

Orthodox Passions: Narrating Filial Love during the High Qing. By Maram Epstein. Harvard East Asian Monographs 425. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019. Pp. xii + 361. \$68.00/£54.95.

Scholars should warmly welcome Maram Epstein's new book on filial love. Though focused on the high Qing, it serves as a masterful rendition of an entire tradition. As I am sure is true for others, I have long looked upon filial piety all too arrogantly as a euphemism for obeying your elders, and as a form of abjection for which we can only have a modern distaste. At its worst, filial love may come down to that and, as other such social virtues anywhere, has its pathological extremes. But Epstein has executed a radically novel and engaging approach that should spur us and our students to new and deeper realizations. The many areas of focus include: besides an articulate discussion of the issues I have just begun with, a historical résumé of the meanings of *xiao* 孝 from the earliest times to the treatment by the Manchus; changing constructions of filial piety in the Qing, especially as illustrated in local gazetteers; and such topics as son-father filial piety vs son-mother filial piety, female agency in the performance of filial piety, especially in cases when it empowers daughters, and fascinating case studies of an array of individuals, both obscure and well-known. The author pays keen attention to the concrete practices of filial sacrifice, including the ancient custom of building a mourning hut by the grave of the ancestor, or the act of *gegu* 割股, that is, cutting flesh from the thigh to prepare a broth as medicine for an ailing parent, and other cases of "somaticized expression," such as wailing, knocking the head against the coffin, or fasting.

Epstein begins with a critique of what can be summed up as a modern and Western over-attachment to the value of the individual self and its choices and directions, which tends to result in an overvaluation of the rupture of the child-parent bond. Scholarship in that mould has held itself to Western paradigms "privileging romantic love, or its closest premodern instantiation, *qing*, as the core of [that] individual self" (p. 2). It has emphasized the impact of the cult of *qing* 情 on portrayals of romantic love to the exclusion of the "depiction of filial piety as a subjective passion" (p. 145). Epstein's move instead is to "take filial love seriously," extremes and all, and to take it as "a model in which people achieve affective and social fulfilment through a process of identification with 'socially inculcated systems of value'" (p. 3). The "coercive aspect" is not her focus, it is important to note. Instead, she wants to see filial piety as a "deeply interiorized emotion that was foundational to articulating a self with affective and ethical agency" (p. 5).

I would still stick with the belief that sexuality and sentiment are core human experiences, but would agree that scholars have been too dismissive and neglectful

of the topic and the experience of filial love. I am still a sort of Freudian/Lacanian, ever fascinated with sex and sexuality, and think that the best interpretative use of Freudianism/Lacanianism and its later evolutions sees the subject as absolutely and inherently, if not fatally, intersubjective, a key term in Epstein's argument. She writes that "the self that is generated through filial bonds is intersubjective" (p. 4) and that the "Chinese understanding of the authentic self is inherently intersubjective" (p. 20). This is in contrast to the Western ideal of the autonomous self, which she suggests is part of Western scholars' underestimation of filial piety. Instead, she writes, "traditional Chinese culture conceptualized the self as embedded in the social through the cardinal Confucian bonds and integrated into a holistic universe through *ganying* 感應 responses" (p. 4). I would say, first, that I am not so sure that the focus on *qing* and sexuality is as universally misdirected as this book suggests. Second, I would emphasize that there is no "atomistic unconscious mind" (p. 258) to begin with anyway, no matter what we are looking at. In other words, we do not have to resort to switching to an emphasis on filial love in order to escape the spurious assumption "that the libidinal unconscious is the ultimate stuff of interiority," though fairer considerations of filial love are indeed a good corrective to many previous approaches. This book wants to modify the tendency since the May Fourth of placing "ritual in an oppositional relationship to the sincere expression of emotions," and to overturn the modernist view "that the traditional self, formed through ritually defined kinship relations, is performative and largely devoid of a private, sentiment-based inner realm" (pp. 256–57). The point is to question the model that "refutes the basic humanity of those primarily non-Western and premodern subjects who do not foreground the libidinal as their primary expression of affect by denying them a self with interiority" (p. 258). Epstein issues challenges in such ways that will, I am sure, result in many fruitful debates and continuations, and that represent, as I have said, a truly new approach.

The book is filled with enlightening themes, using a wide range of sources for support, including gazetteers, biographies, and fiction, with stunning citations from Qing gazetteers in particular. A central theme is how filial piety becomes "an important paradigm for heroic action" (p. 15), in showing which Epstein supplies us with plentiful explanations and descriptions of ritual practices, including the twenty-seven-month mourning period that was marked by living in a mourning hut (*lumu* 廬墓) built by the parent's grave. We may have long heard of this, but can now see it in practice, for example, in the case of the famous Qing philosopher, Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704), or others cited in the gazetteers. The book's vivid portrayal of such customs greatly enhances the more abstract discussion that often surrounds the topic of filial piety.

