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Transition to modernity: new results of textual analysis on emotions and collective imagery

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Abstract The reconstruction of the representation of inner and outer reality and of collective imagery in a civilisation is a very tricky and risky task. However, if we are aware of the limits of any historical and anthropological research, it is possible to contribute from different disciplines for such an ambitious target. For the above purpose the project started at the end of' 80s as a new attempt at understanding the 'world of mind and body' of a certain civilisation and period by means of a multifocal and interdisciplinary way of reading and analysing sources. The results have been published in several essays in Italy and abroad. Several studies which analyse literary, moral and philosophical works have been successfully accomplished, and the colloquium allowed an exchange of our experiences in different fields of studies, and a discussion on the results which have been reached until now. The first part of this paper presents a short survey of the multifarious aspects of the affective world, and in the second part it offers a reflection on the new intellectual and affective elements emerging at the end of the Ming dynasty and the beginning of the Qing dynasty, elements which seem to propose a new anthropological image of man.

Keywords Emotions · Modernity · China · Li Zhi · Feng Menglong · Tang Xianzu

Why write again on the analysis of the representation of emotions and collective imagery? I would simply give two reasons for why it is worthwhile to reflect on them. First, this kind of approach in studying history, culture and ideas requires an interdisciplinary effort. Any kind of research needs to combine various disciplines and methods, but the analysis of a text which focuses on the affective sphere and on

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the imaginative and symbolic heritage shared by a culture is particularly demanding. Second, new enquiries have been made in the last years, and it would be useful to periodically take stock of these activities. Many historians in different fields have given attention to emotional manifestation and the concept of self, from Cynthia Brokaw to Philip Kuhn, from Lynn Struve to Chen Ping-hsiung, from Mark Elvin to Angela Kiche Leung, and many other names which deserve mention. The new Series of Brill "*Emotions and States of Mind in East Asia*" is specifically dedicated to the analysis of emotions and collective imagery in Chinese culture.[1]

The first part of this paper intends to present a short survey of the multifarious aspects of the affective world and their relevance in social studies. In the second part it will offer a preliminary reflection on some new intellectual and affective elements emerging at the end of the Ming dynasty and at the beginning of the Qing dynasty, elements which seem to propose a new anthropological image of man, centred on the consciousness of individuality.

The representations of emotions and states of mind are the mirror of a civilisation, since the way they are described, motivated, and judged reflects the ladder of values, the religious attitudes, and the behavioural rules in a certain society. They are social phenomena. If we consider their manifestation and their 'social sharing',[2] they offer a wealth of information on culture and society.[3] They contain many symbolic descriptions of the imagery concerning the inner and outer reality of a certain society. As a matter of fact, if much of emotional life is universal, their interpretations, motivations, and emulations all reflect the cultural environment with its values, beliefs, and cognitive models. We can say that naturalist and universalist ideas can be complemented by culturalist and constructivist theses, as emotions are both transcendent narratives and embedded in their descriptions; they are basically universal, and yet variant from culture to culture.[4] For example, Zhang Dai, with his *Tao'an mengyi*, shares with his contemporaries not only some past episodes, but also common experiences, nostalgic atmospheres, and all the emotions related to them.

The project on representation of emotions and collective imagery started at the end of'80s as a new attempt at understanding the 'world of mind and body' of a

[1] The last volume, that has just appeared, is *Feng Menglong's Treasury of Laughs: A Seventeenth-Century Anthology of Traditional Chinese Humour*, by Hsu (Ed. and Trans.).

[2] Rimé has singled out two processes of elaboration of emotive experiences: "social sharing" and "mental rumination". Although there are different kinds of social sharing, from the most primitive to the most complex, all of them are outwards-oriented forms of elaboration of emotive data, while mental rumination is inwards-oriented. Re-elaborating emotional experiences, rethinking their standard processes and retelling them to a real or imaginary listener in a logical structure and in a specific kind of a language corresponds to those means formulated by Rimé, that allow to label one's feelings and organise them in a sequence of logical events, and to compare them with others' opinions and point of view. Thus, the emotional manifestation has not only a purely adaptive function, linked with spontaneous communication, but also a symbolic function. The change of perspectives needs this cognitive and social reorganisation. In this re-appropriation of one's personal experience and its translation into an interpersonal message—that can be described as a revised self-image and a new reconstruction of interpersonal relations—some elements are stressed and other elements are forgotten or ignored. Rimé et al. (1992, pp. 175–83).

[3] Dilthey (1992), Bitti and Roberto (1990).

[4] Cf. the classic Berger and Luckmann (1966), and for crosscultural surveys (Harré (Ed.), 1986; Ames and Marks (Eds.), 1995; Angeliki and Tabakowska (Eds.), 1998; Wierzbicka 1999).

certain civilisation and period by means of a multifocal and interdisciplinary way of reading and analysing sources. The results have been published in several essays in Italy and abroad. The database which has been elaborated during the research is very useful for the analysis of the materials as well as for the preparation of glossaries of terms and expressions related to collective imagery and mentality. We are working for the improvement of such tools thanks to the cooperation of national and international institutions.

The main intent of the project is to collect and combine fragments of the so-called *mental structure* in Ming and Qing China, as something similar has been done for Western cultures. By *mental structure* we mean the system of various cognitive and practical aspects of the 'world of mind and body' in a certain civilisation, which are reflected in the way classifications and judgments are commonly formed, rising above the rational and conscious theories of the times: that is, the perception of the self, the sense of responsibility, concepts of health and illness, belief systems and scales of values. Jacques Le Goff mentions the collective imagery and the representation of inner reality, states of mind, and sensations which regulate social subjects' immediate perceptions, the accumulated notions, symbols and images that provide a backdrop to that specific culture.[5] Such notions and images are shared by the subjects of that society. Emotions and the whole affective sphere, states of mind, and physical perceptions occupy a relevant but not exclusive role in this analysis. Besides the pioneering work by the historians of the school of *Annales*, we cannot forget, when it comes to religious mentality, Michel Vovelle, and above all, Jean Delumeau with his classical works on "fear", the emergence of a western guilt culture in the 13th–18th centuries, and the psychological and social effects of the Church's insistence on the horror of sin and on the obsession with damnation.[6] Vovelle has demonstrated how collective imaginary interacts with religious doctrines, moral and political theories, social systems, and technical progress. For Chinese and East Asian history, few studies have focused on such emotions in an anthropological perspective.

Thus, the analysis and the evaluation of the representation of states of mind and their normative rules, by reading the logical and especially analogical language, allow an understanding of the deepest structure of an author's attitude and of a culture. They may also offer some interesting hints on social change. This field of research aims at rediscovering and reconstructing the previously mentioned *mental structure* in Ming and Qing China and its rich fund of lexicon, concepts, and symbols to represent internal and external reality, by collecting and combining fragments of the sources of the period, resorting to an interdisciplinary approach.

It is evident that every society creates its own culture with values, taboos, systems of control over drives and passions, in order to make life inside its community more efficient and harmonious. Chinese society has developed its own tools and codes in order to cope with the affective sphere, encouraging some moral sentiments and discouraging other extreme emotions. And every field of society, from politics to economy, is deeply influenced by emotions and even the scientific world is not exempt of them. Not only does each society have its own system of

[5] Le Goff (1992, pp. 76–94).

