

**COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND POETRY EXCHANGE  
AMONG MING-LOYALISTS: YE SHAOYUAN'S (1589-1648) CASE**

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Scholars have observed that as a literary practice, poetry exchange (*changhe* 倡/唱和 or *chouchang* 酬唱) began with Tao Qian 陶潛 (Tao Yuanming 淵明; 365-427) at the turn of the fifth century in China.<sup>1</sup> Etymologically, however, poetry exchange can be traced back to the *Shijing* 詩經 (*The Book of Poetry*), supposedly edited by Confucius (551 BCE-479 BCE). The interchangeability of the two homophonic *chang* (meaning “initiate” and “recite [a poem]” respectively) in *changhe* suggests that both agency from the initiator of poetry exchange and a subsequent or consequent interrelationship between the initiator and his/her respondent(s) lies behind poetry composition. This interrelationship seems even more pronounced in the alternative term for poetry exchange, *chouchang*, where *chou* literally means “reciprocate.” It suggests that poetry exchange was much more than just a literary activity in imperial China. As I attempt to illustrate below, its social and political dimensions also deserve more of our attention and closer examination.

As an ever-present and prevalent practice among literati, the social elite of imperial China, poetry exchange had been criticized by literary critics in imperial China and had been largely condemned by Chinese scholars up until the late 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars consider it as exclusively trivial occasional writing; some take issue with the practice of rhyme matching, dismissing it as either constraining to the expression of genuine feelings or merely showing-off of prosodic techniques. However, a close look at the poetic exchanges that Ye Shaoyuan 葉紹袁 (1589-1648), a Ming loyalist from Wujiang 吳江 in Jiangnan 江南, engaged in shows that such poetic exchanges were significant to the identity (re)construction of literati, in particular to marginalized Ming-loyalist literati.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a history of the practice of poetry exchange in pre-modern China, see Zhao Yiwu 趙以武, *Changhe shi yanjiu* 唱和詩研究 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Gong Bendong 鞏本棟, “Guanyu changhe shici yanjiu de jige wenti” 關於唱和詩詞研究的幾個問題, *Jianghai xuekan* 江海學刊, No. 3, 2006, 161.

<sup>3</sup> Recent years have seen a flourish of publications by both historians and literary scholars on identity (re)construction during periods of transition. A good collection of articles focusing on the Ming-Qing transition is *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature* edited by Wilt Idema, Wai-ye Li, and Ellen Widmer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

In this paper I contend that poetry exchange in a time of political uncertainty and personal identity crisis helped create a subfield of literary production, which was significant both personally to Ye Shaoyuan and communally to the group of Ming loyalists with whom he interacted. By consolidating the bonds between all the participating Ming loyalists, poetry exchanges centered around Ye Shaoyuan helped the group transcend the traumatic Ming-Qing dynastic transition and survive the difficult days of identity crisis.

By focusing on poetry exchange as a cultural tool mediating “communal remembering,” I attempt to explore the interactions between the political and the cultural fields in Ye Shaoyuan’s times, which were manifested in the dialectics between historical contexts and cultural tools. I use the term “communal remembering” because in the context of imperial China, the function of “collective remembering” was different from what James Wertsch defines in a modern nation-state.<sup>4</sup> For the Chinese literati, it was a kind of collective identity formation through communication in writing, while collective remembering is individual-based but oftentimes nationally manifested.

Examples of collective remembering in modern and contemporary China abound. For instance, the construction of monuments dedicated to the martyrs (*lieshi* 烈士) who died in the pre-1949 wars and the production of P.R.C. films about the Second World War both constitute “sites” that are likely to trigger collective remembering for the Chinese. Different from the nationally-oriented collective remembering, communal remembering in imperial China was literati-based. It was partly consummated through the sharing of the same vocabulary, which derived from literati’s education under the system of civil service examinations. However, similar to collective remembering, as I hope to show below, communal remembering is also mediated through shared cultural tools.<sup>5</sup>

## Scholarship on Poetry Exchange

In his monograph on poetic exchanges titled *Changhe shi yanjiu* (1997), Zhao Yiwu observes that from Tao Qian at the end of the Eastern Jin dynasty 東晉 (317-420) to Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) of the High Tang, poetic responses generally match the content of the originals, but not the rhymes. From the mid-Tang (late 8<sup>th</sup>-early 9<sup>th</sup> century) to the Song dynasty (960-1279), poetic responses follow the same rhymes but do not necessarily deal with the same contents. From the Ming (1368-1644) to the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), no set rule or requirement existed as to whether or not the poetic responses should match the originals in either content or rhyme.<sup>6</sup> Zhao’s statement sounds concise but somehow arbitrary; what we see in Ye Shaoyuan’s case, however, will tell us more about content and rhyme-matching in poetry exchange during the Ming-Qing transitional period.

Zhao’s study calls attention to the form of poetry exchange, but he does not explain the motivation for adopting the practice. Gong Bendong, another Chinese scholar, observes that in addition to poetry exchange between the emperor or prince and his

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<sup>4</sup> James Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> According to Wertsch’s conception, what counts as a cultural tool includes language, narrative texts and technologies such as web-based search engines.

