

Women's Social Networks and Sociability in Late Eighteenth and Mid Nineteenth Century China: The Case of Hu Xiangduan 胡相端, 1775-1850

Introduction

Recent scholarship has challenged the traditional portrayal of Chinese women in pre-modern China as secluded and cloistered figures—crippled by bound feet and confined to their boudoirs—a view shaped largely by the May Fourth paradigm.¹ From a revisionist standpoint, the urbanization, commercialization, and the rise of print culture in late imperial China created opportunities for some elite women to access literary and artistic education, engage with literature, and produce, exchange, and publish writings, as well as travel. Thus, women's participation in literary activities and their enhanced mobility enabled them to push the boundaries of traditional women's space, form networks and communities within and beyond the domestic sphere, and engage in broader social interactions outside the confines of kinship ties.²

Given these developments, recent studies have enriched our understanding of women's social lives and the communities centered around literary production in late imperial China,

¹ By rediscovering and investigating the rich social lives and vibrant literary communities of educated women in the lower Yangtze region of seventeenth-century China, Dorothy Ko challenges the conventional depiction of cloistered and victimized women under Confucian orthodoxy in late imperial China, proposing to write against May Fourth formulations. In a later collaborative volume, Ko and other authors advance this revisionist perspective by reexamining the contentious relationship between Confucianism and women, suggesting that women were neither rebels nor victims within the Confucian framework. Instead, they embraced certain aspects of official norms while simultaneously resisting others. See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994) and Dorothy Ko, ed., *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

² Dorothy Ko's studies suggest that, amidst the developments of urbanization, commercialization, and the rise of print culture in late Ming society, some elite women were able to forge communities both within and beyond the domestic sphere through their literary engagements as writers, editors, and readers. Ko categorizes women's literary communities into three types based on membership and activities: domestic, social, and public communities. Within these communities, literary women connected with family members, relatives, neighbors, fellow students, and like-minded writers from afar. Some of these women's communities gained public visibility through publications and the literary fame of their members. Built upon Ko's work, Beata Grant's investigation of the poetic relationships between gentry women and Buddhist nuns in seventeenth-century China also suggests that literary women were able to cross spatial and social boundaries through poetic and epistolary exchanges, thereby creating an expanded spiritual and intellectual space that defied conventional limits on female behavior. See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994); and Beata Grant, "Chan Friends: Poetic Exchanges Between Gentry Women and Buddhist Nuns in Seventeenth-Century China," in *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing*, ed. Grace Fong and Ellen Widmer (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

framing these literary engagements as critical avenues to examine women's agency.³ scholars have also provided nuanced insights into how women's literary activities were deeply intertwined with family dynamics and shaped by male influence, challenging assumptions that these activities were purely spontaneous or independent.⁴

However, existing studies on women's socialization in late imperial China have primarily focused on networks and communities that revolved around literary creation and female homosocial interactions.⁵ Relatively little attention has been given to women's social interactions that arose from cultural practices beyond literary endeavours, nor have scholars extensively explored the complexities of mixed-gender engagements. Additionally, while previous research highlights the intersection of women's literary participation with family practices, there remains a need to examine how women's artistic involvement and broader

