WOMEN AND DIVINATION IN TRADITIONAL CHINA: SOME REFLECTIONS

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Much of the following material has been drawn from my recent book, Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society (Westview Press, 1991), which attempts to restore the mantic arts to their rightful place as a central category of Chinese cultural concern. Focusing primarily on the Qing dynasty, the book argues that throughout the entire imperial era, divination was by no means simply a counter-cultural phenomenon—although it could always be put, of course, to counter-cultural purposes. Nor was fortune-telling confined largely to commoners, as has often been assumed. [1] Rather, it touched every sector of traditional Chinese society in fundamental ways; and it continues to play an important cultural role in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and even the People's Republic of China to this day. What, in brief, can be said about the relationship between Chinese women and time-honored forms of divination in the Qing period?

Not surprisingly, documentary evidence is difficult to come by. As in many other realms of life in traditional China, women have been marginalized in the vast elite record of divination. Standard Qing period sources, such as encyclopedias, official histories and local gazetteers, seldom devote attention to women diviners—in part, no doubt, because most fortune-tellers in pre-modern times, whether scholarly practitioners or professionals, were men. Nor do elite compilations of this sort say much about women as the clients of diviners, except in condemnation of their "foolishness." Even the colorful sections on "Technicians" (fangji) and "Superstition" (mixin) in the Qingbai leichao (Classified Anecdotes of the Qing Dynasty; 1916) contain very few stories of women and their recourse to various mantic techniques, although they are full of tales involving men from all walks of life. Of the nearly twelve hundred Qing dynasty individuals accorded space in Yuan Shushan's massive Zhongguo lidai buren zhuan (Biographies of Diviners in Chinese History by Periods; 1948), only three are women—all daughters or wives of prominent scholars, and all well-educated. Two, in fact, wrote books on divination, and one achieved fame as a warrior in the Taiping Rebellion. [2]

Yet we know from the observations of foreigners throughout the Qing period, and from other evidence (including contemporary practice in Hong Kong and Taiwan), that many traditional Chinese divination techniques were employed by women even more than by men. This was especially true of methods such as the casting of divining blocks (bei, jiao, etc.), the use of "spiritual sticks" (lingqian or qian), and various forms of soothsaying involving spirit possession. And even divinatory practices that were closely identified with male culture in China—such as use of the hallowed Yijing (Classic of Changes) and recourse to geomancy (fengshui, kanyu, etc.)—involved women to a larger extent than is generally recognized.
Furthermore, although most Chinese mantic texts reinforced traditional social values and relationships, including the subordination of women to men, divination had the potential of empowering traditionally disadvantaged people, including women, with access to a special kind of socially valuable knowledge. This was true not only for spirit mediums and professional soothsayers--both male and female--but also for their associates and clients. [3] Moreover, the positive thrust of most Chinese divination techniques, together with the fact that fortune-telling was often closely related to magic (since both shared the same assumptions regarding cosmology and demonology), offered hope to the oppressed, downtrodden, and insecure in Chinese society. At the very least, recourse to mantic methods seems to have given marginalized people a distinctive sense of their own personal identity, and perhaps a greater measure of self-esteem.

It is true, of course, that the Yijing, as the most exalted of all Chinese divination texts, provided a powerful, cosmologically-grounded justification for the male-dominated political and social hierarchies of the imperial era. The hexagram Guime (54), for example, casts the role of women solely in terms of their subordination to men in marriage, concubinage, or slavery; and Jiaren (37) indicates that the woman of a household should submit totally to her husband's authority, attending only to her domestic chores and neither following her whims nor dallying and laughing. Thus we should not find it surprising that the influential neo-Confucian compilation known as the Jinsi lu (Reflections on Things at Hand) cites with obvious approval Zhou Dunyi's use of the Yijing to illustrate the difficulty of governing a family: "If members of the family are separated," he writes, "the cause surely lies with women. This is why the hexagram Kui [To Part; 38] follows the hexagram Jiaren [Family; 37], for 'When two women live together, their wills move in different directions.' This is why [the sage emperor] Yao, having put the empire in order, gave his two daughters in marriage to Shun in order to test him and see whether the throne should be given to him. [...] In order to see how he governs his empire, we observe the government of his family." [4]