<sup>6</sup> Zhao, 418.

subject, other forms of poetry exchange were based on similar background, experience, treatment, or suffering on the side of the participating poets. Therefore, in and through the poems exchanged, they shared the same sentiments. Poetry exchange became a means of expressing or displaying empathy and spiritual affinity (*tongshengqi* 同聲氣, literally “sharing the same voice and breath”) among all the members involved. On the other hand, Gong holds that to match the original rhymes in the responses requires that the respondents strive to perfect the poems and their poetic skills; thus, the practice helped improve the quality of the final products.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to Chinese scholars, Western scholars seem to have paid more attention to the social context for the practice of poetry exchange. For example, Sophie Volpp wisely observes that the flow of poems among a community of poets as gifts helped create networks of social relations. Volpp notes:

The poem is an archetypal example of the distinction Bronislaw Malinowski made long ago between ordinary commodities and valuables that can be exchanged only for other valuables and in specifically encoded contexts. Although there are indications that individual poems, like paintings, were sold for “brush-wetting silver” and then circulated as the compositions of the purchaser, the exchange of poems for money was certainly covert. Individual poems (as opposed to anthologies or collections) were primarily exchanged between individuals and exchanged only for other poems or, occasionally, for paintings.<sup>8</sup>

Volpp is right to point out that the flow of poems is similar to the exchange of gifts, which help create networks of social relations. However, her observation invites more questions and qualifications when it comes to poetry exchange. For instance, what triggers the gift exchange? That is, what exactly is the mechanism that lies behind the creation of these networks of social relations? On the other hand, even though poetry is different than commodities, it can be taken as or translated into cultural capital, to borrow Bourdieu’s term.<sup>9</sup> So, even though we do not see the exchange of cash in poetry exchange, it is in essence an exchange of cultural capital.

In *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou*, the historian Tobie Meyer-Fong notes the significance and signification of poetry exchange among literati in the Qing. She holds that “[c]omposing matched-rhyme poems on social occasions functioned as a form of gift exchange, serving to reinforce relationships, which were then rendered public and tangible through the publication and circulation of small anthologies complete with commentary by other well-known friends and association. Although this was a long-established practice among Chinese elites, it took on new significance in the context of the early Qing.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gong, 167.

<sup>8</sup> Sophie Volpp, “The Literary Consumption of Actors in Seventeenth-Century China,” *Writing and Materiality: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan*, ed. Judith Zeitlin and Lydia Liu (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 150. My thanks to Yang Binbin for referring me to this interesting article.

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Tobie Meyer-Fong, *Building culture in early Qing Yangzhou* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 34.

We should notice that Meyer-Fong highlights the important step of publication and circulation in finalizing a complete narrative or narrativization of communal remembering through poetry exchange. Circulation via publishing was largely inaccessible to many Ming loyalists in the early Qing because of their loss of stable financial sources. But they continued to write poetry for various purposes. Refusing to recognize the new Qing-dynasty political order, a large group of Ming loyalists went into exile and lost access to regular life, let alone printing or publication. Correspondingly, we see differences in their usage of poetry exchange.

Ye Shaoyuan recorded a significant episode during his exile life after 1645 in his diary *Jia xing rizhu* 甲行日注 (*Daily Records [Beginning with] the Journey on the Day Jia*) with the writing of two poems celebrating his own fifty-seventh birthday, which fell on December 30 in the year of 1646. About fifteen months earlier Ye Shaoyuan had fled Fenhu 分湖, his hometown in Wujiang, in order to escape from the new political order. During this period of self-exile, Ye had been sojourning in the most remote regions between Zhejiang and Jiangsu, either in the mountains or on the waterfront by Lake Tai 太湖 (Taihu). Like many of his Ming loyalist peers, Ye Shaoyuan took the tonsure when embarking on his journey and became a nominal Buddhist monk. Even so, he had to find new shelters oftentimes because of both his straitened conditions and the encroachment of the Manchu into Jiangnan.<sup>11</sup>

It is a pity that Ye's original poems did not survive. They are not contained in his diary, and most of his poems were lost, with the exception of those incorporated in the *Wumengtang ji* 午夢堂集 (*Collections of the Midday Dream Hall*).<sup>12</sup> But fortunately he recorded in detail all the response poems, as well as the context of the whole cycle of poetry exchange in his diary. This provides us with a rare opportunity to examine the practice of poetry exchange during the early years of the Ming-Qing transition, the most difficult period for many Ming loyalists. Before we go into further detail about Ye's poetry exchange, however, we might take a glance at the similar practice engaged in by other poets. I choose Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680) as a foil to contrast Ye Shaoyuan's practice because Li was a commercial writer and not a Ming loyalist.

## Li Yu and Poetry Exchange

To highlight the differences between Li Yu and the Ming loyalists, I will first examine Li's exchange with two literati-officials, both stationed in Hubei, Wu Xiuchan 吳修蟾 in Hanyang 漢陽 and Xu Donglai 徐東來 in Wuchang 武昌 (both parts of the modern city of Wuhan 武漢).<sup>13</sup> All these poems were written in the eleventh year of the Kangxi 康熙 reign period (1672) during Li's trip to the Chu 楚 area (modern Hubei and

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<sup>11</sup> Ye Shaoyuan's affiliation with some leaders of anti-Manchu rebellions in Wujiang made him a potential target of the Manchu police. See Ye Shaoyuan, *Jiaxing rizhu*, in *Wumengtang ji*, 992.

<sup>12</sup> This is a massive corpus authored by both male and female writers from the Ye family as well as elegiac pieces from their relatives and friends. Compiled by Ye Shaoyuan, the first edition was prefaced in 1636. There are different translations by scholars for this title.

<sup>13</sup> Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji* 李漁全集, vol. 2, ed. Xiao Xinqiao 蕭新橋 et al. (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji, 1990), 128.

Hunan), starting from the second month of the year. The main purpose of his trip was to invite patronage from his governmental official friends in Hubei.

As a literatus with a wide range of social connections, Li Yu composed many poems throughout his life that were written either to initiate poetic responses or to respond to others' pieces. For example, Li Yu's poem titled "Xu Donglai yi shitong zeng wo, ji shu xinju na qizhong chi yi suo he" 徐東來以詩筒贈我.即書新句內其中.持以索和 ("Xu Donglai Presented me with a Poetry Vase; upon Receiving It I put a New Poem inside and with It I Asked for Response").<sup>14</sup> Without going into the details of the poem, we learn from its title that a process of gift exchange was taking place between the two poets. Xu Donglai's "free" gift invites Li Yu's poem. Li Yu's writing invites response from Xu in the form of poetry. The "free" gift starts a process of exchange.

