the operation because they lack basic medical knowledge. After the birth, they insist on taking their grandson back home to have the ceremony of *xi san* 洗三, a ritual to clean the baby's body on the third day after birth. The baby dies because the mother-in-law keeps sneezing on him. Later, they insist on taking their daughter home from the hospital immediately, which causes her death as well ("*Bao sun*" 91–99). In this farce, the narrator criticizes traditional Chinese medicine for its lack of effectiveness when it compares to Western medicine.

Similar to "Having a grandson," in *Rickshaw Boy*, Western medicine has been appropriated to prove the harmfulness of Huniu's self-indulgence. Greasy, fatty food, which is more nutritious and expensive than the food eaten by the rest of the poor neighbors, is believed to be the cause of her difficult birth. Interestingly, it is traditional Chinese medicine that advocates for eating moderately during pregnancy, opposed to over-eating. For this reason, Western medicine is an empty signifier adopted by Lao She to criticize Huniu's moral deviancy. Here, the author merely seeks to condemn Huniu's behavior, and will use whatever means necessary to do so, even if he contradicts himself in the process. Thus, despite competing with each other, Western and Chinese medical discourses work together to discipline gluttonous deviants.

After Huniu dies, Xiangzi once again resolves to become a good man, the first thing he does is eat bland food:

顧不得到茶館去, 他把車放在城門西的"停車處", 叫過提著大瓦壺, 拿著黃砂碗的賣茶的小孩來, 喝了兩碗刷鍋水似的茶; 非常的難喝, 可是

他告訴自己, 以後就得老喝這個, 不能再都把錢花上好茶好飯上。這麼決定好, 爽性再吃點東西——不好往下咽的東西——就作為勤苦耐勞的新生活的開始。他買了十個煎包兒, 裏邊全是白菜幫子, 外邊又"皮"又牙礮。不管怎樣難吃, 也都把它們吞下去。(Luotuo xiangzi 435)

Rather than go to a teahouse, he parked his rickshaw in the lot west of the gate and summoned a boy selling tea from a clay pot; he drank two bowls of an insipid liquid that passed for tea but tasted like dishwater. It was terrible, but he vowed that that was what he'd drink from then on; no more wasting money on good food and drink. Having made up his mind to live austerely, he decided to get something to eat—something that did not go down easily—to mark the beginning of a new life, dedicated to hard work and privation. He bought ten leathery, crusty griddlecakes filled with cabbage leaves and managed to get them down, despite the foul taste.

(*Rickshaw Boy* 264)

Tea that "tasted like dishwater" and "the foul taste," describe how bland the crusty griddlecakes and tea are, but he treats the bland foods as the symbols of a new industrious and moral life. Swallowing them, he tries to regain the discipline to repress his body. On the one hand, he feels uncomfortable because of the low-quality food. On the other hand, he feels optimistic because he regains a high standard of morality and rekindles the hope that he can become a successful rickshaw puller. However, Xiangzi meets other deviant women again and again.

Xiangzi sees Huniu's "double" in various women he meets. Huniu's own deviant qualities are further underscored by the appearance of these female figures. First, he sees Huniu in his client Mrs. Xia 夏太太.

她的身上老有些地方像虎妞——不是那些衣服，也不是她的模樣，而是一點什麼態度或神味，祥子找不到適當的字——來形容。只覺得她與虎妞是，用他所能想出的字，一道貨。(Luotuo Xiangzi 422)

"There was something about her that reminded him of Huniu. It wasn't her clothes or her look; no, it had more to do with her attitude and her behavior, though Xiangzi had trouble putting it into words. He just felt that she and Huniu were—it was the only expression he could think of—the same sort of goods". (Rickshaw Boy 247)

This Mrs. Xia seduces Xiangzi twice, and what Xiangzi refers to "the same sort of goods" indicates a pursuit of sexual pleasure similar to that of Huniu. Although he looks down upon her, he cannot stop having a secret sexual relationship with her. Later, he feels the prostitute called Baimian koudai 白面口袋 (Flour sacks) looks very similar to Huniu. Flour sacks lives in the lowest brothel, White Manor *bai fangzi* 白房子, outside the city. The nickname, Flour sacks, both describes her large breasted body, and implies how her body is supposed to be food for men. This name is also related with food—the woman's body is compared to a sack full of an essential ingredient for making various foods—and this implies that she has no restriction to pursue her bodily pleasure. This again, reveals Lao She's gender discrimination towards women, and how he expresses his

discrimination through food. Nevertheless, in contrast with other prostitutes who have been sold to the brothel by others, she volunteers to work there:

她是這裏的唯壹的自由人。她自己甘心上這兒來混。她嫁過五次, 男人都不久便像癩臭蟲似的死去, 所以她停止嫁人了, 而來到這兒享受。

(Luotuo xiangzi 447)

She was the only independent operator in the place, here because she wanted to be. Married five times, she had, in short order, reduced all five of her husbands to shrunken bedbugs before they died, which is why she gave up on marriage and came here to enjoy what she liked to do.

(Rickshaw Boy 279)

Similar to Huniu, Flour sacks changes the meaning of prostitution by seeing it as a chance to enjoy sexuality. She calls Xiangzi “silly kid,” a nickname Huniu once used to call him as if he were an obedient child, thus reversing their power relation. Under these deviant women’s influence, Xiangzi frequently desires good food and goes to the brothel regularly, and he stops saving to buy a rickshaw. This emphasizes the novel’s two self-contradictory themes and how they interact: one is Xiangzi’s self-transformation into an ethical subject, and the other is how his ethical ideals are distorted by indulgence.

Facilitated by gender relations, Lao She presents this paradox of modernity through food and sex to demonstrate how overindulgence in either prevents one from functioning in capitalist society. By the end of the novel, he is lazy and spends all his time at restaurants and brothels. He has no mercy for those less fortunate, and even lies about his situation so that he can continue his indulgent lifestyle.

Huniu dies, and Flour sacks is driven out of the city. Only some poor men occasionally go out of the city to sleep with her, but when they come back, they are contaminated by diseases. The lowest brothel provides a foil to the bright city, thus creating a binary that reinforces the modern social order. In contrast, the author criticizes deviant men less severely. For example, the author shows some sympathy to Erqiangzi 二強子, the neighbor of Xiangzi and Huniu, who is an alcoholic and treats his female family members brutally. He sells his daughter Xiao Fuzi to a soldier, but later on the soldier abandons her. After she comes back, he persuades her to become a prostitute to put food on the table for him and her two younger brothers. Once, when he is drunk, he even beats his wife to death. He feels guilty about losing the money he obtains by selling his daughter when he awakens, so he drinks more to comfort himself. It seems Erqiangzi's sin is not selling his daughter and enslaving his wife, but his alcoholism. If he merely shows remorse, he can be a good man. The novel criticizes those who do not restrict their bodily pleasure, but this critique is gendered.

In comparison with these deviant women, Xiao Fuzi is a good model of femininity. She refuses all bodily pleasure and works as a prostitute in order to feed her family. Compared to Huniu, Fuzi victimizes herself in prostitution, but Huniu is jealous about the sexual pleasure of Fuzi's life as prostitution since "Fuzi would rather not have talked about (sex)... but for Huniu it was a joy to hear" (*Rickshaw Boy* 209). Although she is not a virgin when she meets Xiangzi, it does not matter to him because she is a virgin when her father sells her to a soldier. What Xiangzi pursues here is concept of virginity in a moral sense. Compared to Huniu's enjoyment of sex for herself, Fuzi loses her virginity to feed her family, so Xiangzi feels that she is an irresistible alternative:

在他的眼裏,她是個最美的女子,美在骨頭裏,就是她滿身都長了瘡,把皮肉都爛掉,在他心中她依然很美。她美,她年輕,她要強,她勤儉。假若祥子想再娶,她是個理想的人。(Luotuo xiangzi 415)

She was the most beautiful woman he'd ever known; her beauty reached into her bones. Had her body been covered with rotting sores, to him she'd still have been irresistible. Pretty, young, and diligent. If Xiangzi wanted to remarry, she'd be an ideal wife. (*Rickshaw Boy* 239)

Fuzi allows her body to be objectified as a source of food to serve her family, while Huniu always objectifies Xiangzi's body as food to enjoy. From Xiao Fuzi, we see Lao She's mother. However, Lao She shows how he modified this gender view according to the capitalist doctrines. In the capitalist society of the novel, Xiao Fuzi, although she sacrifices herself and skillfully manage the poor family life, there is no way for her to survive or feed her family. Similar to Xiangzi, Xiao Fuzi is also a "good ghost in the hell". Not only are Huniu and Flour sacks driven out of the city's social order, but even the virtuous women, like Xiao Fuzi, at the end cannot survive in the city either.

Xiangzi looks down upon Huniu, but finally he becomes another manifestation of her. As David Der-wei Wang points out, "Lao She seems to despise this character so much as to develop a fascination with her" (151). Lao She criticizes the danger of indulgence in bodily pleasure, but he discloses the pursuit of it at the same time. The changing bio-political system of the 1930s reveals the potential irrationality belying its social order. Before Huniu dies, she admits to her deviance in her marriage, and she promises to be a good wife to Xiangzi when she recovers: "When I'm better, I will be a good wife to you" (*Luotuo xiangzi* 364). However, her promise functions more to satisfy

the author's imagination and re-impose masculine sovereignty than as a confession. Thus, Lao She's novel exhibits how capitalist discourse muddled and reframed gender relations in terms of market forces; while it also worked to reproduce them by disciplining those who failed to appropriately perform the roles required by capitalist society.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Rickshaw Boy is one of the most important realist novels in modern literary history, which shows the inner world of the city's poor. Through dietary management, issues of sex and gender intersect with various forms of discourses. Lao She's novel synthesizes traditional, capitalist and medical discourses in Beiping's seedy underbelly to both modify and reinforce the social imaginaries. Huniu, as a woman who freely pursues bodily pleasure in her marriage, offers a different possibility besides the two most popular female images of the 1930s—the career woman who is harassed by her male supervisor and the housewife. The novel also provides a third solution that is separate from Nora's⁵⁸ limited options to stay at or run away from home: enjoying bodily pleasure within their marriage. In this way, Chinese women's voices emerged on the surface of history during the Republican years.