[6] Delumeau (1978, 1983). See for the justification of political power Battista (1982).

representation and "ritualisation" of emotions, but said system is modified over time. Changes and continuity in such fields are reflected in the perception of emotions itself and in the emphasis of some emotions over others.[7]

P. Ekman and W. V. Friesen identify six basic emotions (happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, disgust, and anger) on the basis of the so-called "display rules". Some draw a distinction between the "natural emotions" directly linked to instinctive stimuli (e.g., fear of the unknown, the joy aroused by warmth and anger at frustration) and "moral sentiments" learnt with social experience and conforming to moral, religious, and ideological criteria (e.g., indignation, benevolence, sense of guilt).[8]

In fact—we stress again—emotions not only are personal life experiences (*erlebnis*) but are also *social phenomenon*, interpretable only within a specific culture's language, with cognitive elements.[9] This is the reason why states of mind such as "love" in its various meanings, or "hate" are taken into consideration, while they are not emotions sensu stricto, as they are sentiments of long duration or emotional complexes, according to naturalistic scholars.[10]

Therefore even basic emotions convey *script*, motivations, rituals, symbols, and values which are shared by the members of a specific culture. These normative structures or emotional codes are learnt since the birth through the socialisation process: we learn how to love and hate, to be angry, and to be happy thanks to social interaction, reading novels, or going to the theatre. As in the masterly article by Tan Tianyuan, paradoxically we can say that if a young couple's love transcends the boundaries of life and death, this miracle happens because two persons possessing *qing* learnt of "ultimate love" (*qing zhi zhi* 情之至) by reading ancient literary texts, their primary source for knowledge of love and emotions. The influence of literature is recalled by Dante in a famous line of the Divine Comedy, "*Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse*" (Gallehault was the book, and he who wrote it!).[11] The Gallehault, the go-between for Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere, finds its Chinese equivalent in the first poem of the Classic of Poetry, which lectured Du Liniang into passion 講動情腸, so that she, awaken to love, could speak of her feelings through the language of the later tradition of the Tang poets.[12]

[7] For the West some studies have already been done on the diachronic evolution of the representation of some emotions, such as the evolution of the ancient term *accidia.* On this and emotive language changes see Santangelo, "Reconstructing Fragments of Emotions: Textual Analysis for Research of the Representation of States of Mind in East Asia", in Pawlak (2009, pp. 20–21).

[8] Cf. Rawls (1971). I already discussed about the affective field, emotions, and states of mind. For recent articles on distinctions within the affective domain between several categories of affect-related phenomena, such as emotions, moods, sentiments, character traits, and temperaments, see Deonna and Teroni (2009, pp. 359–77) and Cochrane (2009, pp. 379–420). Cf. also Ogarkova and Borgeaud (2009, Vol. 48, pp. 523–543), Cochrane (2010), Palazova (2014).

[9] See footnote 3.

[10] For a naturalistic and universalistic approach and the concept of "basic emotions" see Ekman (1994). For balanced reflections on various approaches see Solomon (1995, pp. 171–202), and Russell (1991, pp. 426–450).

[11] *The Divine Comedy*, Inferno, Vol. 137, Trans. by Courtney Langdon.

[12] See Tan Tian Yuan's chapter in this volume, where the author develops his reflection on the difficulty of "talking of love". And again, on the seduction of fiction see the poem quoted by Ōki in this volume: "His eternal romances attracted the youth". 千古風流引後生。

Coming back to a general survey of the multiplicity of affective responses, Max Weber noticed that the legitimacy of an order may be guaranteed or upheld exclusively by internal motives. They may be purely effective, like emotional piety, or may be value-rational belief in the absolute validity of the order as an expression of ultimate values, whether moral, aesthetic, or religious; the legitimacy of a system may also be guaranteed by multiple interests due to the expectations of specific external consequences or of a particular kind.

Closely related to these feelings are those that may be called positive self-conscious evaluative emotions. The sub-groups into which they have been divided concern self-realisation and realisation of one's expectations, like experience flow and satisfaction, and freedom from desires and fears, such as serenity and quietness, and feelings pertaining to positive self-evaluation like pride and self-esteem. Although linked to happiness (Shaver et al. 1987), pride nevertheless differs from it because, in addition to the satisfaction of attaining one's goals and individual expectations, it has the characteristic self-conscious evaluative emotion that is taken into account for the evaluation that the individual makes of himself or of his own behaviour vis-à-vis the internalisation of values expressed by a given group. It is thus linked to the development of social identity.[13] Pride is caused by achievements, possessions, as well as physical, mental, or moral qualities belonging to a group or social position. On the basis of an event that is positive for the individual or the group to which they belong, it tends to extend the self-perception of the ego. Thus, it is the exact opposite of shame and guilt, and is akin to satisfaction and joy. Pride therefore contains a variety of concepts, from justified and balanced pride to an immoderate, arrogant, and disdainful opinion of one's own worth (the opposite of humility), and may include conceit, self-esteem, self-love, presumption, vanity, and self-assurance.[14] Closely related to such states of mind are the feelings of importance and potency, which might be inspired by the influence of certain aspects linked to situations of solidarity, with religious or musical motives.

Among satisfying feelings we should consider those pertaining to aesthetic and religious contemplation, like rapture and ecstasy, the sense of unity with the whole universe, in addition to the consolatory function of religious beliefs. Compassion and being deeply moved because of the contemplation of the world's miseries are authentic religious emotions that contribute to awakening man. Owing to the peculiarities of traditional Chinese religious thought, in which, for instance, the notion of a personal god is absent (unlike in Western monotheisms) the religious quest is manifested in different ways.

Aesthetic and religious contemplation are the feelings of wonder, admiration, joy, and enthusiasm experienced by those who gaze attentively and at length at a work of art or a natural landscape (見景生情). This rapture or transport may derive not only from the concentration on artistic works or natural scenes, but also from religious contemplative emotions. In fact, religious feelings are among the most common emotions, because they cope with several spiritual needs, such for justice, transcendence, and the social, ritualistic, consolatory, and aesthetical functions of

[13] Lewiss and Saarni (1985).

[14] For a general survey see Konzelmann Ziv et al. (2011).

the two. Changes in aesthetic criteria often reflect social and mentality changes as is evident by the rise of the cult of *qing* and the simultaneous development of the School of the Mind-Heart—which has been illustrated by the contributions of the first part of the volume. Moreover, there is no doubt that we need to take into consideration that the sense of ritual in Chinese culture transcends the Western distinction between inner and outer forum, subjective and objective, and that it influences many emotions.

Other emotions are contrition and gratitude. Contrition suggests prolonged and insistent self-reproach and mental anguish for past wrongs. Gratitude is the feeling of indebtedness toward others, and may be even associated with religious feeling when it is directed towards spirits and gods. For instance Zhu Hong袾宏 (1535–1615) was fasting and abstained from sexual intercourse on the prescribed days, as well as offering incense and lantern oil to the temple.