On another occasion, Li Yu wrote two response poems matching the rhymes of the poems by his friend Wu Xiuchan under the titled "Ciyun he Wu Xiuchan shijun guofang er shou" 次韻和吳修蟾使君過訪二首 ("Two Response Poems Matching the Rhymes of Master Wu Xiuchan's Poems on His Visit").<sup>15</sup> In the preface Li writes, "Xiuchan is highly talented; yet his position is low. Thirty years after his success in the civil service examinations, he still holds such a lowly post. How can he suffer so outrageous a fate! We happily met after long separation and the color of our hair has changed. Even though we intended not to compose poems, how could that be possible? I composed two poems inviting responses and another two in response to yours" 修蟾才大而官小.以三十年之巍科.猶淹下吏.數奇亦至此哉.別久欣逢.頭顱各變.雖欲不詩.不可得也.唱予和汝.各得二篇.<sup>16</sup>

Here we see Li Yu's empathy with Wu for being talented but unrecognized. By expressing his (and Wu's) outrage against the unjust treatment Wu had experienced, Li Yu tries to give Wu more cultural capital by relating him to the trope of "talented but unrecognized" 懷才不遇. What also strikes us is Wu Xiuchan's marginal commentary on the two poems by Li Yu: "Both [of Li's two] poems were finished in an instant. Mr. Li is a genius indeed. Shallow and mediocre, I couldn't help feeling ashamed while reading his [works of] pearls and gems" 兩詩成於俄頃.洵天才也.譎陋如予.不勝珠玉在前之愧. Here we see that Li Yu quoted the commentary from his friend and had it published alongside his own poems in order to prove that he himself had extraordinary literary talent and possessed the ability to establish himself through writing (*liyan* 立言).<sup>17</sup>

Another poem written during the same trip has a very telling title, "Du Tianzhu, Xiong Xushu, Xiong Yuanxian, Li Renshu si junzi xiejiu guoyu guan xiaohuan yanju Xiong Yuanxian zengshi si jue yiyun he zhi" 堵天柱.熊荀叔.熊元獻.李仁熟四君子攜酒過寓.觀小鬟演劇.熊元獻贈詩四絕.倚韻和之 ("Du Tianzhu, Xiong Xushu, Xiong Yuanxian, and Li Renshu, These Four Gentlemen Brought Wine to My Place and Watched My Maids Stage an Opera; Xiong Yuanxian Presented Me with Four Quatrains

<sup>14</sup> *Li Yu quanji*, vol. 2, 194. The poetry vase, usually made from bamboo, is a container for poetry drafts. See the website 中國竹刻藝術網 <[http://www.bamboocarving.com/nous/wenzhang01\\_04.jsp](http://www.bamboocarving.com/nous/wenzhang01_04.jsp)>.

<sup>15</sup> Li Yu, *Li Yu quanji*, vol. 2, 194.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> There are three different means to achieve immortality provided and prescribed in Confucianism, i.e., *lide* 立德 (establishing virtue), *ligong* 立功 (establishing [heroic] deeds), or *liyan* (establishing words). See the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳·襄公二十四年 for details

and I Responded by Matching His Rhymes”).<sup>18</sup> The title of this poem illustrates a process of gift exchanges between Li Yu and his friends, performance for wine and response poems for poems.

These poems, some of which were published with commentaries by poets of the originals, were all collected in Li Yu’s very popular *Liweng yijiayan shici ji* 笠翁一家言詩詞集, a commercial publication in the early Qing. It clearly shows the transformation of cultural capital into economic capital through gift exchange and publishing.

Two features of these poems attract our attention. First, these exchanges reaffirm that poetry can be a gift used in exchange for either material objects or other cultural services, for example, in the third case above, Li Yu’s presentation of an opera staged by his maids. Second, they confirm Zhao Yiwu’s observation that in the Ming and Qing dynasties, response pieces were not always required to follow the same rhymes. That is why in his poem titles, Li Yu needs to specify whether his poems match the original rhymes. I shall discuss rhyme matching later. Before that, however, we need to examine Ye Shaoyuan’s involvement in poetry exchanges after 1644.

### Ye Shaoyuan’s “Zishoushi”

The cycle of poems under examination here started with two poems Ye Shaoyuan composed on and for his own fifty-seventh (58<sup>th</sup> *sui* in the Chinese lunar calendar) birthday in the year 1646. In his diary entry for this day, Ye wrote:

[Eleventh month,] twenty-fourth *bingyin* day. Clear. It is my birthday ([Ye’s note:] age fifty-eight). Following my inclination I composed two poems to allude to my dejection. Zhongri [a nephew] was the first to write matching poems; then my sons, one after another, followed.  
二十四日丙寅.晴.余初度也.年五十八.率意作二詩.以寄無聊.仲日首倡和什.兒輩隨續次賡之.<sup>19</sup>

Even though Ye does not emphasize it, all the response poems clearly follow the rhyme patterns of the originals closely. About two weeks later, Ye started to receive many more response poems from his Ming loyalist friends. Reading these poems, Ye continued by writing additional poems in response to the response poems he received. His sons then followed and composed more response pieces.

In the following months, Ye Shaoyuan received response poems continually from his Ming political recluse friends as well as from his daughters and other relatives. These responses reached him by different means. Some were composed on the spot in his presence during visits with friends. In one case, Ye’s friend even asked his son to compose response poems on the spot. Or a poet would come to visit Ye and personally

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 331-32.

