physicians claimed their local medical lineages could be traced back to the fourteenth-century master Zhu Zhenheng's 朱震亨 disciples. Gossip later alleged that two leading physicians, Ye Gui 葉桂 and Xue Xue 薛雪, were bitter rivals, each claiming cures that eluded the other. The only evidence for collective identity of healers resident in the city comes from a printed collection assembled by Tang Dalie 唐大烈 of essays by forty-one Suzhou physicians which came out in a series of volumes published between 1792 and 1801. The volumes were open to all who submitted essays, regardless of doctrinal orientation or literary merit. For evidence of medical specialization, there is a brief biography of a Suzhou acupuncturist, Yu Mingjian 俞明鑑, and of an expert in "external medicine" (*waike* 外科), Wang Weide 王維德. In sum, the fragmentary evidence available to Chao doesn't allow for the sort of sociological investigation of family and career path that one would like to see in a collective portrait of a city's medical practitioners, and that would be needed to flesh out a story of professionalization, even one defined as she does in loose terms of social and literary networks supporting a common culture.

Scholars may never agree about whether late imperial Chinese physicians formed a true profession, given that the question depends upon an implied comparison with European experience. Certainly it is hard to identify a strong institutional base supporting the rhetorical rivalry between *ruyi* and *shiyi* that is documented here. Indeed the sections on medical temples, by introducing ritual practices involving late imperial physicians, in fact work against one of the stereotypes of the Confucian physician trope: that these élite practitioners rejected superstition (*mixin* 迷信) and distanced themselves from religious healing. Chao's work is strongest in setting out the textual evidence that created and reified the model of the Confucian physician, and weaker in an independent sociology of known medical families, lineages or networks of teachers and students, patients and healers—the sort that would produce a picture of social landscape independent of formal discourse. One can see that the need today is to look beyond the writings of élite physicians themselves to the records of resident families and lineages, and those of temples, neighbourhoods and commercial establishments. Here a pioneer work can be excused for pointing towards questions not yet answered.

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Polygamy and Sublime Passion: Sexuality in China on the Verge of Modernity. By Keith McMahon. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010. Pp. vii + 215. $55.00.

Historians know that polygamy was a key marker of China's backwardness in the treaty-port era. As an emblem of women's oppression, polygamy—like footbinding—was a telling sign that China's march toward enlightened civilization would be a long one. Reformers in Meiji Japan identified polygamy and concubinage as major blights on the

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new nation's face and moved speedily to attack them. But reform movements in China, while quick to denounce footbinding, side-stepped polygamy, focusing instead on women's education as the centerpiece of the late nineteenth-century nation-building project. Chinese reformers and revolutionaries alike criticized the double standard that held women to a lifelong commitment to one man, whereas men could remarry; and they saw prostitution through new eyes as a source of disease and danger. But polygamy itself was hardly a barn-size target of China's reformist discourses. By the 1920s, young intellectuals had embraced the *xiao jiating* 小家庭—the neolocal conjugal family unit—as a new norm for the modern nation. But concubines continued to be treated gingerly and with a certain degree of respect in the courts in the 1930s, after the new Marriage Law was promulgated. In other words, sometime between 1895 and the 1930s, polygamy was supposed to (poof!) disappear. But it didn't.

For historians who are just noticing this amazing sleight of history's hand, Keith McMahon's book will come as a welcome, and somewhat embarrassing, statement of the obvious. For his book tracks in excruciating detail the complex systems of behaviour, meaning, value, and sexuality embedded—for men and for women—in polygamy. When Chinese men were told that to be modern they had to be monogamous, profound changes in notions of passion and in the performance of sexuality began. These changes continue to play out today. Historians need to pay attention.