In China, in addition to the capillary influence of Neo-Confucianism on the population in a process of more and more vast integration, it is worthy of noting the role of the so-called *Sanjiao* (Three Doctrines, namely Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism), which interested both the common people and the upper classes. Buddhism and Daoism experienced new developments in the Ming dynasty thanks to the work of Zhu Hong and some esoteric schools, while the syncretic tendencies inside and outside of Neo-Confucianism grew a great deal. A deep religious feeling accompanied the speculative and moral research, while a new interest for the individual emerged in the exegetical work started on the Classical texts, as well as in popular literature. In popular culture, syncretic movements spread everywhere, with a new religious ideal, imbued of daily and simple devotions, practised predominantly by women.

The unsophisticated and popular Confucianism, which incorporated Buddhist and Daoist religious elements in its morality books and fiction, is exemplary of these trends that are an ulterior example of the adaptability and vitality of Chinese civilisation. Furthermore, the progressive disaffection with orthodox Neo-Confucianism from the end of Ming dynasty was expressed in the intellectual field by the re-evaluation of Buddhist anti-institutional elements (under the influence of Wang Yangming's schools) or by the extension of philological studies,[15] and in the literary field by the deliberated parody of the historiographical tradition and the subversion of the conventional narrative sequence, up to the delegitimisation of the established moral system.[16] The extolling of "craziness", "foolishness", and the "unrestrained man", *kuangshi* 狂士, is one of the phenomena concerning the new intellectual trend and the cult of *qing*. *Kuangshi* could be a kind of role model for young people from low and high-ranking families who, dissatisfied with their lives, either disdained pursuing a career as a bureaucrat or who had already failed their exams.[17] Probably associated with Li Zhi's 李贄 notion of original genuine child-soul, *tongxin* 童心,[18]

[15] See the classic essay by Elman 1984.

[16] Hegel (1994).

[17] See my "Preface" (2008, pp. 1–29), where I discuss the new trend of the 'romanticisation' of obsessions, foolishness, and abnormal behaviours as an aesthetic sign of distinction from vulgar people. Cf. also Santangelo (2010, pp. 323–380), and the recent volume by Liu Mengxi 劉夢溪 (2012).

[18] Li Zhi, *Tongxin shuo* 童心说, in *Fenshu*, pp. 97–99.

was Feng Menglong's concept of "youthful fancy" (童痴). He too regarded himself as an "odd person" 畸人.[19] We can say that the revival of 'foolishness', 'outrageousness', 'unrestrainedness' (*chi* 痴, *kuang* 狂 and *pi* 癖, *dai* 呆, *chun* 蠢, *yu* 愚) with both the metaphorical meaning of 'lack or retardation of mental brightness and understanding', and the notion of 'lack of judgment and wisdom' in the sense of abnormal evaluation and madness, gained a certain success as new models of personality in intellectual circles.[20] Such terms—well known in the Daoist and Buddhist traditions—were especially promoted by some scholars of the Gong'an movement. If from the subjective point of view they represented a way to express a new concept of intellectual élite, their ideological and social meaning cannot be underestimated. In fact, the concept of "crazy and foolish" was contrasting the dominant ideas and mocking traditional values by extolling improper behaviours, such as disregarding social rules and conventions, giving priority to an aesthetic life and to love affairs.[21] In the present volume this concept is well presented by Ōki Yasushi who offers a vivid description of the image of Feng Menglong by his contemporaries as an unrestrained man. Feng Menglong's life is truly representative of the free intellectual of the late-Ming dynasty, and we can notice how this "romanticisation" corresponded to a certain atmosphere linked with the cult of *qing*.

Feng Menglong admired the abovementioned Li Zhi, and made his thoughts guiding principles of his life, and, just to mention a significant case, we can see the new anthropological model elaborated in the crossroad between the philosophical trend of the School of the Mind and the literary current of the *Gong'an pai*. Li Zhi's (Zhuowu 卓吾, 1527–1602) thought is emblematic of this change both in the perception of individuality and society. We can sum up some important elements:

1. Li Zhi's discourse begins with a demolition of the bases of traditional morality: men do not need of benevolence, but should assert their real nature, which is the pursuit of a vital space. The traditional morality that does not take account of these realities is destined to become only the justification and legitimisation of what in principle should be terminated, the source of hypocrisy: everybody openly speaks of the knowledge of Dao, goodness, benevolence, but underneath is in fact pursuing career and wealth (陽為道學, 陰為富貴).[22] Is it not a coincidence that Li Zhi choose the term *tongxin*, rather than the most widely used, the Mencian "innocent heart of the child" (赤子之心). In fact, the true selfishness is being cloaked in moral superiority, acting on the authority of the

[19] See here Ōki Yasushi's essay.

[20] "Unrestrained men do not observe the existing rules and do not follow the old examples, and their knowledge is high, like a phoenix flying far in the sky, without rival […] Only those unrestrained can be enlightened" 狂者不蹈故襲, 不踐往跡, 見識高矣, 所謂鳳凰翔於千仞之上, 誰能當之? 未有非狂狷而能闻道者也 (Fenshu, Yu Geng sikou gaobie 與耿司寇告別, Vol. 1, p. 27).

[21] See Santangelo (2008, pp. 1–29), Santangelo (2006, pp. 323–380), and Ōki Yasushi's essay in the present volume.

[22] *Xu Fenshu*, *Sanjiao gui ru shuo* 三教歸儒說, Vol. 2, p. 76.

"common good", administering ethical guidance that seeks to impose rules and sacrifices to the rest of humanity. From here comes Li Zhi's anti-moralism, which does not condemn Confucian ethics or the Buddhist doctrine in themselves, but only their ignorance of man's essence. Personal identity is no longer related to the "moral self", but to a natural self, free from ideological incrustations. Passions and desires that every man of the road experiences in his life of every day are then identified with the true rites, and the true morality. This concept of universality and respectability of the desires felt by everybody constitutes the core of a form of "individualism", or "personalism", that identifies the basis of the general (*gong*) in the particular (*si*).

2. By identifying the Dao with the daily demands of the human being, Li Zhi first of all wanted to exclude that a moral system could be considered superior to man and his needs and desires (人即道也 道即人也 人外無道 道外亦無人). Man could never be sacrificed in the name of an idea. Going on with his argument, he even vaguely advocates a new form of government, in which men are autonomously governed according to their own specific dispositions (*huo* 貨),[23] and people are not tyrannised by the sovereign. Li Zhi proposes that each man rule himself autonomously (以人治人,以人本自治), no longer bound to the prohibitions of the authorities (人能自治,不待禁而止之也).[24] The Dao (i. e., the truth, and the moral system) is just the way, but there is not one way, the ways are many (夫道者,路也, 不止一途). [25]
3. Li Zhi's concept of human nature is based on his idea of the child-mind, *tongxin* 童心. The essential nature of human nature, the original genuine mind, *zhenxin* 真心, the child-mind, is neither good nor bad, and it corresponds to the individual's desires: appetite for food, attraction for beauty, shelter from the cold, desire for elegance, quest for comfort, the fulfilment of one's ambitions; "the search for profit and the evasion of damage correspond to the common feelings of human beings" 趨利避害, 人人同心.[26] This leads him to the paradoxical exaltation of "selfishness", which was not a purely ethical or cynical discourse by him, but was the premise for a radical transformation in the perception of the individual and society.
4. Li Zhi not only recognised that the reviled desires were positive in natu-re, but he set out to praise 'selfishness' as the spring of action and social welfare:

> The human mind is selfishness: without selfishness, there is no mind. He who works on the land must have an interest in the harvest so that he works diligently; he or she who works at home must have an interest in accumulating wealth in order to shrewdly manage household affairs; the student must have an interest in passing exams in order to study well. Likewise, if a functionary was not interested in receiving his pay, he would not have sought the job. 夫私者, 人之心也　人必有私, 而後其心乃見; 若無私, 則無心矣。如服田者私有秋之

[23] *Chu Tan Ji* 初潭集, *Shiyou 10* 師友十 1974, Vol. 20, p. 358.