<sup>19</sup> Ye Shaoyuan, *Jiaying rizhu*, in *Wumengtang ji*, 964. The translation is a modification based on Grace S. Fong’s rendition in her conference paper titled “Reclaiming Subjectivity in a Time of Loss: Ye Shaoyuan (1589-1648) and Autobiographical Writing in the Ming-Qing Transition” for Workshop “Of Trauma, Agency, and Texts: Discourses on Disorder in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century China,” McGill University, April 23-25, 2004. This paper will be published in No. 60 of *Ming Studies* (Fall 2009).

present him with response pieces. These were either written in advance or spontaneously. Distant poets, who had no chance of meeting Ye personally, sent their response poems from afar via various channels. In the end, Ye's original two poems generated 76 poetic responses. This round of poetry exchange extended not only temporally over some number of months, but also spatially because the respondents came from far and near. Moreover, some of those writing responses did not receive the originals directly from Ye himself; the originals had been passed on to them through a third party. As a result, Ye was surprised when he received their works.

The respondents include not only Ye Shaoyuan's family members (though they were the first to respond because they were nearby when the originals were composed) but also fellow Ming loyalists, some of whom were relatives while others were not. However, all the respondents shared the same anti-Manchu sentiment. It was this sentiment and the hope of reviving the Ming that linked them together.

By composing poems on such an occasion, Ye was actually following the convention of writing *zishoushi* 自壽詩 (poetry celebrating one's own birthday), another cultural tool with a long history. However, during a time of dynastic change, political uncertainty, and personal identity crisis, his choice to write *zishoushi* had special significance.

In her articles on the poetic sub-genre of *shouci* 壽詞 (*ci* lyrics celebrating birthdays), Li Hongxia 李紅霞 observes that during the Southern Song dynasty, in addition to *ci* lyrics written to celebrate the birthdays of other people, particularly celebrities, there also appeared a number of *zishouci* 自壽詞 that poets wrote to commemorate their own birthdays.<sup>20</sup> Conventionally, *zhushou wenxue* 祝壽文學, i.e., literary works celebrating birthdays, which dated back to the pre-Qin period, were full of compliments and flattery for those in high ranks and often devoid of real meaning or content. However, according to Li, the *zishouci* of the Southern Song dynasty, by contrast, are free from any purpose of deliberate flattery. Instead, many *zishouci* endeavor to explore the value and meaning of life and are marked by a strong personal color. Instead of festivity and entertainment, the tone of *zishouci* is usually self-reflective and/or sorrowful.<sup>21</sup>

Li Hongxia identifies two major types of *zishouci*. In the first, the author recollects his own past experience and reflects upon his life. Poems of this type usually are filled with a sense of loss and sadness over the lapse of time and lack of accomplishment. In Li's second type the author shows his acceptance of life after reaching a degree of *satori*-like enlightenment.<sup>22</sup>

The appearance of *zishouci* during the Southern Song was not accidental. Li Hongxia attributes it to the political weakness of the Southern Song, a dynasty full of chaos and uncertainty, although the rise of Neo-Confucianism and Chan 禪 Buddhism could also be reasons. The Southern Song was a period more or less similar to the Ming-

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<sup>20</sup> Li Hongxia, "Lun Nansong shouci de fenxing ji tezheng: Jianlun zhushou wenxue de lishi yanjin" 论南宋寿词的分型及特征：兼论祝寿文学的历史演进. *Shenzhen daxue xuebao* 深圳大學學報, Vol. 22, No. 3 (May, 2005): 87-90.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 90

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

Qing transition; therefore Li Hongxia's analysis can be helpful to our understanding of Ye Shaoyuan's case.

Ye Shaoyuan's poems were written at the end of the year. Earlier that year the anti-Qing uprisings led by Wu Yi 吳易,<sup>23</sup> a Wujiang native and Ye's friend, was suppressed by the Manchus, and Wu died tragically after being captured. Joining Wu Yi and also defeated and killed were Ye Shaoyuan's two brothers-in-law, Shen Zibing 沈自炳 and Shen Zijiong 沈自炯. This defeat must have had a profound impact on Ye.<sup>24</sup> Even though there were other anti-Manchu activists planning more uprisings in the south, they were too far away to have had direct connection with Ye.

We should also note that this cycle of exchanged poetry was different from other cycles happening under relatively peaceful circumstances. If the time and place in which the poet lived was marked by peace and tranquility, poetry exchange could more usually become little more than a kind of literary game. We can see that this cycle of poetry exchange among fellow loyalists was also different from Li Yu's or from the family-based exchanges earlier in Ye Shaoyuan's life. It was much more intense, generating many more responses and, as we can see, served to bond a political community.

Additionally, none of these poems were formally collected, printed or published. In this respect, this set of exchanges also differed from poetry exchanges late in the transitional period, such as Li Yu's poems written early in the Qing. Therefore, they take over some of the functions of marginal commentary, showing admiration or appreciation for the poet writing the original verses. As we can see in the publication of his family corpus *Wumengtang ji*, Ye Shaoyuan always sought symbolic capital by writing and printing rather than economic capital. This poetic cycle written not for commercial publication was a further addition to his cultural capital.

Finally, many response pieces were not written in Ye's own presence; instead, the respondents voluntarily composed responses and had them presented or sent to Ye. A typical example is the poems from what Ye calls "Lichuan zhuyou" 梨川諸友 (friends from Lichuan) from a locality in the eastern part of Wujiang county. Moreover, the response pieces were not written on any single occasion and there was no wine-sharing or beautiful landscape as poetic inspiration. Both of these elements were commonly found in poetry-writing gatherings from more tranquil times, from that organized by Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361) at Lanting 蘭亭 to Chen Chen's 陳忱 gathering with his Ming loyalist friends (ca. 1650-1664).<sup>25</sup>

What was significant in this round of poetry exchange was that around Ye Shaoyuan's now-absent original poems there formed a textual community centering on Ye. This community was possible not only because all the participants all responded to the same poems by Ye Shaoyuan, but also because all the writers shared the same

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<sup>23</sup> A variety of his name is Wu Yang 吳易; for example, see *Mingji nanlue* 明季南略, *juan* 4 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984). But in Ye's *Jiaying rizhu*, it is Wu Yi.

<sup>24</sup> Ni Zaitian 倪在田, *Xu Ming jishi benmo* 續明紀事本末, *juan* 15 諸方義旅 (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang, 1962).

