



ROUTLEDGE

Harmony Garden

The Life,
Literary
Criticism,
and Poetry
of Yuan Mei
(1716-1798)

J. D. SCHMIDT

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

First published in 2003
by RoutledgeCurzon

Published 2013 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY, 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Typeset in Sabon by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 13: 978-0-700-71525-1 (hbk)

Dedication

This book is warmly dedicated to the memory of Mrs. I-Min Pao Han 包一民. Mrs. Han, a graduate of the Literature Department of Dongbei University, loved classical Chinese poetry throughout her life, and especially the verse of Yuan Mei. Mrs. Han was the mother of Mr. Howard H. D. Han 韓效忠, Chairman of the Himalaya Foundation, which has so generously supported the publication of this work.

Preface

Poetry in the classical language was always regarded as the most important literary form by Chinese critics before the twentieth century, but the verse of late imperial China, the age when Yuan Mei lived, is largely *terra incognita*. A few Chinese scholars, particularly the students of Prof. Qian Esun (Zhonglian) of Suzhou University, have published excellent articles and books on the classical poetry of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) during the last fifteen years or so, but very little of this scholarship has been noticed by Western (or even most Chinese) specialists, who tend to concentrate on the earlier periods of Chinese literary history.

Ever since the 1911 revolution that overthrew the dynasty, the study of Qing verse has been impeded by a number of prejudices and misconceptions, which include (1) hostility to the culture of the period in general, for the most part inspired by Chinese opposition to its Manchu rulers, (2) a widely held belief that there is no original poetry after about the thirteenth century in China and that the mainstream of literature during the Qing dynasty is represented by the vernacular novel, (3) a concentration on Qing poetic theory (as opposed to poetry itself) on the part of the minority of scholars interested in the age's classical literature.

One still confronts hostility to Qing culture in its totality among some Chinese scholars today, but most students of Chinese culture, both East and West, now forgive the rulers of the dynasty for their sin of having been non-Chinese “barbarians” and admire both its political and cultural accomplishments, the latter including boldly innovative philosophies, China's most outstanding vernacular novels, as well as some of its more original painting and calligraphy.

The myth that classical Chinese poetry petrified at some point in the past has died very slowly. When I was still in university, one of my professors told me that no verse of worth had been written after the tenth century (he said that his teacher believed that the cut-off date was the third century, but he had been mistaken!); then further research of Chinese and Western scholars advanced the “demise” of classical poetry to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, while in recent years a few patient researchers have been gradually pushing the date closer and closer to our present age.

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Most Qing critics thought they were living in an era of great classical poetry, and they would have been amazed by current prejudices against their dynasty's literature. Our knowledge of Qing verse is still quite sketchy, but I think that the following study will demonstrate that at least as far as the major genres of didactic (i.e. philosophical) and narrative poetry are concerned, the Qing dynasty was China's *Golden Age*. Although the development of political verse was somewhat hampered by the Literary Inquisitions of the eighteenth century, poetry on history flourished, too, largely due to new approaches to the study of China's past, including a strong skepticism about all received traditions.

Even such a familiar form of lyrical verse as nature poetry underwent great changes during the Qing dynasty, a phenomenon that was closely linked to the Qing thinkers' rejection of neo-Confucian metaphysics, Daoism, and Buddhism in favor of a more rationalistic and quasi-scientific view of the world. Finally, Qing-dynasty eccentric verse represents a complete reinterpretation of eighth-century literary innovations that had largely lain dormant for nearly a thousand years and that were closely linked to the exciting painting of the age, the subject of much interest among Western art scholars during the last few decades. It is true that Qing poets were still writing in a classical language that was farther and farther away from the vernacular and that they were using the same poetic forms current in the seventh century, but the style or content of their verse could hardly have been confused with that of poetry before their time.

One reason for the current neglect of Qing verse in both China and the West is the view that the vernacular novel is the most important form of literature during the dynasty. This notion is largely a product of the 1920's, when Chinese scholars came under the influence of second- and third-hand accounts of now largely discredited nineteenth-century European literary theories, which stated that the spirit of each age is best expressed by a specific literary genre. Chinese scholars were eager to pigeon-hole all earlier literature according to such ideas, and the formulations they came up with entered school and university curricula at that time and are still adhered to at the present. Thus, most educated Chinese today will still tell you that if you wish to read poetry in the *shi* form, you should look at the works of the Tang dynasty (618–907) and that the vernacular novel is the only worthwhile literary form of the Qing period. Qing writers would have found this idea preposterous; although a fair amount of fiction criticism was written during their age, critics wrote many times more about classical poetry, and no one would have entertained the idea that fiction was *more* important than verse.

The current interest in Qing-dynasty poetry criticism is laudable, but it has had an almost equally insidious effect on the study of poetry. Before I started working on this book, numerous (almost too numerous) studies of Yuan Mei's literary theory existed in Chinese and Japanese, but very

little had been written about his poetry. This situation has been partially rectified by a few good Chinese articles and even one book published in recent years (notably the contributions of Wang Yingzhi, a student of Qian Esun,) but it is still much easier to study the literary theory of Wang Shizhen, Zhao Yi, Weng Fanggang, and Shen Deqian in Chinese rather than read about their poetry. It would seem that quite a few scholars believe that once you understand an author's literary theory, you do not need to read his poetic creations! Qing-dynasty literary theory is, indeed, impressive in both quality and quantity, and I have taken great pains to explicate Yuan Mei's famous contributions in this area, but it would seem to me that the only sensible way to understand the literature of the Qing dynasty is to study the works themselves.

Why do the current misunderstandings of Qing-dynasty verse continue to persist, even among many Chinese scholars? The lay public in China can be forgiven for their ignorance, since they are not responsible for the school curriculum to which they have been subjected; nor were they the authors of such man-made disasters as World War II and the Cultural Revolution, or even of the explosive growth of the new consumer culture, all of which have played a role in the decline of classical literary studies in China. Scholars might be considered more culpable, but anyone who proposes to study classical verse during the Qing dynasty confronts some formidable obstacles: (1) the dearth of good modern editions of poets' works or useful commentaries on the poems of the more difficult authors (a problem that is, however, being solved slowly by a few dedicated scholars and publishers in China) and (2) the huge mass of material bequeathed to us from the age of the Manchus. The collected works of at least seven thousand Qing poets survive, and poems by about another thirty thousand authors are found in anthologies. No single person could hope to study more than a small fraction of this literature in a lifetime, but the only way that our understanding of the period will improve measurably is through a careful and thorough study of its literary riches, a task that will take several generations of patient labor. At present there are very few monographs on even the major poets of the Qing dynasty; in fact, who the major poets are is still very much open to debate, because so little research has been done.

Why have I chosen Yuan Mei for this monograph? I first hoped to write a general history of Qing poetry in English, but when I was confronted by such a huge mass of material, I realized that if I cast my nets too widely, I could never do much better than copy the received opinions of others, so I decided that I would at least attempt a thorough study of one important author. I do not claim that Yuan Mei is necessarily the greatest eighteenth-century Chinese poet, because I have not read enough poetry of his age to make such a claim with a straight face, but at least I am reasonably certain that he was the most popular poet of his age, judging from the many

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references (both appreciative and hostile) to his work during his lifetime and immediately after.

Yuan Mei himself would have denied the validity of the idea of a “greatest” poet anyway, and he was only interested in separating “good” poetry from “bad.” That Yuan wrote much “good” poetry I do not doubt one bit, and I think I am safe in claiming that much of it is “great,” too. In any case, a study of his verse is a starting point for any serious investigation of eighteenth-century Chinese literature, and I hope that this book will inspire others to follow it with more studies of Qing poetry. We really do not need any more general histories of Qing verse until more of the major poets of the dynasty have been examined in detail, for until our knowledge improves such works will only repeat earlier prejudices and misconceptions.

Yuan Mei is the subject of one of the few studies of Qing-dynasty poetry published earlier in a Western language, Arthur Waley’s witty and informative book of 1956. This is certainly one of the most entertaining works on classical Chinese poetry ever written, but Waley’s account focuses almost exclusively on Yuan’s biography and has only a little to say about such important topics as his philosophy or his literary theory. Waley’s translations of Yuan’s verse and prose in this book maintain the high standards for which he was justly famous, but, unfortunately, his interest in Yuan Mei’s life caused him to ignore some of his subject’s most creative poetry.

Furthermore, knowledge of Qing literature was so limited in Waley’s age (or at least he had so little contact with Chinese experts in the field, who consisted for the most part of old-style scholars left over from the Qing bureaucracy) that he failed to provide much literary context for the reader who wishes to comprehend how Yuan Mei’s work fits into the writing of his age or how Qing poetry fits into Chinese literature as a whole.

My own interest in the latter problem has turned this book into an essay on Qing verse in general (within the limits of my knowledge,) for although my primary interest is to provide a fair and full portrait of Yuan Mei’s contributions to Chinese literature, I feel that I have had to provide a good deal of background to show his uniqueness and the uniqueness of his Qing-dynasty predecessors and contemporaries. For example, the small quantity of articles published in either Chinese or Western languages about Qing narrative verse has forced me to provide a short summary of narrative poetry (and theory) before that age and then discuss the contributions of the first major Qing narrative poet, Wu Weiye, before I can possibly make sense of Yuan Mei’s own contributions in this area.

Since this book contains the first substantial and representative selection of Yuan Mei’s verse published in a Western language, it is necessary to say something about my selection criteria and translation methods. I have not selected poems I found uninteresting in the original, but I have attempted

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to translate a wide variety of works that represent all the major styles and themes explored by Yuan Mei. I believe that earlier translations have been too narrow in their selection criteria with the result that some of his best verse has been ignored by scholars. Not all of Yuan's poems are worth rendering into English, but a large number are, and I have obviously left out many excellent works, including some long pieces that proved particularly difficult to translate. I have not rendered any of his excellent prose-poetry into English, because although it is of high quality, traditional Chinese genre theory classifies it with his prose. A proper treatment of Yuan Mei's prose writings would require at least another monograph, and I have translated these only to the extent that they help us understand his life, literary criticism, or poetry.

Generally speaking, I have tried to steer a course between literal and literate translations, tending to favor the second somewhat more. I see little point in creating pidgin English renderings of Yuan Mei's poems, for they will be of little interest to more than a handful of specialists (a small but vocal minority of whom demand that Chinese verse be translated with the deadly literalness one might expect from beginning students in a graduate seminar.) Whenever I judge that my translations have diverged a bit too far from the original, I have supplied more literal renderings. Sometimes I translate Yuan Mei's historical and literary allusions quite precisely, but frequently I paraphrase them, in the interest of readability, supplying a literal translation and explanation of his allusions in my notes. I encourage first-time, non-specialist readers to consult the notes to translations only when what they are reading does not make sense. I sincerely hope that at least some of the translations in this book convey the great beauty of Yuan Mei's originals. His verse does not challenge a translator as much as the works of some Qing-dynasty authors, but it is rarely easy to translate, and I hope that other scholars will forgive the mistakes that undoubtedly remain in my renderings.

Let me conclude this discussion by mentioning certain conventions I have followed in the translations. Since many of the poems I study are longer than most earlier Chinese verse, I have broken many of them up into four-line units resembling the stanzas of Western poetry. There is no basis for this division in Chinese verse form or literary theory, the basic unit of classical poetry being the couplet, but my use of this convention is certainly easier on the reader's eyes and makes the poems simpler to follow.

Chinese calculate their ages according to *sui*, and a person is one *sui* old when in the first year of life, so Chinese celebrate their fiftieth birthday when Westerners would celebrate their forty-ninth. Normally I convert Chinese *sui* to Western years, but I retain the Chinese age, if it seems intended to be approximate, or if a precise Western age would disturb the sense or beauty of a poem (e.g. substituting forty-nine for fifty in a birthday poem.)

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In both the translations of Yuan Mei's verse and in other parts of this book, I have retained the lunar calendar, and hence I speak of things happening in the first (lunar) month and so forth, giving Western dates in only a few instances. This practice may confuse some readers, but I have done this because of the close link between Chinese poetry and the cycle of the seasons and traditional festivals. Chinese New Year (i.e. the first of the first lunar month) normally falls in late January or early February of the Western calendar, so one can convert lunar dates to Western by adding approximately twenty-five to thirty-five days to the former. In the part of China where Yuan Mei spent most of his life, the sixth and seventh lunar months (roughly July and August) are hot and humid, while the eight, ninth, and tenth months (September, October, and November) are pleasantly cool. Snow falls occasionally during the eleventh, twelfth, and first months (December, January, and February,) the weather remaining quite chilly into the beginning of the third month (April.) It usually rains a good deal for at least a couple of weeks during the fourth and fifth months (May and June,) with the weather alternately hot and cool but usually very humid.

For the most part, I convert Chinese weights and measures into the system still prevalent in the United States (the so-called "British" system,) because the metric units have not been with the English-speaking world long enough to sound poetic. I have left *li*, the principal measure of distance in ancient China (slightly more than one-third a mile) untranslated, since many Western readers have heard of this unit, and most attempts at conversion lead to unpoetic fractions of miles.

For translations of official titles, I follow Hucker's handy dictionary, but when listing the dates when pre-Song scholars passed their *jinsshi* examinations, I merely write that term in transliteration rather than rendering it as "Metropolitan Graduate." An examination of Hucker's entry about the term will show the reason why.

I have appended a brief glossary of classical Chinese literary terms for those who have no background in the field, along with a short guide to the *Thirteen Confucian Classics*, constantly mentioned in Yuan Mei's writings, as well as a short chronological table.

I have attempted to identify all names of persons mentioned in the translated passages, using a wide range of biographical and historical sources. These have been converted into their normal form (i.e. family name and *ming*,) even when the *zi* ("style") or *hao* ("courtesy name") of individuals have gained wide currency. When I have been unable to identify an individual, I have left his name in the form found in the original text and supplied Chinese characters following its *pinyin* spelling. Since most names appear as *zi* or *hao* in the original texts, I have had to make much use of Yang Tingfu's and Yang Tongfu's excellent dictionary for Qing-dynasty alternate names, but there is sometimes the possibility that I may have confused a few contemporaries who had the same *zi* or *hao*.

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I have used the *pinyin* spelling system for Chinese words and names throughout, because although I am just as aware of its shortcomings as others, it is now the official system used in China and in the Western media. Since most earlier scholarship on classical Chinese literature used (and some still uses) the Wade-Giles system, readers will notice a few discrepancies between Chinese names cited in the main body of this book and some of its Western-language references, but these should not present great difficulties. My sole intentional departure from *pinyin* spelling is the use of Shaanxi 陕西 and Shanxi 山西 to represent the names of two provinces otherwise spelled identically in *pinyin* without tone markings.

Manchu and Mongol names present special difficulties for students of Yuan Mei's age, but with the exception of the names of certain well-known figures from the older generation (e.g. Ortai) I have treated them as if they were Chinese names. By Yuan Mei's age sinicized Manchus and Mongols (e.g. Yin Jishan and Fa Shishan) were using their names much like Han Chinese, and in many cases they were already well on the way to forgetting their mother tongues. My Chinese software has forced me to write all Chinese (as well as Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese) names in traditional Chinese characters, so I apologize to scholars whose names may have been written incorrectly as a result of the conversion of the simplified Japanese and Chinese scripts to older forms.

Many individuals have aided me during the long gestation period of this book. I have received considerable assistance from the most famous scholar of Qing poetry living in China today, Prof. Qian Esun, now nearing the age of ninety, and his two learned students, Professors Wang Yingzhi and Ma Yazhong.¹ Prof. Wang has published a larger number of books and articles about Yuan Mei than any earlier scholar, and practically every chapter of this work is indebted to his research. Prof. Chen Shaosong, who teaches at Nanjing Normal University, has also answered many questions about my translations and supplied me much useful information about Qing-dynasty narrative verse. I also constantly pestered Prof. Chen Yunji 陳允吉 of Fudan University, Prof. Liu Cheng of Shanghai Normal University, and Prof. Liu Yongxiang of East China Normal University for help with difficulties I encountered. I am also grateful to Prof. Zhu Zejie of Hangzhou for mailing me a copy of his excellent but out-of-print history of Qing poetry. I also want to thank my graduate students, particularly Lap Lam of Hong Kong, for the many valuable suggestions they made when we read some of Yuan Mei's more challenging poems in graduate seminars, and my colleague, Prof. Donald Baker, a noted Korean specialist, for his help with Korean names. A former teacher and colleague, Prof. Florence Chia-ying Yeh Chao, has also answered a number of difficult questions about translations. The mistakes that remain in my translations are the result of me ignoring the good advice of all these learned individuals.

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My work would have been impossible without excellent library facilities, and I am grateful to the staff of the Asian Library at the University of British Columbia, especially Mr. Hsieh Yim, Chinese Bibliographer, and Ms. Linda Joe, Head, both retired now, and to the staffs of the Library of East China Normal University in Shanghai, the Library of Fudan University, the Shanghai Library, and the Nanjing Library, the four Chinese libraries where the majority of my research materials were gathered.

This book would never have been finished without the assistance of the Committee for Cultural Planning, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China for the translation sections and of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for several research trips to China. The Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada has provided generous publication support, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. However, I especially wish to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Howard Han, Chairman of the Himalaya Foundation in Taipei, who constantly encouraged me in my efforts and made it possible to publish a book of this size. Last of all, I must thank my wife Xia Wei for putting up with the many lost weekends and vacations that this work represents. At many times during the hot summers we spent in the Shanghai region, she must have wondered why she did not marry an expert on Icelandic literature. I thank her for seven years of happiness.

Note

- 1 Chinese characters have been supplied only for the names of scholars whose works have not been cited in the bibliography.

Chronology

Legendary sage kings	(before 2205 B.C.)
Xia 夏	(traditional dates, 2205–1766 B.C.)
Shang 商	(traditional dates, 1766–1122 B.C.)
Western Zhou 西周	(1122–770 B.C.)
Eastern Zhou 東周	(770–256 B.C.)
	(Spring and Autumn Period 770–476 B.C.)
	(Warring States 475–221 B.C.)
Qin 秦	(221–206 B.C.)
Western Han 西漢	(206 B.C.–A.D. 9)
Eastern Han 東漢	(A.D. 25–220)
Three Kingdoms 三國	(220–265)
Western Jin 西晉	(265–317)
Eastern Jin 東晉	(317–420)
Period of Division or Northern and Southern Dynasties 南北朝	(420–581)
Sui 隋	(581–618)
Tang 唐	(618–907)
Five Dynasties 五代	(907–960) (in the north, the south split into minor states)
Northern Song 北宋	(960–1127)
Southern Song 南宋	(1127–1279)
Liao 遼	(916–1125)
Jin 金	(1115–1234) (in the north)
Yuan 元	(1271–1368)
Ming 明	(1368–1644)
Qing 清	(1644–1911)

Glossary of Chinese literary terms

ancient-style poetry (*gushi* 古詩)

a form written in large quantities during all periods since the Han dynasty, which usually has rhymes on the final words of even-numbered lines and with either pentasyllabic or heptasyllabic lines throughout but lacks the parallel structure and tonal restrictions of regulated poetry.

ancient-style prose (*guwen* 古文)

a relatively free style of prose writing without the parallelism and rhymes of parallel prose.

ci 詞

a form of poetry that first became popular during the late Tang dynasty, written as the lyrics for set musical tunes and with tight restrictions for the length of each line and the tones of words.

eight-legged prose (*baguwen* 八股文 or *shiwén* 時文)

a form primarily used in the civil service examinations during the Ming and Qing dynasties, characterized by a rigid division into eight sections and usually restricted to discussions of canonical Confucian texts, particularly the *Four Books*.

heptasyllabic (*qiyan* 七言)

poetry with seven syllables per line.

hexasyllabic (*liuyan* 六言)

poetry with six syllables per line, quite unusual in *shi* poetry.

level tone

the first tone in ancient Chinese, corresponding roughly to the first two tones of modern Mandarin, except when they are derived from ancient Chinese words with final *p*, *t*, or *k* (so-called “entering-tone” words.) Speakers of standard Beijing Mandarin cannot distinguish entering-tone words without consulting a dictionary.

Music Bureau poetry (*yuefushi* 樂府詩)

a style of verse that arose during the Western Han dynasty, first created to be sung to popular tunes, and hence usually much less regular in meter

than pentasyllabic or heptasyllabic *shi* poetry; this also includes later imitations of such verse.

oblique tone

a class of tones comprising the second (*shang* 上, “rising,”) third (*qu* 去, “leaving,”) and fourth (*ru* 入, “entering”) tones of ancient Chinese, roughly equivalent to the third and fourth tones of modern Mandarin, except that some ancient fourth tones are expressed as Mandarin tones one to four.

parallel

The two lines of a couplet are said to be parallel when they match grammatically word by word. An example of such parallelism in a couplet from an early poem by Yuan Mei is: “This mountain district town is deserted, and shops close early;/Watch tower lamps seem distant, as my boat moors late.” (“Shanxian cheng huang guandian zao;/Shulou deng yuan bochuan chi.” 山縣城荒闕店早/戍樓燈遠泊船遲,) a literal translation of which is: “Mountain district town deserted, close shops early;/Watch tower lamps distant, moor boats late.” Here the noun “mountain” (*shan*) is parallel to the noun “watch” (*shu*); the noun “district” (*xian*) is parallel to the noun “tower” (*lou*); the noun “town” (*cheng*) is parallel to the noun “lamp” (*deng*); the predicate adjective “deserted” (*huang*) is parallel to the predicate adjective “far” (*yuan*); the verb “close” (*guan*) is parallel to the verb “moor” (*bo*); the noun “shop” (*dian*) is parallel to the noun “boat” (*chuan*); and the adjective “early” (*zao*) is parallel to the adjective “late” (*chi*.) The parallelism between words in couplets often involves more than grammatical concerns; e.g. “early” and “late” are opposite in meaning. See the complete poem translated on p. 545.

parallel prose (*piantiwen* 駢體文)

a form of prose favoring pairs of sentences arranged in grammatically parallel structure and frequently using rhyme.

pentasyllabic (*wuyan* 五言)

poetry with five syllables per line.

prose-poem (*fu* 賦)

a highly irregular form of poetry mid-way between *shi* and prose and generally characterized by detailed description of objects and scenes.

qu 曲

a form of poetry first popular during the Yuan dynasty, written to preset tunes like *ci* but with even greater freedom to interpolate extra phrases and using language and rhymes reflecting the spoken language of the age.

quatrain (*jueju* 絕句)

generally classified as a sub-category of regulated verse because of its tonal restrictions but with four lines per poem and normally without the parallelism of regulated poetry.

regulated poetry (*lüshi* 律詩)

a form of *shi* that normally is eight lines long and usually observes grammatical parallelism in the two inner couplets and follows strict rules for balance between level and oblique tones throughout.

shi

the oldest and most plentiful form of poetry in pre-twentieth century China, subclasses of which are ancient-style verse, regulated verse, the quatrain, and Music Bureau poetry.

song form (*gexingtǐ* 歌行體)

a type of ancient-style poetry with great freedom of line length but in which the majority of lines are heptasyllabic.

tetrasyllabic (*siyan* 四言)

poetry with four syllables per line.