Lao She, like his contemporaries, attempted to find a way to solve the social and economic crisis in modern China through literature. At the end of the novel, Lao She suggests that proletarians, like Xiangzi, could not survive alone—only through collective action could they succeed (*Luotuo Xiangzi* 444–445). In addition, he problematizes bodily

⁵⁸ Nora is a figure in *A Doll's House*, a play written by Henrik Ibsen. The protagonist, Nora, chooses to leave her husband and children to discover herself, which sparked an intellectual debate about whether and how should women leave an unhappy marriage in Republican China.

pleasure by portraying it as the object of moral solicitude. And yet, even if the proletariat rises up, they will never truly free their bodies,⁵⁹ because their struggle is based on the repression of bodily pleasure. Thus, the severe control of this pleasure that arose after 1949, can actually be seen as early as the 1930s in *Rickshaw Boy*.

In 1961, Lao She published an article in the *Beijing Evening News* entitled “*Qinjian chijia*” 勤儉持家 (Frugality in household management), which focuses on eating in the family and raises the criteria for what constitutes a good wife, based on how skillfully she can manage the food budget. At the end of this article, he emphasizes that although people are leading good lives after 1949, the frugality of Republican period remains relevant for communism, and argues that people should still adhere to it. From this article, we can see how discourse intended to regulate the pleasure of eating compliments Maoist political ideals. Later, it worked in tandem with revolutionary literature sanctioned by Chinese leftist politicians and progressive writers to further control people’s biological needs. During the *Wenhua da geming* 文化大革命 (Cultural revolution) (1966-1976), people considered the desire for the gourmet to be anti-revolutionary, and aimed specifically at controlling women’s bodily pleasure, and compelled them to become women warriors—the common female figures of Chinese communist revolutionary discourse. They do not eat for pleasure but fight against human

⁵⁹ In an essay titled “Li youren shu” 勵友人書 (A letter to encourage friends) published on *Shun Pao* 申報 (Shanghai News) in 1933, Lao She satirizes people who care about their bodily pleasure like eating and sexuality more than the fall of the nation. It shows that he consciously believes that the enjoyment of bodily pleasure is not proper in the national crisis.

desires for pleasure. They lose their gender characteristics and become even more radical in criticizing their bodily desires than Xiangzi.

It was not until the 1980s that some literary works began to rediscover aesthetic pleasure with the development and rise of consumerism. In *Meishijia* 美食家 (The gourmet) (1983), a novel written by Lu Wenfu 陸文夫 (1927–2005), the protagonist Zhu Ziye 朱子冶 is addicted to the pleasure of eating, which saves him from Republican China, the Cultural Revolution, and the political debate in *Gaige kaifang* 改革開放 (The reform and open) period. However, he behaves awkwardly during each of the three consecutive political eras. The author shows that indulging in the pleasure of eating offers more concrete content for one's life than any political movement, but the ways of enjoying the pleasure of eating are deeply steeped in the politics of these periods, which makes Zhu Ziye look perpetually inappropriate. In "Jianding de xizhou" 堅硬的稀粥 (Hard porridge) (1989), a short story written by Wang Meng 王蒙, again, eating is used to criticize ridiculous political movements. We can see the same strategy used by Wang Anyi 王安憶 in her novel *Chang hen ge* 長恨歌 (The song of everlasting sorrow) (2003), in which the protagonist Wang Qiyao 王琦瑤 enjoys private tea parties with three other little urbanists to hide from communist political movements in public spaces. The pleasure of eating maintains an individual's dignity to fight against the national discourse.

Chinese scholar Hong Zicheng 洪子誠 points out the efforts of Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893-1976) to create a new leftist culture, which ruptures from the old imperial culture, by censoring literary output (7). Based on my study of *Rickshaw Boy* from the

perspective of gender and body, I argue that the creation of the “new leftist culture” began earlier, and the traces of this new leftist culture do not only exist in the leftist writers’ works, but also can be found in the works written by authors like Lao She, who is considered to have no firm political stance⁶⁰ but still remained popular after 1949. The New Cultural Movement (*Xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動),⁶¹ sought to create a new culture in China, but was never able to accomplish this. Republican Chinese literature continuously enriched the content of “new culture” by shaping the social imaginaries about behavioral norms in everyday life and influenced the development of contemporary Chinese literature. Thus, reading a novel from Republican China not only gives us a chance to hear the distant echo of gender discrimination in history, but also enables us to re-examine the assumptions of normative notions of eating and gender in contemporary life. The discourse that connects gender, eating and sexual desire has never stopped, and continues to influence people’s behaviors to this very day.

Lao She committed suicide in 1966 after he was beaten by the Red Guards at the beginning of Cultural revolution, a political movement that labeled individuals who enjoyed any bodily pleasure as *zou zi pai* 走資派 (capitalist roaders) and violently punished them for betraying the communist ideal. The day after his beating, Lao She walked towards his mother’s home, where he lived as a child, and eventually jumped into

⁶⁰ See *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* by Chang-tai Hung (1992).

⁶¹ The New Culture Movement of the 1910s and 1920s was led scholars like Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, Li Dazhao 李大钊, Lu Xun 鲁迅, Zhou Zuoren 周作人, and Hu Shi 胡適, who were disillusioned the Republic of China’s failure to bring about meaningful change in Chinese society. Thus, they called for the creation of a new culture based on western values and democratic principles, instead of Confucianism.

a lake nearby to end his life. The irony of Lao She's death is that he was ultimately a victim of the leftist culture, which he enabled, consciously or unconsciously, through his writings. In this way, as capitalist discourses placed Xiangzi, the worker, in an impossible position, Maoist discourses placed Lao She, the artist, in a similarly precarious position.

CHAPTER 4

COOKING AND EATING IN SU QING'S WORKS

Food and sex are the basic desires for men.

-*The Book of Rites*

People first require "food and sex."

- Su Qing "Eating in the summer"

During the occupation of Shanghai in the 1940s, many male writers left Shanghai and the ones who stayed could not publish ideologically driven works due to political censorship. In this occupied city, a space that "time, culture, and history all ruptured," female writers gained their chance to be heard (Meng and Dai 231). Catherine Yeh believes that a common characteristic of these female writers is that "they do not have to clearly get involved with ideology, but concentrate on writing about women, family, and marriage" (650). Su Qing 蘇青 (1914–1982)⁶² and Zhang Ailing 張愛玲 (1920–1995) are the two of most famous female writers from this period.⁶³ They both followed the cultural trend to focus on writing material life from a woman's perspective. Compared to the 1920s female writers such as Lu Yin 廬隱 (1898–1934), Bing Xin 冰心 (1900–1999), Xie Bingying 謝冰瑩 (1906–2000), and Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904–1986), Su Qing and

⁶² Su Qing was once called Feng Yunzhuang 馮允莊 and Feng Heyi 馮和議.

⁶³ See the interview of Zhang Ailing and Suqing in 1945, in which the author introduced Su Qing and Zhang Ailing as the most famous contemporary female writers in Shanghai ("Su Qing Zhang Ailing Duitan ji" 3).

Zhang Ailing abandoned the sentimental mode in their writings. As what Edward Gunn called in *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking, 1937-1945* (1980), they show the anti-romantic tendencies, and in their writings, and they offered a new possibility to imagine women, gender, and gender relations under the tightened political restrictions in occupied Shanghai (7).

Zhang Ailing obsessed over the details of material life while still negotiating with different intellectual gender discourses in her writings. In contrast, Su Qing kept her distance from any intellectual theories. In *Fu chu lishi dibiao—xiandai funü wenxue yanjiu* 浮出歷史地表—現代婦女文學研究 (Emerging from the horizon of history—A Study of Modern Women’s Literature) (1993), Yue Meng 孟悅 and Jinhua Dai 戴錦華 argue that Su Qing is not a feminist in any sense (231). They believe that opposed to the May Fourth female writers in the 1920s, who were interested in depicting “new women,” Su Qing portrayed the women, who lived in the “new and old interwoven way” (231). Meanwhile, they believe that Su Qing abandoned the discourse about “love,” which positions women as the weaker sex, and instead, adopted “the words of the strong” in her works (231). By researching Su Qing’s essays and novels, I contend that the reason why Su Qing could adopt the tone of the strong one, is because she did not pursue men’s recognition of women’s legitimacy of having bodily desires. Instead of pursuing love as a way to get men’s recognition, morally and emotionally, Su Qing calculated the bodily pleasure she could get from romantic relationships. She never questioned that women should enjoy their bodies in any circumstances, and she placed her bodily needs and pleasure in a higher position than moral norms. This lays the foundation for her to think about gender and gender relations and helped her to maintain a distance from different

ideologies. Moreover, by writing the bodily feelings of marriage and motherhood, she, as what Meng and Dai argues, “shows the hypocrisy of the virtuous mother and wife in the patriarchal discourse” (238). Therefore, she is not a feminist, but she argues, advocates for, and celebrates women’s bodily rights in her writings.

In this chapter, I explore how she writes her everyday experiences of cooking, eating and imagining bodily pleasure, to show how these experiences construct her subjectivity and shape her gender relations in the semi-autobiographical novel *Jiehun shinian* 結婚十年 (Ten years of marriage) (1943), and her autobiographical essays. Specifically, I examine the author’s memories and shifting interpretations of her childhood eating experiences to argue that Su Qing’s nostalgic feelings towards her hometown cuisine interact with her sexual desire to shape her attitude towards the patriarchal family. I believe, a line in Su Qing’s essay “Xiatian de chi” 夏天的吃 (Eating in the summer) (1945) reveals her unique position as a modern female writer:

在人們僅能解決最低限度的物質生活之際，甚至連最低限度的物質生活還沒解決的時候，藝術似乎總應該居於次要地位，因為人們先要求的是“飲食男女”。(22)

When people can only meet their lowest requirement for material possessions, or even when the lowest requirement cannot be met, art should always be placed in less important position because people first require “food and sex.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ In this Chapter, all the Su Qing’s quotations are translated by me.

Born at a time when China was experiencing foreign invasion, domestic wars, drastic social changes, Su Qing, as a woman, also faced both material insecurity and gender discrimination in that patriarchal society. Especially in Japanese occupied Shanghai where Su Qing wrote most of her works. She, like many new migrants, suffered from financial, emotional and physical instability. Catherine Yeh believes that the foundation of Su Qing's views about women's issues is that "she takes the gender discrimination as a reality, so she criticizes women who make decision to hurt their benefit in this reality" (658). Drawing on Yeh, I believe that Su Qing not only accepts the gendered reality but would also rather attempt to satisfy her material needs first. This is her way to change the discriminatory trends against women of her time. "Yinshi" 飲食 (food) and "nani" 男女 (sex) are two important themes in her writings, and they represent the basic needs of material life. The most influential combination of food and sex, is from *Li ji* 禮記 (The Book of Rites) (475 BC–221 BC) as I discussed in the Introduction. The author(s) of the *Book of Rites*, believes appetite and sexual desire are people's two basic desires, so men should learn rites to manage these desires (*Li ji yi zhu* 275). Instead of seeing a need to manage these desires, she considers them as the most important content of life, especially for women. Food and sex not only represent the bodily needs and pleasure she believes that everyone should have, they are also the everyday topics for her as a housewife, wife and mother. She refuses to manage her appetite or sexual desire, and furthermore, she writes about her hunger, her desires, and her happy memories about eating and love, to criticize all different discourses including patriarchal gender norms and the flashy urban fashion that requires women to be modern.