<sup>25</sup> See Ellen Widmer, *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyalty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council of East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987), 16. Widmer observes that in the poetry writing gatherings attended by Chen Chen and other members of the Jingyin shishe 驚隱詩社 or Tao zhi meng 逃之盟, a principal poetic society of the Wu region, "wine was another attraction, as was the beauty of the woods and streams around Lake Tai."



vocabulary for communal remembering. For example, in their response poems, we find a large number of allusions to Tao Qian and Xie An 謝安 (320-385), both of the Eastern Jin dynasty.

Allusions to Tao Qian include *sanjing* 三徑, *taoyuan* 桃源, and Pengze 彭澤. The first and second terms both refer to a hermit's home, originating from Tao Qian's "Guiqu lai ci" 歸去來辭 (The Return) and "Taohuayuan ji" 桃花源記 (The Peach Blossom Spring) respectively.<sup>26</sup> Even though the word *sanjing* (three paths) did not start with Tao Qian, his "Guiqu lai ci" is the best known earlier literary piece in which it appears. In as much as Ye Shaoyuan was an admirer of Tao Qian's poetry, lifestyle, and his integrity, it is safe to say that this allusion was intentional.<sup>27</sup> On the communal level, by referencing Tao Qian, Ye's respondents indicate their communal remembering of Tao Qian as a hermit of moral integrity, and betraying their pronounced commitment to the Ming and their collective refusal to serve the new political order.

In the response pieces we also see many allusions to Xie An, a prime minister and head of the Xie clan that also produced Xie Xuan 謝玄, a famous general; and Xie Daoyun 謝道韞, a prominent woman poet. Born into a prominent clan forced to migrate to the Jiangnan area (called Jiangdong 江東 during the Six Dynasties periods), Xie An never cared for fame or fortune. He refused to take an official post before he was forty years old, even though he was summoned to office several times by the royal court. In 383 he led the army of the Eastern Jin to defeat the troops of the Former Qin 前秦 at Feishui 淝水. This was a decisive victory against the non-Han nomads that secured the survival of the Eastern Jin dynasty. Xie An was not only known for his own heroic deeds and moral integrity but also for his descendants Xie Xuan and Xie Daoyuan. Therefore, the allusions to Xie An may have implications at more than one level.

First, the allusions respond to Ye Shaoyuan's own self-identification with the Xie family. These allusions signify an appreciation of the Ye family for their moral integrity and literary talent. While this implication is essential in Ye's own allusions to the Xie family in the *Wumengtang ji* (because the *Wumengtang ji* is basically a family corpus), the identification between the two families is not so pronounced in this cycle of poetry exchanges. In contrast to the *Wumengtang ji* where Ye Shaoyuan uses "Xie ting" 謝庭 or "Xie zhai" 謝齋 to allude to the Xie family and for self-identification,<sup>28</sup> here the poetic respondents employ *Dongshan* 東山, a place that is more closely related to Xie An as a heroic individual who, after a long reclusive life at Dongshan (at Guiji 會稽 in modern Shaoxing 紹興, Zhejiang), was again called by the royal court and subsequently enjoyed a successful official career.

Second, since Xie An was a hermit for the first half of his life, and avoided fame and fortune, comparing Ye Shaoyuan to Xie An shows the respondents' affirmation of

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<sup>26</sup> In "Guiqu lai ci," for example, 三徑就荒松竹猶存 (The paths to my hut are covered with weeds, while pines and chrysanthemums still survive). The original story is about Jiang Xu 蔣詡 who resigned from his official post and made friends with only Qiu Zhong 求仲 and Yang Zhong 羊仲. Leading to his reclusive hut there were only three paths, thus "san jing."

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the term 三徑 and its employment as an allusion see Li Zhushen 李竹深. 詩話"三徑" in *Zhangzhou Zhiye daxue xuebao* 漳州職業大學學報, No. 1, 2000: 46-49.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see Ye Shaoyuan, "Tianliao nianpu bieji" 天寥年譜別記, *Wumengtang ji*, 897.

Ye's choice of resignation in order to preserve moral integrity. Third and most importantly, the comparison displays the longing of other Ming loyalists that Ye might act like Xie An during a time of dynastic crisis by stepping forward to participate in or lead anti-Manchu activities. Xie was remembered most for his heroic deeds during the national crisis when the Eastern Jin was confronted with serious threats from northern nomadic forces. Though not completely the same, it was politically analogous to the Ming-Qing transitional period.

Since Ye Shaoyuan voluntarily chose to retire from a low position in the Ministry of Works in 1631, he had lost any chance of establishing himself through heroic deeds. To turn to *lide* (virtue) and *liyan* (writing) for immortality were his only options. But during the transitional period, he seemed to have opportunity again to engage in *ligong* (heroic deeds). That other loyalists wished to see Ye step forward is attested by Gu Xianzheng's 顧咸正 (style Duanmu 端木) response poems. The Gu family had produced five Ming loyalists, all of whom died in the early years of the transitional period. At least three of the five wrote poems in response to Ye. The four response poems from Gu Xianzhen are collected in the first volume, *Ming yimin juan* 明遺民卷 (*Volume of the Ming Loyalists*), of the *Qing shi jishi* 清詩紀事. The last one reads:

三朝朋舊事多迷。Having lost track of those old friends from the royal court  
 流落孤臣好共棲。As remnant subjects we are fortunate to find shelters together.  
 物色夷吾江左右。To seek for a Guan Zhong<sup>29</sup> on both sides of the Yangtze  
 謳歌建武漢東西。We sing praise of the Guangwu Emperor of the Later Han.<sup>30</sup>  
 閑成春草池邊句。In idle time you compose lines of spring grass upon the pond<sup>31</sup>  
 度入寒風塞上聲。Mingled in the wind of drumming sound from the cold frontier.  
 翹首日南新詔下。Looking forward to the arrival of imperial decree from  
 the South  
 公徒十萬待親提。Ten myriads of soldiers waiting to be at your command.<sup>32</sup>