Please note that these definitions are only meant for the convenience of non-specialist readers. For more detailed explanations, consult the relevant articles in ICTCL.

The Thirteen Confucian Classics

Analects of Confucius (*Lunyu* 論語,) also counted as one of the *Four Books* (*Sishu* 四書)

contains sayings attributed to Confucius, translated in Arthur Waley tr., *The analects of Confucius*, London, 1938.

The Ceremonies and Rituals (*Yili* 儀禮)

a text on ritual.

Chronicles of Zuo (*Zuozhuan* 左傳)

a commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, providing a detailed history of China during the period covered by that book. A full translation is contained in James Legge tr., *Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*.

Classic of Changes (*Yijing* 易經)

an ancient text of prognostication, which had a large influence on later metaphysical speculation, the most recent translation being Richard John Lynn tr., *The classic of changes*.

Classic of Filial Piety (*Xiaojing* 孝經)

a short text about the Confucian virtue of filial piety.

Classic of History (*Shangshu* 尚書 or *Shujing* 書經)

China's earliest surviving historical work, consisting of a collection of ancient documents, some of which were forged in later ages, the best translation of which is Bernhard Karlgren, *The book of documents*, Stockholm, 1950.

Classic of Poetry (*Shijing* 詩經)

an anthology of about 300 poems, the earliest surviving verse of China, two standard translations being Bernhard Karlgren, *The book of odes* and Arthur Waley, *The book of songs*.

Gongyang Commentaries (*Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳)

a commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

Guliang Commentaries (*Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳)

a commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

The Thirteen Confucian Classics

Mencius (*Mengzi* 孟子,) also counted as one of the *Four Books*, contains the philosophy of Mencius and is translated in James Legge tr., *The works of Mencius*, in James Legge tr., *The Chinese classics*, Taipei repr., 1972. *Record of Ritual* (*Liji* 禮記)

a ritual text, two chapters of which, “The doctrine of the mean” (“Zhongyong” 中庸) and “The great learning” (“Daxue” 大學,) were later read as two separate works in the *Four Books*.

Refined Definitions (*Erya* 爾雅)

an ancient dictionary.

Ritual of Zhou (*Zhouli* 周禮)

a ritual text containing an idealized account of the Western Zhou government, which was of great influence to later political philosophy.

The Spring and Autumn Annals (*Chunqiu* 春秋)

a bald history of the state of Lu during the so-called Spring and Autumn period of the Zhou dynasty, translated together with the *Chronicles of Zuo* as mentioned above.

Places and dates of publication have not been given for works cited in the bibliography. An excellent source of basic information on the *Thirteen Classics*, including references to other translations is Burton Watson, *Early Chinese literature*.

Abbreviations

Where citations are incomplete, please refer to the bibliography.

BBCSJC	<i>Baibu congshu jicheng</i> 百部叢書集成, Taipei, 1965–.
BSJ	Zhang Pu, <i>Han Wei Liuchao baisan jia ji</i> .
Buyi (when used alone)	Yuan Mei, <i>Xiaocang shanfang shiji buyi</i> .
Chidu	Yuan Mei, <i>Xiaocang shanfang chidu</i> .
CSJC	<i>Congshu jicheng chubian</i> 叢書集成初編, Shanghai, 1935.
CZJ	Yang Wanli, <i>Chengzhai ji</i> .
Duwai	Yuan Mei, <i>Duwai yuyan</i> .
HJAS	<i>Harvard journal of Asiatic studies</i> .
HYSIS	<i>Harvard-Yenching Institute sinological index series</i> .
ICTCL	William H. Nienhauser Jr. ed., <i>The Indiana companion to traditional Chinese literature</i> .
Liji	Liu Dianjue and Chen Fangzheng, <i>A concordance to the Li Ji</i> .
Lunyu	<i>A concordance to the Analects of Confucius</i> .
Mengzi	<i>Concordance to Meng Tzu</i> .
MQSW	Suzhou Daxue Ming Qing shiwen yanjiushi ed., <i>Ming Qing Shiwen lunwenji</i> .
Oubei pi	Yuan Mei, “Oubei shichao fu Yuan Mei piyu.”
Pi	<i>Piben Suiyuan shihua</i> .
QDZJCK	Zhou Junfu 周駿富 ed., <i>Qingdai zhuanji congkan</i> 清代傳記叢刊, Taipei, 1985.
QSG	Zhao Erxun, <i>Qingshigao</i> .
QSH	Guo Shaoyu ed., <i>Qing shihua</i> .
QSHXB	<i>Qing shihua xubian</i> .
QSJS	Qian Esun, <i>Qingshi jishi</i> .
SBCK	<i>Sibu congkan chubian suoben</i> 四部叢刊初編縮本, Taipei, 1965.
Shihua	Yuan Mei, <i>Suiyuan shihua</i> , in YMQJ, vol. 3.

Abbreviations

- Shihua buyi Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua buyi*, in YMQJ, vol. 3.
- Shijing *A concordance to the Shih Ching.*
- Suibi Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan suibi.*
- SYQJ Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan quanji.*
- SYSJ Yuan Zuzhi, *Suiyuan suoji.*
- SYYS Jiang Dunfu, *Suiyuan yishi.*
- SZDX *Suzhou daxue xuebao (zheshheban)*
蘇州大學學報(哲社版.)
- Taishō *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經,
Tokyo, 1924–32.
- XSP Wang Yingzhi, *Xushipin zhuping.*
- XTRJ Yuan Mei ed., *Xu tongren ji.*
- W Arthur Waley, *Yüan Mei: Eighteenth century Chinese poet.*
- Waiji Yuan Mei, *Xiaocang shanfang waiji.*
- Wenji Yuan Mei, *Xiaocang shanfang wenji.*
- YJSM Yuan Mei ed., *Yuanjia sanmei hegao.*
- YMQJ Yuan Mei, *Yuan Mei quanji.*
- ZGMS Shen Yunlong 沈雲龍 ed., *Zhongguo mingshan shengji zhi* 中國名山勝蹟志, Taipei, 1975.
- Zhao Yi (when alone without a title) Zhao Yi, *Oubei ji*, Shanghai, 1997.
- Zhao Yi 1 Zhao Yi, *Oubei ji*, 1812.
- Zhao Yi 2 Zhao Yi, *Oubei shichao.*
- Zhuangzi *Concordance to Chuang Tzu.*
- Zuozhuan *Combined concordances to Ch'un-ch'iu, Kung-yang, Ku-liang, and Tso-chuan.*

PART I

Biography

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The early years

Youth

MANY CENTURIES AGO an ape king lived a blissful existence in the remote regions of that great silver river in the sky, the Milky Way. We do not know how long his residence in that paradise lasted or how he enjoyed himself in that blessed realm, but one evening on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month he made the unpardonable error of secretly peering at the Weaving Girl and the Herding Boy, when those two immortal lovers had their sole meeting of the year after ferrying across the great river on a bridge formed from ravens.¹ Even in those days privacy (especially the privacy of fairies!) was to be respected and the two lovers instantly condemned the mischievous ape to exile in the world of mortals, where he was to be born into a family surnamed Yuan 袁, since the Chinese word for ape (*yuan* 猿) has exactly the same sound.²

The ape god was born with the full name Yuan Mei 袁枚 in Big Tree Lane (Dashuxiang 大樹巷) in the city of Hangzhou 杭州 (formerly spelled Hangchow) on March 25, 1716.³ At that time, Hangzhou, the seat of the provincial government of Zhejiang 浙江 province, was not considered much inferior to the Milky Way by most Chinese, since all knew it as one of the country's two "earthly paradises," a city devoted to the pursuit of material and intellectual pleasures. Hangzhou had been the most populous city in China (and perhaps in the world,) when it had served as the capital city of the Southern Song 南宋 dynasty (1127–1280,) and its wealth and glory had hardly diminished by the time Marco Polo (1254–1324) visited it in the fourteenth century.⁴ Both the Tang-dynasty poet Bai Juyi 白居易 (772–846) and the Song author Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101) had served as officials there, composing verse about the city and its surroundings and leaving monuments that bear their names down to the present.⁵ In later ages Chinese scholars wrote detailed travel guides to the city, the earliest being *A Record of a Tour of West Lake* (*Xihu youlan zhi* 西湖游覽志) from the year 1564.⁶ One of the most vivid accounts of Hangzhou during Yuan Mei's age is contained in the book *De la Chine* by the French traveler Abbé Grosier (1743–1823,) who visited the metropolis in the late eighteenth century:

Han-tcheou-fou [Hangzhoufu 杭州府,] the capital of the province, is, according to the Chinese, a paradise on earth; it can be considered as one of the richest, best situated and largest towns in the empire: it has a circumference of four leagues, without counting the suburbs, and a population of over a million . . . What makes the town most delightful, however, is a little lake named Si-hou [Xihu or 西湖 West Lake,] which washes the foot of the walls on the west side . . . This large city is famed above all for the magnificence of its public buildings, the beauty of its bridges, its triumphal arches, and quay sides, as well as for the number of its canals which cross it in all directions . . . All the streets are paved with large, square stones . . . As it is the provincial capital, the town of Han-tcheou-fou has a garrison of three thousand men under the viceroy's orders, and seven thousand Tartars, commanded by a general of the same nation.⁷

Today many of the ancient buildings are gone, but life still centers around the jewel-like West Lake, where Chinese sit sipping tea in the evening or lovers stroll hand in hand through the shade of the lakeside trees.

Grosier's mention of a "Tartar" general in Hangzhou refers to an important political reality of the eighteenth century, which had a strong influence on Yuan Mei and his contemporaries; China was under the rule of an alien dynasty. The native Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644) had been overthrown by popular uprisings, giving an opportunity to the ruler of the Manchus, who were based in what is now the northeastern part of China, to occupy northern China and found the Qing 清 dynasty in 1644. After defeating Ming loyalists, the Manchus set up a Chinese-Manchu dyarchy, which ensured their control over a large Chinese bureaucracy but also provided China with one of the most efficient and stable governments it or any other country had enjoyed up to that age.⁸ Some of this success is certainly attributable to the strong personalities of rulers such as the Kangxi emperor or his grandson the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (reg. 1736–96,) during whose sixty-year reign Yuan Mei lived most of his life.⁹

Yuan Mei was the descendant of a long line of scholar-officials. A distant ancestor, Yuan Zai 袁載 (Metropolitan Graduate, 1523,) who was a native of Cixi 慈谿 District in the northeastern part of modern Zhejiang province, was a scrupulously honest official, got into frequent trouble with his superiors, and retired to his hometown to nurse his mother to an age in excess of ninety years, anticipating the course of Yuan Mei's life.¹⁰ Yuan Zai's great-grandson, or Yuan Mei's great-great-great-grandfather, Yuan Maoying 袁茂英 (Metropolitan Graduate, 1586,) served in Sichuan, Guangdong, and Hubei-Hunan, attaining the rank of Provincial Administration Commissioner (Fangbo 方伯) and publishing a collection of poems named *Zhujiang ji* 竹江集 (*Collected Writings of Bamboo River*) together with his father, Yuan Zongsi 袁宗泗, a thrice unsuccessful examination candidate.¹¹ The preface

to the book was by one Yang Zhenxi 楊震錫 and talked of how all poetry “is based on human nature and feelings” (*jie ben zhu xingqing* 皆本諸性情,) adumbrating Yuan Mei’s own literary theory.¹² Yuan Maoying’s son, Yuan Hongxun 袁宏勳 (Metropolitan Graduate 1619,) achieved the rank of Vice Minister of the Court of Judicial Review (*Dalisi shaoqing* 大理寺少卿) in the central government and left behind writings that were published together with those of his two brothers.¹³ Yuan’s great-grandfather Yuan Xiangchun 袁象春, who does not seem to have served as an official, was famed for his love of travel, a trait inherited by his great-grandson.¹⁴

In the time of Yuan’s grandfather, Yuan Qi 袁錡, the family moved from their original hometown to the provincial capital Hangzhou, most likely for the sake of improving their fortunes. Yuan Qi was himself an eccentric man noted for his wild behavior and love of the Daoist religion. According to a story recorded by Yuan Mei, Yuan Qi was caned in a dream by one of popular Daoism’s Eight Immortals, Li Bo 李跛 (literally, “Lame Li,) waking up to discover that the place where he had been “beaten” was swollen to the size of a chicken egg; this injury supposedly caused his death three years later.¹⁵

Yuan’s father, Yuan Bin 袁濱 (1678–1752,) who was known for his legal learning, traveled all over southern China working as a secretary to high officials and tutor for their sons but never earned enough money to supply the family’s needs, leaving the rearing of his children to Yuan’s mother, Madame Zhang 章, (1685–1778.)¹⁶ According to Yuan Mei’s own painful recollections of his childhood,

[Father] was as far as ten thousand *li* away, and correspondence with him was frequently cut off. Mother supported our grandmother and fed our widowed aunt, in addition to hiring a master to teach me. Half of our living expenses were paid by her manual labor, and every time that she came close to a dead end with our loans, and when our foodstocks were exhausted, she would silently pace around the house with my sisters and me crying out for food, hardly understanding how exhausted or sad at heart she was.¹⁷

In spite of her earlier anxieties over money, Yuan Mei describes his mother as being blessed by a basically imperturbable personality, and no matter what happened to the family or her son, “she was always placid as usual.”¹⁸

Madame Zhang’s easy-going attitude to life may explain why she did not adopt the severe methods favored by most traditional families to educate their children:

From my youth to the time I grew up, she never used a switch to discipline me. If I misbehaved, she reprimanded me mildly, as if she were afraid to hurt me. She often told my older sister: “Your little brother is like me. He blushes easily, so I do not treat him like an ordinary son.” I was even more terrified when I heard this!¹⁹

Biography

Madame Zhang mild approach seems to have been quite effective, for Yuan Mei was a model of filial piety throughout his life and was deeply influenced by both his mother's skeptical attitude toward the supernatural realm and her love for poetry:

She did not eat vegetarian food and did not worship the Buddha, nor did she believe in the Yin and the Yang or prayers. When she had time off from her sewing and embroidery, she held a volume of Tang-dynasty poems in one hand, entertaining herself by chanting them out loud.²⁰

Yuan's grandmother, Madame Chai 柴, spoiled her grandson terribly, and in a later poem Yuan wrote:

I grew out of baby clothes, but she was eager to hold me;
At the age of twenty, I still slept in her bed.
Her topknot cast a shadow beneath her red lantern;
The sound of my reading echoed before her white hair.
I often acted cute to get gifts of fruit from her;
Whenever I played hookey, she saved me from being whipped.
She respectfully offered dainties to bribe my teacher,
And padded cotton jackets for her little boy.
She protected and cherished her precious pearl;
Hoping I would soar high like a stork on a chariot.

All this love was conditional, for later in the poem (translated in full on page 551) Yuan Mei describes how his grandmother expected that he would pass his civil service examinations with distinction and bring glory and wealth to his impoverished family.

Another woman who molded Yuan Mei's character and interests was his Aunt Shen 沈, a lady who lived with the family after being widowed at the age of thirty. In addition to being responsible for "washing my clothes and face," Aunt Shen was one of his first teachers:²¹

When still a young lady, my aunt was elegant and refined and loved to read . . . At the time I began to have my hair cut, I loved to listen to my elders talk about the affairs of antiquity, and would cry if they didn't. Therefore, my aunt collected the sorts of things I could understand from formal and informal histories and recounted them to me tirelessly, so that before I attended school, the names of the famous figures from the Han, Jin, Tang, and Song dynasties came to my lips easily.²²

It is quite likely that Yuan's penchant for historical research and his early skill in writing historical poetry owed much to his Aunt Shen's informal lessons.

The limited income of Yuan Mei's mother was barely sufficient for the family to survive, and throughout Yuan Mei's childhood his mother was constantly harassed by debt collectors:

When young, I was both poor and lowly,
And my only interest lay in books.²³
My mother sold her fancy skirts,²⁴
And with the money, we could be half full.
We heard people knock to collect their debts,
But we would cry out loud and quickly hide.²⁵

The family's humble status is confirmed even more forcefully by the shocking fate of Yuan Mei's Aunt Sun Xiugu 孫秀姑, who was widowed young and hanged herself after a rich and powerful neighbor tried to seduce her.²⁶ In eighteenth-century China, a family with wealth and political power would never have allowed such an insult to its good name to have gone unavenged, but Yuan's relatives were helpless.

Although he loved reading, Yuan Mei's parents were unable to buy him many books, and during his childhood about the only writings available to him were the Confucian classics. A wealthy neighbor surnamed Zhang had a huge collection of books, but when Yuan tried to borrow a few volumes, he met with refusal, "dreaming about them when I returned home, so pressing was my desire."²⁷

Nonetheless, the Yuan family was distinguished by its love of literature. At one time Yuan possessed a volume of poetry by his grandfather, "written in a cursive script fine as a fly's head," but this was lost later, and Yuan was able to transmit only a few lines of his grandfather's verse to posterity.²⁸ One of Yuan's elder sisters wrote poetry, and one of her daughters-in-law, Zhang Yaoying 張瑤英, later became a female disciple of his.²⁹ The sons of two other sisters were also poets, and Yuan had the works of one of them, his favorite nephew Lu Jian 陸建 (1731–1765,) printed after Lu's early death.³⁰ Yuan's younger sister Yuan Ji 機 (1720–1759,) who was later divorced from her husband and spent her final years in Yuan Mei's household, wrote poetry of high quality, but, unfortunately, most of it was destroyed by her husband. The poetry of Yuan Mei's youngest sister Yuan Shu 杼 (d. ca. 1768,) who was widowed early, fared somewhat better, and Yuan had the works of both Ji and Shu published together in a single volume.³¹ Several of his cousins were also poets, the most accomplished of whom was a male cousin Yuan Shu 樹 (born 1731, Metropolitan Graduate 1763,) who had a successful official career but eventually gained greater fame as a landscape painter.³² Yuan Mei's female cousin Yuan Tang 棠 (1732–1771) also wrote poetry of distinction, which Yuan Mei later published together with the works of his two younger sisters.³³

Yuan's first teacher, Shi Zhong 史中 (d. 1734,) a man whom he describes as "standing tall with a lean body, looking every bit like the fin of a fish planted in the ground," began tutoring Yuan at the tender age of six, during the same year (1722) that the family moved to Mallow Lane (Kuixiang 葵巷) in Hangzhou, perhaps an indication of improving fortunes.³⁴ According to Yuan Mei:

[Shi Zhong] did not have any teachers. At the age of nineteen, he heard a neighbor's son reciting the *Four Books*, which he seemed to have heard some place before.³⁵ Shi loved listening [to the boy] so much that he soon was able to recite the works by heart. When he saw some civil service examination papers on a desk, he playfully tried to imitate them and was unexpectedly successful. He asked an old scholar what they were, and the startled man replied: "They are eight-legged essays."³⁶ When he told the man what had happened, the fellow did not believe Shi at first, but then he came to think of Shi as a marvel.³⁷

The fact that Shi had few intellectual debts to repay may have contributed to Yuan Mei's own unconventional approach to life and literature.

In line with his previous incarnation as an ape, Yuan was a boisterous student, and as soon as Mr. Shi left the classroom, he started playing hide and seek with his classmates and doing somersaults to amuse them. However, he was so bright that whenever Shi examined him, he was able to recite each passage by heart, and he did not suffer the punishments reserved for the less intelligent pupils.³⁸

Although hardly a well-known poet, Shi Zhong did write verse in his leisure time, and Yuan Mei admired a historical poem that his teacher had concealed in one of his student's textbooks, a subterfuge adopted in order not to distract his young pupils from more "serious" reading, i.e. preparation for the civil service examinations. However, Yuan Mei's first detailed introduction to classical verse took place when one of Shi Zhong's friends left a copy of the early Qing poet Wang Shizhen's 王士禛 (1634–1711) famous *Anthology of Ancient Poetry* (*Gushixuan* 古詩選) in the Yuan household in exchange for a small loan.³⁹ Yuan Mei read this book avidly and then began to compose poetry at the age of seven together with a classmate, "carrying our works in our sleeves and enjoying them during a rainstorm."⁴⁰ A few lines of Yuan Mei's poetry from this period still survive, preserved in critical writings he composed many years later:

When I was eight years old, I went on an outing with some people to Mount Wu at Hangzhou and practiced writing pentasyllabic regulated poetry, composing the couplet: "In two or three levels before my eyes;/Thousands of houses lie beneath my feet." Even nowadays whenever I revisit this mountain, I feel that these words of a boy are true words.⁴¹

As a child, Yuan Mei particularly enjoyed playing literary games with his younger sister Yuan Ji, who one day “combed her hair into two topknots and put on some thin silk cloth,” so that the two children could act out an ancient poem from the *Classic of Poetry* in Yuan Mei’s study.⁴² Yuan’s teacher just happened to open the door at this moment, and “hearing us chant poetry, with voices that resembled the tinkling of jade pendants, he could not keep himself from smiling and sighed over and over.”⁴³

At ten Yuan Mei was able to write essays of five or six hundred words in the difficult style required for the examinations, but at first he refused to be restricted by the rules and conventions of the form.⁴⁴ In recognition of his abilities, Yuan was given the rank of Cultivated Talent (*xiucai* 秀才) the next year and entered the District Academy (*xianxue* 縣學,) still under the tutelage of Shi Zhong.⁴⁵ By the age of thirteen Yuan had written his earliest surviving prose work, a short essay attacking a traditional paragon of filial piety Guo Ju 郭巨 (fl. second c. A.D.), who tried to bury his son alive, because the child consumed food that Guo wished to give to his own mother.⁴⁶ This piece was highly praised by Yuan Mei’s teachers, and one of his twentieth-century biographers thought that it was the beginning of his love for overturning old conventions.⁴⁷ Four years later Yuan composed an essay felicitating a local scholar Zhu Duanshi 朱端士 on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, and although we know practically nothing about Yuan’s relationship with Zhu, it is quite possible that this was the first literary work for which he received some form of remuneration.⁴⁸

At the age of fourteen, Yuan was named an Added Student (*zengsheng* 增生,) which meant that he could enter state schools at the prefectural or lower levels. When he was seventeen, his mother enrolled him in the Myriad Pine Academy (Wansong shuyuan 萬松書院,) about eight miles from his home, where he was instructed by the famous Confucian scholar Yang Shengwu 楊繩武 (Metropolitan Graduate, 1713,) known for his writings in the so-called “ancient prose” (*guwen* 古文, see the glossary) form, a style which Yang encouraged Yuan Mei to master.⁴⁹ Years later (1779) on a return visit to the academy, Yuan wrote:

A myriad pines form a ring around the hill,
And the academy was built at its very top.
I used to come here to do my studies,
Less than twenty, with the face of a boy.
At that time our school’s Headmaster Yang
Had a belly crammed with classics and history.
The “gates and walls” were at their high point then;⁵⁰
The school was crowded with a host of worthies.
We were constantly engaged in literary battles,
Exhausting the night in intensive studies . . .⁵¹

By eighteen Yuan had become a Stipend Student (*linsheng* 廩生,) a title which enabled him to receive an allowance from the government and indicated that he was especially qualified to take part in the Provincial Examinations. One year later (1735) Yuan Mei took the preliminary level of the special Erudite Literatus Examinations (*Boxue hongci* 博學鴻詞,) only rarely given to recruit students of outstanding literary talent for service in such document-compiling agencies of the central government as the Hanlin Academy (Hanlin yuan 翰林院.) He passed with distinction after writing a poem on the subject of “Spring Snow,” but unfortunately, Yuan did not preserve this work for posterity, and except for the fragments just mentioned, his earliest surviving poetry, for the most part highly allusive historical verse, comes from the following year, when he was still living in Hangzhou. Few readers would associate these early works with Yuan Mei’s mature poetry, evidence of how hard he had to work to create his own original style.