³ Some scholars adopt a *longue durée* perspective to examine women's literary engagements and connections, while others may take a more focused, localized view to study women's communities, such as specific women's poetry clubs or writing groups led by male literati. For example, Ellen Widmer explores continuities and discontinuities between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries in her study of women's emerging literary connections. Similarly, Grace Fong examines how late imperial women writers constructed literary and social communities within the discursive space of poetic criticism that transcended temporal, spatial, and social constraints. On the other hand, Daria Berg discusses the Banana Garden poetry club 蕉園詩社 (Jiaoyuan Shishe) in seventeenth-century China, a literary society for gentlewomen, tracing the ways in which these poets constructed and participated in a network of social negotiations and exchanges regarding a gentlewoman's gentility. See Ellen Widmer, "Women's Literary Networks in Nineteenth Century China 十九世紀中國女性的文學網絡", *Qinghua Daxue Xuebao* 清華大學學報, Vol. 23, 106-116 (2008); Grace S. Fong, *Herself an Author: Gender, Agency, and Writing in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); and Daria Berg, "Negotiating Gentility: The Banana Garden Poetry Club in Seventeenth-Century China," in *The Quest for Gentility in China: Negotiations Beyond Gender and Class*, ed. Daria Berg (London; New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁴ For example, in her study of the talented women of the Zhang family, Susan Mann reveals how women's literary talents were intertwined with patronage networks essential for the survival and perpetuation of a lettered family. Binbin Yang's investigation of the literary production of a talented woman, He Peizhu 何佩珠 (1819-?), suggests that her poetry writing, as a means of social networking, was part of a family project to establish its fame among local elite families and to acquire social and cultural capital. See Susan Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family* (Berkeley, CA: 2007) and Binbin Yang, "New Perspectives on the Writings and Social Circles of Yangzhou Women of Talents: A Case Study of the Social Circle of He Peizhu's Family 揚州閨秀著述與交遊研究新視野: 以何佩珠一門交遊圈為例," *Journal of Chinese Women Studies*, no. 5, series no. 149 (2018).

⁵ In Dorothy Ko's work, while cultured women were able to transcend traditional boundaries through literary production, their connections with non-kin were predominantly with other literary women. In her recent study on female friendship in late imperial China, Grace Fong also focuses on female homosociality beyond kinship but skirts female mixed-gender interactions. See Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994) and Grace Fong, "In the Absence of Discourse: Articulating Female Friendship in Late Imperial China," in *Gender and Friendship in Chinese Literature*, ed. Wai-ye Li (Boston: Brill, 2024).

social lives might have reshaped gender dynamics and refined gendered roles within the family.

This prompts three key questions that this paper aims to address: How did women's involvement in cultural practices beyond literary creation forge alternative modes and open new possibilities for their social engagement? In what ways did women navigate their roles in mixed-gender gatherings, and how did these interactions reshape traditional norms of sociability? How did women's broader social lives contribute to the transformation of gendered roles within the family structure? By investigating these questions, this paper intends to explore the complex forms of women's social lives in late imperial China and to analyze how evolving patterns of sociability impacted gender dynamics both within the familial sphere and in the broader social context.

The paper will conduct a case study of Hu Xiangduan 胡相端 (1775-1850), a celebrated female talent who garnered public recognition and crafted a remarkable career as a versatile artist excelling in poetry, painting, and *qin* music. Through her artistic practices, Hu cultivated an extensive network of contemporaries, encompassing both men and women, extending beyond the confines of her kinship ties. By employing a microhistorical approach, inspired by the methodologies of scholars such as Natalie Zemon Davis and Carlo Ginzburg, and applying Clifford Geertz's concept of thick description, this study aims to reconstruct Hu's interactions within her extensive network, delve into her subjectivities and expressions of agency, and analyze the broader significance of her cultivated social life.⁶ Furthermore, this paper situates Hu's networks and social activities within the framework of her family practices, examining how her broad social interactions and diverse identities challenged and redefined traditional gender roles within her family.

⁶ See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); and Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

My investigation will center on close readings and selected translations of Hu Xiangduan's poetry collections: the *Baoyulou xiaolü* 抱月樓小律 (*Short Verses from the Pavilion of Embracing Moon*), published in 1816, and the *Sanhua tianshi gao* 散花天室稿 (*Drafts from the Chamber of Scattering Flowers*), published in 1823. These works will serve as the primary foundation for analyzing Hu's literary voice, artistic expressions, and social interactions. To provide a richer contextual understanding, I will incorporate a diverse range of supplementary sources authored by both men and women, including biographies, local gazetteers, musical anthologies, and other poetry and prose collections.

In my analyses, I will approach Hu's poetry not merely as literary works, but as a critical form of autobiographical writing that provides rich information for reconstructing her life history and exploring her inner world. As Grace S. Fong has noted, literary women in late imperial China often composed poetry throughout their lives, using it as a medium for autobiographical expression. Through their verses, these women recounted everyday experiences, travel narratives, social interactions, introspective reflections, and more.⁷ Consequently, women's poetry collections serve not only as literary artifacts but also as vital sources for uncovering the daily lives and inner worlds of elite women, revealing the multifaceted dimensions of their personal and social identities.