[24] *Ming Deng Dao Gu Lu* 明燈道古錄, *xia*, in *Li Wenlingji* 李温陵集, 1998, Vol. 19, p. 575.

[25] *Fenshu* 焚書, *Lunzheng* 論政篇, Vol. 3, p. 87.

[26] *Fenshu*, Da Deng Mingfu 答鄧明府 Vol. 1, p. 41.

藷，而後治田必力；居家者私積倉之藷，而後治家必力；為學者私進取之藷，而後舉業之治也必力　故官人不私以祿，則雖召之必不來矣 [　].[27]

5 The Confucian tradition does not lack concrete recognition of the importance of the primary needs of individuals (examples range from the "Analects" to Zhu Xi),[28] but the scope was undoubtedly delimited to the quantified need, and theoretically it was clear that food and procreation were legitimate needs, based on social requirements, while exceeding them was the egoistic search for profit, lust, and greed (*si* 私, *li* 利, *tan*貪) of immoral people.[29] Exemplary is the distinction between gluttony and hunger by Zhu Xi.[30] Needs are different from desires—whose essence do not consist of their realisation or their full satisfaction, but of their perpetual reproduction. Li Zhi extends He Xinyin's discourse on desires, and does not stop short at recognising the basic vital needs. He extends this category to desires which are positive in nature and goes on to praise "selfishness" as the starting point of any social process by developing the arguments of the previous passage:

> The wise have taught that "one succeeds by not being troubled [over-doing]" (*wuwei er cheng zhe* 無為而成者). But now the expression "not being troubled" has come to mean "absence of mind-heart" (*wuxin* 無心) […]. If he does not use his mind-heart, the peasant leaves the field untilled, the craftsman works shoddily, and the scholar is not up to his job. How can something be obtained without the use of the mind? Commentators assure us that the so-called "absence of mind" is not a real lack of mind, but only an absence of selfish feelings (*wu sixin* 無私心). Yet the mind of man is characterised by

[27] *Cf. Cangshu* 藏書, Deye ruchen houlun 德業儒臣後論, Vol. 32, p. 544. Li Zhi's praise of "selfishness"—considered one of the basic differences—recalls Bernard de Mandeville's praise of private vices in his the paradoxical Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Public Benefits, a masterpiece on human nature and psychology and social science, published at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

[28] See *Lunyu*, 12, 7: "When Zigong asked him about government, the Master answe-red: 'The government's requirements are sufficiency of food, military sufficiency, and the consensus of the people for the king'. Zigong said: 'If it were not possible to satisfy all three requirements, which one should be renounced?'. The Master answered: 'Military sufficiency'." Confucius answered the next question about which of the remaining two alternatives was more important by saying that it was better to renounce food, because since ancient times, death has always been the fate of all men, but if the people do not trust the king, the state will not hold. 子貢問政。子曰：「足食。足兵。民信之矣。」子貢曰：「必不得已而去，於斯三者何先？」曰：「去兵。」子貢曰：「必不得已而去，於斯二者何先？」曰：「去食。自古皆有死，民無信不立。」Other important examples in ancient times are the famous statement by Gaozi (食色性也) and a passage in *Liji* 禮記 (飲食男女，人之大欲存焉). Zhu Xi, in his notes on the Four Books, does not ignore the importance of the people's primary needs. This tradition is still recalled at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, when Wang Wei 王禕 says: If a king wishes that *the cosmic energy in this world is in harmony, he must comply with the nature of the masses*… (See *Zhici* 巵辭, 4a).

[29] Compare the three corresponding appetites of drinking, loving, and eating (*potoi, aphrodisia, edodai*) mentioned in Plato (Laws, III, VI, IX), in Aristotle ("*Nicomachean Ethics*", III, VII) and in Xenophon ("Memorabilia", I), with the relative recommendations to avoid excess. Throughout the history of European thinking it is possible to perceive a clash between "real" and "false" needs, "good" needs and "bad" ones, and between "needs" and "desires". Cf. Heller (1985, pp. 314–17). See also Santangelo (1992), last part.

[30] Zhu Xi's famous sentence distinguishes between eating for living (*need*) and gluttony (*desire*): 飲食者，天理也；要求美味，人欲也。」 (*Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類, Vol. 1, p. 224).

> "selfishness".[31][…] Desire for goods, for sexual satisfaction, for education, for a personal career, for the amassing of wealth; the desire to buy land or houses for one's descendants; the quest for geomantic things to bring good luck to one's children—all of these things are productive and keep life going in this world, all of these things are loved and practised by the people, all of these things are known and openly discussed […][32] The concrete principles of human relations consist of clothing and food. Without these items there would be no relationships […] Scholars should recognise the true essence that lies behind these relationships, and stop quibbling over them […][33]

he priority of each man's vital needs and desires is based on acknowledging the fundamental importance of personal stimulus in every activity.[34] This attitude can be considered the beginning of the transition from the system of 'moral subject of roles'—the orthodox Confucian definition of the individual in the society—to the system of an 'individual subject of desires'. When Li Zhi speaks of profit, interest, self-advantage, clothes, sexual activity, and career, his scope is beyond the classical natural needs for living and procreation inscribed in society, and it concerns the projections, wishes, and desires everybody nurtures, from the peasant to the scholar. In an open and developed society, what is individually ("selfishly") yearned for is understood as a "necessity". The constant reference to man's fundamental appetites goes beyond the mere reference to concepts already known in antiquity, as it attributes an important dialectical function within social relations to the constitutive nature of desires. This new concept of self and of the individual is not influenced by Western thought, and is the extreme process in which traditional elements in Chinese thought, such as the Daoist care for the body—which is considered part of the cosmos—the Buddhist freedom from conventions and rules, and the syncretism of non-orthodox elements concerning the innateness of emotions and desires were combined. There are other various elements that concur in this trend, such as the rehabilitation of passions and desires, the reversal of values (*qi* versus *li*, desire versus heavenly principles), the critical reflection on the five relations, especially between ruler and subject, male and female, and friend and friend, and finally Lu Ji's 陸楫 (1515–1552) discourse on luxury.[35] No less important are the hints we can find in literary works, not only concerning the concepts of love, but on the expansion of desires, which was the opposite of their containment, repression, and restriction preached by the orthodox moralism.