Later in the same year after he obtained financial support from a friend, Yuan traveled to the remote southern province of Guangxi 廣西 for a meeting with his uncle Yuan Hong 袁鴻 (d. 1744.)⁵² While passing through the river port city Jiujiang 九江 in Jiangxi 江西 province, Yuan composed the following poem about a famous local building:

Lute Pavilion

The moon sets by a lone pavilion at Jiujiang in autumn;
Even after the lute is played, the river is still sad.
Today the reed blossoms are laughing at this poet,
Who is drifting about even *before* he gets old!⁵³

Lute Pavilion provided the background for one of Bai Juyi’s most popular poems, “The Lay of the Lute,” about the deserted wife of a merchant whom Bai heard playing a lute near the building when he was sending off a friend there. Although Yuan locates his poem in the same place and alludes to Bai’s original several times, mentioning the woman’s instrument and comparing himself to the wandering lady, his short work is very different from Bai’s tragic masterpiece, being strongly influenced by the playful approach of Song masters such as Su Shi, particularly in the humor of its concluding line.⁵⁴

Yuan Hong did not give Yuan Mei a very warm welcome, but he did introduce his nephew to his superior Jin Hong 金鉞 (1678–1740,) the powerful Guangxi Provincial Governor (*Guangxi xunfu* 廣西巡撫,) already famous for his administrative and agricultural reforms in the hitherto backward province with its large non-Chinese population.⁵⁵ Jin seems to have taken an immediate liking to Yuan Mei and was especially impressed by a prose-poem (see the glossary) that he composed on the topic of an ancient bronze drum in the possession of the local government.⁵⁶ Shortly

before Yuan's departure, Jin wrote a letter to the imperial court recommending that the young poet take part in the next level of the Erudite Literatus Examinations to be held in Beijing and, even more important, he provided traveling expenses.⁵⁷

Yuan Mei's prose-poem on the bronze drum would appeal to few modern readers, but his verse in the *shi* form reached a new level of sophistication while he was staying in Guilin, the most outstanding work being a highly original long poem (see complete translation on page 547) about the strangely shaped mountains of that part of Guangxi province. This work again demonstrates Yuan Mei's familiarity with Song masters such as Su Shi, particularly in its deft use of extended metaphors, but the scale of the poem and its highly eccentric form show that Yuan was experimenting with radically new approaches to writing.⁵⁸

Yuan Mei, bureaucrat

When he reached Hunan province on his voyage to Beijing to take the examinations, Yuan Mei read Jin Hong's recommendation letter and could hardly contain his joy:

This one-page letter recommends a young Mi Heng,
In the eighth month I unfurl banners to the autumn wind.
During the last three reigns, emperors valued scholars;⁵⁹
A man turned twenty startles the empire with his skill.
Friends left in Guangxi stand in the shade of red cassias,
While I listen to rain drip on Hunan's bamboo branches.⁶⁰
The excess praise of this document really embarrasses me –
It says my great talent was born in *response* to our age!⁶¹

With the hyperbole of youth, Yuan Mei compares himself to the Eastern Han poet Mi Heng 禰衡 (173–198,) and Jin Hong to Mi's patron Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220,) the most powerful military leader of his age.⁶² Yuan had grown up under the reigns of the Kangxi, Yongzheng 雍正 (reg. 1723–1736), and Qianlong emperors, three monarchs who had promoted the civil service examinations, which he was about to take and which he expected to propel him to fame and fortune. His prospects seemed particularly rosy, for he had recently left Guangxi during the season when the vermilion cassia (more accurately *Osmanthus*) blooms, the term “picking a vermilion cassia” (*zhai dangui* 摘丹桂) happening to symbolize success in the civil service examinations.

In spite of his great optimism, Yuan Mei's first attempt at the examinations in 1736 was a dismal failure. During the next three years in Beijing, he was frequently cold and hungry, eking out a meager living as a family tutor, and he was also under constant mental stain, for he had to master

the so-called eight-legged prose style (*baguwen* 八股文, also known as the “contemporary style” *shuwen* 時文, see the glossary) required for the examination papers. This prose form had been denounced by the philosopher Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–82,) and in Yuan Mei’s own opinion it differed from his beloved ancient-style prose in that “ancient-style prose speaks your own words, while eight-legged essays speak the words of others.”⁶³ Like most aspiring candidates for the civil-service examinations, Yuan had studied eight-legged essays earlier but had thought that he was finished with them, because the 1736 examinations tested candidates in their ability to write poetry. In spite of his difficult circumstances, Yuan Mei quickly mastered this rigid and demanding genre, but as he said in a letter to a friend, his new skill came at a high price:

From the time of my youth I have disliked writing [eight-legged] essays about the *Four Books*.⁶⁴ Although I entered school, received a stipend, and was recommended by the examiners, deep down in my heart, I did not think [writing them] was proper . . .⁶⁵ However, I was getting older, my family was poor, and my parents’ hair had turned white. With my previous hopes dashed, I was forced to restrain my heart and bow my head. I studied the “contemporary” style only, and since I was concerned that I had not mastered it, I steeled myself, and cutting myself off from my true love, neither wrote poetry nor composed ancient-style prose. I did not even read ancient books, taking a job as a tutor in the capital, where I taught the six-year-old son of the present Secretary Ji Huang.⁶⁶

Yuan suffered greatly from his poverty during this period, but he found consolation with the many friends whom he made among the younger literati residing in or visiting the capital city. One of the most prominent of these was Hu Tianyou 胡天游 (1696–1758,) a skilled poet who gained even greater fame in later years as a master of the parallel-prose style (*pianwen* 駢文, see the glossary,) a form which had come into being during the Period of Division but was undergoing a revival during the eighteenth century.⁶⁷ Yuan describes their meeting as follows:

Hu Tianyou and I were recommended for the Erudite Literatus examination in the same year. When we met for the first time, he said: “Fair talents are many, but unusual talents are few. You are an unusual talent, . . . and sometime in the future it will be you who will equal the Tang-dynasty prose masters.” He called a coach for us to ride in and introduced me to men of the older generation such as Qi Zhaonan, Shang Pan, Hang Shijun, Wang Jun, etc. and urged them to become my friends.⁶⁸ I was twenty years old then.⁶⁹

It is quite likely that Yuan’s friendship spurred his own efforts in parallel prose, and eventually his works in this form exceeded Hu Tianyou in fame,

but in spite of potential rivalry between the two authors, Yuan Mei was always grateful for Hu's inspiration:⁷⁰

In the *bingchen* year [1736] when scholars were invited to the capital, I was particularly taken with Hu Tianyou of Shanyin and once said: "I take Hu Tianyou as my teacher" . . . The parallel prose writings of Hu excell the works of Xu Ling and Yu Xin!⁷¹

Yuan Mei was usually rather apologetic about his skill in such a complex and artificial prose style, calling his collection of parallel prose his *External Collection* (*Waiji* 外集,) and according to a friend Li Ying 李英 (Metropolitan Graduate, 1745,) a minor painter of the period, Yuan "did not write much in this form nor did he write in it lightly."⁷² However, the skill that Yuan Mei developed in using the parallel structure and the erudite allusions typical of the genre also served him well in his composition of poetry, and the complexity of much of his youthful verse no doubt has a close connection with his early cultivation of parallel prose.

Another important friend whom Yuan met in Beijing was Cheng Tingzuo 程廷祚 (1691–1767,) a scholar who came to the capital in 1736 for the same examinations Yuan Mei failed.⁷³ They do not seem to have been particularly close at the time, but Yuan and Cheng continued to exchange letters about a variety of philosophical and scholarly issues over the years, and Yuan Mei addressed quite a few poems to Cheng.⁷⁴ Although Cheng eventually became a Buddhist in his old age, he had been a student of the early Qing philosopher Li Gong 李榕 (1659–1733,) and it was probably through Cheng that Yuan became so conversant with the philosophical and scholarly controversies of the age.⁷⁵

It was also at this time that Yuan Mei had his first liaison with a handsome young actor named Xu Yunting 許雲亭, who was strongly attracted to Yuan in spite of his poverty.⁷⁶ In later years Yuan vehemently denied that there was any sexual side to his interest in young men, and perhaps we should believe him, since contemporary intellectuals such as the painter-poet Zheng Xie 鄭燮 (1693–1765) wrote fairly openly about such things, in spite of theoretically drastic legal sanctions against homosexual activity.⁷⁷ In any case, Yuan Mei was not as disturbed by such behavior as some of his more strait-laced contemporaries, and there are numerous references to homosexual activities in his writings, among the more entertaining being a description of a presumably bisexual contemporary:

A certain young man from the Fuchun River area, who received his Provincial Graduate degree in 1738, had a countenance as beautiful as a woman and was unrestrained by nature.⁷⁸ He was on unfriendly terms with his wife and loved to roam about with handsome young men, sleeping and waking up together with them, unable to distinguish a male crow from a female one. Once he wrote a poem:

Biography

Everybody has his unique nature and feelings;
Each tree has its own leaves and branches.
I would not want to be Zhongli Chun's husband,⁷⁹
But rather the concubine of handsome Zidu!⁸⁰

His father, the Grand Coordinator, saw this and was angry, but the son wrote another poem which read:

When the ancient sages set the rules for society,
How profound and marvelous their intentions were!
They only set up shrines for faithful women,
But did not build temples to virgin lads!

His father laughed and said: "My lowly son has come to this state in his sophistry!" Later in the *yichou* year [1745,] when [the young man] entered the Hanlin academy, his wife Madame Yang died. He then married Madame Wu, who was equal to him in beauty, and they loved each other to distraction.

Yuan Mei later presented this man a poem and tells us that when they were watching an opera performance together, another man mistook the handsome scholar for an actor and tried to make a pass at him. After rebuffing this suitor, Yuan's friend commented:

People are intimate with me because they love me. Haven't you seen the "Remonstrance against executing the Master of the Stables" in the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan*?⁸¹ It is a pity that this fellow is not my match. For me to get angry at him would be vulgar.⁸²

Yuan Mei's studies of the eight-legged prose style, irksome as they were, must have seemed worth their while, for in the autumn of 1738, he passed the Provincial Examinations (*Xiangshi* 鄉試) in Beijing, obtaining the degree of Provincial Graduate (*Juren* 舉人.) The next year, at the unusually young age of twenty-three, he passed the examinations for the Metropolitan Graduate degree in the fifth place, and as was normally the case with such a high pass, he was immediately awarded a position in the Hanlin Academy. His full title was Hanlin Bachelor Released from the Institute (*Shujishi sanguan* 庶吉士散館,) the second part referring to the expectation that he would soon be "released from the Institute" to work in one of the Ministries or other agencies of the central government.⁸³

During the Palace Examination (*Dianshi* 殿試,) some of the examiners had wanted to fail Yuan, because they did not think the poem he had written sufficiently flowery, but the powerful Manchu official Yin Jishan 尹繼善 (1696–1771) defended him, the beginning of his lifelong patronage

of Yuan Mei.⁸⁴ Many years later Yuan Mei described Yin Jishan as having a:

Pure white complexion with only a light beard and brows. His jaws were full, and he had a large mouth. His voice was clear and carried a great distance, and there were little red marks on his body resembling fresh cinnabar. His eyes were elegant and kind.⁸⁵

Most important for Yuan Mei was the Manchu grandee's grand passion for literature:

Whenever he had time off from official duties, he was with a book under the light of his lamp, just like some old student, never resting summer or winter. When he finished writing a poem, he loved to have people recite it or listen to it, and when they got to the critical places, he would beat out the rhythm with his hand. If just one word was wrong, he would revise it severely before resting.⁸⁶

Another important friend of this period was the historian Jiang Hening 蔣和寧 (Metropolitan Graduate, 1752,) whose passion for historical research must have encouraged Yuan Mei's historical studies and his continuing interest in historical poetry.⁸⁷ Yuan Mei describes him as an old man who "was so good at making himself up that even his relatives and townspeople did not feel he was old." He was a careful dresser, and "whenever he had clothes made, he summoned the tailor and gave him personal instructions."⁸⁸ Both Yuan and Jiang sat together until the late hours of the night, "pounding on the table and shouting out loud" whenever they came to any new conclusions about historical events or ancient personalities.⁸⁹

In spite of the examiners' disapproval of certain details of his writing, Yuan Mei was so successful in composing eight-legged essays that he published a collection of his works in this form named *Collected works of Yuan, Junior Compiler* (*Yuan Taishi ji* 袁太史集,) and the book enjoyed such a wide circulation that his name was soon known all over the Chinese empire.⁹⁰ In fact, for many years this publication, popular as an examination textbook, was Yuan Mei's most widely read work, and in his old age, a young scholar from Fujian gave up his bed in a full inn to Yuan Mei, because he had "obtained such a great deal of benefit from it."⁹¹ It is indeed quite ironic that the man who would accomplish so much in reforming the art of poetry and who was one of the most outstanding ancient prose authors of his century was famous during his youth as a writer of the most stilted and artificial prose form in Chinese literary history.⁹²

However, Yuan Mei's prose essays were of only secondary interest to him at this time, for he was certain that he was on the threshold of a brilliant official career, and shortly after entering the Hanlin Academy, he wrote:

After so many turns on the road to this fairy realm,⁹³
Today I actually arrive at the immortals' palace!⁹⁴
I haven't started studies in the Palace Library,⁹⁵
But the title on my name card has already changed.
Mottled writing brushes moisten from the rain on its peonies;
The jade halls' wind wafts the fragrance of brocade robes.⁹⁶
The state's favors cannot be deserved by a writer like me –
Especially when my essays are still so defective.⁹⁷

In spite of the false modesty of his closing lines, the splendor of the imperial court in Beijing must have temporarily turned the head of the poor young scholar from Hangzhou, and as befitted a man who had risen to “fairy realms,” Yuan Mei returned in glory to Hangzhou in the winter of that year to marry his fiancée, a certain Miss Wang 王 (ca. 1716–ca. 1803).⁹⁸ As was common during the eighteenth century, Yuan had probably been engaged to her since early childhood, and although he appreciated his wife's devotion to him over the years, his relationship with her does not seem to have been based on romantic love. Yuan's wife outlived him, but they never produced a child, and most of his strong feelings for women would be reserved for the concubines he chose himself.⁹⁹

After his return to Beijing in 1740, Yuan Mei began studying the Manchu language under the direction of the Minister of the Ministry of Justice (*Xingbu shangshu* 刑部尚書) Shi Yizhi 史貽直 (1682–1763).¹⁰⁰ In spite of his many official duties, Yuan was beginning to take the writing of poetry ever more seriously, and his first poem about poetry (see complete translation on page 180), dating from 1741, states: “In the end I conclude that a poet's poems/Result from much grinding, are literally cut from his guts!” Yuan continued to write highly allusive historical verse of the sort favored by court scholars eager to show off their learning, but he was slowly developing the superficially simple but witty verse that would become his hallmark in later years.

His Manchu studies continued throughout 1741, but in 1742, the unimaginable happened; the brilliant, young scholar, who had displayed so much promise as a prose writer and poet, failed his Manchu examinations and was immediately demoted to become District Magistrate (*Xianling* 縣令) of Lishui 溧水, now a small town southeast of Nanjing (previously Nanking) in Jiangsu province. One of Yuan Mei's principal Manchu patrons, the powerful minister Ortai 鄂爾泰 (1680–1745) had graded the examinations and had been dismayed to find Yuan's name on one of the papers he had failed, after removing the paper slips pasted over the candidates' names.¹⁰¹ In a poem about this startling reverse in his fortunes, addressed to the friends who saw him off from Beijing, Yuan Mei wrote:

Suddenly the human world and heaven are divided by dust;
What decides an official's fate is hard to know.¹⁰²
The setting sun reflects on the level terrace's trees,
Someone planted long bamboo there, a little spring garden.
In the fifth month, traveling bags press the lowly clerk's
departure,¹⁰³
But for the time being, wine cups circulate from poet to poet.
We look at each other and my luggage, nothing else worth
remarking –
Only a residue of fairyland's snow sprinkled over my body.¹⁰⁴

The “snow” from the court's fairy realm had not yet melted from Yuan Mei's clothing, but his failure at the Manchu examinations had forced his exile from the realm of “heaven,” and he must leave soon, never to return to the “paradise” of the imperial court for the rest of his life.

Yuan Mei complained that the reason for his demotion was not easy to understand, and, indeed, he may have been sent packing for more important reasons than his failure to master the intricacies of Manchu grammar. In spite of the humble tone of the poetry and prose which he composed while serving in the Hanlin Academy, Yuan was becoming increasingly notorious for his hot temper and unconventional ideas. We have already seen him attacking one of the traditional paragons of filial piety during his youth, but his hostility to many accepted Confucian values continued to grow over the years. One of his most controversial ancient-prose essays from this period, the “Exposition of Purity” (“Qingshuo” 清說,) consists of a biting critique of the Confucian ideal of moral purity (*qing* 清,) generally regarded by China's Manchu rulers as one of the most exalted qualities an official could possess. We shall have more to say about this prole piece in Chapter Two, but let it suffice us to say here that the court must have found Yuan Mei's ideas extremely irritating, not the least because anti-Manchu scholars would have applauded his critique of *qing* as an attack on the sacrosanct name of the Qing (“Pure”) Manchu dynasty itself.¹⁰⁵

In any case, there were certain mitigating factors in Yuan's demotion, as another poem in the same series tells us:

Blue Creek is only a few bends away from the road home;¹⁰⁶
Now Heaven allows the poet to care for aging parents.¹⁰⁷
From now on, I will strive to be a model official;¹⁰⁸
In recent years I've indulged in too many impractical books.¹⁰⁹
Why am I not fated to live my life in the Academy's fairy realm?¹¹⁰
How I would love to linger in its shade a while longer!¹¹¹
I pick some lotus blossoms to take to the human realm,¹¹²
Wondering to myself what it's like down there.¹¹³

Yuan would soon be returning to the rivers and lakes of southern China, where he would be able to fulfill his obligations as a filial son more easily. In spite of his love of learning, life in the Hanlin Academy must have seemed isolated from the real world, and now he would have an opportunity to prove his mettle in the arena of local government.

Yuan arrived at Lishui in the summer of 1742, but he did not stay there very long, being transferred to Jiangpu 江浦, just west across the Yangzi River from Nanjing, and then by the end of the year to Shuyang 沭陽, far off in northern Jiangsu near the border with Shandong 山東, where he spent the next two years.¹¹⁴ Life in Shuyang was grim for the common people. According to one of Yuan Mei's poems, the district had suffered one natural disaster after another over a period of eight consecutive years, and soon after his arrival, locusts devoured the crops, a calamity followed by flood and then drought, so that: "Wild dogs carried skulls of humans in their jaws,/Together with wasted bones devoid of flesh."¹¹⁵

Yuan was so moved by the sufferings of the peasants in Shuyang that he abandoned the learned historical verse in short forms he had favored earlier in order to write long, rugged poems in imitation of ancient ballads about their hardships and his personal difficulties. One of these poems "The Disaster" (translated on page 553) depicts a terrifying drought and famine, while another work "The Lament of the Tax Collector" (translated on page 556) exposes the inefficiency and corruption of the eighteenth-century taxation system. In later years, Yuan abandoned political and social poetry almost entirely, so the poems of this period are a particularly precious record of his views on the pressing problems of the age.

In spite of his sympathy for the poor, Yuan Mei became rapidly disillusioned with his life as a local official:

We hold our tablets to meet our superior,
Seeing him for the first time in his imposing office.¹¹⁶
People who hear about my background all sigh with regret;¹¹⁷
I'm still a newcomer to this constant bowing.
It's hard to write the tiny characters required for forms;¹¹⁸
My knees creak loudly from learning to kowtow.
I return to quarters at night and remove my uniform;
What a surge of emotions, as I gaze toward our office!¹¹⁹

Yuan Mei was very proud of his knowledge of the classical tradition and his literary achievements, so he was understandably loath to bow down to his superiors as other junior officials did. In later years someone asked him if he would prefer to be a Clerk (Dianshi 典史) or a humble water carrier, but Yuan said that he would prefer the latter, because at least "when the water carrier carries water [into the office of a Governor General,] he walks with big paces and everyone gives way to him!"¹²⁰

However, life was not always so unpleasant in his new post, and some of the poetry from this period combines vivid descriptions of his work as an official with an exploration of the bucolic themes so common in Chinese verse from the time of the great nature poet Tao Qian 陶潛 (362–427) onwards:¹²¹

I learn to write my name smaller than a fly's head;
I'm ashamed to ride a nag just to prove my honesty.¹²²
Rain falls and cotton flowers turn to white snow;
The verdure of wheat invades the city in spring.
No one can use connections, for I settle suits quickly;
I fear faulty judgments and hand out light punishments.
The courtroom often changes into my study;
I sit until everyone leaves – just a single bird chirping.¹²³

Here town and countryside lose their boundaries, and the District Magistrate's courtroom becomes the recluse's study.

According to surviving accounts, Yuan was a model official, scrupulously honest in his dealings with everyone and taking a genuine interest in the welfare of the common folk. In spite of his disapproval of certain aspects of Confucianism, his approach to governing was based solidly on the principles of that philosophy, as he explains in a letter to a student:

Government may be external, but it is especially important to govern your own mind. If your mind is upright, then all evil thoughts vanish, and if it is harmonious, then many good things gather in it. If your mind is familiar with its many responsibilities, then laws and orders need not be troublesome. If it is indifferent to glory and salary, then the superior officials will have no way to get hold of you . . . Honesty you are not aware of is real honesty. Public spirit that you do not capitalize on is great public spirit. If the people trust you, you can command them as easily as one does a favorable breeze. If the clerks submit to you, you can use them as you would use your own arm.¹²⁴

Yuan Mei was repelled by much conventional Confucian morality, but he still believed in the Confucian idea that personal moral cultivation is a prerequisite to all effective political action.