My analysis in this chapter is based on two theories: commensality and culinary nostalgia. According to David Goldstein, commensality is “food in its relational aspect; it is eating conceived as a network or as a principle of connectivity” (41). Commensality describes “the range of relationships that emerge and are reified through the act of eating” (Goldstein 40–41). In Su Qing’s writing, eating keeps constructing and reconstructing family relationships in her marriage, and her experience of migration from the countryside to the city. Eating also lies at the intersection of the discourses of cuisine, nutrition, medicine from both Chinese consumers and western fashions. Eating, sexuality, love and writing are all brought together in Su Qing’s works, which suggests another way to think about gender issues in China’s transitional period. The second theoretical framework I employ is culinary nostalgia. As I discussed in the Introduction, Mark Swislocki in *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Urban Experience in Shanghai* (2013) defines this concept as “the recollection or purposive evocation of another time and place through food” (1). Swislocki focuses on historical documents to discuss how Shanghai residents, through their nostalgia for regional food, constructed their identity from pre-modern to contemporary China. Drawing on his work, I further explore how the nostalgia of hometown food helps Su Qing to construct her understanding about gender relations as well as her subjectivity as a rebellious female writer. Culinary nostalgia extends commensality of food to an imaginative level. Through imaging taste in her past life, culinary nostalgia relates Su Qing to past relationships in her life, and thus modifies her present relationships.

Su Qing was born in a declining intellectual family from a mountainous area about thirty miles from the city of Ningbo 寧波 in 1914 (Mao 3). When she was only a

few months old, her father went to Columbia University to study (Mao 8). Because of this, Su Qing lived in the mountain area with her maternal grandparents' house for about six years. When she was eight years old, her father became a manager in a bank in Shanghai, so she moved to Shanghai with her parents (Mao 11). Her father died suddenly, and soon after Su Qing went back to Ningbo with her mother and younger brother. Without the father, they lost their financial support, and had to lead a frugal life (Mao 24). When she graduated from high school she was arranged to marry to Li Qinhou 李欽後, a rich young master of a business family (Mao 24). In 1934, they formally married (Mao 26). The same year, Su Qing became pregnant, which forced her to give up her studies at the Zhongyang Daxue 中央大學 National Central University in Nanjing (Mao 26). Su Qing published her first essay "Sheng nan yu nü" 生男育女 (Child-bearing: Boy or Girl) in 1935 based on her experience delivering the baby, and in the following years, she published several essays and short stories in several literary journals, such as *Lunyu* 論語 (Discourses) and *Yuzhou feng* 宇宙風 (Cosmic Winds) (Mao 31–36). During her marriage, she first lived in the extended family with her parents-in-law in Ningbo (Mao 28). Later, she moved to Shanghai with her husband and eventually had five children (Mao 52). In 1944, she decided to divorce Li Qinhou because of financial difficulties and domestic violence (Mao 52). In 1943, Su Qing established her own literary journal, *Tiandi* 天地 (*Heaven and Earth Monthly*) and founded her own publishing house, Heaven and Earth Press (Mao 38). She published her most famous novel *Jiehun shinian* 結婚十年 (Ten Years of Marriage) (1943) and her essay collection *Huan jin ji* 浣錦集 (Washing Brocade) (1944). *Ten Years of Marriage* was republished

eighteen times and became a best-seller in the early 1940s (Mao 53). This earned Su Qing great fame and made her a public figure (Mao 53–54). In 1945, when the Japanese surrendered, Su Qing, was criticized by the Nationalist government because of her personal connection to Chen Gongbo 陳公博 (1892–1946), a politician who collaborated with the Japanese (Mao 55). She ended *Heaven and Earth Monthly* in the same year (Mao 59). During the late 1940s, she published another semi-biographical novel *Xu jiehun shinian* 續結婚十年 (Ten Years of Marriage Continued) (1947), and several essays collections (Mao 59). After 1949, Su Qing could not find any job besides a scriptwriter for a local theater (Mao 60–61). In the 1950s, when the Anti-Rightist movement began, and later on the Cultural Revolution, Su Qing lost her job and lived in poverty under political persecution (Mao 63–64). She died in 1982, alone (Mao 68). Before she died in 1982, she wanted to read her novel *Ten Years of Marriage* again but could not find a copy (Xie 119).

In this chapter, I focus on Su Qing's writing before 1949. In the first section, I explore how writing about the previous eating experience form her subjectivity as being rebellious towards cultural norms. In the second section, I examine her semi-autobiographical novel *Ten Years of Marriage*, and discuss how her writing about personal feelings, such as hunger for both food and sex, depicts women's suffering in domestic life. In the third section, I explore how in her writings, hometown taste relates her to another cultural space that differs from modern Shanghai. This helps her to refuse and criticize Shanghai's urban culture and makes her have an ambiguous attitude towards Confucian patriarchal tradition.

4.1 WILD FOOD IN CHILDHOOD

In this section, I focus on Su Qing's essay "Shuohua" 說話 (Talking) (1936) to examine how eating and the articulation of eating, in both spoken and written forms, shaped her subjectivity as a rebel against cultural norms. This essay is biographical, in which Su Qing stages several events in different periods of a girl's life when people treat her as a deviant, because she talks about eating ways that differ from what people would normally accept. According to Marry Douglas's theory⁶⁵ that eating defines our understanding of the social order and our recognition of deviant behaviors. To outside observers, a particular group's habits can be regarded as dangerous, polluted, and in need of transgression. That is to say, eating defines people and lets them relate to their community's culture and history. Eating and identity interact with each other from the time of birth, and continue to connect, upset and reconcile people with certain cultural norms and self/other binaries. In "Talking," when the narrator shows a different understanding of foods that are edible and inedible, people see her as a deviant, and thus attempt to discipline her. She then forms her subjectivity as the one who is rebellious to fight against people's critique, education, discipline and punishment towards her.

At the beginning of "Talking," the narrator memorizes her early life with her maternal grandma in the mountain area around Ningbo. Her grandpa is dead but has left his concubine to live with his wife ("Shuohua" 44). When the narrator is six years old, her grandma adopts a nephew to inherit their properties because they do not have a son and they begin to live with their daughter-in-law ("Shuohua" 45). One day, the little girl

⁶⁵ See Mary Douglass's book *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1991).

goes out with the concubine to pick up *ye sun* 野筍(wild bamboo root), and on the way home, the girl happily intends to express her gratitude but ends up calling the concubine “a prostitute”—something which the daughter-in-law had taught her in hope that she would be barred from inheriting some of her grandfather’s wealth (“Shuohua” 45). Later, the girl tells her grandma that she is “a lonely old woman and will die without descendants,” but this time the grandma sees *chao mitang* 炒米糖 (fried rice candy) on the little girl’s lips, so she finds out that it was the adopted daughter-in-law who gave her the candy and taught her those rude words (“Shuohua” 46). This incident causes a serious family conflict and the narrator’s mother takes her to live with her paternal grandparents (“Shuohua” 46). In this scene, in the eyes of the child, food and nature relate to each other insofar as they offer pleasure to her; however, in the eyes of adults, food can be a tool to lure, to trap and to hurt others. By eating and talking, the little girl enters the social order in a patriarchal family where only men can inherit property.

The narrator’s paternal grandparents are members of a respectful elite family and live together with many of their relatives (“Shuohua” 47). In their household, she likes to tell the other children how she ate wild food in the countryside: picking fruits in the mountains where the oranges and peaches grow, or wild bamboo roots and sweet potatoes while trying to catch *tianluo* 田螺 (river snails) (“Shuohua” 47). The children in that house, originally are refined and cultivated. However, because of the narrator’s stories, they begin to yearn for the country life, and they also learn to use vulgar language like countrymen (“Shuohua” 47). This articulation of such “backwards” eating acts makes her adult relatives laugh at her and her mother (“Shuohua” 27). Even though her grandma in the countryside is respectful, in the eyes of her city relatives, their eating habits—like all

the other country people—are not cultivated. In response, the narrator’s mother tries various methods to deter her daughter, but to no avail. Finally, her grandpa begins to teach her about literature in hope that she will talk about these literary works instead of her past eating experiences. She develops a great interest in the literary texts, and her grandfather’s teachings prove successful (“Shuohua” 47–48).

By presenting her different cultural background through these eating stories, the narrator obtains confidence as a new family member, who does not belong in the elite family but has her own culture. Through talking about different eating habits in the countryside, she presents the possibility of another way to imagine food, and accordingly challenges the legitimacy of the elite cultural taste. The wild food, and the way people prepare it, reflects a specific commensality that people and nature are in a more intimate relationship in the countryside. Children easily get pleasure from eating wild food, but adults in the elite family judge these rural eating experiences according to their cultural taste. In this scene, Su Qing positions the pleasure of eating with innocent children and nature to be the opposite of culture. This essay is one of her series of essays⁶⁶ in which the rural childhood eating experiences serves as the source of true happiness to support her to pursue bodily pleasure in many cultural contexts. The culinary nostalgia also helps her to keep distance and maintain a resistant position towards different cultures in her later life. In this essay, when the grandpa teaches the narrator to read literary works, he also leads her into the elite culture. Making the narrator become part of the elite social order, helps her to re-evaluate and re-interpret the memories of the countryside. This is the reason why he successfully stops her from telling those eating stories.

⁶⁶ In section three, I will discuss more essays about hometown taste.