To the extent that divination required literacy, the options for women to divine personally were naturally limited. Thus relatively few used the Yijing themselves. But some, by virtue of their elite status, acquired the education necessary to explore the refinements of Yi scholarship. Thus we occasionally find women such as Zhang Tun, who not only divined with the Changes, but also studied its principles, and later wrote a book entitled Yidao rumen (Introduction to the Way of the Changes). [5] Similarly, although geomancers tried to cultivate a scholarly air, and to exclude women from the profession (or even the practice) of "siting," it is clear that in their daily lives many Chinese women took an active interest in the art, and at least some of them "read books on the subject." [6] A famous story by Pu Songling describes how two brothers surnamed Song, each leading "his own little army of geomancers," battled for three years over where to bury their father, a former high official. Eventually both men died without resolving the issue, whereupon their wives, after jointly enlisting another set of fengshui specialists, found an auspicious location in a matter of days. Pu's commentary to the story calls explicit attention to the fact that two women were able to settle the matter quickly and quietly. [7]
Of course women could become pawns as well as players in the fraternal contests that often attended fengshui divination. In elite families, where concubinage was prevalent, sons of the same father but different mothers often sought paths to fortune through their respective maternal graves. As Maurice Freedman has noted, men descended agnatically from one ancestor could "differentiate themselves in respect of the women married to him and so escape from the inconvenience of sharing geomantic fortune with those whose success it is their very last wish to promote." Viewed from this perspective, women ancestors were necessary "not only to discriminate among agnates but also for swelling the number of chances [for geomantic success] open to a man when he is unwilling to look to higher generations [beyond parents and grandparents] for assistance." [8]

Predictably, most Chinese mantic techniques drew sharp distinctions between men and women. Male horoscopes, for example, were generally calculated according to different principles than those for women; and the advice offered by professional fortune-tellers invariably expressed gender-specific values regarding social or domestic roles and responsibilities. But the practice of physiognomy (kanxiang, xiangren, etc.) played a particularly significant role in reinforcing gender boundaries in traditional Chinese society. In the first place, the illustrations in physiognomic manuals, not to mention the painted displays that adorned many fortune-telling booths, always differentiated between the features of men and women. In so doing, they promoted certain stereotypes of "good" and "bad" faces for both gender groups.

Furthermore, the techniques of physiognomic evaluation differed. Palm readers, for example, always scrutinized a man's left hand (yang) and a woman's right (yin). Although sighted physiognomers relied heavily on direct observation, some also employed the techniques of blind fortune-tellers, who touched the faces and hands of clients, felt their bones (chuai'gu), and listened to their voices (tingsheng). Some also felt the pulse (zhenmo) in the manner of physicians. Rigid and long-standing notions of Confucian propriety limited male-female contact in traditional China, however. For this reason, male physiognomers generally used different techniques to "read" men and women, and blind exponents of the art seem to have relied almost entirely on sounds in dealing with members of the opposite sex. [9]

Significantly, most physiognomic manuals of the late imperial era evaluate only those parts of the body that would normally be visible to the public, in contrast to pre-Song works, which tended to be far more explicit about other parts of the body, including sexual organs. Stereotypes of feminine beauty in works such as the Shenxiang quanbian (Complete Guide to Spiritual Observation; 1797), including the so-called "Nine Good Points of Women," also reflect Song and post-Song values—although several sections of the work clearly date from an earlier era. [10] According to the Shenxiang quanbian, the nine attractive points were: (1) a round head and flat forehead, (2) delicate bones and smooth skin, (3) red lips and white teeth, (4) long eyes and refined eyebrows, (5) pointed fingers, with thick palms and delicate lines that look "like tangled threads of silk," (6) a voice "as clear as water," (7) a smile that does not reveal the teeth, (8) grace and dignity both in movement and at rest, and (9) a "delicate and moist" appearance. [11]
Despite a deep suspicion of all forms of spirit-possession on the part of the Qing government (see below), aspiring scholars often sought divinatory guidance by means of spirit-writing (fuji, fuluan, etc.). Cults organized for this purpose, which sometimes numbered in the thousands, championed orthodox Confucian values and offered various forms of scholarly advice and assistance—often expressed in elaborate word play that was closely related to yet another form of divination known as "word analysis" (xiangzi, chaizi, etc.). According to Xu Dishan, in provinces such as Jiangsu and Zhejiang, where the "scholarly fashion" prevailed, the common attitude in Qing times was simply that "if one did not believe in writing spirits [jixian], he could not be successful in the examinations." [12]