Building on Fong's work, I will closely examine the abundant textual and paratextual information found in Hu's two collections, tracing the networks of obligation and acquaintance that shaped her social and cultural life. Drawing on Gérard Genette's concept of paratext, Fong classifies components of women's individual collections into two categories: textual and paratextual. Important textual considerations include the internal arrangement of the poetry collection, themes relevant to various life stages and experiences, lengthy prose

⁷ Grace S. Fong, "Introduction," in *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming Through Qing*, ed. Grace S. Fong, and Ellen Widmer (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 4.

titles that occasionally provide biographical information, and interlinear notes that offer further context or personal reflections. Paratextual elements, as Fong outlines, consists of the author's name and title, prefaces, biographies, accounts of conduct, epitaphs, endorsement verses, and postscripts.⁸ This framework will serve as the main analytical categories for this paper, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of both the content and the broader cultural contexts that inform Hu's literary works.

This paper will begin with an overview of Hu Xiangduan's life story, drawing on local gazetteers, biographical prefaces written by her relatives and friends, and her own writings. These three types of sources provide valuable (auto)biographical information about Hu's roles as a daughter, wife, mother, poet, painter, *qin* musician, and teacher. I will then reconstruct and analyze Hu's social networks among women by closely examining the textual and paratextual information in her individual collections, with particular focus on her friendships with several female poets and her interactions with female disciples. The paper will further explore Hu's extensive involvement with high-ranking officials, male literati, writers, painters, and musicians of her time, noting an economic dimension to the artistic relationships she developed with both men (and women). In the concluding section, I will discuss the implications of Hu's sociability within the family context, scrutinizing how her active social life transformed her familial roles and contributed to an alternative mode of family practice.

A Sketch of Hu Xiangduan's Life Story

This section will first reconstruct Hu's life history in her maternal and marital families, where she nurtured bonds with her family members, enjoyed a continuity of education in

⁸ Grace S.Fong, "Auto/biographical Subjects: Ming-Qing Women's Poetry Collections as Sources for Women's Life Histories" in *Overt and Covert Treasures: Essays on the Sources for Chinese Women's History*, ed. Clara Wing-chung Ho (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2012), 369-410.

poetry, painting, and *qin* music, and obtained network resources she could mobilize throughout her life. It will then trace Hu's career as a successful teacher for boys and girls from elite or literati families in different regions, which enabled her to transcend the physical boundary of her family, develop more non-kinship networks, and gain financial resources for her family.

Although Hu was born into an elite family in northern China, her life was more closely linked to the Jiangnan region, the economic and cultural hinterland of nineteenth-century China. Her father served in official positions there, and she eventually married into a local elite family.⁹ Even though Hu's natal family seemed to decline after the death of Hu's father, the family networks still provided resources for Hu to seek financial assistance in her life. When Hu experienced financial pressure in her middle age, her frequent written contacts with her father's old friends and colleagues indicate her efforts to mobilize her family networks and seek potential financial help to sustain her household.

The exchanges of poems and letters with her close family members and a wider network of collateral kin suggest Hu's close emotional bonds with her siblings and her efforts to maintain contact with her kinship members. Hu Xiangduan's mother might have come from a family surnamed Cao 曹 in Changshu 常熟, a place near Suzhou.¹⁰ After her marriage, Hu still managed to maintain frequent contact with her maternal great-grandmother in Changshu, her sister in Hangzhou, and her brother, then an official in Guangdong, through exchanges of

⁹ Hu's natal family was from Daxing 大興, which is present-day Beijing. Born in 1775, she was the daughter of Hu Wenquan 胡文銓, who once served as the magistrate (知府) in Fuping, Changde, Ningguo, and Suzhou, and held a position in the Ministry of Agriculture. Brought up in such an official-literati family, Hu received her initial education in literature, painting, and *qin* music.