According to Chen Qubing 陳去病, the word *rinan* in the above line must refer to the anti-Qing activities organized by Ming loyalists in the South.<sup>33</sup>

In her insightful analysis of this episode during Ye Shaoyuan's years of exile, Grace Fong holds that "through this act of recording, it seems that Ye is continually renewing and reaffirming his identity and subjectivity as a loyalist literatus-monk-recluse through the poetic response of friends and relatives and, thus, representation by them."<sup>34</sup> Although Fong's analysis of the significance of Ye Shaoyuan's poetry exchange is brief, she is absolutely right in observing its significance in helping Ye (re)construct his

<sup>29</sup> Guan Zhong 管仲 (? – 645 BCE), whose original name was Yiwu 夷吾, was the most famous prime minister of the state of Qi 齊 during the Spring and Autumn Period.

<sup>30</sup> Jianwu was the first reign period of the Guangwu Emperor 漢光武帝 (6 BCE-57CE), founder of the Later Han Dynasty and a wise military strategist before he became a powerful emperor.

<sup>31</sup> This is an allusion to the poet Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385-433), grandson of Xie Xuan. In one of his poem he writes about spring grass turning green by the pond. This may be related Ye Shaoyuan's and other Ming loyalists' hope of seeing the revival of the Ming.

<sup>32</sup> *Qingshi jishi*, ed. Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯 et al. (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji, 1987), vol. 1, 80.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Grace Fong, "Reclaiming Subjectivity in a Time of Loss."

identity and subjectivity. Inspired by her observation, one may go further and ask in what way the identity construction was achieved or reaffirmed.

On the other hand, since this round of poetry exchange involved many poets, both from within and outside the Ye family, spanned a long period of time and covered a wide space, it was not only an activity that was significant for Ye Shaoyuan as an individual, it was ultimately a communal event and, therefore, its significance to its whole Ming loyalist community of poets is intriguing. So, what was the mechanism that made it possible to exert such an effect upon the community of Ming loyalists?

### **Mechanism of obligations**

In *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Society*, the French sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss talks about gift exchange in what he calls societies/cultures of “gift economy,” which is the opposite of commodity economy. Mauss points out that there is no free gift because any gift engages the honor of both giver and receiver.<sup>35</sup> Gift exchange transcends the divisions between the spiritual and the material in a way that Mauss terms “magical.” The giver gives not merely an object but also part of himself, for the object is indissolubly tied to the giver. Because of this bond between giver and gift, the act of giving creates a social bond with an obligation to reciprocate on part of the recipient.<sup>36</sup> That is to say, to receive and reciprocate a gift spells an acknowledgement of his/her commitment to the bond, a bond that is initially created through gift giving by the giver.

Sophie Vlopp is insightful in noting that the poem “is not simply an object; it is an artifact of a person, an extension of the author that circulates in his or her stead. The metonymic relation between persons and poems accounts for the peculiar status of poems among other types of artistic production.”<sup>37</sup> What is essential in Mauss’ theoretical conception of gift exchange is a mechanism of obligation.<sup>38</sup> He identifies three different types of obligation behind gift exchange, i.e., the obligations to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. In Ye Shaoyuan’s case, we can clearly see the operation of this mechanism of obligation centering around the poet.

Ye Shaoyuan enjoyed a high status among Ming loyalists of Wujiang and nearby areas. This is testified to by Wu Yi’s 吳易 appreciation of Ye Shaoyuan.<sup>39</sup> He not only asked Ye to help him finance their anti-Manchu activities but also sought his advice on related strategies.<sup>40</sup> Given the fact that the anti-Manchu uprisings in the Wujiang area were all put down and their leaders including Wu Yi died earlier that year, it was natural for Ye Shaoyuan to become at least a symbolic leader to a community of Ming loyalists

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<sup>35</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Society* (New York: Norton, 1990), Chapter 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid..

<sup>37</sup> Vlopp, 150.

<sup>38</sup> Mauss, 23.

<sup>39</sup> See *Mingji nan lue* 明季南略 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984) *juan* 4 《吳江吳易》載：“吳易.字日生.號朔清.吳江人.崇禎丙子舉人.丁丑進士.”

<sup>40</sup> Ye Shaoyuan, *Jiang xing rizhu*, *juan* 2, in *Wumengtang ji*, 948.

in Wujiang. That explains his initial obligation to give by writing the two poems which invited poetic responses.

For those who, through various means, received and read his poems, there was also a strong obligation to reciprocate. In a diary entry dated the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month of the same year, Ye Shaoyuan relates that in response to his gift of poems, the Buddhist monk Pougong 剖公 replies in a letter, “Your poems are just brilliant. I was unable to respond, but I should transcribe them” 佳什燦如.不能廣和.當錄之.<sup>41</sup> This comment indicates that the receiver/reader of the poem felt a strong obligation to receive and return. To receive and return means an acknowledgement of belonging to the same group. Therefore, it asserts part of Pougong’s identity. Since he was not able to reciprocate in the form of response poems, he promised to transcribe Ye’s poems. In as much as transcribing of scriptures is an act of merit, especially for Buddhists, Ye’s poems by implication became revered texts.

The obligations involved created and strengthened the textual community around Ye Shaoyuan. As shown in the following discussion, this bond was further reinforced by the adoption of the same rhyme patterns by both the initiator and the respondents of poetic exchanges. On the other hand, since Mauss’ conception of gift exchange is mostly applicable to cultures of gift economy, Ye Shaoyuan’s use of poetry as gift betrays his nostalgic longing for an archaic past of gift economy and his dislike of commercialism.