In later years, many stories circulated about Yuan Mei's wisdom as an administrator and judge, and a collection of such tales entitled *The Cases of Harmony Garden* (*Suiyuan gong'an* 隨園公案) was eventually published and became so popular that various stories from it were made into operatic dramas with titles like "The Case of the Centipede" or "The Case of the Donkey."¹²⁵ Although many of these tales were obviously fictional, Yuan Mei resolved a number of unconventional cases with his accustomed humanity and wisdom:

When I was governing Shuyang, there was a woman from an official family, who was living together with her grandmother. After she had sexual relations with her nephew, a certain Mr. Chen, she tried to escape but was arrested. It just happened to be the sixth month when she was being questioned, and as she knelt [before me] in the blazing sun, her sweat rained down, so that her fine skin shined like jade. Chen was very ugly in appearance, and made a living sewing skins. I wondered how “she sought a handsome mate but got this toad,” something I found especially hard to understand.¹²⁶ I asked the lady what she had to confess, and her tears poured down as she said: “Because of one error in judgment, I have disgraced my ancestors. This must be the result of bad karma from a previous life.” The grandmother was extremely angry and wanted to have her sentenced to death, but I used the language of a Zhuo Mao to reason with her again and again.¹²⁷ I had the nephew caned and returned the woman to her family.¹²⁸

Incest with a nephew was a capital crime in the eighteenth century, and Yuan Mei was able to save this beautiful, young woman from a terrible fate.

In 1743 Yuan Mei took his first concubine, a lady surnamed Tao 陶 (1726–55,) who gave birth to his daughter Chenggu 成姑 (1747–65) four years later.¹²⁹ In a poem written at Miss Tao’s death, Yuan praised her skill at embroidery and playing chess.¹³⁰ She also seems to have been the only of his concubines who could write poetry, and Yuan Mei thought enough of her work to record two samples for posterity.¹³¹ It was normal, accepted practice for scholars to take concubines in the eighteenth century, but not all of Yuan Mei’s contemporaries approved of his actions, and even his patron Yin Jishan urged him to sleep alone more often to conserve energy and preserve his health.¹³² Yuan Mei did not agree with the Manchu grandee on this point and wrote the following witty reply:

Sir, it is only because you are worried about me becoming ill that you “skillfully lure me on,” teaching me to isolate myself from my many “flowers” [i.e. beautiful women] and to sleep alone . . .¹³³ However, there is an explanation for me not avoiding the flowers in my residence. When men try to stay far away from flowers, there are some who break their abstinence when they smell [the blossoms’] fragrance [from a distance,] or others who just have to pick them whenever they meet them. But what about the fellow who planted plums at Dengwei or the old man who grew blossoming orange trees at Dongting Island, both of whom were able to look at flowers all day long as if they did not even see them?¹³⁴ They were familiar with flowers and disported themselves with them, so that the flowers paled in significance and the men forgot them . . . When Yan Hui waited on his master [Confucius,] he said that he could sit and forget

[everything about physical desires.]¹³⁵ A man like me can be said to forget everything [about his desires] as he lies down [with women.] I wish that you would not worry about me!¹³⁶

In the autumn of 1744 Yuan Mei went to Nanjing to serve briefly as an examiner in the Provincial Examinations, shortly after which he was transferred from his post in Shuyang back to Nanjing, where he was to administer Jiangning 江寧, a southern section of the city and its surrounding countryside.¹³⁷ A poem composed when he left Shuyang reads:

Every five paces, we down a farewell cup;
Every ten paces, we break willow branches.¹³⁸
I, the magistrate, ride my carriage;
Clerks and peasants run along and hang on its sides.
Local elders shed tears as they say to me:
“You performed no miracles during your term with us, sir –
No tigers swam away, and the locusts still swarmed.¹³⁹
Yet all the law cases, both large and small,
Were never delayed for more than ten days!”
The clerks and runners all wept as they spoke:
“There was only one good thing about you, sir –
You didn’t tax folks to the last fish in their ponds;¹⁴⁰
Nor could people hoodwink others with paperwork;
Every day you let us leave the office on time;
If there were no emergencies, you closed up early.”
When I heard what they said, I knew they understood me;
I was proud I could do this in just two years.
As the sun set, I whipped my horses and turned around;
The sound of weeping receded, the river’s water flowed on.¹⁴¹

Yuan Mei was now living in the second largest metropolis of the Chinese empire, a major cultural and commercial center with a long and rich history. Nanjing had been the capital of southern China during the Period of Division (fourth century-late sixth century) and then of a united China under the first two rulers of the Ming dynasty until the Yongle 永樂 emperor (reg. 1403–25) transferred the seat of government to Beijing at the beginning of his reign. The city’s military and economic importance in ancient times and during Yuan Mei’s age is explained by its location on the south bank of the Yangzi at the point where that river begins to build a delta and where it is narrow enough to cross easily by boat. Unfortunately, very little of eighteenth-century Nanjing remains today, because the city was devastated during the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64,) the most impressive ancient monument being the Ming-dynasty city wall, the longest such structure in the world at 20.7 miles.¹⁴²

Here, in 1748, Yuan took his second concubine Fang Congniang 方聰娘, (1724–1772,) a woman from the famous pleasure city Suzhou 蘇州 (formerly Soochow.) Yuan made her his chief concubine in later years, and she bore him his daughter Penggu 鵬姑 (b. 1764.)¹⁴³ In the autumn of the same year, Yuan also bought a garden, located just north of the massive city wall near Little Granary Hill (Xiaocangshan 小倉山,) a place name he used in the titles of both his collected poetry and prose and where he spent most of the rest of his life.¹⁴⁴ Yuan Mei's prose account from the next year describes the surroundings of the garden, its historical background, method of construction, and his reasons for residing there:

*A Record of Harmony Garden*¹⁴⁵

If you walk two *li* west from the bridge at the north gate of Nanjing, you arrive at Little Granary Hill. This hill is born from the womb of Pure Coolness Mountain and divides into two ridges, which end right at the bridge. Twisting and turning, narrow and long, the hill has pure ponds and rice paddies in an area which the common herd calls Dry River Bank. Before the river dried up, Pure Coolness Mountain was a summer resort for the Southern Tang court, and one can imagine its glory then.¹⁴⁶ The famous sights of Nanjing mentioned by everyone include Raining Flower Terrace on the south, Sans Souci Lake on the southwest, Cup Mountain on the north, Smelting Fort on the east, and the Filial Emperor's Tomb and Cockcrow Monastery on the northeast.¹⁴⁷ If you climb Little Granary Hill, all these sights float majestically toward you, and all the things that Little Granary Hill did not originally have, to wit, the grand scale of the rivers and lakes, and the transformations of the clouds and mists, become the property of the hill.

During the Kangxi era, a certain Mr. Sui 隋, Superintendent of Imperial Silk Manufacturing, constructed imposing buildings by the northern summit of the hill, which he surrounded with an enclosure, and within which he planted a thousand catalpa trees and a thousand plots of cassia flowers.¹⁴⁸ At that time it became a great fashion for the people of the city to go there on excursions, and they named the place Sui's Garden [Suiyuan 隋園] after his family name. Thirty years later, when I governed Jiangning, his garden had already collapsed and lay in ruins, its buildings being used as a wine shop, noisy with the shouts of low-class people. Birds despised the garden and were unwilling to nest there. All of its plants were overgrown and were incapable of blooming even under the spring wind. This grieved me so much that I asked the garden's price, and when I was told that it would cost three hundred ounces of silver, I bought it with one month's salary.¹⁴⁹

I repaired the wall, changed the eaves, and repainted everything. I set out pavilions overlooking the river and in harmony with the high places. I set out kiosks overlooking creeks and in harmony with the low places. I built bridges in harmony with the rushing torrents. I had boats made in harmony with the fast currents. I made peaks and grottoes in harmony with places that were high in the middle and slanted on the sides. I set up buildings in open places surrounded by lush vegetation. Some places I raised up; other places were squashed down and limited, everything in harmony with the available resources. I created vistas in harmony with the lay of the land, limiting nothing unnaturally. Thus, I named my garden Harmony Garden [Suiyuan 隨園,] which sounds the same [as the name of the earlier garden] but has a different meaning.¹⁵⁰ When my garden was completed, I sighed to myself and said: “If I continue to serve as an official here, I can only come once a month, but if I live [in reclusion] here, I can come here every day. Since I cannot do both of these things at the same time, it would be better to give up my official position for the sake of the garden.” Therefore, I asked for sick leave and took my [male] cousin Yuan Shu and my nephew Lu Jian along with our books to live at Harmony Garden.

I have heard that Su Shi said: “It is unnecessary for a gentleman to serve as an official, but it is also unnecessary that he *not* serve.”¹⁵¹ Now, whether or not I serve as an official or how long I will live in this garden will all be in harmony [with my fate.] Whether or not one can exchange something for another, frequently implies that one of them is superior to the other. The fact that I finally exchanged an official position for my garden shows its marvelous qualities. Recorded in the third month of the *jisi* year [1749.]¹⁵²

Today Pure Coolness Mountain (Qingliangshan 清涼山) is the site of a popular park on the west side of Nanjing, where one can still see the poorly preserved remains of a well constructed during the reign of the second Southern Tang ruler Li Jing 李璟 (reg. 943–61,) but, rather ironically, practically nothing survives from Yuan Mei’s eighteenth-century garden.¹⁵³ Yuan was himself quite aware of the ephemeral nature of such constructions, since he was building on an old site, but, in any case, at the beginning his garden was probably little more than a diversion from the pressures of his official career, since he was not certain how long he would be able to live there. He was still a young man, and a tempting position in the government might be offered to him at any moment.

Possibly reflecting the instability in his official career, Yuan Mei’s philosophy of life seems to have wavered during his tenure in Jiangning, and in spite of his mother’s example, he even flirted momentarily with Buddhism, which was undergoing a major revival among intellectuals of

the Qianlong period.¹⁵⁴ During one visit to a Buddhist monastery, Yuan wrote:

The entire plum tree is brimming with flower buds;
By midnight its perfume inundates the sky.
The stream sounds very busy after rain;
The shadow of a peak stands in front of my lamp.
I fill myself on food fit for monks,
And meditate with them on bamboo shoots like jade.¹⁵⁵
I am apart from all human concerns of this land of China;
After awaking from my dreams, I still feel carefree.¹⁵⁶

Yuan stayed at his post in Jiangning for four years, during which time he became a close friend of his Manchu patron Yin Jishan, who had been serving in Nanjing since 1743 in the powerful position Governor-general of Liangjiang (Liangjiang zongdu 兩江總督,) exercising authority over Jiangsu, Jiangxi, and Anhui provinces.¹⁵⁷ Yuan met Yin frequently to exchange poetry and discuss current affairs, no doubt benefiting greatly from his continuous assistance and protection. Yuan Mei's association with Yin and his circle must have afforded him a good deal of pleasure, but Jiangning was a populous district, and he was certainly much busier here than he had been in Shuyang. One can form some idea of the rat race he led in Nanjing from such poems as "A Vulgar Official" (translated on page 565,) where he complains that he has so little time to be with his mother that "her rarely-seen son seems a thousand *li* away" and that even when he returns exhausted late at night he is usually awakened by one emergency or another. Young scholars constantly harass him for advice about their writing, widows and orphans besiege him with petitions, and he must keep an eye out for all the chicanery of his underlings. His only escape seems to be the same ideal of reclusion manifested in the life of Tao Qian, whose bucolic realm Yuan had first begun to investigate in Shuyang:

I look at the sky, laugh aloud, and ask if they know,
That this vulgar official bows and scrapes for five pecks of rice.¹⁵⁸
It would be better to sing loudly: "I want to go home!"¹⁵⁹
And learn from the ancient poet how to plant willow trees!¹⁶⁰

In spite of his complaints, Yuan Mei continued to be a model official, administering the government efficiently and providing impartial justice for the commoners. Social and political concerns were still foremost in his verse, and for the most part, he continued to cultivate the same rugged style adopted in Shuyang.

However, Yuan was becoming increasingly exhausted from his official duties, and later in 1749, he applied for sick leave, an act which was

tantamount to submitting his resignation.¹⁶¹ He may have been a very talented and dedicated official, but his heart was not in his job:

There are some things a man is skilled at and other things he is not skilled at. Sometimes he can serve in an official position long, but at other times he cannot . . . At Jiangning . . . the people did not occupy me too much, but there was a lot of entertaining. I may be skilled at the people's business, but I am not good at entertaining. Now I forced myself to be good at it, and compelling myself to provide it for four years, . . . I said that I was punishing myself this way for the sake of the people, something that I was happy to do. However, all this staying out [so late that] I could not distinguish dawn from dusk and coming back home in the morning frost and dew was for nothing other than entertaining superiors or receiving and sending off people, both of which only showed what a slave I was to the high officials.¹⁶²

Yuan also felt that he might be able to serve his country better as a writer than as an official:

It is said that you can repay your country by your deeds in office, but you can pay it back with your writings, too, and the creation of writings is the more difficult of the two . . . And when I speak of writings repaying your country, I do not necessarily mean works like Liu Zongyuan's "Zhenfu" and Ban Gu's "Dianyin," in which one sedulously flatters and praises [the ruler.] If you create magnificent and perceptive works, which greatly surpass those of the ancients and moderns, and which cause people to say that such and such author lived in a certain dynasty, they must certainly be credited to the glory of your nation.¹⁶³

However, poetry of this period suggests that frustration of Yuan Mei's earlier political ambitions may have been an equally important factor in his resignation:

My poems have sung vainly about my superior talents;¹⁶⁴
After ten years no emperor summons me to a post.¹⁶⁵
A stork confined in a cage rarely cries out loud;
Only cold plum trees outside fences can remain fragrant long.
Knees, I betrayed you by kneeling before superiors;¹⁶⁶
The man drinking from his own spring is the most unrestrained!
I love the thoughts of the lone cloud above the mountain range;
It goes home full of rain to produce a cool shower!¹⁶⁷

Yuan still smarted from his earlier demotion to local government, and the imperial court continued to display no interest in his talents. Perhaps it was better to float away freely like a "lone cloud."

Many officials would have been content to wait patiently for another opportunity, but Yuan Mei had been deeply insulted by a more recent rebuff. In the fifth month of 1747, Yin Jishan had recommended him for the post of Department Magistrate (*zhizhou* 知州) of Gaoyou 高郵, near the city of Yangzhou 揚州 in Jiangsu province, but later in the year the government refused to approve the appointment, ostensibly because it involved too sudden a promotion, a department (Zhou 州) usually including several districts (*Xian* 縣,) the largest administrative unit Yuan Mei had governed up to that time.¹⁶⁸ Many years later in his *Will* (1797,) Yuan said:

I was favored by Yin Jishan's recommendation for Department Magistrate of Gaoyou, but the Board did not approve it. I was displeased, and since my mother just happened to be sick, I requested to return home to nurse her.¹⁶⁹

Perhaps the court had still not forgiven what it considered Yuan Mei's veiled attack on the dynastic name. In any case, his prospects for immediate advancement seemed poor, and he was weary of toadying his superiors and yearned to return home, where he could write poetry and enjoy himself as he pleased. After he arrived in Harmony Garden and sent in his resignation, Yuan Mei wrote:

Like a tame horse carrying a ton on its back,
I galloped along, a whip behind me.
Suddenly I'm free on the mountains of Hua;¹⁷⁰
My body once more belongs to me.
It's just like the time when Master Shu
Gave up his post to return to the fields.¹⁷¹
Someone sends me off, but we don't speak at all,
Only drinking wine to cheer ourselves up.
I look at my reflection in the turquoise stream –
Is my face really the same as it was before?¹⁷²

Notes

- 1 According to popular Chinese lore, the Weaving Girl (Zhinü 織女) and Herding Boy (Niulang 牛郎) were two heavenly lovers who were forced to live apart by the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母.) They were allowed to be together on only one evening of the year, the seventh day of the seventh lunar month.
- 2 This story appears in a very useful collection of anecdotes about Yuan Mei's life: Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復, *Suiyuan yishi* 隨園軼事 (hereafter abbreviated SYYS,) 35 and 63, in Wang Yingzhi 王英志 ed., *Yuan Mei quanji* 袁枚全集 (hereafter abbreviated YMQJ,) Nanjing, 1993, vol. 8, with a preface from 1864. Many of the anecdotes recorded in this work are based on Yuan Mei's prose or poetry, but the author occasionally cites new material, not always reliable.

According to Jiang's preface, he collected most of this material orally from Yuan Mei's grandsons. See SYYS, i. Jiang Dunfu (1808–67) is a fascinating figure in his own right, collaborating with Western scholars in the translation of books and taking refuge as a Buddhist monk after being discovered cheating on the civil service examinations.

- 3 Or on the Chinese calendar, the second day of the third Chinese lunar month in the fifty-fifth year of the Kangxi 康熙 emperor's reign (reg. 1662–1723.)

The most important primary source for the reconstruction of Yuan Mei's life is his collected poetry and prose, of which there are numerous editions, some of the more important noted in the bibliography. One of the more commonly cited editions at present is Zhou Benchun 周本淳 ed., *Xiaocang shanfang shiwenji* 小倉山房詩文集, Shanghai, 1988, 4 vol. This contains a brief discussion of earlier editions which served as the basis to Zhou's text on p. 13. The main drawback of this work is that it leaves out almost three-quarters of Yuan Mei's prose writings. A much more complete edition is found in the eight volumes of YMQJ. This contains everything by Yuan Mei that survives in addition to other works edited by him, and even some spurious works attributed to him. The editions that form its basis are analyzed in vol. 1, 10–22. There are discussions of this edition by the editor in Wang Yingzhi 王英志, "Yuan Mei yu Yuan Mei quanji" 袁枚與袁枚全集, *Suzhou daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexueban)* 蘇州大學學報(哲學社會科學版) (hereafter abbreviated SZDX) 3 (1993), 56–62 and "Guanyu Yuan Mei quanji" 關於袁枚全集, *Hubei daxue xuebao (zheshheban)* 湖北大學學報(哲社版) 2 (1994), 123–4. Another older but very useful edition of Yuan Mei's complete works is *Suiyuan quanji* 隨園全集 (hereafter abbreviated SYQJ,) Shanghai, Saoye shanfang 掃葉山房, Shanghai, 1928, 56ce. This contains materials by Yuan Mei's relatives and descendants not included in YMQJ. Refer to the catalogue of forty-three titles at the head of vol. 1. There are earlier but sometimes less comprehensive editions of Yuan Mei's "complete" works in *Suiyuan sanshizhong* 隨園三十種, Qiantang Yuanshi kanben 錢塘袁氏刊本, 1765–1807, 80 vol. in 8 boxes, published by Yuan Mei and his family; *Suiyuan sanshiliu zhong* 隨園三十六種, Tushu jicheng yinshuguan 圖書集成印書館, Shanghai, 1892, 7 vol. double leaves; and *Suiyuan sishisan zhong* 隨園四十三種, Zhuyitang shuju 著易堂書局, Shanghai, 1921, 56 vol. in 8 cases. For a general discussion of these editions and Yuan Mei's poetry, see Yuan Xingyun's 袁行雲 massive study of the works of Qing poets, *Qingren shiji xulu* 清人詩集敘錄, Beijing, 1994, vol. 2, 1078–80. I have used Zhou Benchun's edition as the basis for all poems translated, because of its relative lack of misprints, and YMQJ for all other translations of prose works, because of its high quality and easy availability.

Yuan Mei is probably a reliable autobiographer, at least when it comes to dates, for he tells us that he kept a diary in his old age, but, unfortunately, this does not seem to have survived. See Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shi hua buyi* 隨園詩話補遺 (hereafter abbreviated Shihua buyi,) 7.34.722, in YMQJ, vol. 3 (see note 12 below for the citation method.) One work with important biographical information is the account of Yuan Mei and his garden written by his grandson Yuan Zuzhi 袁祖志 (1827–98), *Suiyuan suoji* 隨園瑣記 (hereafter abbreviated SYSJ,) in SYQJ, vol. 36 with a preface by the author dated 1877. This should be read together with the anecdotes collected in SYYS. Yuan Zuzhi's book has a close relation with Jiang Dunfu's work, for many entries are nearly identical, but it is difficult to tell who copied from whom, for although Yuan's book was published later, it is possible that much of it was in manuscript form earlier. Another important primary source for Yuan's

biography is the large volume of poetry addressed to him by friends, much of which is contained in his Yuan Mei ed., *Xu tongren ji* 續同人集 (hereafter abbreviated XTRJ,) in YMQJ, vol. 6. This work includes over 400 poems and nearly one hundred letters. Another important contemporary source is Mao Guangsheng 冒廣生 ed., *Piben Suiyuan shihua* 批本隨園詩話 (hereafter abbreviated Pi,) 1916, which is also included in YMQJ, vol. 3, 813–838, the edition used here. This book supplies much interesting information about Yuan Mei, but some of it is little more than scandalous gossip. According to a postface, the work was edited from handwritten notes to Yuan Mei's poetry talks, once in the possession of a Manchu official. The author is probably one of the sons of Juelo Wulana 覺羅伍拉納 (d. 1795,) a high Manchu official of the period, who administered Fujian province, was responsible for suppressing banditry and rebellions there and in Taiwan, and was eventually executed because of his cruelty and corruption. See Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽, *Qingshigao* 清史稿, (hereafter abbreviated QSG,) Beijing, 1976–7, 339.126.11081–4. There is a letter from Wulana to Yuan Mei in XTRJ, “Wenjuan” 文卷, 3. 330, “Da Jianzhai xiansheng shu” 荅簡齋先生書. There is a discussion of Pi's authorship and contents in “Lüeshuo piben Suiyuan Shihua” 略說批本隨園詩話, in Mou Runsun 牟潤孫, *Zhushizhai conggao* 注史齋叢稿, Beijing, 1987, 510–22.