Given the scholarly orientation of spirit-writing in the Qing period, women normally did not engage in it. They did, however, perform most other shamanistic services—primarily for members of their own sex, and particularly in South China—despite prohibitions against female mediums (nuwu, shipo, wupo, xipo, duanpo, etc.) dating from the sixteenth century at the latest. Although a number had bound feet, their preliminary ritual and "dancing" approximated that of male shamans, as did their medical remedies, exorcisms and oral prognostications. [13] The most popular female deity for spirit possession was Zigu (lit., the Purple Aunt, also known as Sangu, the Third Aunt), and, less flatteringly, as the "Goddess of the Privy" (Ceshen). Her use as the primary focus for a pre-literate divination cult can be traced to the Tang dynasty, and by Song times she had come to be considered a talented writer and artist. [14] During the Qing, however, she seems to have reverted to her Tang role as a pre-literate oracle. Local gazetteers indicate that Zigu was worshipped by women primarily on the fifteenth day of the first month, usually at night, and asked about prospects for the coming year. [15] This was not, however, the only time she could be called upon to shed light on the future. [16]

A number of women shamans specialized in communicating directly with the dead, perhaps because so many unplacated spirits in traditional China were female—gui who had an axe to grind against the oppressive patriarchal society that caused them so much misery in life. [17] These women mediums, known as "feeble aunts" (wangyi), "spirit ladies" (xianpo), "rice-inquiry ladies" (wenmipo) and so forth, were often blind, a condition which people in the Qing generally considered conducive to clairvoyance. Such shamans usually met with groups of women on an auspicious day, and for a small fee agreed to help them find out about loved ones or discover the source of their gui-related family problems. [18] By means of a trance-like state the shaman entered the nether world (yinfang; lit., "the dark realm"), made direct contact with deceased relatives or friends, and spoke both to them and for them. As with male shamans, the answers given to the questions of clients were sometimes difficult to understand. They did not always address the queries raised, and they often gratuitously offered advice, even rebukes, to clients. [19]

Another technique used by women shamans to communicate with the deceased friends and relatives of other women involved a small wooden image, made of willow wood. This image, endowed with spirituality by various secret rituals, was placed on the stomach or chest of the shaman to whom it belonged. There it served as a secondary
medium, to be inhabited temporarily by someone from the nether world. According to
Justus Doolittle, a well-informed missionary in mid-nineteenth century China, "questions
are addressed to the [primary] medium; the replies appear to come from her stomach.
[ . . . ] The medium makes use of no incense or candles in the performance of this method.
Widows who desire information in regard to their deceased husbands, or childless
married women who wish to learn in regard to the future, not infrequently call upon this
class of spiritualists or mediums." [20] Apparently one means of investing the carved
image with supernatural power was to write upon it the "eight characters" (bazi) of "some
clever living person whose spirit is desired, and then worshiping the image, and leaving it
out-doors until this person dies, . . . which it is said will surely take place in a very short
time." Needless to say, this approach occasionally gave rise to the charge of murder. [21]