¹⁰ The evidence is a series of poems Hu wrote to celebrate the eightieth birthday of her maternal great-grandmother Lady Jiang. The poems were entitled "Composed to Celebrate the Eightieth Birthday of My Maternal Grandmother, Lady Jiang, in Changshu" 常熟省外祖母蔣太恭人適值八十壽誕作此奉祝 and thus indicate the family background of Hu's maternal family. See Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaoliu* 抱月樓小律 (1816), 294.

poems and letters, despite the distance and physical separation.¹¹ These interactions and efforts to maintain family ties through exchanges of poems and letters suggest a mode of “child socialization” proposed by Susan Mann, where women were brought up to assert and pursue their interests by nurturing emotional bonds with brothers and other siblings and maintaining contact with a wide network of collateral kin.¹²

It is likely that Hu married while her father was serving as an official in Ningguo 寧國 (Anhui).¹³ Hu married Xu Yinji 許蔭基, who came from another literati family in Qingpu 青浦, a place in Shanghai. While Xu’s father, Xu Baoshan 許寶善, held a government position as imperial censor (侍御) and was a famous scholar in literature, Xu himself did not undertake an official career. Instead, he had a career as a doctor and a skillful painter. The shared interests in painting seemed to cultivate intimacy between the couple.¹⁴ The couple had two daughters, Xu Shuxian 許淑賢 and Xu Shuhui 許淑慧, and no sons. The family experienced a consistent lack of financial resources.

While Hu received her initial education in poetry, painting, and *qin* music in her maternal family, she enjoyed a continuity of education and was able to develop her artistic proficiency in poetry and painting after her marriage. Despite her new role as a wife in charge of all household duties, Hu continued to advance her literary skills under the instruction of

¹¹ For example, sometimes, Hu would visit the sister of her mother, Lady Cao Pingxiang 曹蘋香夫人, who was talented in poetry and painting, and create poems to commemorate those visits. See Hu Xiangduan 胡相端, “Visiting the Garden of Bi Family and My Maternal Aunt, Lady Cao Pinxiang, and Presenting Four Poems to My Uncle” 過畢氏園謁母姨曹蘋香夫人即呈姨丈香塾都尉四首, “Farewell to My Maternal Aunt” 留別畢氏母姨, in Hu Xiangduan, *Sanhua tianshi gao* 散花天室稿 (1823), 402.

¹² See Susan Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹³ Hu completed her wedding in Wanjiang 皖江, another place in Anhui. Xu Yinji 許蔭基, “Preface”, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaolü* 抱月樓小律 (1816), 235.

¹⁴ When Xu traveled to other places, Hu maintained poetic correspondence with her husband, updating him on recent family affairs and discussing the art of painting. Hu once wrote two poems to document moments when she learned to paint orchids from her husband. One poem appreciates the vividness of the painting, which evoked artistic synesthesia and the imagined fragrance of orchids. The other poem recalls how their shared experience in artistic creation cultivated intimacy between the couple. Hu Xiangduan, “Learning to Paint Orchids from My Husband” 從外學畫蘭, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaolü* 抱月樓小律 (1816), 309.

her father-in-law.¹⁵ One poem might refer to an experience when Hu learned literary skills from Xu Baoshan in a quasi-formal way:

Jade Peak Academy

玉山講院

Before the elder, I was introduced to learn,
His laughter and joy, I always earned.
Before disciples arrived, the courtyard was still,
I held a book, eager to develop my talents.¹⁶

堂上先容問字來，
承歡每博笑顏開。
生徒未到庭堦寂，
一卷親攜學秀才。¹⁶

This poem alludes to a woman's experience in a formal and public educational institution. While the academy was usually exclusively open to males, the first and second lines recall moments when the elder taught Hu and enjoyed having a woman disciple like her. The third and fourth lines allude to Hu's diligence in learning and her ambitions to develop her talents like her male counterparts.