McMahon's book examines the presumptions of polygamy that framed sexual identities, sensibilities, and passions for both men and women on the cusp of the twentieth century. He defines polygamy as part of a regime in which a man of influence would expect to have access to many women: a wife, concubines, and courtesans. In that sense, he views polygamy as inextricably linked to what he calls prostitution. All of fiction's great plots depended on the relationships between a polygamous man and many women. Women, embedded as they were in this regime, are loosely grouped in three types. The first is the "remarkable woman" who, through her management of the man in her life, and her multiple talents and skills, supplied him with concubines or access to sex or moral grounding, or all of the above. Often remarkable women were wives, but courtesans—especially at the end of the century—frequently moved into such roles. A second type is the woman who shares with a man the sublime passion of *qing*—exemplified by Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 in her relationship to Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉—or, again, a courtesan. This kind of sublime passion, McMahon argues, merged man and woman in depths of feeling that overrode differences of gender and status. But generally speaking, such relationships were doomed, and plots unfold around their tragic impossibilities. The last type, and perhaps the best-known and most-studied anti-heroine in Chinese fiction, is the shrew, who depends on the polygynous regime to wreak havoc, taking revenge against her rivals and making her man suffer for enjoying them. As McMahon shows by a thorough investigation of plotlines from fourteen novels and two autobiographical collections, polygamy—a man's access to many women, a woman's ways of coping with it—sets stories in motion and holds readers' imagination.

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Tensions in the relationship between polygamy and what McMahon calls "sublime passion" lie at the heart of his book. Polygyny involves both men and women in complex negotiations about sex and power. In these negotiations, women generally have the upper hand, whether as wives who claim the moral high ground and keep their husbands mindful of their ultimate commitments, or as courtesans whose allure and ultimate inaccessibility claim their patrons' impassioned devotion. Men are frequently described, in McMahon's account, as "passive polygamists" who—when they are not in the throes of sublime passion—are vulnerable to the exhortations, admonitions, or entrapments of the many women to whom they have sexual and/or emotional access. They are, to borrow a phrase from Mao Zedong 毛澤東, "poor and blank," awaiting the imprint of the remarkable woman or the transformative state of "radical evanescence" that attends sublime passion. Less pleasingly, they may fall victim to the machinations of women who cheat, shame, and humiliate them.

Searching for an analytical language to address the concerns of his inquiry, McMahon turns to Lacanian psychoanalysis. The usefulness of this framing probably depends on the reader's familiarity with and confidence in psychoanalytic categories in literary studies. For this historian, the more important point of McMahon's interest in consciousness and subjectivity is his ability to explain how male consciousness was constructed through representations of women. The polygynous world of the nineteenth century becomes intelligible to us, McMahon suggests, through the activities of women described in fiction. Fiction, in turn, is the medium that reveals the subjectivity of the male writer, and that subjectivity maps for us the polygynous regime where reformers and revolutionaries struggled to articulate a position as "post-polygynist subjects." Men's involvement with the commercial marketplace of courtesans, boy actresses (*dan* 旦), and female impersonators, and with the wives and concubines to whom they are legally attached, supplies plots through which we grasp their experience of the predations of opium addiction, the degradation of commercial sex markets, and the horrors of Taiping occupation.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, consciousness of Western values, reform agendas, and political crises began to raise doubts about polygamy. What was to become of couples denied a polygynous script? How would sexuality be expressed? How would male-female relations reconfigure in the literary imagination? McMahon uses a chronological framework to show how these questions crept into the plotlines of men's writing. He begins with stories that feature the remarkable woman, the shrew, the soul-mate, and the otherworldly courtesan, starting with the fiction of Pu Songling 蒲松齡 and with *Hong lou meng* 紅樓夢. He pays particular attention to *qing* 情 as it is captured in *Hong lou meng* and to the nostalgia for that sublime passion in *Hong lou meng*'s many sequels, which attempted to rewrite and resolve in some happy polygynous way the fate of the three star-crossed lovers at the centre of the plot. He notes also that the mid-Qing novel *Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言, which did not appear until 1881, offered readers a new masculine hero who was "confident and valiant . . . but also full of 'deep feeling'" (p. 35).

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This new hero—unlike Baoyu—managed his polygynous world with aplomb. He was, in a sense, the last male in fiction to enjoy such confident success in the polygynist context. Men writing after that time found themselves inevitably addressing the relationship between their sexuality and the fate of the country.

The next chapters in the book examine this later stage, using (in addition to fiction) Gong Zizhen's 龔自珍 and Wang Tao's 王韜 autobiographical reflections on opium smoking, Shanghai prostitution, foreign gadgetry and accouterments, and encounters with Western men and women. Here McMahon suggests that during the late nineteenth century, the courtesan and the boy actress were seen to offer men under siege a kind of pure refuge—aesthetic, emotional, and sometimes sexual—from the dangers and despair of a failing empire. After the Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion, he finds plot lines increasingly filled with polygynist-philanderers and concubine-prostitutes. They, and not the "egalitarian" new man and woman, are the dominant figures modeling sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century.