In part because of such practices and accusations, Qing elites tended to be particularly
critical of women shamans and their putatively "foolish" women followers. [22] Viewed
more positively however, the activities of male and female spirit mediums, operating as
seers, healers and advisers, fulfilled a variety of individual needs--both social and
psychological--in traditional China. In so doing they overlapped and complemented the
responsibilities of physicians and professional fortune-tellers in a variety of important
ways. [23] Furthermore, as ritualists for families and other groups, including sometimes
entire communities, they contributed to social solidarity, not only by acting as
prognosticators and purifiers, but also as arbitrators and intermediaries. And looking at
matters from yet another perspective, the practice of shamanism allowed traditionally
powerless people, both men and women, a way to approach figures of distant, autocratic
authority by providing an idiom--possession by a superior but "related" being--that made
sense from the standpoint of their own perception of social reality. [24]

Of the many different forms of traditional Chinese divination, the use of "spiritual sticks"
seems to have been the most pervasive in Qing times. It extended to all areas of the
dominion, including Tibet, and gave rise to the cliché, "If anything happens, seek [advice
from] qian slips" (you shiqing qiuqian). Although men, including elites, availed of
"spiritual sticks" more than is generally supposed, women were particularly inclined to
rely on this form of divination. One reason was that lingqian could almost always be
found at religious temples, which, after all, women were far more likely to frequent than
men. [25] Visits to temples constituted one of the few forms of non-domestic recreation
available to Chinese women in pre-modern times. [26] Moreover, lingqian were
comparatively easy to use, and the messages they conveyed tended to bear on domestic
issues that were of vital importance to women. This was particularly true of the "spiritual
stick" sets associated with the Guanyin cult. In addition, a number of lingqian sets gave
specific attention to medical questions, and some even provided actual perscriptions. [27]

Since most women in pre-modern China were illiterate, the majority of them needed
assistance in interpreting the cryptic messages derived from "spiritual sticks." Clerics and
temple caretakers, as well as professional fortune-tellers, generally performed this
function. Most non-professionals were older men with at least a passing knowledge of the
Chinese classics and histories, and a familiarity with lingqian poems and the historical or
mythological events they described. These individuals did more than simply explain the
text and commentaries of lingqian handbooks, however. They also offered concrete advice on matters such as personal finances, business, marriage, travel, household affairs, litigation, farming, animal husbandry, the loss of personal property, moving, sickness and so forth. [28] Professional fortune-tellers, for their part, counselled clients on how to overcome misfortune through the use of charms and religious rituals. [29]

A description of the advice given by an old lingqian interpreter to a younger client in Taiwan two decades ago sounds very much like what one might have expected to hear under similar circumstances in the Qing dynasty: "A woman of forty asked the interpreter whether it was good for her to leave home and take up residence in a temple with the intention of becoming a nun. When questioned by the interpreter, she told him that she had only an adopted son, who did not care for her very much. She was so disappointed that she decided to donate all her money to the temple and stay there the rest of her life. The interpreter advised her not to go to the temple because she would be taken care of only so long as she had money to donate. 'But,' the woman said, 'I have lots of money.' The interpreter said: 'There is an old Chinese saying that even a mountain will break down if you keep digging at it. How long do you think your money will last if you continue to donate it?' When the woman failed to reply, he again advised her to stay home with her son. He said: 'A son is a son. He is still young and does not appreciate the invaluable relationship between mother and son. Give him a little time. When he grows older he will learn to treat his mother better.'" [30]

We may take another example from a recorded conversation. The lingqian interpreter begins by asking his client: "What is the problem?"

Client: "Marriage. The man has a concubine."
Interpreter: Don't marry him. The qian says not to marry."
Client: "I'm already married to him. Should I separate?"
Interpreter: "Do you have children?"
Client: "Yes."
Interpreter: "Does he give you money?"
Client: "Yes, he gives me at least half the money."
Interpreter: "Then don't separate from him. It is not good to separate." [31]

Like astrologers, fate-extrapolators, physiognomers and others, lingqian interpreters negotiated the future with their clients. In Arthur Kleinman's words, "the chief concern is not the beauty and consistency of the explanatory models, but their utility in providing meaningful psychosocial interpretations of difficult situations." [32]