[31] Cf. *Cangshu*, Deye ruchen houlun 德也儒臣後論, Vol. 32, p. 544 (聖人之學，無為而成者也. 今之言無為者，不過曰無心 焉耳。。。農無心，則田必蕪；工無心，則器必窳；學者無心，則業必廢。無心安可得也。解者又曰所謂無心 者，無私心耳。非真無心也。)

[32] Cf. *Fenshu* 焚書, Shuda 書答, Da Deng Mingfu 答鄧明府, Vol. 1, p. 40 "如好貨，如好色，如勤學， 如進取， 如多積金寶， 如多買田宅為子孫謀， 博求風水為子孫福蔭，凡世間一切治生產業等事，皆其所共好而共習，共知而共言者，是真邇言也。"

[33] Cf. *Fenshu*, Shuda, Da Deng Shiyang 答鄧石陽, Vol. 1, p. 4: "穿衣吃飯，即人倫物理。除卻穿衣吃飯， 無倫物矣。。。學者只宜於倫物上識真空，不當於倫物上辨倫物。".

[34] Cf. the conclusions in Santangelo (2009).

[35] Lu Ji, *Jianjiatang zazhu zhaichao* 蒹葭堂雜著摘抄, pp. 3–4, cit in Xu Hong 徐泓, (1986, p. 103).

We can compare this position with the ambiguous attitudes of some literary works that also focus on desires and passions. In this volume a chapter is dedicated to the already mentioned drama, "The Peony Pavilion", which sings the triumph of love. Contrary to the usual moralist's admonition that reminds of the ineluctability of retribution for any correct or incorrect behaviour, it offers the reader or the spectator a "reassuring" explanation of what could appear as absurd; its plot presents a love story with a happy ending, where the heroism of passions is rewarded with a miraculous resurrection. The lyricism and fascination of the work are evident, on one side, in Liniang's crescendo of passion—a purely subjective obsession—, and, on the other, in its contrasts and contradictions. Death is not conceived as an alien and arbitrary phenomenon, or as a punishment for sin and guilt: it becomes a fleeting liberation to a dimension without time, liberation for the young woman who in this way escapes the rigid regulations of social life. Death is like a dream, and a dream is like death. They are the only places where sexual attraction and passion can have an outlet without yielding to moral and social inhibitions. Death and resurrection mean the supreme sacrifice that love requires in order to overcome current limitations and moralistic rigorism, and at the same time love's almost ultramundane superiority. After her miraculous resurrection, however, the main female character, Du Liniang, firmly denies her fiancé's propositions, refusing any relationship with him before marriage, according to proper customs: "Sir,—she states—now it is not like before. During the previous nights, I was only a ghost, but today I am a living person. A ghost may be deluded by passions, but a person must observe the rites."[36] Here the author seems to oppose the inconsistency of passions to the concreteness of the regulations of social behaviour: Liniang can pass from the "world of freedom", where life identifies itself with love, to the "world of necessity", where social roles reign and the Confucian concept of life and duty does not allow any aberration. However the unexpected metamorphosis of the protagonist's character—the contrast between the passionate lover she had been and the self-possessed and severe lady she becomes after regaining life—is balanced by the triumph of love in society. If the first part of the play responds to the author's revolutionary quest on the authenticity and supremacy of true passion, Liniang's "mission" does not end with the realisation of her dream. Her goal is to make this passion concrete on earth, and therefore she starts to make sure that her dream-partner is not married.[37] Thus, from scene 36 and on, the main question concerns the *social recognition* of the relationship, instead of the personal problem of individual sentiments and life and death. Then she struggles in order to have a marriage according to all the necessary rites, with the parents' assent and go-between's participation. The task, of course, is not easy, because though her mother is satisfied with her lover Liu Mengmei, her father's mind set is too permeated by orthodox morality to trust him and acknowledge human emotions. Only the *deus ex machina* of an imperial edict that recognises Liniang's reasons and approves the marriage is able to solve the problem. In fact, her final reconciliation with social norms does

[36] Cf. *Tang Xianzu ji*, *Mudan ting*, (1973, Vol. 3, p. 36). Cf. translations by Birch (1980, pp. 206–207) and by Hsia in de Bary (Ed.) (1970, p. 278).

[37] *Tang Xianzu ji and Mudanting* (Vol. 32, 1957), Birch, Trans., (1980, pp. 183–184).

neither imply a compromise nor a submission, but a change of attitude: from passion to institution.[38] Thus, Liniang combines two irreconcilable scales of values through her double identity as a dreamer and an awakened dreamer.

Tang Xianzu, in another drama, "Life Inside a Pillow" (*Handan ji* 邯鄲記) deals with human dissatisfaction and ambition. The plot derives from a Tang short story where the protagonist, Lu Sheng 盧生, replies to the Daoist Lü Dongbin 吕洞賓, who inquires about the reasons of his dissatisfaction:

> Born into this world, a scholar ought to achieve great deeds and establish his fame. He should serve as a general when on the frontier and as a prime minister when at court. He should preside over sumptuous banquets and order the orchestra to play what he likes. He should make his clan prosper and his own family grow rich, and then he could say that he has fulfilled his heart's desire. I was once ambitious in my studies and applied myself in all the arts, and I thought that rank and title were mine for the taking. But now in the prime of my life I still have to till my own field. What do you call this if not failure?[39]

At this point the monk offers a pillow to Lu Sheng so that he can put it under his head, and orders him to sleep. In the dream, he experiments all sorts of vicissitudes, from high success to the misfortunes of a high-rank official. Here ambition rather than love is satisfied, and different sides of success are experimented, but the dream seems to end with the conclusion of passions or desires. Then, when he awakes, he does not feel any ambition nor desire to fight, though his conversion might be understood as another dream, the illusion of immortality.[40] Aware that glory, as well as suffering, cannot have but a short life, although they appear at the moment eternal and unfailing, writers resort to the dream as the most significant metaphor to describe such an experience. We find a similar case in Ling Mengchu's 凌濛初 love story between a sea goddess and the merchant Cheng Zai 程宰. Also here the happy times cannot go on indefinitely: it is not the habit of everyday life that consumes the relationship, and neither do the contradictions that emerge between them weaken the love of the couple "whose bond remains as strong as the first day".[41] Rather it is the call of the other reality—the existence of his family awaiting for him in the South—to force the merchant to interrupt this dreaming experience.[42]

Like Lu Sheng is satisfied with his experience, analogously, after her resurrection, Du Liniang accepts the social responsibilities related to her status, and Cheng Zai, the merchant, reconsiders his family duties and ends his love story with the goddess.[43] The two are the tragic aspects emerging from these issues according our modern perspective: (1) the logic of passions and the logic of society

[38] Cf. Cheng (1980, pp. 284–294).

[39] *"The World inside the Pillow", Zhenzhong ji* 枕中記, quoted and translated by Hsia (2004*, pp. 118–119), originally in de Bary, (Ed.) (*1970*, p. 266).*

[40] Cf. Li (1993, pp. 70–75).

[41] Ling Mengchu, *Erke pai'an jingqi* 二刻拍案驚奇, [1632–1633], 1985. Vol. 37, pp. 759–776.

[42] *Ibidem* (Vol. 37, pp. 772–776).