The paratexts in Hu's individual collections indicate that her husband and family network facilitated the publication of her writings. This reminds us that the visibility of women's writings is not an individual, but a cooperative project. Two prefaces in Hu's second collection reveal that her drafts were circulated among male literati within her family network. In a preface written by Qian Shi 錢榘, a relative of Hu's husband and a prestigious official-literati, Qian mentioned that Hu's husband originally brought her writings to him, allowing him to read and write a preface.¹⁷ Another preface by Chen Bangtai 陳邦泰, a relative of Qian Shi and also a scholar, noted that he had the opportunity to read Hu's writings when he visited Qian.¹⁸ The self-references in these two prefaces indicate that both

¹⁵ When Xu Baoshan taught his disciples literary composition, Hu, as she was accompanying and serving her father-in-law, also had opportunities to learn. Hu sometimes would present her own poems to Xu Baoshan and request his feedback. During a family excursion to Jade Peak 玉峰, Xu Baoshan once commanded Hu to write poems to pair with his productions.

¹⁶ Hu Xiangduan, "Jade Peak Academy" 玉山講院, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaolü* 抱月樓小律 (1816), 245.

¹⁷ Qian Shi 錢榘, "Preface", in Hu Xiangduan, *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿 (1823), 469.

¹⁸ Chen Bangtai 陳邦泰, "Preface", in Hu Xiangduan, *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿 (1823), 471.

Qian and Li were not very closely related to the family. Yet, the invitations they received to write prefaces for the publication suggest that they were carefully selected within the family network because of their status as either officials or scholars, thus adding prestige to the collection.

Besides her role as a versatile artist sustaining herself by “plowing inkstones,” Hu also conducted a career as a woman teacher in literature, painting, and *qin* music. Through this role, Hu developed many teacher-disciple relationships beyond her kinship networks. While a more typical teaching career for women in late imperial China was to educate girls, Hu also had a few male disciples, in addition to many female students. Dorothy Ko argues that woman teachers of girls can be seen as a natural extension of the duties of mothers in the domestic realm.¹⁹ The gender diversity of Hu’s disciples indicate a further extension of prescribed woman duties in education and a more fluid gender division in terms of the teacher-disciple relationship. The son of Zhuping Shanren 竹坪山人, Zheng Zhi 鄭治, offers an example. While Zheng learned painting skills from his father since childhood, he learned more sophisticated sketching skills from Hu.²⁰ Hu’s career suggests that women like Hu were not only “teachers of the inner chamber.”

A teaching career could prompt a woman to adopt a peripatetic lifestyle. After Hu’s marriage, she originally lived in Qingpu and later moved to Suzhou with her husband.²¹ Frequent poems about her wearying travels to Yushan, Wulin, and Yangzhou, and other places indicate that Hu may have lived in her students’ homes while giving instruction.²² It is

¹⁹ Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-century China* (intra.).

²⁰ Yet, Zheng died when he was twenty years old. Hu once wrote an elegy poem with a short biography for him. See Hu Xiangduan, “Elegy for Zheng Xiaogu” 輓鄭生小谷, in Hu Xiangduan, *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿 (1823), 458.

²¹ Xu Yinji 許蔭基, “Preface”, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaolü* 抱月樓小律 (1816), 235.

²² Hu Xiangduan 胡相端, “From the beginning of summer to midsummer, I travel back and forth to Mountain Yu by boat and carriage, busy and long away from writing. Sitting by the north window to escape the heat, I completed four quatrains” 自首夏至伏日往返虞山舟車歷碌久離筆硯坐北窗消暑補成四絕句, “Written on the boat heading to Mountain Yu” 赴虞山舟中作, “Written on the boat to Yu Mountain on the ancient Flower Festival” 古花朝虞山舟中作, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaolü* 抱月樓小律 (1816), 298, 326, 346-347. Hu

likely that Hu's clients usually paid her traveling fees. Her husband did not always accompany her on her travels.²³ One of Hu's poems portrays a moment when she stayed with her female disciple in a household outside of her family:

A Poem Written in Mid-July While Staying at the Yamen, in the Peace Room After Lessons

七月中旬下榻臬署報平安室課餘偶成

The beauty of the jade cannot compare to the graceful figure of the fairy maiden,
仙女嬌姿玉不如，

Under red curtains, we sit together, reading books.