### The Politics of Rhyme Matching

When the poetic response matches the rhymes of the original, matching is often noted in the title of the response piece in the *Wumengtang ji*. This was also the case with Li Yu’s poems, as we have seen above. However, we do not see such indicators in those response pieces to Ye Shaoyuan’s *zishoushi*, even though all the response poems follow the same rhyme patterns. When Pougong said that he was not able to *genghe* 廣和, he might have meant that he was unable to respond by matching the same rhymes. It suggests that to match the same rhymes conveys not only respect for the poem giver but also presents a challenge to the respondent. To follow the same rhyme pattern shows that there is more respect—demonstrated by more careful writing.

We can say that Ye’s respondents matched his rhymes partly because of the generic convention of *zishoushi*. We can explain this practice by resorting to the function of poetry exchange in achieving *tongshengqi* as mentioned above. That means the original rhyme was adopted when the respondent wanted to share with the initiator of poetry exchange (*shouchang zhe* 首倡者) intense feelings or sentiments. Ultimately, all the participants shared the same tone and voice with Ye even though they did not necessarily get together in any physical sense.

In China, when someone receives a gift, common practice holds that he or she should return or repay it by giving back a gift with the same or, more often, a higher value. An example can be found in the Chinese idiom *toutao baoli* 投桃報李 (to return a plum with a peach). This saying is drawn from a poem titled “Mugua” in the “Wei feng”

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<sup>41</sup> Ye Shaoyuan, *Jiaying rizhu, juan 4*, in *Wumengtang ji*, 968. Wu Weiye had a poem on the same figure titled “Yuanmu ye Pogong” 元墓謁剖公.

section 衛風·木瓜 of the classic *Shijing* 詩經 (*Book of Songs*).<sup>42</sup> This sentiment is analogous to what Mauss describes as gift exchange of equal value.

Part of the reason for this practice is easy to explain; the value attached to the returned gift shows the recipient's appreciation and respect for the giver, the one who initiated the cycle of gift exchange. That may explain why in Ye Xiaowan's 葉小紉<sup>43</sup> (1613-1657) poems sent to her aunt Li Yuzhao 李玉照, the second wife of Shen Zizheng 沈自徵 (1591-1641),<sup>44</sup> Shen Yixiu's 沈宜修<sup>45</sup> (1590-1635) brother, she still employs the same rhyme patterns as her father's *zishoushi*. As a result, perceptive readers, including Xiaowan's aunt, the recipient and first reader of her poems, the compiler of her poems and readers from her contemporary period and those in later times, all share the same remembering of Ye Shaoyuan and his poetic exchanges.

On the other hand, as the poem "Mugua" suggests, to repay a *mugua* (Chinese quince) with fine jade/carnelian is not just to reciprocate the gift, but to establish an everlasting bond (永以為好 literally meaning "to be on good terms forever"). The same practice is also found in another Chinese saying, "*dishui zhi en dang baoyi yongquan*" 滴水之恩.當報以涌泉, which means that one should repay a tiny obligation with a larger return. What is significant, again, is not the gift and return per se, but the bond between benefactor and beneficiary established thereby.

One more reason for the practice, however, may be better explained if we discuss it by relating to the practice of rhyme matching. As mentioned above, Gong Bendong contends that in the long run, rhyme matching helped to enhance the general quality of exchanged poetry. However, we should remember that in addition to showing respect to the composer of the original poems by matching the rhyme and composing high quality response pieces, a respondent also displays his own poetic competence and thus accumulates more symbolic capital for himself.

In Li Yu's case, he matched the original rhymes mainly for the purpose of showing off his literary skills, a way to accumulate more cultural capital. This was particularly important to Li Yu as a writer living on sponsorship from government officials and wealthy non-official literati. In a time or place of uncertainty and crisis, however, this symbolic capital might be something important as a psychic solace. It is under the drive of both motivations that we see all the poetic responses in Ye Shaoyuan's case match the original rhyme patterns.

The preceding discussion shows that when and where peace reigned in imperial China, forms of poetry exchange were more diversified and more relaxed. However, when and where crisis dominated, the pattern was more strict. This uniformity of form indicates and, to some extent, also consolidated the mutual bonds among a particular community of Ming loyalist poets. The transformation of poetry exchange as a cultural tool indicates that cultural tools are largely affected by historical contexts. But, conversely and dialectically, the form of cultural tools also informs historical contexts.

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<sup>42</sup> The poem reads: 投我以木瓜.報之以瓊琚.匪報也.永以為好也.投我以木桃.報之以瓊瑤.匪報也.永以為好也.投我以木李.報之以瓊玖.匪報也.永以為好也.

<sup>43</sup> Ye Xiaowan was Ye Shaoyuan's second. She was both a poet and a *zaju* writer. Her *zaju* work *Yuanyang meng* 鴛鴦夢 (*Mandarin Ducks' Dream*) was the oldest extant drama authored by a female writer.

<sup>44</sup> Shen Zizheng was known as a *zaju* dramatist in the late Ming.

<sup>45</sup> Shen Yixiu was Ye Shaoyuan's wife and a woman poet of the late Ming.

## Conclusion: Ming Loyalists' Doom in the Early Qing

To explain this dialectics between historical context and cultural tools, we may turn to either Bourdieu's theory of field or Stuart Hall's concept of "conjuncture." Both repudiate the existence of any fixed or stable identity. Hall holds that "everything exists simultaneously amid specific historical forces in process and amid specific determinant structures." He argues that "the elements within any conjuncture and the relations of force among them are differently 'articulated' at different times and places. [ . . . ] Social groups, including intellectuals, will work to make their 'articulation' of a given constellation of elements prevail."<sup>46</sup> Viewed thus, the poetic exchanges in Ye Shaoyuan's case spell a typical example of (group) articulation in a historical conjuncture.

On the other hand, according to Bourdieu, the changes of any agent's position and position-taking in a field are likely to result in an identity crisis; under such circumstance, the agent will take actions in order to reconstruct (an equilibrium of) identity. Viewed in this light, the adoption of poetry exchange by Ye and his cohort translates into a strategy for collective identity reconstruction. We should note, however, that this new equilibrium is always temporary and subject to new reconstruction and new identity formation.