Unquestionably the Confucian values embedded and expressed in lingqian oracles, as well as the "practical" advice offered by clerics and temple caretakers and fortune-tellers, tended to reinforce traditional patterns of behavior, including submission to authority. But from a psychological point of view, "spiritual stick" divination helped both men and women to eliminate anxiety and strengthen self-esteem. In the words of Jin Xu, "part of the therapeutic effect of qian lies in its ability to mobilize hope, inspire a feeling of well-being, and thus spur actions that lead to the fulfillment of the hope. The widespread
acceptance of qian and faith in its reputed high rate of accurate prediction is probably due to its self-fulfilling nature." [33]

There were a number of less well-known but extremely popular qian-related mantic systems by which people in Qing times--women in particular--could obtain written oracles and have them interpreted by specialists. One of the most popular involved trained birds and the use of sixty-four small pieces of paper--each containing a prophetic verse, usually of four seven-character lines, and perhaps an illustration. These sheets would be arranged so as not to reveal any visual message, and a bird released from its cage to select a slip or two. The fortune-teller then interpreted the message(s) in light of the client's particular needs. According to Justus Doolittle, writing of mid-nineteenth century Fuzhou, "Females and and the lower classes of the populace largely patronize this kind of fortune-teller." [34]

Another little-known but widespread system employed cards with qian-like inscriptions. Clients first chose a card from a pack of one hundred, each of which had an oracle indicating very good, good, middling, bad, or very bad fortune. After a card had been selected, the client returned it to the deck, making note of the inscription on it. The fortune-teller then shuffled the card and released a bird to select a card by itself. If the bird's choice matched that of the client, the prediction would be verified. In Sichuan, a fortune-teller by the name of Jin Dayu established such a reputation for his "trained bird method" of divination that he earned a place in the Nanquan county gazetteer. His technique, similar to the one described above, used pieces of paper marked with the sixty cyclical characters, together with twenty-eight slips of bamboo representing the twenty-eight lunar lodges. According to John Gray, in the city of Guangzhou (Canton) "female fortune-tellers who predict the future of females only," used the same basic system, but had turtles choose the cards instead of birds. Other professional soothsayers allowed snakes to indicate a choice with their heads. [35]

Among some minority peoples in China--for instance, the Lolo in Sichuan--women assumed roles that were reserved almost exclusively for men among the Han population (such as physiognomy). [36] But most Chinese women in the Qing period lacked access to the kind of formal education that brought enhanced prestige and influence to male fortune-tellers; and because most women diviners in China were illiterate, they tended to engage in fortune-telling practices that were scorned, at least theoretically, by the orthodox elite.

Shamanism, as one of the most important spheres of female divinatory activity in the Qing period, drew particularly heavy fire from the literati, even as scholars themselves freely patronized mediums who were experts in spirit-writing. Significantly, fuji does not normally occupy a place in the discussions of diviners and other "technicians" in works in official compilations--presumably because as a shamanistic technique it was considered too unorthodox, too far removed from conventional types of prognostication. Likewise, Yuan's book ignores spirit-writing entirely as a category of divination. [37] Encyclopedias, histories and gazetteers do, of course, contain some information on male and female "spirit mediums;" but they are not treated as diviners per se and are not in any
case afforded individual biographies. It is revealing that the "Arts and Occupations" section of the massive Gujin tushu jicheng (Complete Collection of Writings and Illustrations, Past and Present) devotes a mere fifteen pages to shamans, as against 2,172 pages on divination. [38]

Despite the special threat that spirit-mediums posed by virtue of their abnormal social behavior and their capacity to attract large groups of loyal followers, most other forms of Chinese divination reinforced existing power structures rather than undermining them--particularly since recourse to fortune-tellers and fortune-telling methods was by no means confined to the margins of Chinese society. And even when employed by political dissidents, including anti-dynastic sectarian organizations such as the White Lotus Society, divination was only a practical tool, not itself an expression of alienation from the existing order. [39]