絳帷侍坐共攤書。

With deep feelings, I reflect on the bond between teacher and student,

情深省識師生誼，

Recalling the early days when I first sought instructions.²⁴

回憶當年問字初。

The title of the poem refers to a place where she resided temporarily because of her teachings. The first two lines recall a moment when Hu sat with her girl disciples inside the boudoir and read books together. This ordinary moment evoked Hu's intimate feelings of the teacher-disciple relationship and her childhood memory of when she first began to develop her literary talents. Beneath an appreciation of the deep connection between teacher and disciple, Hu's lament of the passing time also emerges in this poem.

Hu's career as an itinerant teacher may have evolved into a more stable teaching career in a fixed place in Yangzhou during her forties or fifties. Local gazetteers document that Hu taught in Nanhe Jieyuan 南河節院 (the government office in Nanhe) in the early years of the reign of Emperor Daoguang (1820s). Her second daughter, Xu Shuhui 許淑慧, accompanied

Xiangduan, "Three quatrains inscribed on the wall of my temporary home when I returned again to Mountain Yu" 重過虞山書寓齋壁三絕句 in Hu Xiangduan, *Sanhua tianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 363.

²³ Hu Xiangduan 胡相端, "Leaving My Husband, a Farewell to Wulin" 往武林留別外子, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaoliu* 抱月樓小律(1816), 492.

²⁴ Hu Xiangduan, "A Poem Written in Mid-July While Staying at the Yamen, in the Peace Room After Lessons" 七月中旬下榻臬署報平安室課餘偶成, in Hu Xiangduan, *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 441.

Hu and assisted with her teachings. When Xu Shuhui's husband passed away, she returned to her natal family and lived with her mother. Besides teaching, this mother and daughter pair devoted themselves to Buddhist practice and involved themselves in literary and artistic creation. Their artistic talents and practice won them great fame. Although their record was placed under the section of "Biographies of Virtuous Women" in local gazetteers, it was their literary and artistic talents in poetry writing and painting, instead of their virtues, that were documented and emphasized.²⁵

Beyond kin roles, Hu's roles as a painter, a published poet, a *qin* musician, and a teacher, as well as the mobility she enjoyed, expanded the parameters of her social life. These roles connected Hu to different nodes of intricate networks and the various communities open to cultured men and women in her period. The next section will discuss Hu's social interactions with her female contemporaries.

Hu Xiangduan's Social Lives with Cultured Women

Hu's two poetry collections record her interactions with around forty-six women (Table 2). While some of them came from Hu's kinship circle, such as her two daughters and women from her maternal family, more than half were cultured women or daughters from families beyond her kinship ties (Table 1). These women's interactions revolved around poetic correspondence, poetic inscriptions for paintings, elegant gatherings, casual visiting, excursions, farewells, teachings, and more.

This section will first discuss Hu's friendships with female poets, including Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀 (1762-1832), Xi Peilan 席佩蘭, and Liao Yunjin 廖雲錦. The friendship between Hu and Gui offers a prime example of women's homosocial intimacy. The overlapping and

²⁵ See local gazetteer of Qinghe County 清河縣志(1854). The original Chinese texts are: 道光初，母胡授書南河節院，淑慧隨侍。長齋繡佛，間為詩詞，寫生花鳥，精妍澹冶，名動一時。……胡氏名相端，亦著有及抱月樓詩稿。以上待旌。

intertwined social networks among these women suggest that Hu was a meeting point between Yuan Mei's famous literary circle and other groups. It will then offer a detailed treatment of Hu's interaction with her daughters and female disciples. Hu's teaching of *qin* music, painting, and poetry writing helped carve out a female community with close interactions among members. Their social lives provide insight into the ways in which Hu built a wider network of elite ties and companions for her daughters.