[43] *Ibidem* (Vol. 37, p. 776).

are basically incompatible, since the second is grounded on stable and lasting relationships, while the first is by nature neither stable nor lasting; (2) passion itself contains a basic and contradictory logic which brings its failure before society and institutions. In fact, though passion tends to be total and absolute, to the point of compromising the personal interests and even life of the human being who suffers from it, it is however unstable and transitory. Acting on this double contradiction, many Chinese authors of the Ming-Qing period created an outlet for emotions and desires, keeping in mind, nonetheless, of the "ultimate reality" of social and interpersonal relations. But one should wonder whether the two such aspects were felt as actually tragic for the authors and their readers. Thus the fugacity is not only accepted, moreover its creative features rather than the disruptive ones are emphasised. As I have noticed during a previous study, Lu Sheng, as well as other protagonists of Chinese fiction and drama, are far away from Faust's or Don Juan's Titanism.[44] These two heroes represent, in Western culture, the archetype of man's unlimited and everlasting dissatisfaction and rebellion against universal order, which the concept of sin makes even more tragic. Their search for the absolute in evil reaches the peak of tragedy where the sense of absurd is mixed with the consciousness of transgression, and unhappiness with the extreme challenge. Their immortality therefore stands only in the immoderate range of their desires and in the challenge of their rebellion. It would be absurd to conceive them as either repented or converted; as a matter of fact the nineteenth century versions which modify the story of Don Juan in a way that that at the end he is converted to a pious life[45] or turns out to be a good head of family[46] are considered as impious parodies which distort the nature of the legend. Chinese fiction and drama, on the other hand, despite the roles played by love, anger, and other passions—examples being Feng Menglong's stories or Tang Xianzu's dramas—do not provide consistent instances of a clear or strong rebellion against the ruling moral order.[47] Although Lu Sheng is unsatisfied and ambitious—as C.T. Hsia points out—he does not suffer from anything which could resemble romantic nihilism, and on two occasions he declares he is satisfied with life: when, after reaching the peak of success, he feels that there is nothing more to long for, and when, after waking up, he realises that existence is just a mere illusion.[48] The brevity and vanity of desires is a fundamental topic of these plays and directly involve the relationship that plays between dreams and emotions.[49]

There are examples of custom change during this period in China. For instance, mocking of the usual moralist's admonitions against excess and lust can be found in

[44] Santangelo (1997, pp. 156–157).

[45] See the story by Prosper Mérimée "Les âmes du Purgatoire" (The Souls of Purgatory, 1834) or José Zorrilla y Moral's drama Don Juan Tenorio (1844, repr. 1957).

[46] It is a theatrical project by Charles Baudelaire, *La fin de Don Juan*, of 1893. On the evolution of the myth, see Macchia, 1966.

[47] See the excellent analysis in Hsia (1968, pp. 299–321), and in de Bary (Ed.) (1970, pp. 249–290). Li Wai-yee (1993, pp. 68–69), referring to the Buddhist paradox of conjoining compassion with emptiness, considers the persistence of passions and illusions in the Story of Nanke (*Nanke ji* 南柯記) as instrumental to the final enlightenment.

[48] Cf. Hsia (1970), in de Bary, (Ed.), pp. 266–270.

[49] Cf. Santangelo (1997, pp. 156–157).

the collection of popular songs edited and re-elaborated by Feng Menglong. In the song "The lustful girl" we can read[50]:

尼屄姐兒	The Lustful Girl
尼屄匠人做子尼屄床,	A lustful craftsman made lustful beds
尼屄姐兒嫁子尼屄郎,[a]	A lustful girl married a lustful man
尼折子床傍打地鋪,	Making lustful love, they broke the bed and so slept on the floor
尼穿子地皮見閻王。[b]	And they dug a lustful hole in the ground, until they met Yama

[a] *Ze* 尼 is a term used as a vulgar expression, as already noted, for "sexual intercourse". *Zebi* 尼屄 is rendered by Ōki (2003, pp. 563–564) as *sukebei* 助平, "obscene", "lustful"

[b] *Jian Yanwang* 見閻王 lit.: "to see or meet Yama" is a euphemism for "to die". Here however it can be rendered as "to make love up until death"

The morality behind these songs can be considered similar to that of the characters in the late-Ming erotic novel *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅: "*Carpe diem*" 人生在世, 且風流了一日是一日! (Seize the day and enjoy life!).[51] The protagonist Ximen Qing, especially, permits a comparison with the two Western heroes Faust and Don Juan, which in this volume have been discussed as expression of modernity in the West in the essay by Roberto Gigliucci. In this article the specific elements of the evolution of European culture between the Baroque and Enlightement periods have been evidenced. Some analogies however can be drafted for late-Ming China. *Jin Ping Mei* is the novel which represents the overflow of desires, and presents the dissolution of the Confucian principles governing human relations. Cases of characters being "infatuated" with negative values, such as the quest for pleasure and money, correspond to the cardinal sins of *se* 色 and *cai* 財, which are the main purpose of their lives: the "use of money for lust", as well as the "use of love for getting money" (借財求色, 借色求財); human beings are described in their attempt to satisfy their wishes like cats feasting their eyes on a fishy dish (就是貓兒見了魚鮮飯).[52] But love and sex could be used instrumentally not only for getting money, as in the cases of Wang Liuer 王六兒 and Song Huilian 宋惠蓮, but also for other purposes within the network of desires: for pleasure and for power, as Golden Lotus (Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮) did, and for the only legitimate aim, offspring, as Yueniang 月娘. Lust (*yin* 淫) is the peculiar obsession of Ximen Qing and Golden Lotus, while the other characters are possessed now by ambition, now by greed, and now by lust, in a society dominated by disorder (*luan* 亂).[53] Thus, lust becomes one of the main aspirations of the characters that are individualistic by definition, unbound by family

[50] Song (Vol. 5, p. 117). See Ōki and Santangelo (2011, p. 204).

[51] See *Jin Ping Mei* (Vol. 85, pp. 1217–1218).

[52] *Jin Ping Mei* (Vol. 57, p. 749), quoted by Plaks (1987, p. 100).

[53] See Plaks (1987, pp. 156–174).

ethics and dedicated solely to their own desires.[54] Despite the different cultural references, the figure of the unrepentant seducer does however exist in Chinese literature, and various terms are used to describe him—"the love-bee", *langfeng* 浪蜂, is one example. But it is *qingbo* 輕薄 the term which is most used in these cases[55]: its literal meaning is "frivolousness" and "irresponsibility", and fundamentally it signifies ungodliness and irreverence towards others and the natural order of things, due partly to reckless passions and emotional tendencies. Condemned in morality books (*shanshu* 善書) as the opposite of honesty, prudence, and modesty (*dunhou* 敦厚, *shenzhong* 慎重, *qianxu* 謙虛), *qingbo* implies pride, contempt for others, and 'gut reaction'; it is comparable in seriousness to the major crimes of which it is often the underlying cause, such as murder or adultery.[56] The figure of Ximen Qing belongs to this category. Though he is neither rough nor violent, he is possessed by the passions of lust, greed, and ambition, which dominate his affective world. The novelty of this figure and the other characters in *Jin Ping Mei* is to be found in their relative freedom from family and social ties. Notwithstanding the numerous banquets and meetings, a sense of loneliness pervades the novel, which is symbolised by the cold emptiness of the brittle moonlight.[57] At the same time, as Tian Xiaofei has noticed, "*Jinpingmei* is certainly a very sensual novel in the sense that it attends to every minute detail of physical reality; and yet, the sensual world of *Jinpingmei* is extremely *fragile, darkened by the shadow of death from beginning to end*."[58] In this allegory of the inversion of self-cultivation",[59] where values are set upside down, Ximen Qing, like Don Juan, seeks women to gratify his orgiastic passion: it cannot be denied that there is a certain desperate Dionysian intoxication in his approach, in his uncertainty of success, and in his encounter with the unknown. Like the sensual seducer described by Kierkegaard, he is following his primordial instincts, seeking instant pleasure through the possession of the object of his desire, in a continual and insatiable thirst for new adventures. In Don Juan, seduction is generally considered narcissistic and alienating: narcissistic because he seeks gratification, above all, in the reflection of his own image in the woman being seduced, or in the restoration of his own worth, and alienating because he resorts to illusions that are consistently shattered (the promise of marriage). In Ximen Qing's case it is less alienating inasmuch as his line

[54] Cf. Kawashima (1986, pp. 591–608).