The essay also portrays the narrator's eating experience in Shanghai when her family moves there. In Shanghai, they have many parties at western-style restaurants, where she keeps telling people about how she ate in the countryside again ("Shuohua" 48). For example, when she eats steak, she asks for the pickled vegetable sauce because this is how it would be served in the countryside ("Shuohua" 48). She embarrasses her parents, and thus loses the chance to join them on social occasions ("Shuohua" 48). By talking about the rural eating activities, she puts the city's westernized eating culture in conflict with the rural Chinese eating culture—the bias against the country eating culture is not solely based on Chinese high culture and low culture, but also western cultural hegemony from imperialism. The way of cooking food, the tableware and table manners, the clothes people wear, the restaurant decorations, and topics of conversation in these restaurants all seek to imitate foreign cultures as well as the westernized relationships. This speaks to the complex psychology at work in the semi-colonial metropolis as its citizens internalize their feelings of cultural inferiority. In this scene, again, the narrator does not engage in the western eating culture but sees food according to her bodily needs. She holds this attitude towards food, and unconsciously, tears apart her family's fragile identity as modern city residents, and challenges the taste of Shanghai's westernized urban culture.

In response to her uncultivated behaviors, her father not only denies her access to these social occasions, but also instructs her to conform to Confucian female virtues such as "*zhenjing*" 貞靜 (women should be virtuous and quiet) ("Shuohua" 48). He orders the maids to teach her traditional Chinese; however, since she does not change, he even orders the maids to shun her ("Shuohua" 49). In this scene, Confucianism becomes the

tool for the father to change her daughter into a modern lady. As a result, both the traditional Chinese culture and Western culture conspire to make her into a passive, ideal woman. From all these refusals—her aunt’s hoax, her grandpa’s attempts at cultivation, and her father’s denial—the feelings of eating from her early childhood become the Real, in a Lacanian context, that cannot be expressed by language, but nevertheless compel her to make repeated attempts at its expression. The flavor of the food she ate in the countryside renders her body a habitus that always reminds her of an alternative commensality—one should resist the cultural norms placed on both food and their bodies.

The essay then shows the process how the narrator forms her subjectivity because of her experience of talking about her childhood eating in these different environments. She is not conscious about how her subjectivity is related to different eating practices and articulations of these experiences. However, she is conscious about herself as an opponent of established social orders:

我有一個脾氣，就是好和人反對，其實我並沒有什麼成見，只是一味的好奇立異，以顯得與眾不同罷了。（“Shuohua” 51）

I have a personality that is always opposed to others. I actually have no bias, but I just like to be different, so it appears that I am out of the ordinary.

I believe that when she keeps talking about her eating experience in the countryside, people’s negative responses towards her for acting as the deviant one shape her subjectivity as the one who always “likes to be different” and is “out of the ordinary.” The narrator describes how this “temper” brings her trouble in school, and yet the personal frustrations she shares resonate with the national frustration of expression. As

the January 28th Incident⁶⁷ causes more severe censorship, people around her all refuse to talk about the political frustrations the country is experiencing. They either work hard without talking about social affairs or enjoy life without caring about society; however, the narrator chooses a different attitude:

我常常恭維我所最看不起的人，也常放意使期望我的人灰心；我要人家都誤解我，讓他們在我“不由衷”的談話裡想象我的思想，我自己卻冷冷地在鼻子裡笑。（“Shuohua” 53）

I always flatter the people I look down upon. I also often make people who have high expectations of me feel disappointed; I want people to misunderstand me and let them imagine my thoughts from my “insincere” words, while I am coldly laughing at them.

She does not completely give up communication with others but turns to irony to express herself. Her pleasure of expression now becomes the pleasure of misleading others. She now adopts a playful attitude to be the antagonist of those who cannot understand her—“coldly laughing at them.” At the beginning, she keeps communicating to bridge the gaps between her and others, but now she gives up on these attempts.

At the end of the essay, the narrator completely abandons the desire to speak, and in turn she no longer has any feelings. She thinks “若說要除去這重壓而恢復得到原來輕快的境界的話，那我也只有獨自跑到溪邊去訴淙淙的流水了，然而這裏連溪水也根本不容易找到呀！（if I want to relieve the heavy pressure and recover to a happy state

⁶⁷ It is also called the Shanghai incident, which was a conflict between the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan. This was the beginning of the Japanese invasion of China.

as before, I have to go to a river by myself to talk to the flowing water, but I cannot find a river here at all) (“Shuohua” 53). She does not explain if “這裏” (here) refers to Ningbo or Shanghai, but “here” is the space where she has a remote distance from nature, far away from the countryside where she grew up. Nature, again, serves as the ideal place that can invigorate her. This ending echoes the beginning of the essay when she eats wild food in the countryside. The pleasure of eating in the innocent nature draws a comparison with the numbness in the complex cultural and political debate.

The reason why I analyze this essay first is because, in this early work of Su Qing, the conflict between primal bodily pleasure and the cultivated social hierarchy is a thread to connect the narrator’s life. In many of her later works, food, on the one hand, through her culinary nostalgia, serves as the resource of primal pleasure; on the other hand, with its commensality, serve as the tool to maintain a social order. By writing about this conflict, Su Qing finds her own voice as a modern female writer who attacks gender discrimination not through intellectual discourse, but through her pursuit of bodily pleasure. I believe this essay, which she wrote at twenty-one years old and married for one year, also reveals the process how she obtained her belief in bodily pleasure. Many of the plots in this essay coincide with Su Qing’s life, family, life trajectory, and even the river in her hometown. Nicole Huang in *Women, War, Domesticity: Shanghai Literature and Popular Culture of the 1940s* (2005) considers Su Qing as having “manipulated the hazy boundaries between the authorial voice and the narrative self to produce ethnographical accounts of wartime survival and personal growth in the form of novels” (159). Huang only focus on Su Qing’s wartime novel *Ten Years of Marriage*, and I believe Su Qing adopted a similar narrative strategy in this early essay. In her self-

reflexive writing, Su Qing not only shows her real life, but reveals how she interprets her personal experience to the readers in a literary form. By writing, she interprets different eating practices in her previous life to express her repressed desires in her current life.

The interaction between eating and writing constructs her subjectivity as a modern female writer, as well as her understanding of gender relations in her marriage.

4.2 COOKING AND EATING IN MARRIAGE

In this section, I undertake a close reading of Su Qing's most important work, *Ten Years of Marriage*, with a focus on the culinary and eating activities in this novel. In the protagonist Su Huaiqing's 蘇懷青 ten years of married life, living in the extended family in the city of N, and in the "xiao jiating" 小家庭 (nuclear family) in modern Shanghai are the two main settings. Even though the former is Confucian, and the latter is modern and westernized, both of these family structures are patriarchal. In these two different settings, cooking and eating play an important role in trapping women in cyclical time, a term used by Kristeva. The cyclical nature of household dining imprisons women in a cyclical time, the temporality that Kristeva attempts to conceptualize from the perspective of motherhood and reproduction (16). This cyclical time is different from the linear time related to masculinity, which can be seen in the narratives of personal development and national progress depicted in the novel. Su Qing, in this novel, portrays the commensality of food in the patriarchal family where women are trapped in cyclical time through quotidian cooking and eating. She describes how these culinary and alimentary practices are a way to maintain the patriarchal hierarchy and repress women's appetite and sexual pleasure. Also, the culinary nostalgia of her eating with her college friend, reflects women's complex psychology about food, sex and motherhood in domestic life. In this

way, Su Qing creates the tension between individuals' personal feelings and the oppressive gender discrimination.

The novel talks about the protagonist Su Huaiqing's ten years of marriage. In this semi-autobiographical novel, which Su Qing calls "autobiographical fiction," Huaiqing marries a wealthy business family, and lives with her parents-in-law in the city of N ("Jiehun shinian houji"147). She and her husband Xian 賢 are both college students, and they go back to school soon after the wedding. At college, a classmate of hers, named Ying Qimin 應其民, falls in love with her, and they go to the library and eat together. Months later, when Huaiqing realizes she is pregnant, she goes back to her parents-in-law's family and delivers a baby girl there. After living in that extended family for more than three years, Huaiqing and Xian, living with their daughter and one maid, move to Shanghai, where her husband goes to college. Since then, Huaiqing begins her life in the nuclear family. Different from living with her parents-in-law, Huaiqing begins to manage the housework such as purchasing food, cooking, and managing the maid with Xian's limited income. Xian, after graduating from college, becomes a successful lawyer, and they lead a wealthy life for a period of time. Her parents-in-law, because of the war, lost most of their properties and wealth. They take Huaiqing's eldest girl and move in with them too. Later, because of the January 28 incident, Xian loses his job. Huaiqing is pregnant again, and the parents-in-law decide to move back to the city of N to alleviate the financial pressure on Huaiqing and Xian. During the time in Shanghai, Huaiqing delivers two girls, and after Huaiqing delivers her son, she finds out Xian has an affair. They eventually divorce.

In the novel, from the very beginning of Huaiqing's marriage, food begins to be used to maintain the gender hierarchy and repress women's bodily needs. During the wedding banquet, men and women sit separately, and the men eat better dishes. The dishes on the bride's table are same as men's, but it is not considered proper for the bride to eat them (*Jiehun shinian* 6). Then Huaiqing finds out the other women all accept this eating way, and she stays hungry, because "this is the custom" (*Jiehun shinian* 6). These rituals can be traced back to how eating and sex are framed in Confucian discourse as two basic desires, and women must discipline themselves to be virtuous and control such desires. This is especially true of the bride who by eating no food proves her virtue and shows the groom that she has no sexual desire. The customary nature of these eating rituals places the current wedding within its larger Confucian historical context. The protagonist's hunger, among other feelings of deprivation, forms her identity as the wedding functions as the formal symbolic moment for her to become a married woman, and therefore a part of the gendered hierarchy. In this scene, Su Qing sees through the eyes of Huaiqing to observe this banquet, and describe her hunger as "暗中咽口吐沫" (secretly swallowing saliva) (*Jiehun shinian* 6). The protagonist's interior monologue on her bodily feelings serves as her interpretation of the customs that repress woman's bodily desire.

After the wedding, there are many eating rituals repeated every day to force the new wife to internalize her responsibility to be in a subordinate position and serve her husband's relatives. At the end of the three-day-wedding ceremony, the ritual "going to the kitchen" (*ru chufang* 入厨房) not only requires the bride to control her appetite, but also requires her to cook for the family. The protagonist wears the wedding dress while

“stirring the boiling soup,” and being watched by friends and relatives (11). Since it is a wealthy family, Huaiqing does not need to cook in the kitchen. This ceremony has a symbolic meaning to show that the bride accepts the role of serving food to the family in the new marriage. In the morning, Huaiqing needs to “serve tea” (*fengcha* 奉茶) to her parents-in-law and her sister-in-law every morning at six, and she has to “get up half an hour earlier than them to clean herself and dress up” (*Jiehun shinian* 40). These eating rituals, repeated every day, discipline her to accept the female gender role of serving food to the family.