In the modern West, by contrast, divination--like other so-called occult practices--"serves usually as a muted protest against everyday social identity or generally accepted scientific values and cosmology." According to Evan Zuesse, in an increasingly fluid, anonymous, and heterogeneous society, practices such as divination restore a sense of control to personal life "through the aesthetic and probabilistic terms in which predictions are couched." Thus, he says, astrology appeals particularly to women because it "desubstantializes oppressive personal relationships, offering instead an exotic alternative identity in which faults are erased or elevated into association with a 'star family' embracing strangers." [40] Putting aside the condescending tone, his basic point seems valid: Oppression and marginalization invite esoteric, or at least irregular, means of escape. [41]

Divination does not invariably provide relief from social misery, however. Disadvantaged groups in China, including women, may well have been particularly inclined to seek personal advice and assistance through mantic methods in order to enhance their sense of self esteem and personal control; but they could also be victimized by these methods. Consider the case of a mother in the late Qing period, who was told by a diviner that her son would die unless her daughter was removed from the family. The daughter later recollected that her parents "were very sorry to have me go, but as a boy is of so much greater value than a girl, they would not risk my brother's life by keeping me." [42]

Thus, despite the psychological value of divination as a means of making sense of the world, and perhaps even manipulating aspects of it, the clients of diviners were still captives of the prevailing social order. In the end, the assumption of an alternative identity in China demanded a more dramatic step than simply consulting a fortune-teller. It generally required becoming one--in the case of women, most commonly as a spirit medium. And even so, the oppressive, male-dominated environment of Qing China provided few opportunities for women mediums to assume the sort of high-profile roles as prophets and mediums enjoyed by, say, the spirit-rapping Fox sisters in mid-nineteenth century America. [43] Modern-day Taiwan provides some such opportunities, but that is another story, from another era. [45]

Notes
1. See, for example, W. T. de Bary, et. al., eds., Sources of Chinese Tradition (New York and London, 1964), 2: 286: "While educated Chinese have paid homage only to Heaven and their ancestors, and sometimes to Confucius, Buddha, Lao Tzu, and a few other historical personages, the common people have believed in the existence of thirty-three Buddhist Heavens, eight-one Taoist Heavens, and eighteen Buddhist hells, and put faith in astrology, almanacs, dream interpretation, geomancy, witchcraft, phrenology, palmistry, the recalling of the soul, fortune telling in all forms, charms, magic, and many other varieties of superstition." Cf. the similar statements by Wing-tsit Chan in Religious Trends in Modern China (New York, 1953), p. 142.

2. Li Suzhen, one of the three, joined her brother, Li Mengjun, to fight the Taipings in south China in the early stages of the war. The daughter of an illustrious family, Li Suzhen knew horseriding, archery, military tactics and astrology, and as a strategist and adviser, she rendered valuable service against the rebels. She died a heroic death in an attack on Hanyang, Hubei, in 1855. See Yuan Shushan, Zhongguo lidai buren zhuan (Biographies of Diviners in Chinese History by Period; Shanghai, 1948), 38: 9.

3. For details from foreign observers on professional women diviners and the personal use of divining techniques by women, see, for example, Leon Wieger, Moral Tenets and Customs in China (Ho-kien, 1913), p. 242; John Gray, China: A History of the Laws, Manners and Customs of the People (London, 1878), 2: 6-7; David Graham, Folk Religion in Southwest China (Washington, D.C., 1961), p. 135; Henri Dore, Researches into Chinese Superstitions (Shanghai, 1914-1933), 4: 369 and 374.


5. Yuan (1948), 38: 8.

6. See Herbert Giles, Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio (London, 1916), p. 447. I have noticed no women geomancers in Yuan (1948) or in any of the several dozen local gazetteers I have consulted.


9. Xu Ke, ed., Qingbai leichao (Classified Anecdotes of the Qing Dynasty; Shanghai, 1916; hereafter QBLC), fangji, pp. 118 ff., esp. 121.

11. TSJC, yishu, 47: 6631.

12. Xu Dishan, Fuji mixin di yanjiu (Research on the Superstition of Spirit-Writing; Changsha, 1941), p. 32. QBLC, fangji, p. 28.