[55] The term *qingbo* [literally "haughtiness and levity"] is opposed to *zhenqing* 真情. *Qingbo* is an extremely important concept in the world of traditional Chinese emotions, because it has at least four different aspects: excess, pride, love-lust, and despair. While it is currently used to denote "contempt" in Ming and Qing prose, it mainly meant a "philanderer's frivolous behaviour". In modern terms we would translate it as "love-caprice", or "love-vanity". It expresses irreverence and even contempt towards one's neighbour and rebellion against the natural order, which can also be the result of unbridled passion and emotional tendencies. On the concept of *qingbo* cf. Yoichi (1979, pp. 842–843).

[56] It also manifests itself in "railing against heaven and earth" (*yuantian youdi* 怨天尤地, *yuantian nudi* 怨天怒地). These morality books severely condemn both adultery (the seduction of another man's wife or even of a young woman against her parents' wishes) and rebellion against the universe.

[57] See Plaks (1987, p. 148).

[58] Tian (2002, p. 356). Italics are mine.

[59] See Plaks (1987, pp. 56–180).

of talk is less ambiguous and more aggregative; nor does it appear narcissistic, unless we take it as a search for gratification through acknowledgement of his supremacy. In this context we note another difference between Ximen and his Western counterpart. It will be remembered that one of the characteristics of Don Juan's behaviour was abandoning his "prey" as soon she had been won and seduced, propelled by an irresistible urge to escape from the liaison that was just begun. The Chinese Don Juan has no need to leave the new relationship because the institutional setting in which he operates allows him to add this to previous affairs through marriage. He merely adds the most recent conquest as another attachment to his domestic domain. All he has to do is enlarge his house, ordering more rooms to be built for his new concubines, or else put up new external pavilions for his lovers—this is no problem for him thanks to the flourishing economic conditions produced by his commercial activities.[60]

Moreover, some of his transgressions are extremely serious in Chinese culture and condemn him to the role of anti-hero in the country's literature, whilst undoubtedly adding even more excitement to his adventures. First there is the excessive way in which Ximen Qing indulges his lust, an excess that ultimately leads to his death; then, added to his unlawful adultery and love affairs is his violation of social order with incestuous liaisons, and his mockery of supernatural powers. Such lack of respect puts this character on a similar level to Don Juan with his unbridled profligacy, his lack of moral scruples in the pursuit of his goals, and his profanation of the sacred and mockery of the supernatural world. All things considered Ximen, like Don Juan and Casanova, belongs to a world on the threshhold of modernity. Certainly his behaviour is compulsive, and appears to fall within the framework of the so-called Casanova complex, with the considerable waste of energy and risks to his image, business, and health.[61] As Roberto Gigliucci notices, both Faust and Don Juan are heroes emblematic not only of lust, but also of will of power, revolt against God and authority. Analogously, Ximen shows that his pleasure is mixed with the satisfaction of dominance and transgression, and this seems to happen any time he has an affair with another man's wife. This, for instance, is the case of Ruyi'er 如意兒. In chapter 78, the dialogue between them during their lovemaking clearly confirms the importance of exercising his total power over the woman. After rhetorically asking her to whom she belonged, her answer that she now belonged to him brings the latter to affirm in delight: "You say that you are the wife of Xiong Wang, but now you belong to your dearest man" (你說是熊旺的老婆,今日屬了我的親達達了), and soon she reconfirms that she has been once wife of Xiong Wang, but that now she belonged to him. The gusto with which he pursues the affair seems to be strengthened by the perception of his dominance over the wife of another man. Sexual transgression and dominance are the drives of Ximen's personality.[62] Contrary to what we are told by the Danish

[60] Besides his legitimate wife Wu Yueniang 吳月娘, his concubines were Li Jiao'er 李嬌兒, Sun Xue'e 孫雪娥, Meng Yulou 孟玉樓, Pan Jinlian 潘金蓮, and Li Ping'er 李瓶兒. Moreover, many other women are object of Ximen's attention: maids, prostitutes, the wives of his servants, and even the wives of his friends.

[61] Cf. Tranchtenberg (1988).

[62] Cf. Huang (2001, p. 106).

thinker, however, the complexity of Don Juan's relationships is not trivialised by the undeniable superficiality to which they are condemned. At least in the case of Ximen Qing, because each character possesses something unique, each affair is in any case a meeting of two different personalities with their separate histories, cultures, and experiences: even if Ximen is a great seducer always in search for new adventures, the personality of each of his wives or lovers, and the respective relationships are all different fron each other; all of these characters express desire, but in different ways according to differences in social condition, and other personal attributes. To speak of a lack of differentiation which "puts everything in the same pigeonhole" would be misrepresentation. It would be proper to borrow the elderly Karamazov's words: "According to my rule, you can find in every woman something—damn it—something extraordinarily interesting, something you won't find in any other woman. Only you must know how to find it—that's the point! That requires talent!…"[63] At least for Ximen Qing, seduction is not just simulation, not simply an exercise in duplicity, a mere essay in dialectic technique and psychology, nor is it just an expertise in playing a role convincingly. It is first and foremost understanding another's psyche and being able to change and adapt to it; although, the naturalness with which the seducer moves is not divorced from the control of his emotive independence, he must bare his soul to the other party, and above all he must be convinced of the worth of the experience, above and beyond the risks which any intimacy involves. Ximen Qing sincerely despairs for Ping'er's illness and consciously faces his own damnation in seeking pleasure with Golden Lotus. Another example of losing one's self-control (*bu neng jinzhi* 不能禁止) is described, in a lively manner, when Ximen Qing is overwhelmed by the infatuation for a young lady: his soul is almost dispersed (*hunfei tianwai posang jiuxiao* 魂飛天外, 魄喪九霄), his heart is beating fast and his eyes are wandering (*xintiao mudang* 心搖目蕩).[64] Like Don Juan, he is not able to control his own behaviour in his adventures, and cannot escape from the ultimate consequences, the encounter with Death.[65] On the other hand, dubious is the amount of Faustian or Dionysian elements in the self-destructive passions of *Jin Ping Mei*. In Chinese culture excess is usually not accepted, neither in moral discourse nor in aesthetic perception—with the exception of a few cases of praised "obsessions".[66] At times, as in many erotic tales, the search for pleasure is treated as independent, free of any moral judgement, but the horror of excess and reckless living basically remains alive. Ximen's tragic death is the effect of retribution for his dissipated behaviour, but this happens at a human level, not with a supernatural visit of the "*convidado de piedra*". This is the fate reserved to Ximen Qing in the *Jin Ping Mei*, in accordance with another proverb: "The gate which brought me to life is [also] the gate which kills me".[67] Moreover, I mentioned that Ximen Qing does not escape from the relationship he

[63] Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1958, p. 159).