The relationship between Hu and Gui illustrates women's homosocial intimacy beyond kin ties. The intensity and endurance of their interaction stands out among Hu's female contacts. Gui, a daughter from an elite literary family in Changshu, was a talented poet and painter, as well as a successful teacher. As Hu's poem indicates that her maternal family was from Changshu, shared geographical connections and shared interests in poetry and painting might have supplied the context for the two women to become acquainted. A series of six poems by Hu indicates that their interactions may have begun with correspondence and poetic exchanges:

A Series of Six Poems in Response to Lady Gui Peishan (the Sixth Poem)
答歸佩珊夫人六首（其六）

Fate has been unkind, allowing us but a single meeting,
一面緣慳註想殷，
Night after night, my dreams are haunted by clouds over the sea.
連宵夢繞海邊雲。
In your boudoir, you promised we would become poetry companions,
妝樓許結清吟侶，
When the peach blossoms bloom, I will surely visit you.²⁶
開到桃花定訪君。

²⁶ Hu Xiangduan, "A Series of Six Poems in Response to Lady Gui Peishan" 答歸佩珊夫人六首, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaolü* 抱月樓小律(1816), 290.

In the first line of the poem, Hu expresses her regret for not having the chance to meet with Gui in person, suggesting that this poem was written before she first visited Gui. The second line uses a poetic motif of dream to express her great longing to meet with Gui, her poetry companion.

The friendship between Hu and Gui later exceeded mere poetic exchanges and correspondence connections. Constant poetic correspondence and several poems on mutual visits, elegant gatherings, and excursions suggest a greater intimacy between these two friends.²⁷ The promise of a plan to visit Gui at the end of the above poem turned out to be more than a random lyrical verse. Hu arranged a visit to Gui on a spring day. Before her first visit to Gui, Hu sent another series of three poems to her poetry companion, where she referred to her excitement of the coming visit and her concern about her poor literary proficiency compared to Gui:

Letters to Lady Peishan
寄珮珊夫人

Suddenly, I am delighted to see the thawing snow on the steps,
乍喜階前凍雪融，
Taking advantage of the clear weather, I plan to visit your ethereal abode.
趁晴便擬訪仙蹤。
I am certain that we will feel as familiar as before when we meet,
定知一見情如舊，
Because for last night, we already met in my dream.
昨夜先曾夢裡逢。

²⁷ Hu Xiangduan, "On the Joy of Lady Peishan's Visit to My Place" 喜珮珊夫人過舍, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaoli* 抱月樓小律(1816), 319. "Three Poems on a Spring Excursion with Lady Peishan and Fellow Student Zhulin to the Southern Garden on the Tenth Day of Late Spring" 季春十日偕珮珊姊暨珠林同硯遊南園諸勝歸成三絕, "On the 15th day of the lunar February, Mr. Shuangshu, Mr. Xinqing, Xiaozhen, and Mr. Hongxue visited the Chamber of Scattered Flowers. Miss Peishan also came by. We lingered all day. Mr. Hongxue created a painting for our elegant gathering, where I inscribed this poem" 仲春之望, 雙樹先生偕心青太史小真茂才紅雪山人過散花天室, 適珮珊女史亦至, 流連竟日, 山人為作雅集圖即題其上, "Passing by the Prefect Yu Song's Hanbi Pavilion with Sister Peishan, Leaving a Poem" 偕珮珊姊過玉松太守涵碧樓留題, "On the Nineteenth Day, Revisiting Hanbi Pavilion with Sister Pei Shan for A Small Gathering, Having My Elder Daughter Shuxian Become Lady Shu Xia's Godchild, and Presenting Four Poems" 十九日偕珮珊姊重過涵碧樓小集以長女淑賢寄漱霞夫人膝下再呈四絕句, in Hu Xiangduan, *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 421, 320, 406, 409.

With shallow learning, I deeply feel ashamed of my ignorance,
學淺深慚百不知，
Empty and sparse, yet boasting of my spontaneous poetry.
空疎翻詡性靈詩。
Not a single book have I fully comprehended,
竟無一卷書曾熟，
I worry about our conversations when we meet.²⁸
問答應愁見面時。

In the last line of the first poem, Hu employed a poetic motif of a dream to express her deep feelings and great intimacy with Gui. While Gui was a more famous poet, thirteen years older than her, she expressed her worry about her poetry proficiency and the coming meeting and conversation with Gui.