Short traditional-style biographies of Yuan Mei in classical Chinese are contained in Yao Nai 姚鼐, “Yuan Suiyuanjun muzhiming bingxu” 袁隨園君墓志銘並序, in Li Huan 李桓 ed., *Guochao qixian leizheng chubian* 國朝耆獻類徵初編, 234. 21–22, 161–533 to 541 in Zhou Junfu 周駿富 ed., *Qingdai zhuanji congkan* 清代傳記叢刊 (hereafter abbreviated QDZJCK,) Taipei, 1985, and also included in Wang Xianqian 王先謙 ed., *Pingjiao yinzhuxu guwenci leizuan* 評校音注續古文辭類纂, Shanghai, 1920, vol. 6, 17.11b–13 together with a simple commentary; Li Yuandu 李元度 ed., *Guochao xianzheng shilüe* 國朝先正事略, “Wenyuan” 文苑 42.6a–8a, 193–519 to 521, in QDZJCK; Qian Yiji 錢儀吉 ed., *Beizhuan ji* 碑傳集, 107.19b–21a, 112–042 to 045, in QDZJCK; Qian Lin 錢林 and Wang Zao 王藻 ed., *Wenxian zhengcun lu* 文獻徵存錄, 6.95a–100b, 011–189 to 200, in QDZJCK; Zhang Weiping 張維屏 ed., *Guochao shiren zhenglüe* 國朝詩人徵略, 30.12a–18a, 022–024 to 40, in QDZJCK; Ye Gongchuo 葉恭綽 ed., *Qingdai xuezhe xiangzhuan* 清代學者象傳, Shanghai, 1930, Diyiji di'erce 第一集第二冊, no page no. (with two portraits of Yuan Mei, one of him holding a flower at the age of fifty and another of him with a black beard, holding a book); Li Fusun 李富孫 ed., *Hezheng houlu* 鶴徵後錄, Yangjia laowu kan 漾葭老屋刊, 1872, 8.7b–11a; Gong Jiajun 龔嘉雋 ed., *Hangzhou fuzhi* 杭州府志, Hangzhou, 1895, 146. “Renwu” 人物 8. “Wenyuan” 文苑 3, 2; Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 ed., *Qingshi liezhuan* 清史列傳, 72.2b–4a, 104–918 to 921, in QDZJCK; and QSG, 485.272.13383. There is an annotated text of the last item in Wang Yingzhi 王英志, *Xushipin zhuping* 續詩品注評 (hereafter abbreviated XSP,) Hangzhou, 1989, 115. Many of these sources are conveniently reprinted in Wang Yingzhi, *Yuan Mei zhuanji ziliao* 袁枚傳記資料, in YMQJ, vol. 8. Two more similar collections are *Yanjiu Yuan Mei ziliao* 研究袁枚資料, Taipei, 1982 and *Yuan Mei shengping zhuanlüe* 袁枚生平傳略, Taipei, 1982. These two compilations also contain many non-biographical items.

The volume of secondary biographical material in modern Chinese for Yuan Mei is already considerable, but many of these works tend to merely copy from earlier books with little critical reevaluation of the sources. The principal monographs by twentieth-century Chinese scholars, all of which

include extensive biographies, are Yang Honglie 楊鴻烈, *Yuan Mei pingzhuan* 袁枚評傳, Taipei, 1976 (first ed. 1927,) 12–145; Gu Yuanxiang 顧遠蕪, *Suiyuan di shishuo yanjiu* 隨園的詩說研究, Shanghai, 1988 (repr. of 1936 ed.,) 1–18; Hu Ming 胡明, *Yuan Mei shixue shulun* 袁枚詩學述論, Hefei 合肥, 1983, 1–16; Jian Youyi 簡友儀, *Yuan Mei yanjiu* 袁枚研究, Taipei, 1988, 37–97; and Si Zhongao 司仲敖, *Suiyuan jiqi xingling shishuo zhi yanjiu* 隨園及其性靈詩說之研究, Taipei, 1988, 1–26. Many of these works contain irritating discrepancies in their dating of events in Yuan Mei's life, but most of these chronological problems have been resolved in the most detailed and scholarly *nianpu* 年譜 (chronological biography) for Yuan Mei published so far: Fu Yuheng 傅毓衡, *Yuan Mei nianpu* 袁枚年譜, Hefei, 1986. (See also his article "Yuan Mei shengping kaolue" 袁枚生評考略, *Nanjing shifan xueyuan wenjiao ziliao jianbao* 南京師範學院文教資料簡報 7.8 [1982,] 48–61.) For the most part, I have adopted Fu's chronology for Yuan Mei. An older and sparser *nianpu* is Fang Junshi 方濬師, *Suiyuan xiansheng nianpu* 隨園先生年譜, Shanghai, 1933. Most of the important modern biographical sources are discussed in one of the more useful reference books on Chinese biography published in recent years, Huang Xiuwen 黃秀文, *Zhongguo nianpu cidian* 中國年譜辭典, Shanghai, 1997, 413–4.

Short biographies by twentieth-century Chinese scholars are found in Liang Rongruo 梁容若, "Yuan Mei pingzhuan" 袁枚評傳, *Shu he ren* 書和人 2 (March 27, 1965,) 1–8; Weiru 畏如, "Duocai duozhi di Yuan Zicai" 多才多姿的袁子才, *Wentan* 文壇 236 (November 1, 1964,) 253–6; Huang Qian 黃乾 et al., *Zhongguo wenxue shihua xuji* 中國文學史話續集, Taipei, 1974, 217–26; and Wang Xu 王序, *Zhongguo wenxue zuojia xiaozhuan* 中國文學作家小傳, Hong Kong, 1962, 245–8. In addition, contemporary Chinese scholars continue to delight in gathering little anecdotes about Yuan Mei, some of them quite interesting to the biographer. Examples are Yuzi 餘子, *Zhangguo mantan* 掌故漫談, Hong Kong, 1974, 445–53 and Luo Jizu 羅繼祖, "Suiyuan yishi" 隨園遺事, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 2 (May, 1980,) 236. The only book-length biography of Yuan in a Western language is Arthur Waley's delightful *Yuan Mei: Eighteenth century poet* (hereafter abbreviated W,) London, 1956. In spite of its occasional errors, Waley's book is one of the few studies that does not merely reproduce earlier secondary works and is especially distinguished by its lively use of Yuan Mei's prose works. Another useful, but much shorter, English biography is found in Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing period*, Washington, D. C., 1943, 955–7, still one of the best sources for biographical information on Qing-dynasty figures. The earliest study of Yuan Mei ever published in a Western language is Camille Imbault-Huart, "Un poète chinois du XVIII^e siècle, Yuan Tseu-ts'ai, sa vie et ses oeuvres," *Journal North China British Asiatic Society* 19.2 (1884,) 1–42. There is a valuable collection of critical materials about Yuan Mei in Wang Yingzhi 王英志, *Yuan Mei pinglun ziliao* 袁枚評論資料, in YMQJ, vol. 8. The largest selection of Yuan Mei's poetry and prose in translation before this work is found in W. Other selections are found in Irving Yucheng Lo and William Schultz ed., *Waiting for the unicorn*, Bloomington, 1986, 190–201 and Jonathan Chaves, *The Columbia book of later Chinese poetry: Yuan, Ming, and Ch'ing dynasties (1279–1911)*, New York, 1986, 440–65. There are also beautiful translations of some of Yuan Mei's shorter poems to be found in a new work published after the first draft of this book was written: Jerome P. Seaton, *I don't bow to Buddhas: Selected poems of Yuan Mei*, Port Townsend, 1997.

- 4 An excellent account of Hangzhou during the Southern Song dynasty is found in Jacques Gernet, H. M. Wright tr., *Daily life in China on the eve of the Mongol invasion*, Stanford, 1962, 22–58.
- 5 Yuan Mei was not directly involved with many of the major historical events of his age, so this book will have little to say about them. The limited historical summary in the following pages does not pretend to be original in any way and is based on reading in primary and secondary literature in Chinese and English. The most commonly used primary source for the period is QSG. An excellent and detailed study of Qing history by a modern scholar is found in Xiao Yishan 蕭一山, *Qingdai tongshi* 清代通史, Taipei, 1962–3, 5 vol.
- 6 This has been reprinted in a number of modern editions, the best of which is Tian Rucheng 田汝成, *Xihu youlanzhi* 西湖遊覽志, Shanghai, 1980.
- 7 Jean Baptiste Gabriel Alexandre Grosier, *De la Chine*, Paris, 1818–20, 104–7.
- 8 For the founding of the Qing dynasty, see Xiao Yishan, vol. 1, 272–377. A detailed study of how the Manchus set up their empire is Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *The great enterprise: The Manchu reconstruction of imperial order in seventeenth century China*, Berkeley, 1985. A study of the Manchus is found in Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Manchus*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and Oxford, 1997.
- 9 A fascinating book on Kangxi is Jonathan D. Spence, *Emperor of China: Self-portrait of K'ang-hsi*, Harmondsworth, 1977. The most complete study of the Qianlong emperor so far is Zhou Yuanlian 周遠廉, *Qianlong huangdi dazhuan* 乾隆皇帝大傳, Zhengzhou, 1990. Less detailed for politics but somewhat stronger on cultural history of the Qianlong period is Dai Yi 戴逸, *Qianlongdi jiqi shidai* 乾隆帝及其時代, Beijing, 1992. The most complete study of the Qianlong period in a Western language is H. L. Kahn, *Monarchy in the emperor's eyes: Image and reality in the Ch'ien-lung reign*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971. There is an English-language biography of Qianlong in John E. Wills Jr., *Mountain of fame: Portraits in Chinese history*, Princeton, 1994, 231–58. See also Crossley, 109–49 for an overview of his reign.
- 10 Earlier works on Yuan Mei in either Chinese or Western languages do not consult original sources concerning his ancestors and are riddled with errors. The entire family history is given in Yuan Zhaochi 袁兆墀 ed., *Cixi Zhujiang Yuanshi zongpu* 慈谿竹江袁氏宗譜, Chunxutang 惇毅堂, 1923, the immediate family of Yuan Mei being treated in *juan* 4, “Fushigonghou qian Qiantangzhi” 副使公後遷錢塘支. For a biography of Yuan Zai, see Feng Kexiu 馮可繡 and Yang Taixiang 楊泰享 ed., *Cixi xianzhi* 慈谿縣志, 1899, 28. Ming 明 3. “Liezhuan” 列傳 5.5b–6b. All official titles in this study have been translated according to Charles O. Hucker, *A dictionary of official titles in imperial China*, Stanford, 1985. For the ancestors and immediate descendants of Yuan Zai, see Yuan Zhaochi, 3.1b.
- 11 Feng Kexiu, 29. Liezhuan 6.13a–b. The title *Fangbo* was an unofficial designation for *Chengxuan buzheng shi* 承宣布政使 (Provincial Administrator.) See Hucker, 127, 209, 391. For the ancestry of Yuan Maoying, see Yuan Zhaochi, 3.8a. For the ancestors and immediate descendants of Yuan Zongsi, see Yuan Zhaochi, 3.6a. Yuan Zongsi was the son of Yuan Huan 袁鑾. See Yuan Zhaochi, 3.1b. Some of the poems by Yuan Zongsi and Yuan Maoying in *Zhujiang ji* are preserved in Yuan Zhaochi, 25.6b–8a and 25.9a–10b.
- 12 Feng Kexiu, 47. “Yiwen” 藝文 2. Ming. 40a–b. I am not sure if the work survives. Yuan Maoying is given the alternate name Yuan Zhongxi 袁仲錫 in the same source. His *zi* was Junxue 君學, his *hao* Wenhai 文海. Previous sources state incorrectly that this collection was a collaboration between Yuan

- Maoying and his son, most likely misled by Yuan Mei's statement to this effect. See Yuan Mei, *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話 (hereafter abbreviated Shihua,) 2.73.61, in YMQJ, vol. 3. (In citations to Shihua and Shihua buyi, the first number is the *juan*, the second number the paragraph in the YMQJ edition, and the third number is the page. There is a very useful, if rather incomplete, commentary to Shihua and Shihua buyi in Lei Jin 雷縉, *Jianzhu Suiyuan shihua* 箋註隨園詩話, Saoyeshanfang 掃葉山房, Shanghai, 1925. A modern commentary and translation of part of the text is in Wang Jinghai 王鏡海 and Wang Guo 王果 ed. and tr., *Suiyuan shihua xuanzhu* 隨園詩話選注, Changsha, 1994. A modern Chinese translation of the entire work has also recently appeared: Wang Jingwei 汪靜韋 and Tang Tingyang 唐婷陽 tr., *Suiyuan shihua* 隨園詩話, Changchun 長春, 1996, 3 vol. Unfortunately, this does not provide any annotations for allusions and the proper forms of poets' names. A reproduction of part of Yuan Mei's surviving manuscript is found in Yuan Mei 袁枚, *Chuxingfangshi zhencang Suiyuan shihua yuangao er juan* 儲杏坊氏珍藏隨園詩話原稿二卷, Xinhua gujiubu 新華古舊部, Beijing, 1983, 2 vol.) Yuan Maoying also had another work named *Daren kuanglan* 達人曠覽 in one chapter, which may have been philosophical in nature, but the book was already missing at the end of the nineteenth century. See Feng Kexiu, 47.46b.
- 13 All earlier sources about Yuan Mei give Yuan Hongxun's name incorrectly as Yuan Huaimei 袁槐眉, which is actually his *hao*. See Feng Kexiu, 28.3.5.23b. Yuan Mei says that he achieved the post of Attendant Censor (Shiyu 侍御.) See Shihua, 2.73.61. For the immediate ancestors and descendants of Yuan Hongxun, see Yuan Zhaochi, 3.8a. For the writings of Yuan Hongxun and his brothers, which included a *Later Collection of Bamboo River* (*Hou Zhujiang ji* 後竹江集,) see Feng Kexiu, 47.53b. Some of Yuan Hongxun's poems are preserved in Yuan Zhaochi, 25.11a–12b.
- 14 Fu Yuheng does not even mention Yuan Xiangchun in his account of Yuan's ancestors and states that Yuan Maoying was Yuan Qi's father. See Fu Yuheng, *Yuan Mei nianpu*, 2–3. However, Yuan Mei tells us: "My great-grandfather Xiangchun made a trip to Guangdong at the age of eighty." Yuan Mei, *Xiaocang shanfang shiji* 小倉山房詩集, 30.776, in Zhou Benchun, *Xiaocang shanfang shiwen ji*. Since this edition has been taken as the basis for all translations of Yuan Mei's poetry in this work, sources for poems are indicated here by citing only the *juan* and page numbers in Zhou's text. Yuan Mei's poems are arranged in chronological order, but sometimes confusion arises, because works of two or more years are combined into one chapter. Furthermore, the chronology of Chapter 35 is questionable, because although it is marked as having been written in the *yimao* 乙卯 year (1795,) the lack of a chapter for poems created during the preceding year 1794 and the indication that Chapter 36 was written in the *yimao* year, too, leads one to suspect that the order is wrong. There is a very sparse but sometimes extremely useful traditional-style commentary on Yuan Mei's poetry in Xie Youren 謝有仁 ed., *Xiaocang shanfang shizhu* 小倉山房詩注, Daoguang 道光 28 (1848,) a work that I have seen only in the library of East China Normal University, Shanghai. This book contains a postface by the famous poet and prose master Zhang Weiping 張維屏 (1780–1859,) dated the eleventh month of the same year. Even sparser is the commentary in Lu Lüxi 陸律西 comm., *Yinzhu Yuan Suiyuan shi* 音注袁隨園詩, Wenming shudian 文明書店, 1928. There are also modern Chinese anthologies with commentaries found in the following: Li Lingnian 李靈年 et al., *Yuan Mei shiwen xuanyi* 袁枚詩文選譯, Chengdu, 1990; Zhou Gemin 周舂岷, *Yuan Mei shixuan* 袁枚詩選, Hangzhou, 1989

(Zhou wrote an introduction to this anthology and to Yuan Mei's poetry in Zhou Gemin 周軻岷, "Yuan Mei shixuan qianyan" 袁枚詩選前言, *Zhejiang shifan daxue xuebao [zhexue shehui kexueban]* 浙江師範大學學報【哲學社會科學版】4 [1987,] 42-50;) Wang Mingchao 王名超 ed., *Yuan Mei shixuan* 袁枚詩選, Harbin, 1987; and Wang Yingzhi 王英志, *Yuan Mei shixuan* 袁枚詩選, Zhengzhou, 1993. An introduction to Wang Yingzhi's selection is to be found in Wu Diaogong 吳調公, "Yuan Mei shixuanxu" 袁枚詩選序, *SZDX* 1 (1990,) 53-4. Please see the note at the beginning of the translation section for the method used for citing these modern commentaries in the notes below. For an unannotated selection of Yuan's poetry with extensive critical comments, see the most extensive and useful large anthology of Qing poetry to date, Qian Esun (Zhonglian) 錢萼孫 (仲聯,) *Qingshi jishi* 清詩紀事 (hereafter abbreviated QSJS,) Nanjing, 1989, 5078-99. Some of the poems not originally included in the collected works were gathered together in Jiang Dunfu 蔣敦復 ed., *Suiyuan jiwai shi* 隨園集外詩, Dadong shuju 大東書局, Shanghai, 1915, 2 *ce*.

See the genealogy proposed in Gu Yuanxiang, 19 and supported by textual references in Si Zhong'ao, 1-3. That Yuan Xiangchun belongs to the third generation in the family before Yuan Mei is supported by the names of two brothers, Yuan Xiangkun 袁象坤 and Yuan Xiangbei 袁象北, who are clearly said to be grandsons of Yuan Maoying. See Feng Kexiu, 31.Liezhuān 8.Guochao 國朝 1.81. The brothers and male cousins of Yuan Xiangchun and his descent are clearly indicated in Yuan Zhaochi, 3.8a. See the discussion of "human nature and feelings" on page 181. "Human nature" and "nature" (in the sense of the natural world around us) are distinct words in Chinese, and so I have usually qualified the term "nature" with the word "human" when used in the first sense.

- 15 Yuan Mei, *Zi buyu* 子不語, 17.320, in YMQJ, vol. 4. Because of this, Yuan Mei is supposed to have had a great hatred for Lama Li. See SYYS, 35. One of Yuan Qi's poems in the *ci* form is preserved in Yuan Zhaochi, 25.17b. It was written at the age of forty-nine, when he was serving as an advisor in Gongxian 鞏縣, Henan province.
- 16 Our primary source of information about the life of Yuan Mei's mother is the biography he wrote for her, found in Yuan Mei, *Xiaocang shanfang wenji* 小倉山房文集 (hereafter abbreviated Wenji,) 27.477-9, in YMQJ, vol. 2. There is a commentary with modern Chinese translation of selections from Wenji, in Yuan Qiming 袁啟明 ed. and tr., *Yuan Mei wenxuan yi* 袁枚文選譯, Beijing, 1989. Two other useful but rather sparse commentaries on some of Yuan Mei's better prose writing are found in Cheng Shaozong 成紹宗 ed., *Yuan Mei wenxuan* 袁枚文選, Shanghai, 1947 and Gao Luming 高路明 ed., *Yuan Mei wenxuan* 袁枚文選, Beijing, 1997. Yuan Mei inherited his father's interest in legal matters and wrote a long letter about the man's legal theories to be found in Wenji, 15.248-52.
- 17 Wenji, 27.477. This contradicts what Waley says: "About his mother we hear very little." See W, 11.
- 18 Wenji, 27.477.
- 19 Wenji, 27.477-8.
- 20 Wenji, 27.478.
- 21 Shihua, 12.44.393.
- 22 This passage is drawn from the inscription of the tomb tablet which Yuan Mei wrote for his aunt, the principal source of information about her life. Wenji, 5.90.

- 23 Literally, “pear and jujube [wood,]” both of which were used in carving printing blocks.
- 24 Literally, “skirts opening at the side” or *chaqun* 衩裙, commonly known in the West under its Cantonese name *cheongsam* 長衫, Mandarin *qipao* 旗袍. 10.231.
- 26 See the discussion in Fu Yuheng, *Yuan Mei nianpu*, 5–6. In later years Yuan Mei wrote a poem about the affair after seeing her tomb. 26.634–5. There is a fictionalized account of this aunt’s tragic death in *Zi buyu*, 15.288–9.
- 27 Wenji, 22.379.
- 28 Shihua, 2.73.61. Yuan also quotes some lines from his maternal grandfather in Shihua, 15.47.505.
- 29 The name of her collected works is *Xiumo shiji* 繡墨詩集, but I have not been able to find a copy of this book either in China or North America.
- 30 Lu Jian’s birthdate has been determined by referring to Shihua, 10.35.329, where it is stated that he was the same age as Yuan Mei’s male cousin, Yuan Shu. Lu’s poems, in two chapters, are contained in Yuan Mei ed., *Meijun shiji* 湄君詩集, in YMQJ, vol. 7. The very first poem of the work is addressed to Yuan Mei. See *Ibid.*, shang 上. 1.
- 31 Yang Honglie, 13, gives Yuan Ji’s birth year as 1719, but I am not sure about Yang’s evidence for this date. Yuan Mei wrote a brief biography of Yuan Ji found in Wenji, 7.132–3. Her poems and the works of Yuan Shu are found in Yuan Mei ed., *Yuanjia sanmei hegao* 袁家三妹合稿 (hereafter abbreviated YJSM,) in YMQJ, vol. 7. The name of Yuan Shu’s husband, for whom there does not seem to be any biographical information outside of Yuan Mei’s writings, was Han Yong’en 韓永恩.
- 32 Yuan Shu’s poems in fourteen chapters are contained in Yuan Shu 袁樹, Yuan Mei ed. *Hongdoucunren shigao* 紅豆村人詩稿, in YMQJ, vol. 7, which, however, is incomplete, since it breaks off in 1794. There is a selection of Yuan Shu’s verse with critical comment in QSJS, 6078–83. His very first recorded poem (1749) is addressed to Yuan Mei. See Yuan Shu, 1.1, “Anheju jishi cheng jia Cunchai xiong” 安鶴居即事呈家存齋兄. Waley thought that Yuan Shu, who was the son of Yuan Mei’s uncle Yuan Hong 袁鴻, was Yuan Mei’s brother, a confusion that no doubt arose from Yuan Mei calling him *di* 弟 (literally, “younger brother,”) a term used for both brothers and cousins of the same surname. See W, 36. Yuan Mei clearly states that Yuan Shu was his uncle’s son, in Shihua, 10.35.329. Important information about Yuan Shu’s life is contained in Yuan Mei’s epitaph for Yuan Shu’s wife, Madame Chen 陳 in Wenji, 31.549–50. There are also brief biographies, none of which give Yuan Shu’s death year, in Li Junzhi 李濟之, *Qing huajia shishi* 清畫家詩史, dingxia 丁下, 13a, in QDZJCK; Dou Zhen 竇鎮, *Guochao shuhuajia bilu* 國朝書畫家筆錄, 2.20a, in QDZJCK; and Feng Jinbo 馮金伯, *Moxiangju huashi* 墨香居畫識, 6.5b, in QDZJCK. There is a reproduction of a fan inscribed with a poem by Yuan Mei at the age of seventy-seven as a present for the prose master Yao Nai (see note 143 to Chapter 3) in Dafang 大方, “Yuan Zicai fuhui shuangxiu” 袁子才福慧雙修, *Daren* 大人, 7 (November 15, 1970,) 3. The reverse of the fan has a painting by Yuan Shu, done the same day as Yuan Mei’s poem.