[64] *Jin Ping Mei*, (Vol. 78, p. 1132).

[65] Santangelo (1996, pp. 120–184).

[66] See Santangelo (2010), Chap. 4, pp. 252, 237, 332, 337, 352–59, 420.

[67] 人都在這裡頭生, 在這裡頭死。This proverb, which refers to the vagina, is based on the writings of the "strategic" current of thought. Cf. *Gujin xiaoshuo* (1991 Vol. 13, p. 532).

has started, while Don Juan leaves his prey as soon as he has conquered her. Ximen does not need to abandon his new relationship after he is able to add it to his net. However, Ximen Qing, the great seducer, is only partially comparable to Don Juan, so it is necessary to clarify some fundamental differences.

The Western myth of Don Juan certainly has no equivalent in China, which does not have in its cultural background the repulsion-attraction tension of the European demoniac and Dionysian traditions. Kierkegaard very clearly identifyed the indissoluble connection between this myth and Christianity. Giugliucci has stressed that Don Juan's modernity embodies the spirit of doubt, of the desire of sensual delight and knowledge, but with an insatiable tension towards something of sparkling and ephemeral, striving toward the infinite far from heaven, far from the transcendent, far from God. His lack of belief is a "challenge to Heaven". Don Juan, with his ambiguous position as a negative hero and with a certain epic aura, has entered collective Western fiction as a projection of desire and as the reckless, libertarian personification of a petty low-class *Burlador*, a vainglorious and misogynist collector, and seeker of an impossible immortality. Born with the insatiable need to violate the respectability of honour, in his complexity and polymorphism he has also become the vindication of emotivity thanks to a romantic reinterpretation, as well as the rebellion of reason against superstitions, and the extreme usage of rational schemes to control emotions. No Chinese literary character who has performed a similar function has had the same good fortune. No personal, unique God was to be challenged in China. Lacking are also the problems raised by the European libertines concerning the polymorphic nature of man, the multiple and inconstant (and necessarily disobedient) ego—a theme which is impendent in Yuan Mei's 袁枚 (1716–1798) *Zibuyu* 子不語.[68] *Jin Ping Mei* however is not just a simple story of debauchery and retribution, as well as Ximen Qing is no less of a dramatic hero than Don Juan, with his search for erotic pleasure and his power in an eternal dimention, which is finally frustrated by the reality of the changing seasons and times, in a cycle of birth, growth, decline, and death. Before he can realise that the flowers of his gardern will wither, his desires kill him. The novel raises the existential problems of the endless desires, and of the impossibility of prolonging infinitely a moment of happiness: "The vital spirit of the man—as noted in the text—is limited, while the sexual desire is unlimited".[69] Emblematic of the utopia of enjoying unlimited sensual pleasures is the garden of Ximen Qing, which is described as the garden of the "perpetual spring", where the flowers never withered.[70]

Speaking of seduction, we should also reflect on the main female character of the novel, Golden Lotus (Pan Jinlian), modelled on Pan, the consort of the Emperor of Qi, or Empress Wu.[71] Does she just belong to the predominantly misogynist tradition, which takes as its model the stereotype of the *femme fatale* who brings

[68] See my Introduction in Santangelo and Yan Beiwen (2013, pp. 1–180).

[69] *Jin Ping Mei* (Vol. 79, p. 1143).

[70] See for instance "enjoying the four seasons" 四時賞玩, "flowers do not wither in the four seasons, with a scenery of an eternal Spring during the periods of the year" 四時有不謝之花,八節有長春之景。 *Jin Ping Mei* (Vol. 19, p. 234).

[71] Cf. for example *Jin Ping Mei (*Vol. 33, p. 423, Vol. 72, p. 997).

disaster upon man and upon society?[72] Or the seductress figure of Golden Lotus is the expression of new times and sensibility? Take the relationship between Golden Lotus and Chen Jingji, or the two versions of the dramatic attempt to seduce one's brother-in-law Wu Song in "At the Water's Edge" (*Shui Hu Zhuan* 水滸傳) and *Jin Ping Mei* respectively. We do not know of course whether the tiger-hunting hero's life would have changed had he accepted the challenge of this *femme fatale* and fallen under her influence, but it is certain that Golden Lotus was well aware that she was risking her life in this attempt, and yet she was subject to the hunter's charm. In fact, as ominously foretold in the earlier novel that inspired *Jin Ping Mei*, "At the Water's Edge", she was to have her throat cut by her brother-in-law; this was his way of avenging his brother and at the same time eliminating—along with her—the desire she aroused in him.[73] I leave these questions open as they deserve a specific study and would lead us far from the present overview.

Faustian myth means that universe is endless, but after the death of God, why cannot man be unlimited as well? On the contrary, being man is being condemned, condemned to decadence and to death. Rebellion and the impossibility to become God is the dramatic dilemma of the Western thought that signs modernity. Ximen Qing and Golden Lotus are also rebels, but their scope is more practical and thus less radical. The demands of Chinese intellectuals seem less dramatic and ultimately more concretely based on social reality: the orthodox morality of the Neo-Confucian system seems no more a sufficient answer to them, and yet it is not completely rejected.

Keeping in mind what was said above, we may conclude that consideration for desires is the new trend which emerges in Chinese philosophical and literary fields. Li Zhi's ideas express the intellectual atmosphere of the most advanced areas of the empire, in search for a more personal and free morality. He can be considered as the forerunner of the concept of "subjective law" that would have been introduced into China in the second half of the 19th century through the neologism of *quanli* 權利 (power personal interest) to render the English term "right". Undoubtedly he is representative of a school of thought which developed in the late-Ming dynasty, shared not only among a few thinkers of the Taizhou school, but also among some important intellectual circles, including writers and dramatists. Literary works echo this trend at the crossroad of fictional narration and philosophical reflection on the centrality of self and desires, although they do not create a myth like Don Juan or Faust.[74] The exaltation of private interests and desires on the basis of individual expectations against the conformism of the principles is in fact an autochthonous precedent to the affirmation of these rights against any possible oppression by political or bureaucratic power. Are all these emerging elements symptoms of a dynamic change that—in Ng On-cho's terms—demonstrate its affinity with

[72] Lu Xun contrasted two stereotypes: the image of women in Chinese culture as a objects of seduction and disaster and ruin, and Don Quixote for the Spanish male's worship of women (Xun 1959, pp. 132–134).

[73] See the relationship between the killing of the tiger and the killing of the woman in the analysis by Ding (1991, pp. 89–121).

[74] In fact, an anti-hero is created by the novel *Hong lou meng*: Baoyu. For his unorthodox character traits, see Santangelo, 2010 and "Preface" (2008, pp. 1–29).

European early modernity with its significant break from the past tradition, or are they just buds and no blossoms, due to the lack of an interconnection with the political changes, unlike in Europe?

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