All such action, of course, is highly gendered in that men and women enact filial love in different ways, the demonstration of which is another of the great contributions of this book. In particular, a woman's filial piety directed toward her natal parents could empower her in ways the chastity cult could not (p. 176). "From a girl's perspective, there were advantages to establishing herself as a filial daughter rather than a chaste maiden or a widow" (p. 177). Being perceived as filial could enable her to be seen as a social male in ways that gave her agency and allowed her a claim to self-determination that Epstein identifies as a kind of "personhood." Achieving such a state in turn allowed her "to participate in the social realm as [agent] rather than dependent [object]" (p. 177). Research in fact shows that "many women's contacts with their natal families were stronger, more enduring, and more prevalent than is reflected in prescriptive moral texts" (p. 163). Geographical differences also play a role, since, for example, the gazetteers from Jiangnan 江南 and Huizhou 徽州 that the book examines were more likely to write about such women and their "acts of natal filial piety" than the ones from Taishan 泰山, Qufu 曲阜, or Tingzhou 汀州 (p. 171). The Qing court, moreover, gradually began to give greater recognition to filial wives, widows, and daughters (pp. 160–61).

The contrast with men can be seen in the fact that son-father filial piety, especially in the case of mourning rites, "was intimately associated with notions of duty and the ritual, political, and social status of the patriline" (p. 32). It was a matter of public (*gong* 公) face. But a different scenario played itself out when sons mourned mothers, where they "were allowed a greater degree of affective and personal (*si*) self-expression" (p. 32; *si* 私). Yet as shown in the case of Yan Yuan, his biography says little about his unnamed wife and his concubine, though he seems to have had a warm relationship with the latter. No record exists of his emotions at her death, though he did make offerings to her spirit. In short, expectations about behaviour at the death of superiors and equals differed vastly from those having to do with sons, daughters, wives, and concubines. A footnote could be added to these observations by mentioning the remarkable cases in which Ming and Qing emperors placed personal affection over orthodox precedents, especially, for example, in the mourning rituals for deceased concubines, birth-mothers of successors in particular. Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398) so mourned a concubine favourite that he had the son of another concubine mourn the favourite for three years. Although he did not perform the observances himself, he, nevertheless, insisted that the love of a mother and a father was the same. In addition, beginning with Ming Emperor Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 1464–1487), imperial mausoleums included not only the emperor and empress, the centuries-old norm, but also the concubine birth-mother of the successor and, in some cases in the

Qing, other concubine favourites as well. Furthermore, Ming emperors created family shrines within the palace, away from the ancestral temple, the *Taimiao* 太廟, which lay just outside the entrance to the Forbidden City, and where custom prohibited death observances for concubines. Emperors simply took things into their own hands, evading the precedents that held sway in the *Taimiao*, which was under the eyes of officials who could intervene and object.

All this fits in well with the themes of *Orthodox Passions*, especially in terms of another focus of the book, filial love in light of Manchu/Han relations. As Epstein writes, filial piety “became a flashpoint in the political and cultural wars between Han elites and the Manchu court, and between the local gentry and the state” (p. 39). This reminds one of the case of foot-binding, which the Manchu court tried but failed to ban and which, as a result, became a strong symbol of the Han identity. In the case of mourning rituals, they likewise became powerful symbols of the Han identity and were accompanied by an increased interest in forming local lineages, especially as the central state weakened. The Manchu rulers were cavalier in their treatment of ritual precedents, she writes, which incited such changes by turning “mourning rites into a potent symbol of the political and cultural differences between the foreign Manchu court and their occupied Han subjects” (p. 90). In this mix lies the practice of *gegu*, which became part of a cultural shift during the Qing. Scholars and other readers are well aware of the practice, especially as it occurs in both fictional and biographical accounts. To modern taste it is nothing but a case of pathological excess, and the distaste for it has led to underplaying and even ignoring it. But as the book demonstrates, the practice became seen as “a mainstream expression of filial devotion” (p. 134) in the Qing and was commonly described, as the excerpts that Epstein cites vividly show. A concurrent and related trend was the increasing promotion in genealogies and household instruction manuals of filial piety as a core virtue, a peak of interest showing in exemplars of filial love that appeared in High Qing narratives, especially gazetteers between about 1750 and 1850.