This dialectical relation is also evident, in a contrasting way, from a diary by a well-known member of that cohort of political recluses, Gui Zhuang 歸莊 (1613-1673). Gui's diary titled *Guanmei riji* 觀梅日記 (*Diary on Plum Blossom Watching*), which records his experiences in the early spring of 1666 centering on an excursion to Suzhou for viewing plum flowers:

The 28<sup>th</sup> day of the second month: We arrived at Huqiu (Tiger Hill, outside the walls of Suzhou) in the afternoon and once again I stayed at the Plum Blossom Tower. [...] I went to tour the [local] floral market and found what used to be scores of vases of narcissus, orchid and plum blossoms are now replaced by crabapple blossoms, beauty-face peach flowers and fragrant orchids. How the season has changed! Throughout this trip, blossoms I have seen include plum, apricot, cherry, camellia, magnolia, and peach. The mountains I visited include Huqiu, Dengwei, Xuanmu, Taiping and Hua. There were so many small ones that I can't record them all. In my company were oftentimes poets, drunkards, Taoists and famous Buddhist monks, none of them vulgarians, which is really a pleasure in my life of poverty and anguish. The only minor regrets were: there was a limited amount of wine which was also not good enough; there was poetry recitation but no responses. Therefore there was a sense of unfulfillment.

However, I should say we did not let the landscape and its flora down.

二月廿八.午間至虎丘.復寓梅花樓.....出觀花市.向之水仙.蘭.梅累累數十百盆者.今皆易為海棠.人面桃及蕙.物候之變如此.....是遊也.花則因梅而杏.櫻桃.山茶.玉蘭.桃李.山則自虎丘.鄧尉.玄墓以及天平.華山.其餘小山不可勝記.所主同遊往往皆騷客.酒人.道流.名僧.無一俗士.亦窮愁中一快事也.所微不

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<sup>46</sup> Vincent B. Leith, et al, ed. *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism* (New York: Norton, 2001), 1896-97.

足者。酒有限又不甚佳。詩有唱而無和。為未盡遊觀之興。然亦可謂不負湖  
山花木矣。<sup>47</sup>

Gui Zhuang shows a poignant sense of loss in this diary entry because there were two big changes according to his observation. First, in the flower market, while people of his generation had favored flowers like narcissus, orchid, and plum blossom, these were now replaced by flowers more appealing to commoners' tastes. His greatest nostalgia is in his final sentence: there is no more poetry exchange among his peer-loyalists. The supply of wine, which Ellen Widmer observes as another attraction in poetry societies' meetings, was insufficient.<sup>48</sup> It is hard to know whether lack of wine was the reason for the disappearance of poetry exchange, though this seems unlikely.

Chen Zuogao 陳左高 observes that of those who interacted with Gui Zhuang after the fall of the Ming, the majority were anti-Qing Ming loyalists who lived in exile and concealed their true identity.<sup>49</sup> However, Gui found no one to accompany him on the trip. This lack of companionship for watching plum blossoms, a symbol of purity, perseverance, and loyalty in Chinese culture, suggests that by the 1660s Gui could hardly find any one who would echo his mind. Additionally, there was no poetic exchange with those who he encountered, though he considered none of them to be vulgar. It suggests that the change in the "chronopolitics of memory"<sup>50</sup> had exerted an impact upon the cultural tools (including poetry exchange) that Ming loyalists used to depend on. One of the major reasons that Gui Zhuang could not find companions must have been that more and more Ming loyalists were dying off under deprived conditions. But there must be other political reasons.

The last of the Ming rump court was destroyed in the early 1660s, and the last of the legitimate Ming dynasty successors died at the same time. These events suggest a collapse of cohesion among the Ming loyalists. The hope of Ming survival was almost completely lost. The mid 1660s also saw some previously very committed Ming loyalists attending literary gatherings organized by Qing officials. The most prominent example was the literary gathering at Vermillion Bridge (Hongqiao 紅橋) in Yangzhou, discussed by Meyer-Fong and Wai-ye Li in their respective works.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the 1660s marked a turning point in both the establishment of the Qing order over China and in the destiny of

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<sup>47</sup> Gui Zhuang, "Guanmei riji," *Gui Zhuang ji 歸莊集 (Collection of Gui Zhuang's Works)* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 402-03.

<sup>48</sup> Ellen Widmer, *The Margins of Utopia: Shui-hu hou-chuan and the Literature of Ming Loyalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council of East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1987), 16.

<sup>49</sup> Chen Zuogao, *Lidai riji congtao 歷代日記叢談* (Shanghai: Shanghai huabao, 2004), 32.

<sup>50</sup> Carol Gluck, "Operations of Memory: 'Comfort Women' and the World," *Ruptured Memories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, ed. Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 59.

<sup>51</sup> See the second chapter of Tobie Meyer-Fong's *Building Culture in Early Qing Yangzhou* and Wai-ye Li's "Introduction," in *Trauma and Transcendence in Early Qing Literature*, 95. They both talk about Wang Shizhen's literary gathering at Vermilion Bridge in Yangzhou in the 1660s. Wai-ye Li also observes that as "hopes for heroic action diminished, Ming loyalists sought historical understanding and self-understanding in the communion of like-minded person, among both their contemporaries and readers from later generations." See Wai-ye Li, "Heroic Transformations: Women and National Trauma in Early Qing Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 2. (Dec., 1999): 377-78.

the Southern Ming. That very probably was also a poignant moment for many of the surviving Ming loyalists.

When she talks about transformation of memory in a modern or contemporary context Carol Gluck contends that “memory change traveled mainly along two vectors: one from outside and one from below.”<sup>52</sup> Does this also apply to the Ming loyalists and the collapse of their doomed-to-fail project of reviving the Ming? If so, what factors from outside and from below had triggered memory change? These are questions that deserve further examination.

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<sup>52</sup> Gluck, 59.