15. See, for example, Taoyuan xianzhi (Gazetteer of Taoyuan District; Hunan, 1892), fengsu, 1: 2b; Linyi xianzhi (Gazetteer of Linyi District; Shandong, 1917), fengsu, 3: 1b-2a; Yicheng xianzhi (Gazetteer of Yicheng District; Hubei, 1866), yudi zhi, 1: 4a; cf. Sihui xianzhi (Gazetteer of Sihui District; Guangdong, 1841), fengsu, 1: 66b; etc.


18. Doolittle (1865), 2: 115, mentions a cost of only two and a half cents per person for this sort of divination, about fifteen cash. Rice, like blood, had apotropaic properties.


25. It is, I think, possible that the religious roles undertaken by Chinese women on behalf of their families may have allowed males in China to feel more comfortable in their alleged "agnosticism," since the prayers and sacrifices offered by their mothers, wives, concubines and sisters would presumably benefit all family members, including themselves.

26. See, for example, Nevius (1869), pp. 103-105; also Charles Gutzlaff "Remarks on the Current State of Buddhism in China," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 16 (1856), pp. 85, 88, 91. In contemporary Taiwan about eighty percent of the people who visit religious temples for the purpose of undertaking lingqian divination are women. Although constraints on the mobility of women today are, of course, far less severe than they were in the Qing period, I would guess that the ratio of women to men petitioners is roughly the same for both periods.

27. For details, see Rong Zhaozu, "Zhanbu di yuanliu" (The Origin and Development of Divination), reprinted in his Mixin yu chuanshuo (Superstition and Folktales; Taipei, 1969), pp. 43-44 and 52; also QBLC, mixin, p. 9-13 and Nevius (1869), pp. 104-105.

28. See the sources cited above, note 27. Perhaps the religious environment of the temple made male-female interactions of this type more comfortable than they would normally be in Qing society, but it was precisely this sort of contact that made elites so critical of temple-centered popular culture.


32. Ibid. Kleinman provides several illuminating examples of the negotiating process. See also Alfred Bloom's article on fortune-telling in Hong Kong in Richard Wilson, et al. eds., Value Change in Chinese Society (New York, 1979).


34. See Doolittle (1865), 2: 333-334.


37. For this reason, presumably, Yuan fails to mention Zeng Guofan's interest in "spirit-writing" in Zeng's biography (18: 10-11); and he omits Ye Mingchen, who was passionately devoted to spirit-writing, altogether.

38. See TSJC, yishu, 48: 8453-8468.

39. See my article on Qing ritual in Kwang-Ching Liu, ed., Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China (Berkeley, 1990), pp. 303 ff.


41. See Robert Galbreath in Kerr and Crow, eds. (1983), p. 24, citing an influential sociological survey of the San Francisco Bay Area in 1973 which concluded that astrology was most appealing to the "traditionally marginal:" the poorly educated, the unemployed, people of color, females, the unmarried, the overweight, the ill, and the lonely. See also the discussion in Jordan and Overmyer (1986), pp. 274 ff., esp. p. 277.


44. See Paper, ibid.; also Timothy Lane, "In the Presence of Gods: Bicameral Minds in Taiwan" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1987).
Women in Traditional China, by Patricia Ebrey. In China from very early times, men have been seen as the core of the family. The ancestors to whom a Shang or Zhou dynasty king made sacrifices were his patrilineal ancestors, that is, his ancestors linked exclusively through men (his father’s father, his father’s father’s father, and so on). When women enter the early historical record, it is often because they caused men problems. Some women schemed to advance their own sons when their husband had sons by several women. Women’s loyalties were often in question. In 697 BCE, for instance, the dau Indirect reflections on these traditions appear in scattered commentaries, in biographical narratives, and, importantly, in excavated texts. The major source for mantic materials from the received textual tradition is the lists of their titles in Han shu 30, the Yiwen zhi or Bibliographic Treatise. It is a guide to the categories of knowledge used by Han thinkers, and created an influential paradigm for the classification of texts and knowledge. The present study provides a necessarily selective survey of mantic texts in the Yiwen zhi with a specific view to