Another male cousin who wrote poetry is mentioned several times in Yuan’s poetry and prose writings. Arthur Waley thought he was a brother, but this is also incorrect. See W, 67. Yuan Mei usually mentions him under his courtesy name Chunpu 春圃, which is the same person as the Yuan Jian 袁鑒 (1724–after 1795, Metropolitan Graduate 1757) who wrote a preface

to Yuan Mei's collection of eight-legged essays, in 1786. This identification is confirmed by Pi, 821. (For Yuan Jian's preface, see Yuan Mei, *Yuan Taishi gao* 袁太史稿, i, in YMQJ, vol. 5.) Yuan Mei calls Yuan Jian his *zudi* 族弟 in Yuan Mei, *Xiaocang shanfang chidu* 小倉山房尺牘 (hereafter abbreviated Chidu), 3.57, in YMQJ, vol. 5 a term for male third cousins. (Note: Chidu is a collection of more informal letters not included in Wenji. There is a traditional-style commentary in Hu Youlu 胡又廬 [Guangdou 光斗], *Yinzhubao Xiaocangshanfang chidu* 音註小倉山房尺牘, n. p., 1888. There is a modern commentary with translation for most of the letters in Zhang Rong 章榮 ed. and comm., *Xiaocang shanfang chidu* 小倉山房尺牘, Taipei, 1970 and a selection with modern commentary in Fan Yinzheng 范寅錚 ed. and comm., *Xiaocang shanfang chidu* 小倉山房尺牘, Changsha, 1987. There is also a French translation of most of the letters in Bruno Belpaire, *L'épistolier Yuen Mei*, Brussels, 1976, 2 vol., but this is full of errors.) Yuan Jian does not appear in the genealogy of the Hangzhou Yuan family in Yuan Zhaochi, and I am not certain what branch of the family he belonged to. Yuan Mei says that Yuan Jian celebrated his fifty-ninth birthday in 1783, so he must have been born in 1724. (See the four birthday poems in 29.768.) Yuan Jian was a Hanlin Bachelor (Shujishi 庶吉士) in 1757, and he served in the post of Jiangning Provincial Administration Commissioner (*Jiangning buzhengshi* 江寧布政使) from 1863–4, after which he was demoted to Prefect of Jiangning (*Jiangning zhifu* 江寧知府.) See Qian Shifu 錢寶甫 ed., *Qingdai zhi guan nianbiao* 清代職官年表, Beijing, 1980, 1854 and 3203. Yuan Mei states that his cousin was serving in an official position in Suzhou, when Yuan Mei was 62. (Shihua, 12.49.396.) A poem by Yuan Jian addressed to Yuan Mei is found in XTRJ, "Yanjilei" 宴集類, 78, "He Xiangting Suiyuan kan furong yun" 和香亭隨園看芙蓉韻, and another poem written on the occasion of Yuan Mei's seventy-ninth birthday proves that Yuan Jian was still living in 1795. (See Yuan Mei ed., *Suiyuan bashishouyan* 隨園八時壽言, 3.47, in YMQJ, vol. 6.) Yuan Mei says that Yuan Shu's poetry suffered from his devotion to painting and that Yuan Jian's poetry was harmed by his official career. See Shihua, 5.1.128.

33 YJSM, 2–38.

34 Wenji, 5.98. This passage comes from Yuan Mei's inscription on Shi's tomb tablet, the document that supplies most of what we know about his life. Since Shi did not have any children, Yuan arranged for his funeral and burial. See Shihua, 9.16.282. Mallow Alley still exists as a street name in modern Hangzhou, although Yuan Mei's house there probably disappeared long ago.

35 The *Four Books* are the four basic Confucian texts, the *Analects of Confucius*, *Mencius*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Mean*. See the chart of the *Thirteen Classics* for the first two of these. The last two are chapters from another one of the *Thirteen Classics*, the *Record of Ritual*, read as separate books from the Song dynasty onward because of their special importance to neo-Confucian thought.

36 For an explanation of this term, see the glossary.

37 Wenji, 5.97–8.

38 SYYS, 34.

39 For a short discussion of the anthology, which includes verse from the Han dynasty until the High Tang period (eighth century,) see William H. Nienhauser Jr. ed., *The Indiana companion to traditional Chinese literature* (hereafter abbreviated ICTCL), Bloomington, 1986, 488–9. Yuan Mei was so grateful to the man who left the book in his home that he gave him a substantial cash present in later years. SYYS, 30.

- 40 Shihua, 13.8.419.
- 41 Shihua buyi, 6.39.702. Yuan also preserves early poems written when he was eight and fourteen years old in Shihua, 9.64.301 and Shihua buyi, 9.27.777, respectively. For the terms “pentasyllabic” and “regulated poetry,” see the glossary.
- 42 This is the earliest anthology of Chinese poetry, dating from the twelfth to seventh century B.C. See ICTCL, 692–4. See also the chart of the *Thirteen Classics*.
- 43 Wenji, 14.229.
- 44 SYYS, 34.
- 45 Strictly speaking, Cultivated Talent was not an examination degree in Qing times but an unofficial designation for men qualified to take part in the Provincial Examinations. Hucker, 248.
- 46 Because of supernatural intervention, the child was not actually killed. Yuan Mei’s work is found in Wenji, 20.358. See also the discussion in W, 13.
- 47 SYYS, 72.
- 48 Yuan Mei also addressed a poem to Zhu, written when the man was eighty-five. See Buyi, 1.1095–6.
- 49 Yuan mentions his encouragement in a preface written for Yang’s works, found in Wenji, 35.650. Yuan tells us that after receiving praise for two early works in the ancient-style prose form, “I enthusiastically applied myself to writing.” Yang was also a rigorous historian, according to Yuan, and must have stimulated the young man’s historical studies. For two of Yang’s surviving quatrains, see QSJS, 3477.
- 50 The term “gates” can also refer to students.
- 51 The “literary battles” of the previous line may be debates among students, but more likely refer to the students’ battle to prepare for the civil service examinations. 26.639.
- 52 See Yuan Mei’s poem mourning his uncle’s death in 4.61, “Ku jifu Jianpangong” 哭季父健磐公. One of Yuan Hong’s poems is preserved in Yuan Zhaochi, 25.18a.
- 53 1.2, c 2.
- 54 For the text of Bai’s poem, see Hiraoka Takeo 平岡武夫 and Imai Kiyoshi 今井清, *A Concordance of the Poems of Pai Chü-i*, Kyoto, 1989, 0602, 138–9. There is a translation in Burton Watson ed. and tr., *The Columbia book of Chinese poetry: From early times to the thirteenth century*, New York, 1984, 249–52. The best general studies of Su Shi’s verse are Ronald C. Egan, *Word, image, and deed in the life of Su Shi*, Cambridge, Mass., 1994 and Michael Fuller, *The road to East Slope: The development of Su Shi’s poetic voice*, Stanford, 1990. For Su Shi’s humor and playfulness, see Egan, 169–176, 173, 178, 195, 276, 378–9.
- 55 Jin Hong’s biography is contained in QSG, 292. Liezhuan 列傳 79. 10304.
- 56 This work, “Prose-poem of the Bronze Drum” (“Tonggufu” 銅鼓賦,) was not originally included in Yuan’s complete works but was preserved in a local gazeteer edited by Jin Hong. It has been added as a supplement to Yuan Mei’s collection of parallel prose in Yuan Mei, *Xiaocang shanfang waiji* 小倉山房外集 (hereafter abbreviated Waiji,) 145–6, in YMQJ, vol. 2. An annotated version is found in Fu Yuheng, *Yuan Mei nianpu*, 17–20. (There is a detailed, traditional-style commentary for most of the works in Waiji in Shi Yunyu 石韞玉 comm., *Bujiao Yuanwen jianzheng* 補校袁文箋正, Lingnan congylu 嶺南叢雅居, 1823 and another even more detailed commentary based on this with additional material in Zhou Jixi 周輯熙 ed., Shi Yunyu 石韞玉 et al.

- comm., *Liudajia Yuanwen jianzhu congkan* 六大家袁文箋註叢刊, Qiuguzhai 求古齋 edition, n. p., 1922. Yuan Mei's grandson also mentions other commentaries on this collection in SYSJ, *shang* 上, 5b.)
- 57 Yuan Mei provides a biography of Jin and his relationship with him in Jin's spirit path epitaph (*shendaobei* 神道碑,) found in Wenji, 3.43–5. Yuan also wrote a set of three poems to mourn Jin's death in 2.22–3, “Ku Deshangong” 哭德山公. Yuan's letter of thanks to Jin, couched in ornate parallel prose, is found in Waiji 5.66–8.
- 58 For an example of Su's extended metaphors, see his poem “He Ziyou Mianchi huaijiu” 和子由澠池懷舊 in Su Shi, *Jizhu fenlei Dongpo xiansheng shi*, 16.299b, in *Sibu congkan chubian suoben* 四部叢刊初編縮本 (hereafter abbreviated SBCK,) Taipei, 1965. This poem is translated and discussed in Fuller, 98–9. See also the discussion in Egan, 192–3.
- 59 Literally, “Unprecedented institutions of three reigns make the scholars important.”
- 60 The place name used is “Xiao-Xiang, [瀟湘]” the general region of Hunan province.
- 61 “Written on the road after seeing Jin Hong's recommendation,” 1.10, b 8.
- 62 For Mi Heng, see ICTCL, 625–6. Mi was recommended to Cao Cao by the statesman-scholar Kong Rong 孔融 (153–208,) a descendant of Confucius. See Fan Ye 范曄, *Houhan shu* 後漢書, Beijing, 1965, 80 xia 下. wenyuan 文苑 70 xia 下. 2653.
- 63 There is a detailed study of eight-legged prose in Wang Kaifu 王凱符, *Baguwen gaishuo* 八股文概說, Beijing, 1992. For the form during the Qing dynasty, see Deng Yunxiang 鄧雲鄉, *Qingdai baguwen* 清代八股文, Beijing, 1994. For a discussion of earlier Qing dynasty dissent against the examination system, see Paul S. Ropp, *Dissent in early modern China: Ju-lin wai-shi and Ch'ing social criticism*, Ann Arbor, 1981, especially the chapter “Ju-lin wai-shih and examination dissent,” 91–119. Wenji, 28.501.
- 64 For the *Four Books*, see note 35 above. In Qing times, the *Four Books* were the sole subject of the eight-legged essays.
- 65 Students of Linsheng 廩生 status received stipends from the government
- 66 Literally, “In Chang'an,” the Tang dynasty capital, referring to the Qing capital Beijing here. Ji Huang 嵇璜 (1711–1794) was an expert on hydraulic engineering but was also known for his calligraphy. See Hummel, 120. Wenji, 35.643.
- 67 See the discussion in Liu Linsheng 劉麟生, *Zhongguo pianwen shi* 中國駢文史, Taipei, 1965, “Qingdai pianwen zhi fuxing” 清代駢文之復興, 123–44. For the intellectual background to this revival, see Ma Jigao 馬積高, *Qingdai xueshu sixiang di bianqian yu wenxue* 清代學術思想的變遷與文學, Changsha, 1996, 76–112. Yuan Mei wrote an ancient-style prose preface to Hu's collected parallel prose, found in Wenji, 11.198. For other biographical materials, see Huang Xiuwen, 403 and Hu's official biography in QSG, 485.272.13382. There is a discussion of his verse in Zhu Zejie 朱則杰, *Qingshishi* 清詩史, Nanjing, 1992, 227–30. For a selection of his poetry with critical comment, see QSJS, 4820–38. See also the discussion of his eccentric poems in our Chapter 12. In spite of his admiration for Yuan, Hu Tianyou did not address many poems to him, or at least not many survive. See his poem to Yuan in Hu Tianyou 胡天游, *Shisi shanfang shiji* 石筍山房詩集, 10.13a, “Huai Yuan Zicai” 懷袁子才, in *Shisi shanfangji* 石筍山房集, Chongkanben 重刊本, 1852. See also the poem by Yuan Mei about Hu Tianyou in the series “Huairenshi” 懷人詩, 3.55. Yuan Mei composed a funerary text for Hu found in Wenji, 14.233–4.

- 68 Qi Zhaonan 齊召南 (1706–68) was a child prodigy with an amazing memory, who later became famous as a geographer, historian, and poet only to fall victim to the Qianlong Literary Inquisitions. See the discussion on page 369. See also his biography in Hummel, 129–30 and in QSG, 305.92.10516. Shang Pan 商盤 (1701–67) was a witty conversationalist and poet who followed the styles of Bai Juyi and Su Shi. For a selection of his poetry with critical comment, see QSJS, 4387–95. Hang Shijun 杭世駿 (1696–1773) was a famous scholar and prose author of the period and later a close friend of Yuan Mei. See Hummel, 276–7 for his biography. For a selection of his verse, see QSJS, 4682–708. Wang Jun 王峻 (1694–1751) was noted as a poet and calligrapher. He started out as a successful official but later retired and taught in academies.
- 69 Wenji, 14.234.
- 70 For an early twentieth-century critic, who had a very high opinion of Yuan Mei's parallel prose, see the comments by Qiu Weixuan 邱燐萇 (1873–1941) in Qiu Weixuan 邱燐萇, *Wubai shidongtian huizhu* 五百石洞天揮塵, Haicheng Qiushi keben 海澄邱氏刻本, 1899, 3.13a. The poet and prose writer Wu Zi 吳翥 (1755–1821), the editor of the best known anthology of Qing parallel prose from the eighteenth century, considered Yuan Mei the best author of this genre during his age. See Wu Zi 吳翥, *Xiaocangshanfang waiji* 小倉山房外集, ii, in Wu Zi, *Guochao bajia siliuwen chao* 國朝八家四六文鈔, 1798. Wu first met Yuan Mei in 1782 and later once more in Yangzhou, where Yuan went for medical treatment, exchanging poems with him and generally considering him his friend and teacher. See *Ibid.*, i. For Wu Zi's biography, see QSG, 485.liezhuan 列傳 272.wenyuan 文苑 2.13386.
- 71 Xu Ling 徐陵 (507–583) and Yu Xin 庾信 (513–581) were the two most famous masters of parallel prose during the Period of Division. Shihua, 7.14.207.
- 72 Waiji, i. For Li Ying's biography, see Dou Zhen, 2.9a. We should note that the standard modern edition of Yuan Mei's parallel prose used here comprises only 145 pages as opposed to his ancient prose in 659 pages, not to mention the ancient prose of Chidu and other works.
- 73 See Hummel, 915. His original name was Cheng Mo 程默.
- 74 For letters on scholarly and philosophical topics addressed to Yuan Mei by Cheng Tingzuo, see Cheng Tingzuo 程廷祚, Hu Shi 胡適 ed. and repr., *Qingxi wenji* 青溪文集, 1936 repr. of Dongshantang cangban 東山堂藏版, 1837, 9.27ab, “Yu Jiangning Yuan Jianzhai Mingfu shu” 與江寧袁簡齋明府書; 10.23a–24a, “Yu Yuan Jianzhai lun shen'en shu” 與袁簡齋論慎恩書; 11.1a–3b, “Fu Yuan Jianzhai shu” 覆袁簡齋書; 11.4a–5b, “You fu Yuan Jianzhai shu” 又覆袁簡齋書; 12.13ab, “Fu Yuan Jianzhai” 覆袁簡齋; 12.14ab, “Yu Yuan Jianzhai” 與袁簡齋; *Qingxi wenji xubian* 青溪文集續編, 5.1a–2b, “Yu Yuan Mingfu lun xiuzhi shu” 與袁明府論修志書; and *Fubian* 附編, 1.3a–8b, “Da Suiyuan xiansheng” 答隨園先生.
- 75 For Li Gong, see Hummel, 475–9.
- 76 Yuan Mei vividly describes his encounter with Xu in Shihua, 4.40.112. This has been translated in W, 27.
- 77 Most of the Qing anti-homosexual laws were aimed at homosexual rape, but sodomy with consent was punishable with one month in the cangue and one hundred blows with a heavy cane, although it seems that this law was rarely, if ever, enforced. See Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the cut sleeve: The male homosexual tradition in China*, Berkeley, 1990, 143–4. See also the impassioned discussion of Yuan Mei's behavior in Yang Honglie, 32–5, which ranges from

- Plato's *Symposium* to Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the psychology of sex*. Yuan Mei's sexual activities, particularly his interest in young men, have aroused great excitement among more popular writers. See, for example, Yuzhai 鈺齋, "Yuan Zicai zhi xingshenghuo" 袁子才之性生活, *Gongshang* 工商, May 5, 1971, 3. For Zheng Xie's homosexual preferences, see the discussion in Ding Jiatong 丁家桐 and Zhu Fuwei 朱福炷, *Yangzhou baguai zhuan* 揚州八怪傳, Shanghai, 1993, 64. It seems that the texts of some of Zheng's poems were changed (in modern times?) to hide his homosexuality. For example, the explicit language from the preface cited by Ding and Zhu does not occur in a popular modern edition of Zheng's works, Zheng Xie 鄭燮, *Zheng Banqiao ji* 鄭板橋集, Shanghai, 1965. Jiang Dunfu loved to record stories about Yuan Mei's alleged male lovers. See SYYS, 56-7 and 77-8. Jiang frequently writes that Yuan "loved male beauty" (*hao nanse* 好男色,) a term that usually refers to homosexual behavior.
- 78 The place name Chunjiang 春江 in the original does not occur in any of the dictionaries of Chinese place names but is frequently used as an abbreviation for Fuchunjiang 富春江, the river that runs by Yuan Mei's native city, Hangzhou.
- 79 Zhongli Chun 鍾離春, who is also known as Wuyan 無鹽, after the place she came from in modern Shandong province, was an exceedingly ugly woman noted for her virtue. She was made a royal consort by King Xuan 宣 of Qi (reg. 454-403 B.C.) after she berated him for his licentious behavior. See Liu Xiang 劉向, Wang Zhaoyuan 王照圓 comm., *Lienüzhuan buzhu* 列女傳補註, Shanghai, 1938, 6.113-4, in *Guoxue jiben congshu* 國學基本叢書.
- 80 Zidu 子都 is a handsome man mentioned in the *Classic of Poetry*. See *A concordance to the Shih Ching* (hereafter abbreviated *Shijing*.) Tokyo, 1962, 18.84.1, in *Harvard-Yenching Institute sinological index series* (hereafter abbreviated HYISIS.)
- 81 According to a story recorded in the *Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan* (*Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋,) Duke Jing 景 of Qi (reg. 546-488 B.C.) was so handsome that a minor official (the "Master of the Stables" here) stared at him with desire. The duke ordered that he be killed, because he had overstepped his position, but the statesman-philosopher Yan Ying 晏嬰 (d. ca. 500 B.C.) remonstrated with the duke, stating that "to resist desire is not in harmony with the Dao and to hate love is unlucky." Yuan Mei wrote the title of the man *Yuren* 圉人 ("stable man,") but in most editions it is *Yuren* (羽人) or "feather man," an official responsible for gathering feathers for tribute. See Wang Gengsheng 王更生 comm. and tr., *Yanzi chunqiu jinzhuzhu jinyi* 晏子春秋今註今譯, Taipei, 1987, 8.384-5. This passage is translated and discussed in Hinsch, 22-3. According to Hinsch's analysis of references to homosexuality in the Zhou period, the duke's objection was not to the courtier's lust for him but rather to the great disparity in rank between the two, something implied in the comments of Yuan Mei's friend, too.
- 82 Shihua, 4.63.121.
- 83 See Hucker, 399.
- 84 Yuan Mei wrote his spirit path epitaph, found in Wenji, 3.34-5, and a long poetic dirge for him in 22.527, "Ku Wangshan Xianggong liushiyun" 哭望山相公六十韻. He also composed a preface in parallel prose to his collected poems, found in Waiji, 3.33-4. Yin Jishan's poems are collected in Yin Jishan 尹繼善, *Yin Wenduangong shiji* 尹文端公詩集, Qing edition in the collection of the Nanjing Library. There is a selection of Yin Jishan's verse with critical comments in QSJS, 4269-76. For his biography, see Hummel, 920-21 and QSG,

- 307.94.10545. There is a discussion of the relation between Yin Jishan and Yuan Mei in Yuzi, 454–62. Although Yuan Mei met Yin very early in his career, the first surviving poem he addressed to him is found in 5.90, “Shang Yin Zhifu” 上尹制府, written soon after the failure of Yin’s attempt to have Yuan promoted in 1747. The first poem from Yin Jishan to Yuan Mei dates from about 1754. See Yin Jishan, 4.29b, “Yuan Zicai guofang liusu Hefang Shuyuan, yinyong leiri, linxing yong Zhuang Rongke yun kouzhan zengbie” 袁子才過訪留宿荷芳書院吟詠累日臨行用莊容可韻口占贈別.
- 85 Wenji, 3.35.
- 86 Wenji, 3.37.
- 87 His biography is found in Wenji, 31.546–8.
- 88 Wenji, 31.547.
- 89 Wenji, 31.546. See also the discussion in W, 26–7.
- 90 The collection is arranged in four sections, according to which of the *Four Books* a particular essay is based on. The first of the three prefaces, by Yuan’s cousin Yuan Jian, also mentions Yuan Mei’s distaste for the eight-legged essay. See Yuan Mei, *Yuan Taishi gao*, i, in YMQJ, vol. 5. Another passage mentioning Yuan’s dislike of a form, which, however, brought him much fame, is found in Shihua, 12.89.409.
- 91 SYYS, 4. A similar story is also told in SYYS, 84.
- 92 We shall have more to say about the connection between his ancient-prose writings and his narrative poetry in Chapter 11. Yuan Mei’s approach to writing in the ancient-prose style is detailed in a series of three important letters found in Wenji, 19.318–24. There is an excellent discussion of his critical ideas concerning the form in Hu Ming 胡明, “Yuan Mei guwenguan shitan” 袁枚古文觀試探, *Gudai wenxue lilun yanjiu congkan* 古代文學理論研究叢刊 11 (1986,) 296–310. Another detailed study is in Jian Youyi, 259–93.
- 93 Literally, “The path to the Ruo River and Mount Peng,” both of which are associated with the realm of the immortals and commonly used as metaphors for the imperial palace. Peng is short for Penglai 蓬萊, a fairy island supposedly in the ocean east of China.
- 94 Literally, “Pistil Pearl Palace.” The results of the *jinshi* examinations were announced in this palace in ancient times, and so it came to symbolize these examinations.
- 95 The institution of the Palace Library (Mishusheng 祕書省) did not exist during the Qing dynasty, but Yuan uses its name to represent the Hanlin Academy, since the two bodies had similar functions.
- 96 The term “jade hall” (*yutang* 玉堂) both refers to the Hanlin Academy and to the fairy palaces.
- 97 “Entering the Hanlin Academy,” 2.20, b 14.
- 98 Yuan Mei’s formal request to return home to get married, written in florid parallel prose, is found in Waiji, 1.1–2. Madame Wang died after Yuan Mei, but none of the sources consulted by me give her death date, Yuan Mei’s grandson merely saying that she lived to be eight-seven without giving her birthdate. See SYSJ, xia 下, 6a. I have calculated her approximate birth and death dates in accordance with a poem by Yuan written in 1795, stating she was eighty (i.e. seventy-nine) years old then. See “Enjoying Old Age,” translated on page 704. Of course, the age Yuan gives may be only approximate. Yuan was so proud of his success that he had someone paint a scroll depicting his journey home. See SYSJ, shang 上, 7a and SYYS, 91. In later years Wang Wenzhi described this painting in a poem. See Wang Wenzhi, 21.19a. “Yuan Jianzhai qianbei geijia guiqu tu” 袁蘭齋前輩給假歸娶圖. Yuan Mei’s