Yet another valuable contribution of this book is its re-examination of Qing fiction in light of filial themes. Epstein originally studied fiction, as demonstrated in her widely read 2001 work, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction*.¹ She has since expanded to include other types of historical sources, as mentioned above, which bring her to a new look at novels such as *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, in which the eighty-

¹ Maram Epstein, *Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001).

chapter version shows “many fewer references to filial themes” than the last forty chapters (p. 197, n. 1). In her view the novel can even be said to give “a distorted view of the affective values of China’s long eighteenth century” (p. 255). For example, omitted are the names of the parents of sisters Wang Xifeng 王熙鳳 and Lady Wang 王, as well as the deceased father of Xue Pan 薛蟠 and Baochai 寶釵, who never appears to give a thought to him. There is a “total occlusion of references to the death anniversaries of any of the deceased males or any acts of ancestor worship beyond the immediate details of funerals” (p. 198). Such details, or lack of them, are striking, as are other examples she cites, such as the death of Jia Zheng’s 賈政 brother, Jia Jing 賈敬, at which Jia Zheng displays none of the usual “somaticized markers of grief,” such as jumping, stamping one’s feet, or beating one’s breast (pp. 203–4). Finally, all but two of the ritual visits to the family ancestral shrine take place in the part of the novel attributed to Gao E 高鶚. In great contrast stands the sequel *Hou Honglou meng* 後紅樓夢, which foregrounds filial piety by rewriting Jia Zheng as a “loving and engaged patriarch,” who “is actively involved in deciding all important household matters.” He and Daiyu 黛玉 “make up the central power dyad in the household” (p. 249), while her strongest attachments are to her immediate natal family. Meanwhile, others find Baoyu’s 寶玉 “qing-struck antics to be tiresome, irritating, childish, and silly” (p. 247).

Such a contrast in emphasis can be seen in other novels—*Yesou puyan* 野叟曝言, for example, in which the hero shows a pronounced preference for filial devotion over conjugal affection. The novel as a whole establishes “the extreme poles of sexual virtue and sexual depravity,” with the close bond between son and mother serving as a mechanism to purify the hero of the “taint of sexual desire” by establishing her “as his primary affective partner”—quite an amazing phenomenon, among the many others in this ever-astounding book (p. 242).

A final focus that struck me was Epstein’s presentation of Yan Yuan and his expressions of filial piety. He was born as Zhu Bangliang 朱邦良 and believed himself to be the ritual heir of the Zhu family until his thirties, when he broke with them and declared his formal ritual relationship with the Yan clan. He went on a long search for his father, travelling to Beijing, where he put up posters on the city gates and went throughout the city announcing his search. He finally found that his father had died farther north, at which point he carried out meticulous performances of mourning rites, such as sleeping at the grave-site using “a clod pillow and grass bedding,” eating “coarse foods in the morning,” and “fasting the rest of the day” (p. 300). In Epstein’s analysis, Yan Yuan’s connection to his father was not “based on a child’s affective bond but on an adult’s need to have a devotional figure at the center of his ancestral rites, someone to anchor Yan Yuan’s

constructed adult identity” (p. 299), and that he “felt incomplete without a strong bond to his father, for this father was a necessary prop to Yan Yuan’s creation of himself as a filial son” (p. 303).

Filial love makes for dramatic stories, as this book shows numerous times. *Orthodox Passions* demonstrates convincingly that, compared to what one might at first come across, filial piety played a far greater role in the lives of people existing at the same time that novels such as *Jin Ping Mei* 金瓶梅, *Guwangyan* 姑妄言, and *Honglou meng* were written. *Orthodox Passions* will compel closer attention to the aspects of filial love in these and other texts, whether distinctly portrayed or not. I can also envision a spin-off topic, namely, filial piety elsewhere than China, especially given the myth we often heard years ago (and sometimes still hear) that, compared to China, Western culture has a miserable way of treating elders. A phenomenon like “filial piety” that receives a unique name and focus in one culture may not easily carry over elsewhere, or if it does, no longer with the same boundaries of meaning and structure of application. But something like filial piety exists everywhere, if not necessarily in the same ways, and awaits our consideration, especially now that so much more has been said about it in this book.

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The Poetics of Early Chinese Thought: How the Shijing Shaped the Chinese Philosophical Tradition. By Michael Hunter. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021. Pp. 228. \$145.00 hardcover, \$35.00 paperback.

In *The Poetics of Early Chinese Thought: How the Shijing Shaped the Chinese Philosophical Tradition*, Michael Hunter seeks to show that the *Shi* 詩, whether writ large as *The Shi*, i.e., the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*), or writ small as simply *shi* (poetry) “was the most foundational corpus of early Chinese thought,” “a sine qua non of elite education in the Warring States period (fifth century BCE–221 BCE), that so-called Golden Age of Chinese thought” (p. 1). Despite this importance of the *Shi*, Hunter argues that it has been left out of surveys of Chinese intellectual history for various reasons (its “pigeonholing” as literature rather than philosophy being just one of the more obvious), and that most readers today do not approach it as a part of Chinese thought (p. 5). This book is his attempt to redress this perceived lack.