Later, when Huaiqing is pregnant and delivers the baby, her parents-in-law begin to feed her a lot of food to ensure that she has a healthy pregnancy. In this way, Huaiqing feels her body is objectified:

天天為我準備吃食，跨筋，惋鴨，小鯽魚湯，巴不得把我喂得像个弥勒佛才好。吃饭的时候，菜上来，公公便说：“这个是补血的。”于是婆婆便赶紧移到我面前，省得我伸手向远处夹菜，牵动脐带。（*Jiehun shinian* 27）

They prepared food for me every day, including cowheel, duck and Crucian carp soup. They'd rather feed me to make me look like a [fat] Maitreya.

While eating, when the dish was served, my father-in-law would say: “this one enriches your blood.” And my mother-in-law moved the dish beside me, so I didn't have to stretch my hand to the other side of the table to move the umbilical cord.

The word “feed” (*wei* 喂) shows how passively she eats, and both her parents-in-law feed her to “enrich her blood” (*Jiehun shinian* 27). They also serve her so that she doesn't

have to move a lot (according to them, this would negatively influence the baby). The extra food at the table is good for the fetus, but not for the Huaiqing's own pleasure. Thus, Huaiqing has no appetite, and no mobility. By eating food for the baby but not for herself, she alienates her body to be a delivery-machine and carries the responsibility to deliver a boy to carry on her parents-in-law's name.

As the delivery, Huaiqing is required to undergo “*zuo yuezi* 坐月子” (postpartum confinement)⁶⁸. During the confinement, she is expected to lie on the bed for a whole month and eat only the food people offer her. With many detailed customs to restrict the food she can eat; she still does not accept the requirement to repress her appetite:

但是我的身子動彈不得，我只能躺在床上等午飯端上來。做產的婦人是吃得好的，蛋啦肉啦什麼都有，就是不備青菜。黃大媽說，吃了青菜會發腫的。我說：腫什麼呢？肚子腫，還是喉嚨腫得嚥不下了？但是她也答不出來，我要吃，她仍舊不許。(Jiehun shinian 35)

I wasn't able to move. I could only lie on the bed, waiting for lunch. Women, during their confinement, eat good food: egg, meat, etc., but no vegetables. The maid Huang said: your body will swell if you eat vegetables. I asked: which part will swell? Belly or throat, so I cannot swallow? But she couldn't answer me. However, I wanted to eat, she still did not permit me to.

⁶⁸ Postpartum confinement refers to a traditional practice following childbirth where the woman is confined for thirty days. It continues as a common practice in China to this very day.

The maid cannot clearly explain why women should have these alimentary choices in their confinement, but she follows them, nevertheless. The eating customs both during pregnancy and confinement serve as the vague traditional knowledge, which retains its authority being passed from generation to generation to restrict women's bodies. In these scenes Huaiqing refuses this custom; however, her refusal does not come from a scientific argument, but from her pursuit of the pleasure of eating.

At the end of the confinement, with days of suffering without any pleasure from eating, Huaiqing, instead of accepting her new identity as a mother, internalizes her emotional hunger turns it in a narcissistic self-reflection of her own body. That is on the day of *manyue jiu* 滿月酒 (one month banquet) for the new baby, when the whole family is busy downstairs to prepare the banquet, host the guests, and receiving the gifts, Huaiqing looks at her image in the mirror: “坐在紅木的大梳妝台前，我幾乎不認識了自己。下巴是尖尖的，鼻子顯得過高，貧血的臉上白淨得一顆黑痣也沒有，我很傷心” (Sitting in front of the mahogany dressing table, I barely knew myself. The chin is pointed, which makes the nose looks like it's too high, and the face, because of the anemia, is white and there is no black mole. I am very sad) (*Jiehun shinian* 37).

In this moment, compared to the banquet noise downstairs where people celebrate a new member of their extended family, she is alone upstairs to mourn her own body. The loneliness she feels in her marriage is expressed in her description of her body. The emptiness she feels about her body cannot be fulfilled by her achieved new identity as a mother. Before this moment, she tries to maintain her connection with her daughter. But her parents-in-law hope Huaiqing can get pregnant again soon, so they take away the baby and let a wetnurse feed the little girl. After this moment, Huaiqing has no desire to

feed her daughter, even when she has the opportunity. This becomes a pattern for how she treats her children. Su Qing does not write about her delivery as a way to valorize motherhood. Instead, she writes about the suffering of women's bodies in the process of delivery to make Huaiqing be the deviant one of the family. These attitudes are why the protagonist eventually choose to leave the family.

After the confinement, there is no extra food offered to Huaiqing. The excessive food for eating is offered in order for women to produce more children in the future, but not to entitle women to enjoy surplus pleasure.:

做產的時候，她們每天除三餐外，還給我吃上下午點心，晚上也有上半夜點心，下半夜點心等等，一天二十四小時內統共要吃上七次。可是過了月那天，驟然便省去三餐點心，下午還有，過此則是長夜漫漫，任你櫓腹待旦，老黃媽再也不問一聲。有時候我實在餓得慌了，便裝作解手暗中摸索到後房去，高聲咳嗽了幾下，藉故喊醒老黃媽道：“廚房裡可有什麼帶湯的點心沒有？我的喉嚨有些難過，給我潤一潤嘴吧。”老黃媽唔唔幾聲後卻又變卦：“少奶奶你還是靜靜的睡吧，喉嚨過會子就會好的，明天還要捧早茶呢。(Jiehun shinian 40)

When I was being confined in childbirth, they gave me snacks in the morning and afternoon every day in addition to my three meals. In the evening, they also had snacks in the first half of the night, and snacks in the second half of the night. I totally eat seven times a day in twenty-four hours. However, after the last day of confinement, I was not given food anymore. After that, it was a long night, and no matter how hungry I was,

Huang Ma never brought me anything at all. Sometimes I was so hungry, I pretended to sneak into the back room and coughed a few times, in order to wake up Huang Ma: “Can there be any dessert with soup in the kitchen? My throat is uncomfortable, give me something to eat.” Huang Ma answered and then changed her mind: “You, young mistress, you’d better sleep quietly, and your throat will feel better. You need to serve the tea tomorrow morning.”

Her body gets used to the excessive food for months and hinders her self-discipline. No matter whether she over-eats or starves, she has no mobility or freedom. Huaiqing’s hunger echoes her starving experience on the wedding day. Women can only eat legitimately when it is necessary to facilitate reproduction. As the maid says, “you have to serve tea tomorrow morning,” so she cannot have any food at night. This is just part of a series of rituals that repress women’s bodily needs. According to Sarah Moss, “the equation between the consumption of food and the production of morality appears most starkly in relation to pregnancy, breastfeeding and prostitution, the states in which it is most obvious that women’s bodies are economically active in a way that men cannot be” (*Jiehun shinian* 23). The eating customs of pregnancy and confinement require women to privilege motherhood against their own subjectivity with an emphasis on reproduction as women’s only societal role. The novel shows that the pleasure of eating is distributed unequally between the sexes.

Huaiqing’s body is exploited via excessive “feeding” or lack of eating, and both of them cause her hunger for love. She, thus, recalls an eating experience with her classmate Qimin. Su Qing, again, writes about an eating experience in another place, and

through this culinary nostalgia lets Huaiqing escape from and criticize her suffering. Huaiqing, uses “*liangke yingtao*” 两颗樱桃 (two cherries) to refer to her relationship with Qingmin, who always orders her food as she likes (*Jiehun shinian* 25). “他關心我，而這裡一切人似乎都是只關心孩子的!” (He cared about me, while people here seem only to care about the baby!) (*Jiehun shinian* 28). By recalling the two cherries he gave her, Huaiqing expresses her hunger for love and her repressed sexual pleasure. Here, Su Qing, by writing about Huaiqing’s feelings during pregnancy and confinement, as well as her imagination of the real love, depicts a new image of the mother, who, besides the maternal role, still preserves her own bodily desires.

After Huaiqing is married for three years, she moves to Shanghai with her husband. While Huaiqing often resented how she was excluded from eating in Ningbo, she finds that in Shanghai she now holds more power to determine who eats what and how. On the one hand, this is a result of her domestic role within the nuclear family; however, without financial support of the parents-in-law, she is trapped in the endless calculation of food and money. In Shanghai, they share the house with other families in a two-story-building and lack the basic ingredients and tools for cooking such as briquets, a stove, and various staple foods. Different foodways in the city reflect different relationships accordingly. For example, they do not have a familiar shop to deliver rice and coals. Also, in Shanghai, they can only afford one maid, Lin Ma 林媽, who was the maid of Huaiqing’s mother, and came with them from Ningbo to Shanghai. Thus, Huaiqing and Xian, who never participated in the housework in Ningbo, now have to help the maid. When the shop does not deliver the briquets, Lin Ma refuses to go to ask because she worries that she may get lost walking on the street. Xian tells Huaiqing that

“cooking is your responsibility; I’d better not do it for you” (*Jiehun shinian* 70).

Although the first night, the three of them end up cooking dinner together—blurring the boundary between gender and class temporarily—he next morning, Lin Ma begins to learn how to be a maid in Shanghai, while Huaiqing gets used to her new marital gender roles.

When Huaiqing begins to get involved in cooking, she begins to calculate how to save small amounts of money. She learns many ways to be frugal from Lin Ma:

於是林媽教了我許多看家的本領，先是做人要精明，各種地方不可以給人家佔了便宜去，從此我知道買小菜應該挨道收攤時去祂便宜貨，一百錢雞毛菜可以裝得滿滿一籃子了。我也知道把人家送來的沙利文糖果吃完了，紙匣子應該藏起來，以後有必要送人時只要到校糖果店裡去買些普通貨色來，把它們裝進沙利文匣子便是了。(*Jiehun shinian* 83)

So, Lin Ma taught me a lot of housekeeping skills. First, I had to be smart. I can't let people take advantage of me all the time. From then on, I knew that when buying vegetables, I had to wait until the seller was about to go home and would sell them for a cheaper price. One hundred dollars of greens could get a full basket. I also knew that after eating Sullivan's Fine Candies that people gave me, I should save the paper box. When I needed to give people a gift, I could go to a candy shop to buy some common candy and put them into the Sullivan's box.