So McMahon's book is really about changing our own perceptions of sexuality in China on the eve of the "modern" transformation. The book asks us to think of would-be Chinese reformers and revolutionaries as "post-polygynist subjects" trying their best to imagine a sexual regime where every single aspect of gender relations had to change. The fact that this new regime was associated with the collapse of the empire and the end of their cultural world only made it more complicated and emotionally charged, producing fiction that was increasingly obsessed with sexuality and passion as a symbolic medium for describing political and social collapse. For historians, the temporal scope of McMahon's investigation will be especially fascinating. He shows how the Opium War framed polygyny in a new context, where opium smoking and profligacy were quickly succeeded by treaty port prostitution, with money replacing sexual allure or aesthetic appeal as the currency of exchange. As he summarizes story after story, we learn how the aftermath of the Taiping Rebellion—which invited writers to viscerally describe the vulgar sexual exploits of Taiping brutalizers—spun old stories in new ways, with courtesans emerging as the lovers who offered the possibility of civilizational regeneration. And as the nineteenth century drew to a close, shameless prostitutes and the philanderers who became their victims stood side by side with the emerging new woman and her egalitarian-minded revolutionary partner.

Pictures of powerful women pervade McMahon's account, giving rise to topic sentences like the following: "The idealization of the woman has a long history in China . . ." (p. 16). Those of us who study Qing *guixiu* 閨秀 are well acquainted with powerful, remarkable, idealized women, but such women are not widely seen in the "victim scripts" that still pervade modern historical narratives. How refreshing it is to encounter them here. As McMahon cautions, however, one cannot view these remarkable women as the precursors of the new woman of the post-polygynist world. Rather, the effect of his book is to stress the ruptures that divide sexuality and gender performance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, for example, McMahon's analysis offers enormous support for

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findings by scholars like Dorothy Ko 高彥頤, Grace Fong 方秀潔, Yu-yin Cheng 程玉瑛, Weijing Lu 盧葦菁, and Beverly Bossler 柏文莉, all of whom have identified deeply touching and baldly revealing writings by men about their intimate relations with beloved women. And in many discussions of what he terms the "egalitarianism of the *qing* aesthetic" in China's polygynist imperial culture (see, e.g., pp. 16, 59, 144), McMahon observes how the classical notion of *qing,* or sublime passion, levelled the differences between the sexes and merged the identities of the lovers such that conventional social markers like gender and status vanished. Yet these patterns of intimacy were predicated on polygynous assumptions about sexuality. Sublime passion, often expressed in terms of intimacy like "the one who knows me" (*zhijizhe* 知己者), also connoted a passion ultimately denied or doomed. The remarkable wife who could manage a man's sexual relationships was not to be the object of sublime passion; the more likely object was the courtesan, whose pitiful past and enthralling charm created an ineffable attraction that promised transcendence but delivered despair. McMahon makes it clear, in other words, that we are not to consider the "remarkable woman" an example of female empowerment or agency (p. 6). Rather, as he continually demonstrates, the polygynist world of fiction writers and autobiographers was a fantasy world that held both men and women in thrall. Women who imagined alternative worlds in poems and song lyrics simply testify to the fantasy's grip.

What after all became of men in the modern world of monogamy after the fall of the Qing dynasty? McMahon asks us to look elsewhere to answer this question, but he is the one who has posed it for us. In posing the question, he shows how the egalitarianism of sublime passion was offset by its foretellings of doom. In other words, the symbolic fantasy world of *qing*—just like the power of the remarkable woman—hardly supplied a foundation for monogamous loving relationships in the modern conjugal family. Historians and anthropologists studying contemporary China and its complex sexual regimes—from gay bars to bigamous husbands to independent new women—must read this book to piece together the scope of historical ruptures that separate the twenty-first century from the nineteenth. On the other hand, historians of the late Ming, and indeed scholars who study the fall of the Song, will recognize enduring sexual meanings in the "end of an era" sensibilities of the late nineteenth century, when men's writings celebrated the purity of a fallen woman or trumpeted the glories of robust love in the face of invading armies.

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