- female disciple Luo Qilan also inscribed the painting. See Luo Qilan 駱綺蘭, *Tingqiuxuan shiji* 聽秋軒詩集, Jinling Gongshi cangban 金陵龔氏藏版, early nineteenth century, 2ce, 2.2b–3a.
- 99 An example of Yuan Mei's gratitude to his wife is the poem addressed to her after she had cared for him during a bout of malaria. 18.426. This has been translated partially in W, 92.
- 100 For a biography of this influential political figure, see Hummel, 650–1. His official biography is in QSG, 303.90.10474.
- 101 Yuan Mei wrote a detailed biography of Ortai and his relationship with the man in Wenji, 8.148–152, as well as a poem mourning his death in 5.86, “Ku E Wenduangong” 哭鄂文端公. See also the biographies in Hummel, 601–3 and QSG, 288.75.10229. For further biographical sources in Chinese, see Huang Xiuwen, 392. Ortai also wrote poetry, and there is a selection of his verse with commentary in QSJS, 3154–60.
- 102 Literally, “It is difficult to ask my previous karma from the sea of officialdom.”
- 103 Literally, “Zither and luggage” (*qinzhuang* 琴裝.) The playing of the Chinese zither was a major activity for many Chinese scholars, but Yuan Mei states elsewhere that he was not a music lover, so it is possible that he was not really taking a zither with him.
- 104 Literally, “Snow of Mount Peng,” another term for Penglai, for which see note 93 just above. “A farewell poem to my classmates when I was transferred to Nanjing,” (one poem of four,) 3.37.
- 105 See the discussion in Fu Yuheng, *Yuan Mei nianpu*, 31–4, which includes the text of the work with detailed annotations.
- 106 Blue Creek is in Nanjing near Cup Mountain (Zhongshan 鍾山,) and was the site of many aristocrats' residences during the Period of Division.
- 107 Literally, “Heaven allows Pan Yue to present his walking board.” Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300) is a famous writer of prose-poetry, who in one of his works on his leisurely life, describes how his mother rode on a walking board (*banyu* 板輿,) a contraption used like a modern wheel chair or stroller to enable aged people to move about. See “Prose-poem on Living at Leisure” (“*Xianjufu*” 閑居賦), in Pan Yue 潘岳, *Pan Huangmen ji* 潘黃門集, 8a, in Zhang Pu 張溥 ed., *Han Wei Liuchao baisanjia ji* 漢魏六朝百三家集 (hereafter abbreviated BJSJ,) Saoye shanfang 掃葉山房, Shanghai, 1925, vol. 17.
- 108 Literally, “Leaving here, it will be good for writing a biography of upright officials,” an allusion to Sima Qian's “Biography of Upright Officials,” which describes model officials of ancient times. See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記, Beijing, 1959, 109.59.3099–3103.
- 109 Literally, “Books of the highest purity,” a Daoist term, which probably refers to the elevated reading Yuan has done in the Hanlin Academy. There is also the possibility that he is referring to books in the Manchu language here, because another translation is “exalted Qing [i.e. Manchu] books,” in which case, Yuan may be complaining about the impracticality of learning Manchu. A further possibility is that Yuan Mei is referring to the essay on purity that got him into trouble.
- 110 Literally, “Why is my karmic nexus with the Ruo River so shallow during my three lives?” The idea of three lives (past, present, and future) is originally Buddhist. For the Ruo River see note 93 above.
- 111 Literally, “After spending one night by this empty mulberry, I have more than enough yearning.” Since the ideal Buddhist monk is not supposed to be attached to worldly objects, he does not sleep more than three nights under the same mulberry tree, but Yuan himself is deeply attached to his post in the

- Hanlin Academy. This expression first occurs in an anti-Buddhist memorial from the Eastern Han dynasty by one Xiang Kai 襄楷 (d. after A.D. 184.) See Fan Ye, 30 xia 下. 20 xia 下. 1082.
- 112 This line alludes to a couplet in Li Bai's famous poem on religious Daoism "Ballad of Mount Lu" ("Lushanyao" 廬山謠): "From faraway I see immortals in the variegated clouds;/They hold lotuses in their hands and pay court to the Jade Capital." See Hanabusa Hideki 花房英樹 ed., *A concordance to the poems of Li Po*, Kyoto, 1957, 438.20.
- 113 3.37, b 21.
- 114 In spite of his short stay at Lishui, the people were so impressed by his honesty and fairness that they tried to block the road, hanging onto his carriage, and draping him with a robe, on which the names of all the district's inhabitants were recorded in golden characters. SYYS, 67.
- 115 See the complete translation of the poem from which these lines come on page 553.
- 116 Literally, "In the great office so imposing, we each got to know [Han] Jing 荆 [zhou,]" an allusion to a famous letter presented by Li Bai to the military governor Han Chaozong 韓朝宗 (fl. eight c. A.D.,) in Jingzhou 荊州 of modern Hubei, when Li applied to work as Han's advisor. See Li Bai 李白, *Fenlei buzhu Li Taibai wen* 分類補注李太白文, 26.357-8, in SBCK.
- 117 Because he was demoted to such a low position after his promising career in the Hanlin Academy.
- 118 Literally, "When I write titles, my accustomed characters are small with difficulty." Yuan had to write small characters in name registers and other documents required for his work. Writing in small characters was also regarded as a sign of humility, a personality trait befitting a local official.
- 119 The term "jade hall" in the original could refer either to the superior's office or the Hanlin Academy. "Poems written after I finished visiting my superior," (one poem of two,) 3.44, b 27.
- 120 SYYS, 71. The title of *Dianshi* referred to unranked subofficials. See Hucker, 506.
- 121 For a brief introduction to Tao Qian, see ICTCL, 766-9. There is a study and translation of his complete poems in James R. Hightower, *The poetry of T'ao Ch'ien*, Oxford, 1970.
- 122 I.e. he does not accept bribes and cannot afford a more expensive mode of transport.
- 123 "Miscellaneous impressions of Shuyang," (one poem of eight,) 3.47, a 18.
- 124 Wenji, 18.304.
- 125 SYSJ, shang 上, 5b. Unfortunately, this book seems to be lost, but quite a few of the cases are probably preserved in such works as the collection of anecdotes by Jiang Dunfu. See especially SYYS, 6-7 and 38-44. Although some of the cases recorded here may be based on Yuan Mei's real official career, the strong supernatural element in a number of the accounts suggests that they come from collections of fiction such as the *Suiyuan gong'an*. Yuan Mei also liked to tell stories of this sort about other model officials. See Wenji, 27.483-4 on how "the case of the burnt coffin" was solved. Another work concerning his service as an official, probably lost, too, is his *Book of My Heart* (*Xinshu* 心書.) See SYYS, 65.
- 126 This alludes to a poem in the *Classic of Poetry*. See Shijing, 9.43.3.
- 127 Zhuo Mao 卓茂 (d. A.D. 28) was a learned scholar with a pleasant personality and popular with everyone who knew him. While serving as an official, he settled a number of lawsuits by means of his clever mediation, his basic

- principle being “the legal code establishes the broad law but ritual follows human feelings,” a principle applicable in the present suit, where the law code prescribed the death penalty. See Fan Ye, 25.15.869–70.
- 128 Shihua, 9.59.299.
- 129 See the addendum “Suiyuan jiren xingshi pu” 隨園 姬人 姓氏譜, in SYYS, 100. Both this passage and Fu Yuheng, *Yuan Mei nianpu*, 41 get the date of Miss Tao arriving in Yuan’s household right, Fu citing the text in Yuan’s works that proves this, but Jiang Dunfu gives an incorrect age for her, stating that she was only thirteen years old when married. This would not have been unusual in the eighteenth century, but Yuan Mei himself clearly states that Miss Tao died in 1755 at the age of 29. See Shihua, 6.110.200. Yuan Mei also had another concubine surnamed Tao, who entered his household in the second month of 1775 but died childless the next year. See SYYS, 101. Gu Yuxiang provides a genealogical chart which shows the first Miss Tao giving birth to Yuan Mei’s daughter Chenggu, but Jiang Dunfu states that she was the child of another concubine Miss Zhang 張 and lists Qingu 琴姑 as Miss Tao’s daughter. This is impossible, because according to Jiang, Miss Zhang entered the household in 1760, and Chenggu was married three years later! SYYS, 100–101.
- 130 For a charming anecdote about how Yuan first dreamed about her in the form of a dragon king’s waiting lady, see SYYS, 9–10.
- 131 Shihua, 6.110.200. Although Yuan Mei himself never said this, one of his biographers tells us that his sole standard in choosing later concubines was physical beauty. See SYYS, 2.
- 132 Yin Jishan was being rather hypocritical it seems, for he had a large number of concubines himself. See SYYS, 90. Jiang also tells us that Yuan had more than ten concubines in his forties, but I have not been able to find the names of so many in his writings. See SYYS, 11.
- 133 Yuan Mei is alluding humorously to a famous description of Confucius by his disciple Yan Hui 顏回 (514–483 B.C.), who among other things praises his teacher for “luring one skillfully on.” See *A concordance to the Analects of Confucius* (hereafter abbreviated Lunyu,) 16.9.11, in HYISIS.
- 134 Dengwei 鄧尉 is a place southwest of modern Suzhou. It was named after a Han-dynasty governor of the region, Deng Yu 鄧禹 (1–58), who loved the flowers there. Dongting Island is in Lake Tai, not far from Suzhou, too.
- 135 According to the *Zhuangzi*, Confucius’ disciple Yan Hui informed his master that he could forget everything while sitting, including the Confucian ideals of benevolence, righteousness, and propriety. After learning of his disciple’s “enlightenment,” Confucius asked to become his pupil. See *A concordance to Chuang Tzu* (hereafter abbreviated Zhuangzi,) Harvard, 1956, 1.6.92–3, in HYISIS.
- 136 Chidu, 1.3, “In answer to the Grand Secretary urging me to sleep alone.”
- 137 This is officially under the jurisdiction of Jiangning District today. Much of it lies on the site of the new Nanjing International Airport.
- 138 It was the custom to break off willow branches when sending off friends, because the Chinese word for “willow” (*liu* 柳) resembles that of another word (*liu* 留) meaning “to keep” people from leaving.
- 139 Under the model administration of Liu Kun 劉昆 (d. A.D. 57,) tigers fled from the territory he controlled. See Fan Ye, 79 shang 上.69 shang 上.2550.
- 140 Literally, “You did not examine fish in the depths and brag of your severity and moral purity,” i.e. he did not tax the peasants to the last fish and act severely in legal judgments.

- 141 “When I was transferred from Shuyang to Jiangning, I took leave of my clerks and the commoners on the banks of the Yellow River,” 4.64, c 31.
- 142 A convenient guide to the antiquities of Nanjing is Barry Till, *In search of old Nanking*, Hong Kong, 1982. The geography of the city is treated in 1–2. The city wall is discussed in 108–112. There is also a fascinating eighteenth-century description of Nanjing in Grosier, 60–64.
- 143 Yuan Mei wrote the inscription on her tomb tablet in moving parallel prose, found in *Waiji*, 6.109–11.
- 144 This place name has fallen out of use, and the “hill” is now known as the Sui Family Granary (Suijiacang 隋家倉.) According to one local scholar, the hill was largely leveled by the Taiping army to make fields to feed troops. See Tong Jun 童騫, “Suiyuan kao” 隨園考, *Nanjing shifan xueyuan wenjiao ziliao jianbao* 南京師範學院文教資料簡報 7.8(1982,) 37. Much of the site of Yuan Mei’s garden lies on the campus of Nanjing Normal University (Nanjing shifan daxue 南京師範大學,) now a popular institution for foreign students learning Chinese. See the study in Sun Wang 孫望, “Cong Suiyuancao xiangdao di” 從隨園草想到的, *Nanjing shifan xueyuan wenjiao ziliao jianbao* 7.8(1982,) 33–6, especially p. 33. See also the sketch map of the garden’s layout imposed on a modern street map of Nanjing at the end of an annotated edition of Yuan Mei’s first record of Harmony Garden in *Nanjing shifan xueyuan wenjiao ziliao jianbao* 7.8(1982,) 47.
- 145 This is the first of six records about Harmony Garden found in chapter 12 of *Wenji*.
- 146 The Southern Tang (Nantang 南唐,) one of the minor states into which southern China was divided during the Five Dynasties Period, had its capital in Nanjing.
- 147 Although mostly dilapidated or rebuilt, these are all famous tourist sites today. The tomb is that of the first emperor of the Ming dynasty (reg. 1368–99.) Till, 7–8, 133, 134–45, 208–11. Raining Flower Terrace (Yuhuatai 雨花臺) has taken on new associations as a site of revolutionary martyrdom.
- 148 The Mr. Sui mentioned here was the Bannerman Sui Hede 隋赫德, who served in the position of Superintendent of Imperial Silk Manufacturing. Before Sui got the garden, it had belonged to his predecessor in that position, the adopted son of the high official and man of letters Cao Yin 曹寅 (1658–1712,) namely Cao Fu 曹頌, who lost the garden, when his property was confiscated as a result of his participation in the cabal of the ninth son of the Yongzheng emperor Yintang 胤禳 (1683–1726.) For Cao Yin’s and Cao Fu’s biographies, see Hummel, 740–42. For Yintang’s biography, see Hummel, 927–9. Since Cao Fu was the father of the most famous Chinese novelist of the eighteenth century, Cao Zhan 曹霑 (better known as Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹, 1715–63,) many scholars have been fooled into thinking that Harmony Garden was the prototype for the Great View Garden (Daguanyuan 大觀園) in Cao’s novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*, but the passage in which “Yuan Mei” makes this claim is, in fact, a forgery, interpolated into a pirated edition of his poetry talks. See Wu Hongyi 吳宏一, *Suiyuan Shihua kaobian* 隨園詩話考辨, Taipei, 1978, 22–3. Arthur Waley was among those who were fooled. See W, 47. See also Tong Jun, 41. The only association of the garden with ancient literary figures mentioned by Yuan Mei is with Li Bai, as it supposedly was the place where Li longed for Xie An, the famous military hero of the Eastern Jin dynasty. See Yuan Mei’s poem 5.90, “Kao zhishu zhi yuanji ji Xiegongdun Li Bai yue Xiejia qingshan yuzhong yan er buguo ji cichu ye” 考志書知園基即謝公墩李白悅謝家青山欲終焉而不果即此處也. Li Bai’s original poem about Xie An

- is found in Hanabusa Hideki, 708.20, “Deng Jinling xibei Yecheng Xie An Dun” 登金陵西北冶城謝安墩. Li Bai talks of building a garden in this poem. Wang Wenzhi (see the discussion of Wang on page 117) also provides more historical associations of the garden conveyed to him by Yuan Mei, including the information that there had been a Suiyuan in Ming times. See Wang Wenzhi 王文治, *Menglou shiji* 夢樓詩集, 1795, 23.3a–b, “Jianzhai qianbei zuoyuan yu Jiangning chengbei . . . 簡齋前輩作園於江寧城北. . . .”
- 149 The unit of money used here is *liang* 兩, normally translated as “tael” and approximately equal to one ounce. Although the eighteenth-century Chinese paid small sums of money in copper cash issued by the government, larger purchases were usually made with silver, a commodity that became commoner in China after the Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru with their immense silver deposits.
- 150 Yuan gives a different etymology for the name of his garden elsewhere, stating that the name was based on the hexagram Sui 隨 (Harmony) in the *Classic of Changes*. See Shihua buyi, 1.56.567. The original passage in the classic reads: “How great is the significance of harmony with the age!” Of course, this alternate explanation does not contradict the account given above but merely generalizes about the concept of harmony. See *A concordance to Yi Ching*, Taipei, 1966, 12.17. tuan 彖, in HYISIS.
- 151 This is a direct quote from an essay by Su Shi about a garden of his time. See Su Shi 蘇軾, *Jingjin Dongpo wenji shilüe* 經進東坡文集事略, 49.291b, in SBCK.
- 152 Wenji, 12.204 –5.
- 153 See Till, 86–7 for a brief account of the well together with a photograph of it.
- 154 See Lu Baoqian 陸寶千, *Qingdai sixiangshi* 清代思想史, Taipei, 1978, 197–220.
- 155 The term for the food in the previous line is *yipu* 伊蒲, short for *yipusai* 伊蒲塞, a variant of *youposai* 優婆塞, which is a transliteration of Sanskrit *upāsaka*, meaning a Buddhist monk. The second line reads literally: “Together we meditate on ‘jade-board’ Chan.” The commentary in c takes the term “jade-board” to refer to Buddhist scriptures, i.e. after the meal Yuan and the monks read Buddhist texts. However, I favor the explanation in Xie Youren’s commentary, which cites a story in which Su Shi invited a friend to visit a famous monk with him. The monastery served them a dish made from “jade boards,” a kind of succulent bamboo shoot, and when the friend asked Su what they were, Su responded that the monk wanted him to understand the “flavor” of joy in meditation. Xie Youren, 5.25a.
- 156 “Two days after New Year’s I pass Oxhead Peak and spend the night at Cloud-clump Pavilion,” (one poem of two,) 5.93, c 33.
- 157 It is interesting to trace the evolving relationship between Yuan Mei and Yin Jishan by reading the poetry they wrote to each other. In a poem created during the New Year’s season of 1763, Yin Jishan still speaks of Yuan Mei’s “feelings as a disciple” (*diziqing* 弟子情) for his teacher, but a few lines later, he speaks of “emotions of teacher and friend” (*shiyou qinghuai* 師友情懷) between the two that had lasted for “more than twenty years.” See Yin Jishan, 7.32b–33a, “Xinzheng siri yu Yuan Zicai yeyin huajiu, Zicai yi shi jizhi, ciyun fengda” 新正四日與袁子才夜飲話舊子才以詩紀之次韻奉答. This beautiful long poem also contains an abbreviated biography of Yuan Mei.
- 158 When the government sent the Local Inspector to visit Tao Qian, and some of his underlings told him to tidy up, Tao said: “How can I bend my waist and reverently serve this small man from the countryside for the five pecks of rice [of my official salary?]” See Shen Yue 沈約, *Song shu* 宋書, Beijing, 1974, 93.53.2287.

- 159 This alludes to Tao Qian's famous work "Prose-poem on Returning Home," about his desire to quit his official career and return to a life of reclusion at home. See Tao Qian 陶潛, *Jianzhu Tao Yuanming ji* 箋註陶淵明集, 5.54-5, in SBCK. This has been translated in Hightower, 268-70.
- 160 After his reclusion, Tao planted five willow trees and wrote his well-known autobiographical prose piece, "Master Five Willows." See Tao Qian, 5.56.
- 161 Yuan Mei's formal request for leave, written in parallel prose, is found in *Waiji*, 5.69-70. The only reason it mentions is Yuan's desire to attend to his ailing mother.
- 162 Wenji, 16.268.
- 163 "Zhenfu" 貞符 is a work in praise of the Tang ruling house by the Tang poet and prose master Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819.) The text is found in Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, *Liu Zongyuan ji* 柳宗元集, Beijing, 1979, 1.2a-3a. For a study of Liu's poetry, prose, and thought, see William H. Nienhauser Jr. et al., *Liu Tsung-yüan*, New York, 1973. "Dianyin" 典引 is a paean of the Han rulers by the historian Ban Gu 班固 (d. A.D. 92.) See Ban Gu, *Ban Lantai ji* 班蘭臺集, 11a-13a, in BSJ. Wenji, 16.269.
- 164 Literally, "My Music Bureau poems have vainly sung 'My horse is better than yours,'" an allusion to an old Music Bureau ballad. See Wu Jing 吳兢, *Yuefu guti yaojie* 樂府古題要解, shang 上 .12b, in *Baibu congshu jicheng* 百部叢書集成 (hereafter abbreviated BCSJC,) Taipei, 1965-.
- 165 Literally, "Ten years, he does not summon me to grow old at Huaiyang," an allusion to the Western Han scholar Ji An 汲黯 (d. ca. 108 B.C.,) who was noted for his blunt and straightforward manner and had to wait until old age to receive an official position as Governor of Huaiyang, where he died after serving about ten years. See Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書, Beijing, 1962, 50.20.2322.
- 166 Literally, "Pointing at my knees, I pity myself for having betrayed you."
- 167 "Hanging up my official cap," (one poem of four,) 5.96, c 34.
- 168 Yuan's letter of thanks to Yin Jishan, composed in florid parallel prose, is found in *Waiji*, 5.68-9. A poem about the rejection is in 5.87, "Zouzhuo Gaoyoumu buyi buguo" 奏擢高郵牧部議不果.
- 169 Wenji, i-ii.
- 170 Mount Hua 華, located in Shaanxi province, is the westernmost of China's Five Holy Mountains.
- 171 Allusion to Shu Guang 疏廣, who served as Grand Mentor (Taifu 太傅) under the Western Han emperor Xuandi 宣帝 (reg. 73-48 B.C.) for five years and then retired from service. See Ban Gu, *Hanshu*, 71.41.3040.
- 172 "Returning to Harmony Garden after my resignation," (one poem of two,) 5.101, b 53.

In Harmony Garden

New friendships and Xi'an

SHORTLY AFTER HIS request for sick leave, Yuan Mei went to Hangzhou to visit his parents, after which he took his cousin Yuan Shu and his nephew Lu Jian back to Nanjing to live together with him in Harmony Garden.¹ Yuan's sojourn with his parents in Hangzhou was the subject of his best narrative poem to date (translated on page 568,) and this period also saw the first significant examples of his didactic poetry (see, for example, page 573,) in which he explained his philosophy of life and commented on numerous topics relevant to eighteenth-century Chinese society and culture. Although his most original poetry at this time tended to belong to one of these two categories, he continued to make important contributions to other genres.