Meanwhile, her relationship with Lin Ma has been changed too. In Ningbo, Lin Ma is not only an employee, but she is also Huaiqing's mother's maid, who has an emotional

attachment with their family. Thus, Huaiqing's mother trusts her to help Huaiqing in Shanghai, and Lin Ma agrees to leave Ningbo to help the new couple. While in Shanghai, a more commercialized city, their emotional bond is challenged by financial calculation:

有時候我連林媽都不相信了，一斤綠豆芽，怎麼只有這麼一小堆，於是故意支使她出去買料酒，自己偷偷地把它放進元寶藍裡稱，剛剛十六兩，沒除籃子，也沒多撈一把，我嘆口氣，別是林媽也學會揩油了…… (*Jiehun shinian* 83)

Sometimes I didn't even trust Lin Ma. She said she bought a pound of green bean sprouts, but how can I only have such a small pile? So, I deliberately asked her to go out and buy cooking wine, and secretly put it onto the scale, just sixteen *liang* including the basket. Not even a little bit more. I sighed, maybe Lin Ma also learned how to take advantage of me...

For Huaiqing, calculating the small profits of managing the household becomes her first priority, that goes beyond her relationship with Lin Ma. At the end, she takes over Lin Ma's work. She "cooked, washed, cleaned the floor, and cleaned the house all by herself" (*Jiehun shinian* 102). This shows how Huaiqing comes to participate in the cyclical women's time as she takes on the quotidian domestic tasks of her childhood servant.

By writing about how housewives cook and serve food every day, Su Qing portrays how they are trapped in cyclical time. Compared to Xian who develops his career from a schoolteacher to become a successful lawyer, Huaiqing stays in the house, and the repeated household chores over and over until the end of their marriage. She faces not only the repression of bodily pleasure, but also financial pressure, endless cooking and cleaning to maintain the household, and the burden of pleasing her husband.

The culinary practices in the city, quickly form a new gender norm that is more in line with the capitalist urban center, but for women this new relationship created by family cooking and eating still compels them represses their bodily pleasure, only in a different way. Because of the trivial household duties, Huaiqing gradually loses her sexual desire:

我覺得生命漸漸的失去光彩了，有時候靜下來，心頭像有種說不出的
悵悶，彷彿有一句詩隱隱綽綽的在腦際，只是記不起來。賢坐在對面
瞅著我，似乎很贊成我的改變，只是仍不能滿足他，因為每晚上我已
經沒有熱情了。(Jiehun shinian 83)

I felt my life was gradually losing its brilliance. Sometimes when I calmed down, I felt sad, but I couldn't say why. It seemed that there was a poem hanging in my mind, but I couldn't remember. Xian sat in front of me and looked at me. He seemed to approve of how I had changed, but I still couldn't satisfy him, because I had no passion at night.

The pleasure of eating disappears, giving way to the constant anxiety of buying and preparing food. By setting up an alternate hierarchy within their household, women create their own spaces and form a new reality within the domestic sphere. This lends itself to a process of subjectification outside linear, masculine time. However, this construction is not completely free and active—other family members force themselves to repress their own bodily needs. Housework replaces the patriarchal eating rituals to become the new quotidian pressure, which represses women's bodily pleasure within the nuclear family.

In this novel, Su Qin portrays how the two family-structures, extended family and nuclear family, as both repressing women, mentally, physically and financially, to trap them in cyclical time. More importantly, Su Qing from a woman's perspective, describes

women's feelings, desire, hunger and appetite, and, in this way, criticizes gender discrimination. Similar to the essay "Talking," Su Qing never questions women's right to enjoy bodily pleasure, no matter as a mother or as a wife. This is her foundation to criticize different eating customs and gender norms. Not from intellectual considerations or moral judgement, but from her bodily needs, Su Qing shows the reason why Huaiqing finally decides to leave the marriage.

4.3 HOMETOWN TASTE IN THE CITY

In this section, I examine several of Su Qing's essays to discuss how the nostalgia of hometown taste helps Su Qing to idealize her hometown as an alternative cultural space and criticize Shanghai's urban culture. Here, Su Qing's celebration of primal desire and innocent nature represent her memory of the hometown food's plain flavor. In *Ten Years of Marriage*, her memory of the tastes of Ningbo creates a bond between Huaiqing and her parents-in-law when they move to Shanghai with her. Compared to the different taste of Shanghai cuisine, the preference for Ningbo dishes makes Huaiqing not only understand her parents-in-law, but also have sympathy for the declining Confucian patriarchal rituals. Su Qing also takes it as a way to criticize the westernized and capitalist culture in Shanghai.

Ningbo cuisine is an important theme in Su Qing's writings to compare with Shanghai cuisine. She writes a series of essays to celebrate Ningbo people's taste in food. In Su Qing's nostalgic writing about Ningbo food in Shanghai, she refigures the eating culture in Ningbo to be more elegant compared to the westernized Shanghai culture. Her nostalgia for Ningbo food, especially when she moves to Shanghai, reforms her relationship with her hometown, and influences her self-awareness of Shanghai's modern

culture as a new Shanghai migrant. In several works, Su Qing introduces how Ningbo people love “*xian*” 鮮 (fresh flavors). People who can tell the subtle flavor from the fresh food have more sensitive feelings and are more cultivated, for, according to *Book of the Late Han*, “大味必淡，大音必希” (the great flavor must be flavorless, and great music must be soundless) (Fan Ye 1136). In the essay “Tan Ningbo ren de chi” 談寧波人的吃 (On Ningbo people’s eating), Su Qing praises Ningbo people’s culinary traditions, stating that these traditions “preserved the original flavor of the food”, compared to Guangdong, Suzhou, and Shanghai cuisines. She believes Ningbo food has less ingredients, unlike Guangdong and Suzhou dishes:

隨便炒只什麼小菜都要配上七八種幫頭，糖啦醋啦調料又放得多，結果吃起來魚不像魚，肉不像肉。又不論肉片、牛肉片、雞片通通要拌菱粉，吃起來滑膩膩的，哪裡還分辨得出什麼味道？ (“Tan Ningbo ren de chi” 54)

No matter what dishes they fry, they will add seven or eight ingredients, such as a lot of sugar, vinegar, and other spices. As a result, fish does not taste like fish, and meat does not taste like meat. No matter what kind of meat, beef or chicken, they all add starch, which makes them slimy—so how are people supposed to tell the flavor?

The culinary practices in different areas are defined by their ability to convey the food’s original flavor.⁶⁹ The interpretation of food reflects people’s cultural identities. By

⁶⁹ Ironically, Guangdong and Suzhou dish since the 1980’s, when regional dishes became popular again, they both advertised it as the dish’s original flavor.

Comparing Ningbo's pickled blue crab to the “*suozi xie*” 梭子蟹 (swimming crab) her roommate bought, she writes that “這種東西, 在我們寧波, 只有那些做苦力的長工會吃” (such things, in Ningbo, can only be served to long-term hired hands, who perform the roughest work) (“Tan Ningbo ren de chi” 55). She also compares Ningbo dish's freshness with Shanghai dish's greasiness:

我們煮草紫不用油, 只需要再滾水裡一沸便撈起, 拌上料理, 又嫩油鮮口, 上海某菜館的油煎草頭雖很有名, 但照我吃起來, 總嫌其太膩, 不如故鄉草紫之名副其實的有菜根香。 (“Tan Ningbo ren de chi” 55)

We boil greens without oil. Only to take them out after a few short seconds, and add some sauce, so that they are tender and fresh. There is a restaurant in Shanghai, which is famous for its fried greens, but I feel they are too greasy, unlike my hometown's, which have the vegetable root's fragrance.

She compares Shanghai's famous restaurant with home cooked wild vegetables from Ningbo. In this way, she expresses the cultural superiority of the Ningbo cuisine. In the end, she compares the taste of her father, an international student, to her own and argues that taste in food is the same as taste in writing:

我知道爸爸是留學生, 有許多外國習慣, 但我很替他可惜在吃的方面不該太講究衛生而不注重趣味。我對於吃是保守的, 只喜歡寧波式,

什麼是什麼，不失其本味。猶如做文章一般，以為有內容有情感的作品原是不必專靠辭藻，因為新鮮的蔬菜魚蝦原不必多放什麼料理的呀！唯有在冰箱裡拖出來的魚屍，以及水浸透的鞭筍，快要腐臭了的種種肉呀之類，才必須靠蔥啦蒜啦來掩飾，放在油裡猛炸，加上濃黑的醬油，終至於做到使人們不能辨出味來為止。這是烹調技術的進步嗎？還是食物本質的低劣？（“Tan Ningbo ren de chi” 57）

I know that my father was an international student who picked up a lot of foreign habits, but I am sorry that he sacrifices flavor for hygiene. I am conservative about eating. I only like Ningbo dishes because they haven't lost their original flavor. It's just like how I write articles, no fancy language or rhetorical tricks, because with good content and genuine emotion it's not necessary—just like fresh vegetables, fish and shrimp, they don't need any more ingredients! Only dead fish from the refrigerator, soaked water bamboo shoots, rancid meat, and so on, need to be cooked with Chinese onion, garlic, and then fried in oil, and have dark soy sauce added, so that make people cannot tell their flavor. Is this really an advancement in cooking? Or is it just a way to mask inferior food?

She praises Ningbo people not only for their good taste for flavor, but also for their cultural taste. Their ability to tell the interesting things in life, and care about more than just hygiene, unlike her father. In the end, she turns taste into a moral issue: that people's writings, which have no content or emotion are like food that has gone bad. On this topic she writes that, “dead fish from the refrigerator, soaked water bamboo shoots, rancid

meat” (“Tan Ningbo ren de chi” 57). The effort to polish these empty writings is just like Shanghai’s thick soy sauce—unrecognizable to the point that people cannot tell the difference between what is good and bad. This shows how their taste for flavors is transferred to their taste for literature and culture. She thinks such writings are inferior. She frames herself as one of the Ningbo people, opposed to the artificial and non-indigenous formations of identity in the bigger cities. In this way, she offers a higher position for Ningbo as a righteous place in comparison with more developed big cities like Suzhou, Guangdong, Shanghai and even those of the West; meanwhile she portrays herself as an honest writer from Ningbo. Thus, Su Qing undoes Ningbo’s cultural inferiority complex by reframing their cuisine as superior to Republican China’s most modern cities.

In *Ten Years of Marriage*, when the protagonist Huaiqing and her parents-in-law all moved to Shanghai, the shared taste for their hometown food creates a bond between them and makes Huaiqing show an ambiguous attitude towards the patriarchal eating rituals in the extended family. In contrast to Ningbo, where Huaiqing needs to serve tea to her parents-in-law every morning, in Shanghai, if Huaiqing gets up late, the maids refuse to serve breakfast to the elders first; rather, they insist on waiting until Huaiqing gets up so that they can eat together. In this situation, the father-in-law would normally take the first daughter, Cucu 簇簇, to buy street food. Even though Huaiqing criticizes the maids for such behavior, they still serve the best bowl of rice to Huaiqing, while giving burnt rice to the parents-in-law. For the maid, Huaiqing is the one who pays them a salary. In this more capitalized servant-master relationship, they serve the best food to the one who gives them money. The old eating rituals create and reinforce her

understanding that the elders are naturally in higher position in the family. These two different eating ways represent two divergent commensalities rooted in the family structure. In this situation, the shared taste between Huaiqing and her parents-in-law makes her understand the conflicts from the parents' perspective:

我總是每天買燒雞，蔥烤肉，還有魚啦，蛋啦，樣樣都是新鮮的。但是上海的煮法與N城不同，各種小菜都要加糖，吃起來甜膩膩的。而且油味過重，他們似乎不很愛吃。N城人是喜歡吃鹹的，清口的，容易下飯的東西，如膠冬瓜啦，臭腐乳啦，這裡都不大容易買到。八月裡應該吃桂花黃魚了，魚肚皮上一抹嬌黃，魚眼睛像透明的綠寶石，N城人居住近海，捕來就吃自然是新鮮的。他們常常放鹽及料酒清蒸，也可以加蝦子醬油，但更愛吃清口的卻放蝦瓜汁或上好鹽菜汁等，但是上海的黃魚就非紅燒不可，先在大量的生油中煎過，再放濃濃的醬油，加蔥加糖，這樣他們老年人就嫌味厚吃不下了。好幾次都是公公在外面自己買了瓶裝香碟之類來，等我知道第二天趕緊再去買時，他們多吃也已經吃厭了。(Jiehun shinian 114)

I always bought roasted chicken, onion barbecue, fish, eggs, and everything was fresh. However, the cooking method in Shanghai was different from that of N City. They added sugar to all kinds of small dishes, which were all sweet. Since the dishes were too greasy, they [my parents-in-law] didn't seem to like them very much. People from N City liked to eat salty, fresh food that tasted like goo with rice, for instance, gelatinous melon and stinky tofu. However, they were not easy to buy

here. In August, people had to eat sweet-scented yellow fish. The fish belly was a little bit yellow, and the fisheyes were like transparent emeralds. People from N city lived near the sea, and they ate the fish right after catching it, when it was fresh. They often put salt and cooking wine, or added shrimp soy sauce, when steaming it. Still, they preferred to use shrimp and melon juice or the salty juices from good vegetables.

However, Shanghai people always cooked yellow croaker braised with soy sauce. First, they were fried in a large amount of oil, then put in thick soy sauce, with onions and sugar added. Because of the heavy flavor, the elderly couldn't afford to eat too much. Several times, my father-in-law bought a bottle of fragrant ingredients and so on, and when I knew that, I would immediately go to buy it too the next day. However, they would have eaten it too often and therefore they don't want to eat it anymore.

When she describes her parents-in-law's dissatisfaction with the food she offers, she introduces the tastes of Ningbo cuisine, which is different from that of Shanghai. In this scene, she and her parents-in-law share the same taste; however, their Shanghai maids do not know how to cook in the more delicate Ningbo fashion. This blurs the fact that her parents continue to deny the food she offers to them. She even quickly changes the subject to talk about how seafood is prepared much better in Ningbo and to complain about the redundant ingredients in Shanghai-style cooking. In her comparison, she projects her explicit yearning for the past and blames Shanghai's food culture for her parents-in-law's negative feelings. Because of these shared tastes, she seems very tolerant of the fact that they are not happy with what she serves them. These descriptions of taste,

following the conflict between the capitalized family structure in Shanghai and the patriarchal family's, make Huaiqing understand their loneliness. She takes their position to criticize Shanghai's modern life—not only the food's flavor, but also the social graces and etiquette. This helps Huaiqing create a bond with her parents-in-law as they all leave home, longing for their hometown's food. This scene shows how the longing for Ningbo flavor changes Su Qing's attitude towards the patriarchal rituals, with which she had more complaints when in Ningbo.

In *Women's Literary Feminism in Twentieth Century China* (2005), Amy D. Dooling argues that “Su Qing incorporates satire into a scathing analysis of the contemporary institutions of marriage and motherhood” (138). Reading the novel *Ten Years of Marriage* differently from Dooling, I also see Huaiqing's strong self-pity and deep sympathy towards her parents-in-law, who continued to believe in Confucian tradition even though it was in decline. I believe these emotions do not fit into a comedic writing style as Dooling argues. I find that it is because Su Qing is sensitive about her and other's bodily needs, and, for her, this is more important than any moral judgement. From this very practical view, she describes the gendered rituals as absurd in a satirical way, has self-pity when she writes her own suffering in motherhood and marriage, and shares the feeling with her parents-in-law when they all move to Shanghai. Food and eating convey different meanings in these different contexts and help her to change her attitude accordingly.

In an essay “Dou su tang” 豆酥糖 (Crisp Bean Candy), Su Qing describes how the candy that she ate with her grandma links the past and present—by eating the candy, the narrator goes back to the past moment, recaptures the bodily pleasure and accordingly

recognizes herself as part of the old culture. This allows her to question modern Shanghai life. In the essay, Su Qing's cousin brings her crisp bean candy from her grandma in Ningbo. The grandma loves eating, and shares candy with Su Qing from a bedside shelf that is full of candies and snacks. They drop a lot of candy flakes on the bed while eating, and sleep on or eat the flakes so that the candies do not go to waste. One day, Su Qing's father finds this out, and he angrily argues with her grandma. The next day, he buys a small bed for the girl to separate her from her grandma. After years, when the narrator has already moved to Shanghai, she sees the same candy when her cousin brings it to her. She feels ashamed and disgusted, but also has desire towards it:

我不忍吃——其實還怕遲它們。想起有小時候在枕頭上，被窩裡揭取來吃時的情形，更覺噁心，而沒有勇氣去拆它們的包紙了。我是嫌它髒嗎？不！這種想頭要給祖母知道了她也許又將氣呼呼的十餘天不理睬我，或者竟是畢生不理睬我呀。我怎樣可以放著不吃？又怎能夠吃下去呢？（“Dou su tang” 119）

I could not bear to eat—actually I was scared to eat them. Thinking about when I was little and I ate the candy flakes off the pillow and comforter, I felt disgusted, and I wasn't brave enough to even unwrap them. Do I feel that they are dirty? No! If my grandma knows this thought she would be angry and stop talking to me for ten days, or not talk to me for the rest of her life. How could I leave them there without eating them? But how could I eat them?

Eating candy flakes on the bed shows a specific commensality: grandmother and granddaughter share the big bed, where it is possible to set up a shelf for candies and

snacks; the authentic local candy is valuable, and eating candy flakes off of the bed is not considered a problem of hygiene. When her father finds this out, he criticizes her grandmother and takes the girl to live with him in modern Shanghai. Here, her father cannot accept this eating way because of his knowledge of modern hygiene, which relates to his experiences studying abroad. When Su Qing grows up and moves to Shanghai, she assimilates to the urban culture and its hygienic knowledge, which her father believes in. Although how she ate with her grandmother initially disgusts her, she comes to project a nostalgic feeling towards these memories. As a result, at the end of the essay, she still eats the candy:

它們雖然已經潮濕，卻是道地的山北貨，吃起來滋味很甜。——甜到我的嘴裡，甜進我的心裡，祝你健康，我的好祖母！（“Dou su tang” 120)

Although they [these candies] are already wet, they are the authentic from the northern mountains. The candies are sweet—they make my mouth sweet and make my heart sweet. Wish you good health, my dear grandma!

The flavor of the candy and the pleasure of eating in her memory lure her to eat the candy and re-accept the way in which people live in Ningbo. By eating the wet candy, she breaks the hygienic rules, and lets her childhood memories and present moment collapse in on one another. The pleasure of eating conquers the disgusting feelings to make her recognize the pre-modern social order in Ningbo as a nostalgic sweetness. The cousin also tells her that the grandma gave one *jiao* (ten cents) to let people buy ten “buns” (*baozi* 包子) to treat the cousin without realizing the money she gave her is the currency from the former government and not enough for even one bun (115). In this turbulent

society, her grandma is outdated, but it also means that she, along with the candy and buns, represents true happiness for Su Qing.

In “Crisp Bean Candy” Su Qing stages the pre-modern foodways in Ningbo to compare it to the more modern hygienic eating practices in Shanghai. She expresses nostalgia towards her childhood, and meanwhile criticizes the more factitious lifestyle in Shanghai. Su Qing not only criticizes her father’s factitious way of living, but also her own. At the end, she chooses to re-live the natural life from her childhood. In another essay, “Dabing youtiao yougan” 大餅油條有感 (Thoughts on flat cake and Chinese cruller), she presents a similar argument to criticize Shanghai’s modern life. In that essay, women consider carrying Chinese traditional breakfast flat cakes and Chinese cruller to be unfashionable, yet carrying western desserts such as cream cake or toffee from Guanshengyuan 冠生園, a famous Shanghai dim sum shop, is fine (“Dabing youtiao yougan” 29). Su Qing, again, criticizes the vanity of urban food culture and people’s values of modern life by celebrating coarse food.