Yuan Mei probably befriended Cheng Jinfang 程晉芳 (1718–84) at about this time, or at least the first surviving poems addressed to him date from 1749.² Yuan describes him as having:

A refined brow and square jaws. His beard floated about, swishing from left to right. When he was happy about a poem or some idea, he would walk with broad paces, shaking like a winnowing fan, a breeze arising from the folds in his robe. He always spoke to people very warmly and gently, as if he were afraid of hurting them.³

Cheng came from a family of wealthy salt merchants, but he had no interest in financial matters and became a well-known writer and collector of rare books.⁴

Over the years, Yuan Mei addressed a large quantity of verse to Cheng, and it is quite likely that Yuan's own poetry was influenced by their literary exchanges, but in the absence of any modern study of Cheng's works, it is difficult to say exactly how.⁵ In one poem, Yuan Mei tells us that Cheng had revived certain qualities of poetry lost ever since the Han and Wei (i.e. the Three Kingdoms) period:

Later scholars lost what had been transmitted,
And chirped like autumn crickets in a sodden swamp.
Yesterday I happened to read your poetry,
Which is in tune with the works of Han and Wei.
You strum the notes *gong* and *shang* again and again,⁶
Your music sounding like flowing water.⁷

Yuan Mei himself usually avoided imitation of ancient models, but he thought that his literary ideals corresponded closely to those of Cheng Jinfang:

Cheng Jinfang examined all fields of learning, but the study of poetry was the most important thing in his life. I sent [my poem] "About My Feelings," which reads: "All your life you have studied very hard and examined everything;/Your skill in poetry is first and as profound as the sea." After less than a month, Cheng sent a letter from the capital, which read: "The only thing I have learned with confidence is poetry." We happen to be in complete agreement [about poetry,] and we can be considered intimate friends who understand each other, men whose minds tally exactly.⁸

In spite of their intimate friendship and agreement on broad principles, Yuan and Cheng frequently differed with each other about details. In particular, Cheng did not share Yuan Mei's scorn for the Song-dynasty neo-Confucians, as is attested by a letter to Cheng, in which Yuan attacks his friend's admiration for this school of thought.⁹

Cheng Jinfang suffered many serious reverses in later years and died penniless, owing Yuan Mei five thousand ounces of silver, but always the faithful friend, Yuan burned the bond of debt and refused to accept any money from Cheng's widow.¹⁰ In the year of Cheng's death, Yuan wrote:

I find a handwritten letter from Cheng Jinfang, asking me to help him buy a house, and I am so saddened that I write this

He had me enquire about a secluded house east of my wall;
He wanted showy scarlet flowers and trees with red blossoms.
Like Bai Juyi I was waiting for my best friend's arrival,¹¹
Same as Xi Kang, I heard that my companion was dead.¹²
Pure tones from Cheng's zither have ceased by the blue ocean;¹³
I hear a flute played at Shanyang, but the old rains have ended.¹⁴
Just at the moment I was weeping with longing for my friend,
I pulled out his note from a jumble of letters.¹⁵

During the winter of 1749, Yuan fell ill and undertook medical treatment, which continued throughout the next year even after he had left Nanjing for a trip to Suzhou. One positive outcome of his illness was that

he came to know Xue Xue 薛雪 (1681–1770,) who was both an excellent poet and a painter of orchids, but who is most famous today for his accomplishments as a physician, a profession first pursued because he wished to cure his mother of an ailment.¹⁶ Together with Ye Gui 葉桂 (1666–1745,) Xue founded a new school of medical practice which introduced the use of aromatic stimulants for epidemic fevers and generally favored contemporary medical knowledge over the traditional medical treatises consulted by other physicians.¹⁷ Xue used his new approach to cure Yuan Mei of his ailment, winning the poet's lifelong admiration and friendship.

Although Yuan was quite interested in medicine himself, the conversations of the two men probably tended to be more literary than medical, for Xue was a disciple of the great critic Ye Xie 葉燮 (1627–1703) and eventually composed one of the more important critical works of the eighteenth century, the *Poetry Talks of a Single Calabash* (*Yipiao shihua* 一瓢詩話).¹⁸ Xue's call for critical fairness sounds very similar to what we shall find in Yuan Mei's mature critical writings:

Discussing poetry and prose, some people set themselves up as the standard as soon as they open their mouths, and they must search for some blemish to attack even in outstanding works produced by others. Those of us who come later have nothing to rely upon and are all misled by [such critics.] We must sit up straight and open the eyes of our wisdom and not encourage someone just because the whole world praises him or defame him just because the whole world disapproves of him.¹⁹

In 1751 the Qianlong emperor visited southern China on one of his frequent imperial circuits, and shortly after the Son of Heaven arrived in Suzhou, Yuan presented him with a set of poems written in the learned and obscure fashion expected from a man whose literary fame was spreading to all corners of the empire.²⁰ Later in the year, Yuan returned to Harmony Garden and Nanjing, where Yin Jishan recommended him for another official position, this time in Shaanxi 陝西 province, far to the northwest. At first, Yuan was excited that he would be able to visit the homeland of classical Chinese culture, writing: "They say there are many famous places inside the Pass;/A man ought to visit ancient Chang'an once," the geographical expression "Inside the Pass," referring to the strategic area guarding the Western Han- and Tang-dynasty capital at Chang'an 長安.²¹

However, as he headed north to visit the court in Beijing first, Yuan must have had serious misgivings about the wisdom of leaving Harmony Garden, for he encountered blizzards, an augur of difficult times ahead:

*On the evening of the Lantern Festival, I pass Gate Mountain Range,
and the snow does not stop*²²

My carriage bell answers the distant fifth watch's bell;
A thousand stone paths hang on mountains, like bows of jade.
My single horse confronts a blizzard face to face;
Surrounding mountains deliver a wind that beats my head.
When I shake my robe in the inn, a flurry of snowflakes
tumbles off;
Our fire heats a frigid sky with its dim, red hue.
Who would believe that tonight is the Lantern Festival?
A lone speck of lamp light shines amidst white clouds.²³

After three months in Beijing, Yuan headed west to the capital of Shaanxi province, Xi'an 西安, a sleepy economic and political backwater during the eighteenth century, built on the site of the ancient Chang'an. Yuan's earlier interest in historical poetry revived briefly as he passed through the basin of the Yellow River, which had witnessed so many dramatic events in China's past. He was particularly moved by Mawei 馬嵬, the place where the imperial concubine Lady Yang 楊貴妃 (given name Yuhuan 玉環, 719–56,) the lover of the Tang emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (reg. 713–56,) was either murdered or committed suicide after the outbreak of a rebellion, and Yuan composed a number of poems about the tragic romance of the imperial couple. Yuan Mei's approach to poetry had changed profoundly by the time he wrote these works, for he did not use them as a vehicle to show off his profound knowledge of history and literature but rather as a forum for discussing the complex problems of traditional attitudes toward women in earlier Chinese historical writing.²⁴

Yuan Mei had no close friends in Xi'an, and that summer the weather was unbearably hot:

In south China heat plagues me, but I can sleep after dark;
Here in the west I suffer more, for I roast the night long.
The land is high, the stars dense, and the sun lies close;
What's worse, the Vermilion Emperor ambles through the sky.²⁵
I rented a small room to live in after my arrival,
But it resembles a steamer with a blazing oven around it.
I wave a huge fan until my wrists shake loose,
Yellow sand flying in league with the scalding wind . . .²⁶

In the autumn of that year, after he had occupied his official post for only three days, Yuan suddenly learned that his father had passed away, and convention required that he leave his post immediately and return to Nanjing to arrange the funeral. His father buried, Yuan Mei returned to Xi'an, but after a very brief period, he submitted what was his second and final resignation from official life, setting out for Nanjing again. According to one of his contemporaries, he had discovered that "his taste was at

variance” with Huang Tinggui 黃廷桂 (1691–1759) the Governor-General (Zongdu 總督) of Shaanxi and Gansu provinces, and after sending up a memorial in excess of ten thousand words, which was ignored by the court, he decided to resign.²⁷ What exactly was the source of disagreement between the two men remains a mystery to this day.

Retirement

Early in 1753 Yuan moved his mother, wife, concubines (he had taken one more, a Miss Jin 金 from Suzhou,) and children to Harmony Garden, which had fallen into disrepair during his absence.²⁸ In his “A Second Record of Harmony Garden” (1753,) he vowed that he would never serve as an official again:

After I had lived at Harmony Garden for three years, I received government orders to travel to Shaanxi, but before the year was out, I was writing poems about my retirement.²⁹ However, all the flowers I had planted [in the garden] had wilted, the loose tiles had crashed down, and the moldy plaster had come loose from the ceilings’ beams, so I was forced to renovate . . . This year I am just thirty-seven and have resolved to be a recluse in the mountains. I have created this garden, but whether or not I can stay here is something I cannot know for sure, so I wrote a poem, in which I made the [following] oath:

Two years ago, I left my garden;
I was exhausted, and it was in ruins.
This year, I came back once again;
The flowers are flourishing, and I am healthy.
I will never leave my garden in the future,
Which I once quit to become an official.
Now I repent of my former error,
I swear and vow I will never forget!

Recorded on the seventh month of the year *Guiyou* [1753].³⁰

Liberated from the shackles of officialdom, Yuan Mei now wrote one of his finest sets of quatrains (translated page 585,) describing his leisurely existence in Harmony Garden, where he could fully indulge his love of books and writing. Although these poems suggest that his life was nearly perfect after retirement, we must be careful to distinguish literary convention from reality, and one of Yuan Mei’s younger contemporaries supplies a healthy corrective to both Yuan’s own poetry and the accounts of his friends:

When I was eleven, I went with my mother to visit Harmony Garden three times. After our meal, I saw Yuan Mei’s wife and four of his concubines, none of whom were beautiful. They complained in unison:

“This place is no good. There is no wall, and we suffer from spooks and robbers. It is also far from everybody, and it is inconvenient for buying food. Owls hoot and wolves howl all night long, and we can’t sleep soundly.”³¹

Yuan Mei may also not have been totally honest about the reasons that he usually gave for his retirement, i.e. his desire to care for his aged mother, his weariness with official life, and his frustration at the failure of the authorities to offer him a more powerful position. Perhaps even more important than these was the belief that he had better quit before he got himself into serious trouble. In a letter to his friend the official Tao Yi 陶易 (Provincial Graduate 1752, d. 1778,) a man who later died in prison after falling afoul of the authorities, Yuan compared his situation to that of a Tang-dynasty prime minister:

When the Tang prime minister Xiao Song asked to leave his post, the emperor Xuanzong tried to keep him, saying: “I am not tired of you yet, so why do you want to go?”³² Xiao replied: “If I were to wait until you were tired of me, how would I dare to request leave then?”³³

Xiao wished to retire from his position before the emperor Xuanzong became tired of him, a situation that might cause him to lose his life, and Yuan Mei himself probably felt that if he continued in official life, his own life might be in jeopardy, a distinct possibility in an age famous for its persecution of scholar-officials suspected of harboring views dangerous to the central government.

Money matters

One may very well ask how Yuan Mei was able to support himself in relative prosperity for the rest of his life without his government salary, particularly since he came from a poor family and was renowned for his honesty as a local official. His grandson tells us that when Yuan retired from service, he had savings of only 3600 ounces of silver, or the equivalent of about one year’s salary, but that he was eventually able to construct one of the most magnificent gardens of the age and travel comfortably all over China, “something that even a rich or noble person could hardly hope for.”³⁴

Some of Yuan Mei’s income came from unexpected sources. On one occasion he was invited to a party attended by rich Yangzhou salt merchants, and as usual, the participants began writing poetry. One of the salt merchants composed a striking line orally, and everyone was terribly impressed, until Yuan Mei pointed out that it was lifted word for word from a Yuan-dynasty poem, which he proceeded to recite in full. The merchant had just wanted to test the knowledge of the party-goers and was so impressed by Yuan

Mei's learning that he presented him one thousand ounces of silver. A bit later during the same banquet, Yuan Mei saw that another merchant was having difficulties remembering a line of poetry in a literary game and beat out the rhythm of the correct answer with his chopsticks. The merchant immediately recalled the line and was so grateful to Yuan that he gave him an additional thousand ounces of silver. One evening's entertainment had earned Yuan about eight months' official salary.³⁵

However, such income was hardly reliable, and Yuan Mei's poetry and prose works, though not written primarily for financial gain, were so popular that they must have provided him a much more significant income, especially during his old age. His grandson tells us that Yuan Mei's descendants received a royalty of one ounce of silver from bookstores that sent workers to Harmony Garden to print his complete works from the original wood blocks kept there (the stores supplied the paper,) and that editions sold in the garden fetched from 3.6 to five ounces, depending on the quality of the paper used, "several hundreds of sets being retailed each year."³⁶ The market for Yuan Mei's works was so good in the early nineteenth century that his descendants did not bother to take food supplies with them on long journeys but lived by peddling their illustrious ancestor's writings on the road.³⁷ It is possible that by the time of his death, Yuan Mei's income from the sale of his collected works alone equaled or even surpassed his earlier official income.³⁸

Eighteenth-century China did not have copyright laws, and there was no way Yuan or his descendants could prevent publishers from pirating his writings, but since such reprints were often of low quality, discerning readers would still want to purchase the first edition.³⁹ Yuan Mei clearly recognized the value of the original blocks to his sons, and shortly before his death, he urged them to take good care of the plates and "to print and sell [the printed books] publicly."⁴⁰ Even such a scholarly work as his study notes, to be discussed in the next chapter, could earn money, and as Yuan said in his *Will*:

Again, all of my works are already printed, the only exception being the *Random Notes of Harmony Garden* in thirty chapters. I was just thinking of printing it, when my great disease suddenly came upon me, so I desisted from this. I hope that, if one day you two [his sons] have some time on your hands, you will cooperate in getting it printed and then fix a price for it and sell it in the bookstores. Both of you can make a profit.⁴¹

The sale of books was one important source of income, but Yuan Mei may also have earned a considerable amount of money from the compilation of such works as his *Poetry Talks* (see the detailed discussion in Chapter 4.) This book of literary criticism quotes a large body of contemporary verse, and since most of the poets of the age wanted to be included

in such a famous work, they paid substantial sums to Yuan, if we are to believe a contemporary:

Those who asked on behalf of someone else to have poems included would pay ten ounces of silver or fifteen ounces of silver. Even his students or poor scholars could not avoid giving him the minimum honorarium of food and drink. In his huge book Yuan only published less than one tenth [of the total contributions,] but he had already made a fortune!⁴²

The author of this passage shared the prejudice against professional writers so common in his age, and his reliability may have been influenced by his envy of Yuan Mei's success, but it is quite possible that, in spite of its great publication costs, the *Poetry Talks* made a handy profit for Yuan Mei.⁴³

However, the principal source of Yuan Mei's income seems to have been the numerous prose works which he wrote for various patrons over the years, especially funerary inscriptions (mostly of two sub-categories, grave-tablet inscriptions, *shendaobei* 神道碑 and tomb inscriptions, *muzhi* 墓志,) but also including many of the biographies (*zhuàn* 傳) he penned, which usually recounted the lives of the deceased parents or relatives of nobles and high officials. The two categories of funerary inscriptions take up about eight of the thirty-four chapters of Yuan Mei's collected prose writings, while biographies fill four.⁴⁴ In addition, it is quite likely that Yuan Mei received monetary compensation for at least some of the prefaces (*xu* 序, about three chapters) he wrote for other authors' works and many of the records (*ji* 記, about three chapters,) a large number of which were composed to commemorate the construction of important buildings. It is quite likely that Yuan Mei included only a fraction of such pieces in his collected prose, but even so, a total of more than half of his surviving prose writings may have contributed to his income.⁴⁵

Of course, monetary rewards were not the only motives for creating such works:

A poem by Liu Yuxi reads: "I feel that libation texts are too numerous in my collected works."⁴⁶ Note, however, that according to Liu Yuxi's biography, he died at the age of seventy-six, and so it is appropriate that his libation texts were so many. Now I am older than he was, and since all my life I have loved to speak about the good deeds of people, I could not stand nobles, high officials, or close friends vanishing without a trace, and the result is that there are more than two or three hundred works in the categories of funerary inscriptions, tomb epitaphs, and eulogies in my collected prose.⁴⁷

Yuan Mei was probably quite sincere in his desire to transmit the memory of the worthy men and women of his age to posterity, but everyone (including Liu Yuxi) knew that a writer was usually paid for such works,

and since earlier authors scrupulously avoided the suspicion that they ever wrote merely for money, Yuan Mei felt that he had to defend the quantity of such prose pieces in his collected writings.⁴⁸ In fact, after repeating some of the same non-monetary justifications of such writing in a letter to a friend, he also admitted that there are some cases when:

The [deceased] person was only a mediocre [figure] in his age and not on intimate terms with me, but, alas, his descendants want to express their filial piety and bring a cartload of money asking me to write something, and I have no choice but to be moved [by them], [although I am] ashamed at lowering myself to do it.⁴⁹

No matter what his motives were, in later years there was a constant demand for Yuan Mei's talents as a prose writer:

When I was young I was proud about my ability in ancient-style prose, but I complained that I had nothing to write about . . . Then I could not have imagined that in my later years, people from all directions sought my prose in numbers greater than hemp stalks, and I suffered unbearably. Therefore, I wrote another couplet, which reads:

People ask for inscriptions, seek prefaces and colophons;
All these social obligations are working me to death!⁵⁰

It is very difficult to estimate what Yuan Mei's income from so much writing may have been, but it certainly was considerable. Shortly before his death, Yuan wrote:

[After] I applied for leave to return home . . . , I sold prose writings for fees [literally, "for wetting my writing brush," *runbi* 潤筆.] A single tomb inscription by me brought in a thousand ounces of silver, but people who loved writing as much as Dong Shiming and Bao Zhidao were rare.⁵¹

The documents referred to here, the tomb inscription (1773) for Dong Shiming's mother, and a biography (1795) of Bao Zhidao's father, Bao Yiyuan 鮑宜瑗 (1731–1795) consist of no more than a page and a half each in a modern edition, and although Yuan tells us that he rarely received such high fees, he eventually must have made an income considerably above that of his original official salary.⁵²

During the eighteenth century, most wealthy Chinese invested in farm land, and two of Yuan's poems from 1751 speak of harvesting grain in Chuzhou 滁州, about one hundred kilometers northwest of Nanjing across the Yangzi River in Anhui 安徽 province, and another work tells us that Yuan traveled to the same place to collect rent from tenants in the autumn of 1759:

Old peasants approach me through the mist,
Leading calves for a meeting with their landlord.
They tell me how good their harvest was,
And then prepare a meal in great confusion.
I see frost on the red maples in front of my bed;
On our clothes is rain from paddy blossoms.
The neighbors around us don't disturb us a bit,
And the peasants and I talk like good old friends.⁵³

Seven years later, Yuan Mei tells us that in earlier times he would have been happy “if I had been worth ten head of cattle, but now I own more than a hundred *mu* of land,” somewhat more than fifteen acres, a sizable holding in populous southern China, where a peasant was lucky to own even one acre.⁵⁴ Yuan Mei’s investments in land grew slowly over the years, and just before his death, he estimated the value of his fields (124 *mu* or almost nineteen acres) at ten thousand ounces of silver, or one third of his total value, the rest being invested in interest-bearing loans (*shengxi yin* 生息銀).⁵⁵ If one keeps in mind that Yuan Mei purchased his garden for three hundred ounces of silver, his former monthly salary as an official, and that one could buy an expensive concubine for a couple hundred ounces of silver, one has an idea of how much wealth he left to his descendants.⁵⁶

Furthermore, Yuan Mei’s land and interest-bearing investments were only part of his total worth. Harmony Garden must have appreciated greatly in value over his lifetime, both because of his growing fame and also because of the extensive construction that he carried out there. Most writers cite the large number of antiques and books that Yuan Mei purchased as evidence for his rich life style, but he probably made a good deal of money out of these, too.⁵⁷ Ancient bronzes, Han-dynasty mirrors, Tang and Song inkstones, and Ming porcelain were all the rage in eighteenth-century China, and an astute collector like Yuan Mei could make a fortune buying and selling them.⁵⁸ Yuan was also on friendly terms with some of the most famous artists of the day, and he possessed an extensive collection of painting and calligraphy by artists whose fame rose greatly from the time that he first befriended them until his old age. For example, the painter, seal maker, and calligrapher Shen Feng 沈鳳 (1695–1757) was a close friend and wrote many calligraphic works for Yuan over the years.⁵⁹ When Yin Jishan saw them hanging all over Yuan’s garden, he was surprised that Yuan Mei had so many works by an artist whose reputation was not fully established yet and asked: “Why is your hill filled with the calligraphy of Shen Feng?” However, “Not long after, Shen died, and people all over China sought his calligraphy, which became as precious as gold paste or liquid jade, and then Yin Jishan sighed at my foresight!”⁶⁰

Although Yuan Mei himself was little more than a competent calligrapher, his fame as a poet made his own calligraphy quite valuable, too. A rich

Yangzhou salt merchant surnamed An 安, who was reprinting a facsimile edition of the *Treatise on Calligraphy* (*Shupu* 書譜) written by the great Tang calligrapher Sun Guoting 孫過庭 (ca. 648–703) paid Yuan Mei two thousand ounces of silver for merely inscribing the work's cover with twenty-two Chinese characters in his own handwriting.⁶¹ Thus, it is quite likely that Yuan Mei's garden and art collections were worth at least as much as his land and cash investments, if not much more. He was hardly one of the richest men of his age, but his example proves that an author of high standards could do quite well in eighteenth-century China without serving in the bureaucracy. He had accumulated so much property that, as he says in a letter to his male cousin Yuan Shu, his descendants could live on it as long as "they behave themselves and don't engage in any unnecessarily risky behavior."⁶²

Eight-legged essays and examinations

Now that Yuan had withdrawn from officialdom, he adopted a more critical attitude toward the examination system, which had formed the basis of the Chinese civil service ever since the Tang dynasty. He became particularly hostile to the eight-legged essay, the principal literary form used for examining scholars since the Ming dynasty, and according to a friend named Yuan Gufang 袁穀芳, he deeply regretted publishing his essays in this form as a young man, in spite of the fame they brought him.⁶³ Yuan Gufang writes:

Even as a young boy, I thought that Yuan Mei's [eight-legged] essays were a mistake. When I worked as a tutor at Nanjing in the *guiyou* year of the Qianlong reign period [1753,] I met the master of Little Granary Hill Hut [i.e. Yuan Mei] at Harmony Garden . . . He expressed strong regrets for publishing and disseminating [his eight-legged essays] during his youth and took me to be a close friend for having so greatly disapproved [of them].⁶⁴

Unlike some of his contemporaries and many nineteenth-century scholars, who attacked the form on intellectual or political grounds, Yuan Mei's dissatisfaction with the eight-legged essay arose largely from esthetic considerations, particularly his perception that its rigid form inhibited literary creativity.⁶⁵ In a poem addressed to Cheng Jinfang, Yuan attacks the entire examination system on similar esthetic grounds:

There was a valedictorian in Han Yu's family,
But why doesn't anyone talk of him any more?⁶⁶
From this we can conclude that the world is fair –
Please, don't confuse examinations with real writing!⁶⁷