In these segments we see Su Qing using food as a means of reinterpreting her past experiences in Ningbo after she moves to the modern city. This parallels the madeleine episode in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, in which the character, through eating a cookie after dipping it in a cup of tea, reinterprets his childhood more positively rather than in terms of his mother’s neglect. In these examples, food and eating ways serve as the vehicle through which the characters reestablish a personal connection to spaces, situations and people from which they thought they had moved beyond. This personal connection is something that Su Qing in particular struggles to relay through language; however, she still feels compelled to make repeated attempts at its expression by writing

about her experiences, past and present, with food. By writing about the adaptation and rigidity of various eating habits, Su Qing develops an ambiguous attitude towards the gendered eating rituals in her hometown to fight against the capitalized gender norms in Shanghai. The memory of hometown flavor shapes her taste—both for the food she eats throughout her life, and for her understanding of gender relations.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Su Qing refuses to be the modern woman, the progressive writer, or the virtuous wife and mother. She writes about the hunger, the appetite and the suffering of over-eating, rather than the political, military and economic upheavals of the time. In this way, her writing struck a chord with many ordinary women, and she made their voices heard in political and cultural debates in modern China. Ding Ling, who also wrote about women's sexual desire in her novel, *Sha Fei nüshi de riji* 莎菲女士的日記 (Miss Sophia's diary) (1928). In that novel, the protagonist Sha Fei attempts to discover her identity by pursuing and analyzing her deep and sensitive feelings, but in the end, she denies the possibility of creating meaning for her feelings and claims that her writings are incomprehensible to others. Compared to Ding Ling, Su Qing refrains from ascribing meaning to women's feelings—she writes about her bodily desire and bodily pleasure and places women's body at a higher status. This writing style challenges the fundamental concept rooted in traditional Chinese culture that desires need to be justified by reason. In a short story “E”蛾 (moth) (1944) she writes about a woman who lives in emotional emptiness and lets herself enjoy sexual pleasure with a man, and has an abortion later on. In the end, the woman would still rather be a moth that flies towards the flame to die. She tells the doctor that: “我是還想做撲火的飛蛾，只要有目的，便不算

胡鬧” (I still want to be a moth, as long as I have a target, it is not mischief) (“E” 4). For Su Qing, bodily pleasure is her *raison d’être*. She refuses to pursue any meaning for the bodily pleasure but believes that the bodily pleasure itself is the purpose of being. She thinks that professional women, without the support of men, cannot survive in this society, and they suffer more than prostitutes. This conclusion is based on her calculation of bodily suffering without any moral evaluation. This is the foundation for her understanding of gender relations. Reading Su Qing through an alimentary lens, I see desires, scarifies and the struggle of a woman who feeds others with her breasts, labor, and anxiety, but still refuses to stop enjoying their bodily pleasure. Su Qing not only enjoys bodily pleasure, but also enjoys writing about such pleasures derived from eating and sex, even if they transgress social norms.

Zhang Ailing writes that she does not like to be considered an equal of Bing Xin or Bai Wei 白薇 (1894–1987), but she is happy to be mentioned in the same breath with Su Qing (17). She wrote about Su Qing, gave an interview with her, and published several important short stories in *Heaven and Earth Monthly* that Su Qing edited. In the essay “Wo kan Su Qing” 我看蘇青 (I read Su Qing) (1944), Zhang Ailing compares the difference between Su Qing’s writing and hers: “我平常看人，很容易把人家看扁了，扁的小紙人，放在書裡比較便利” (Usually, when I observe people, I easily simplify them because it is convenient to write a simple figure in a book,” while Su Qing “reminds the reader of the universal memory of one’s wife and mother” (17). Zhang explains that it is because when Su Qing just divorced she stands for the majority of ordinary women (“Wo kan Su Qing” 17). Zhang keeps the distance of “kan”看

(reading/observing/viewing) and always avoids becoming fully involved when she transforms people into literary characters, while Su Qing writes based her own experience as a housewife, thus she provides a more real picture of the ordinary women's life. She writes that the quotidian serving and cooking duties in the family are to discipline women's minds and bodies; she writes that the migrant family who transformed their appetite, reinterprets their memories and gender relations through everyday eating; she writes about women's complex psychology towards gender discrimination and how they turn their household into a site of resistance. In an essay "Nüxing de jianglai" 女性的將來 (Women future), Su Qing writes that "我總覺得站在時代的面前，個人乃是很渺小的" (I always feel that standing in front of the times, the individual is very small) (97). Writing about these cooking and eating experiences is Su Qing's unique strategy to depart from that of national salvation pushed by nationalist and communist intellectual movements, and to bring a woman's voice to the forefront of modern Shanghai. After the 1990s, When Zhang Ailing became popular, Zhang's remark about Su Qing became one of the few introductions to Su Qing's work. However, the existing studies still do not thoroughly realize Su Qing's importance.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Over the past three Chapters, I studied the late Qing novel *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai* by Han Banqing, Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy*, Su Qing's essays, and the novel *Ten Years of Marriage* from the perspective of food and gender studies. I addressed several issues pertaining to gender such as marriage in both extended and nuclear families, career-women in romantic relationships, prostitution, pregnancy, and motherhood from the late Qing period to 1949. I also discussed topics in food studies such as eating rituals, gastral-sexuality, starvation, gluttony as well as the gendered and economic implications surrounding food and its preparation.

In the chapter on *The Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai*, I argue that the novel shows how banquets in courtesan houses bridged the literati culture with the rising commercial culture in Shanghai's foreign concessions to become part of the urban culture. In the novel, Shanghai's foreign concessions are a highly commercialized environment. The business rules of banquets in courtesan houses offer women new identities as businesswomen, and meanwhile help men project their interest in business onto the courtesans they admire. Thus, business savvy becomes a new female virtue in courtesan society. The novel also depicts how the literati tradition interacted with the commercialized courtesan culture through people's everyday eating practices in different locations. Both courtesans and patrons negotiate between their business interests, romantic and sexual desire along with their cultural preferences in their relationships. As

a result of this intersection, how to spend both love and money in a balanced and economical way becomes the new aesthetic in courtesan society. Some successful courtesans are able to use both men's dream of Confucian female virtue and the business rules of banquets to create spaces for themselves to enjoy love and sexual pleasure.

In the chapter on *Rickshaw Boy*, I explore the repackaging of restrictions on the pleasure of eating in Confucian tradition into a capitalist social order. Lao She's interpretation of his life experience influences him to write a series of female characters, who enjoy their bodily pleasure, especially the pleasure of eating, and because of this are criticized by Lao She. From the most extreme example, Huniu, who dies because of over-eating, I argue that the novel reveals Lao She's gendered prejudice against women's appetite, and this prejudice is influenced by the anxiety towards women's *yin* body in the shared social imaginaries influenced by Confucian patriarchy. In the novel, this anxiety is also combined with the capitalist work ethic and supported by the authority of Western medicine. I believe this novel shows that the Communist leftist culture, which requires people to scrutinize their bodily desires in everyday life, can actually be traced back to the 1930s literary works.

In the chapter on Su Qing, I examine how memories of eating constantly shape Su Qing's understanding of patriarchal hierarchy, gender relations, and motherhood in marriage, and forms her unique position as a modern female writer. On the one hand, the numerous instances of cooking and eating in marriage trap women in cyclical time, which represses their bodies. When people move to the city, even though they live in the modern nuclear family, patriarchal attitudes continued to persist. The modern nuclear family does offer housewives some power to manage the household, but by losing their

family's financial support they opened themselves up to the possibility of economic ruin. Su Qing's memory of hometown food and childhood eating experience serves as the foundation for her to position bodily pleasure higher than moral standards and to negate different bodily disciplines during her adult life. By writing these memories, she creates a stronger figure of both women and female writers.

At the beginning of my dissertation, I stated that I sought to answer the following questions: How did gender norms, especially the norms that define women as virtuous, change through everyday cooking and eating acts as they gradually came to experience modernity? How did the gendered Confucian hierarchy and norms repackage themselves and interact with new emerging norms? By studying these literary works, I conclude that in each of these case studies, women gradually earned more freedom to pursue bodily pleasure. Meanwhile, the critique and regulation of women's bodies, such as: women should serve food in the family; people should balance *yin* and *yang* for both the health of their bodily and society; and that people, especially women, should be cautious about their bodily desires, have always existed within different discourses, social contexts and historical periods.

In the late Qing novel, *The Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai*, courtesans who used to be considered as food for their clients obtain their new identities as businesswomen. Although they still perform the rituals that treat them as food at banquets, they now use such rituals to benefit their business interests. They have the power to refuse their clients by excusing themselves to conduct other business. Their male clients also accept and respect this new standard to morally judge courtesans as a part of Shanghai's new urban high culture. However, the new business rules become the new reason for them to restrict

their bodily needs. For example, they can have multiple clients, but in order to maintain their business, they could not have an open romantic relationship with the men they truly love.

Compared to the prostitutes in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, Huniu, in the 1930s novel *Rickshaw Boy*, is a modern figure. She uses food to seduce a man—not for money, but to fulfil her own bodily desire. Meanwhile, because of capitalist development, women could become independent through their financial skills, and men respected women who had such abilities. Women, like Huniu, show the female masculinity that does not appear in *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*. Although such women are criticized by Lao She, they still show another possibility for imagining femininity. However, society harshly criticizes the pleasure she derives from eating, rather than appreciating the aesthetic sentiment of eating practices. This reveals a shift in literary writing and shows the changing social imaginaries—capitalism represented by people’s demand for food, habits of eating, and gendered nutritional knowledge—had a deep influence on people’s bodies.

In the 1940s, Su Qing continued Huniu’s spirit to pursue the pleasure of eating. Not only did she enjoy it, but she also described her desires in her writings, and became a public figure. From a character in the novel, to a famous female writer, I believe Su Qing’s success reveals the shift of gender norms in Republican China’s social imaginaries. Compared to *Rickshaw Boy* and *The Sing-song Girls of Shanghai*, in Su Qing’s works, the traditional eating rituals in family have lost even more of their legitimacy in *Ten Years of Marriage*. Now they are viewed as outdated and have largely been replaced by Western eating practices in Shanghai’s nuclear family. In comparison

with female characters portrayed by Lao She and Han Bangqing, Su Qing is able to divorce her husband and establish her own publishing house and journal. However, the harsh critique towards women who pursue their bodily freedom still existed—Su Qing quickly failed in her career because of the public’s critique of her personal life, and she was punished harshly after 1949 until she died in poverty.

There is a trend that women, because of commercialization and increased urbanization, can now gain more freedom. They can manage their own businesses, their careers, and garner more respect from men. Meanwhile, deviant women, such as prostitutes in the first chapter, gluttonous women in the second chapter, and divorced women in the third chapter, are placed in an impossible position. The society accommodates them when they can produce and actively participate in businesses such as the courtesan business, the business of the rickshaw shed, and the publishing industry. When they are only interested in enjoying their bodily pleasure, then they are punished and are sometimes even driven out of the city center. Therefore, the patriarchy has not disappeared: from the transformation of elite culture to urban high culture; from the Confucian restriction of one’s desire towards gourmet food to the capitalist work ethic to restrict the urban working poor’s bodies; from patriarchal hierarchy in the extended family to patriarchy in the modern nuclear family; these literary works show that Confucianism in different historical periods and different social contexts, expresses themselves in different forms.

I believe, my study of gender and food in modern Chinese literature shows the complex, fragmentary and sometimes self-contradictory cultural norms in late Qing and Republican China. Different from intellectual and political debates about modernity and

tradition, these literary works offer a compelling window to show how cultural and societal norms repackage themselves and interact with different forms of knowledge and ideologies in everyday life. Many voices about gender and food were briefly popular only to become muted and disappear later on. I believe studying literature is a way to trace back the distant voice of history.

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