The friendship between Gui and Hu went beyond a model of cultural companionship. Gui seemed to be an agent helping Hu to expand her social interactions with other gentry women, which might have brought her more patronage. For example, during one visit to Hu, Gui brought a collective painting created by Ding Jisheng 丁寄生, the wife of Zhang Qiegeng 張且耕, and Ding's four daughters. Gui asked Hu to add inscriptions to this painting.²⁹ It is likely that Hu did not have any ties with Ding before, and Gui was the intermediary connecting them. Hu's inscriptions on Ding's painting might have prompted more direct interactions with Ding. In addition, since Gui was also a successful woman teacher, they may have shared their social networks to recruit more students. The possible economic dimension of their friendship might be one of the reasons why Hu prioritized her relationship with Gui.

²⁸ Hu Xiangduan, "Letters to Lady Peishan" 寄珮珊夫人, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaoli* 抱月樓小律 (1816), 316.

²⁹ Hu Xiangduan, "Painting of Gathering Flowers and Presenting Auspiciousness" 聚芳呈瑞圖, in Hu Xiangduan, *Baoyuelou xiaoli* 抱月樓小律 (1816), 334. The interlinear notes of the poem provide the contextual information. The original Chinese texts are: 圖為茸城張且耕筵室丁寄生偕其四女合作，珮珊姊攜來索詩，為書二絕。

Hu's connections with Gui and a group of female talents evidence Hu's interactions with two major literary communities of women emerging in Jiangnan area: the literary communities of Yuan Mei's and Chen Wenshu's disciples respectively. While Gui was an outstanding disciple of Yuan Mei, she gravitated toward the orbit of Chen Wenshu after Yuan's death. In addition to Gui, Hu also befriended three other prominent disciples of Yuan Mei: Xi Peilan 席佩蘭 (1766-1829) from Changshu, Liao Yunjin 廖雲錦 (1766-1835) from Shanghai, and Luo Qilan 駱綺蘭 (1756-1820) from Jurong. All three women either wrote prefaces for or helped edit drafts of Hu's individual collections.

Beyond her closeness to Yuan's several female disciples, Hu had direct interactions with Chen Wenshu, who wrote a preface for her poetry collection and engaged in poetic exchanges with her. Moreover, Hu and Chen also shared a group of female students, including Hu's younger daughter Xu Shuhui 許淑慧, Shi Miaoying 師妙嫻, and Shi Miaoling 師妙靈. The surviving sources suggest that while the sisters Xu and Shi learned painting and *qin* music from Hu, they simultaneously had Chen as their teacher in literature.³⁰ These overlapping and intertwined social networks demonstrate the ways in which Hu forged connections with the major women's literary communities of her time. Hu's literary style of *xingling* 性靈 (spiritual spontaneity) seems to echo Yuan's literary and artistic principles, indicating that Hu's interactions with the members of these two major literary communities influenced her literary creation.

Besides connecting with her contemporary communities of women, Hu's interactions with her female disciples indicate that Hu might have had created a female community

³⁰ Chen Wenshu 陳文述, "A Poem for My Twelve Female Painter Disciples" 畫家十二女弟子詩, in Chen Wenshu, *Selected Poems from the Hall of Cultivating the Dao* 頤道堂詩選. Chinese Text Project, Zhongguo zhexueshu dianzihua jihua 中國哲學書電子化計劃. <https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&file=41686&page=52>. The original Chinese texts are: 定生敏速如流泉, 筆歌墨舞盈輕絃, 珍珠密字工雕鐫。(青浦許定生淑慧)。

centered on her teachings in *qin* music, paintings, and poetry writing. Local histories identified the Shi sisters (Shi Miaoying and Shi Miaoling) as the “female disciples of the Chamber of Embracing Moon” 抱月樓女弟子—that is to say, Hu’s female disciples—and Miaoying was regarded as one of the most outstanding students.³¹ While they were skillful painters, the Shi sisters were better known for their talents in *qin* music. Each compiled or published their own anthology of *qin* scores and playing instructions.³² The reference to the Shi sisters in local histories suggests a female community that revolved around Hu’s teachings and was named after Hu’s studio, the Chamber of Embracing the Moon. This studio might be the place where Hu typically hosted her disciples and socialized with them. In this sense, her chamber was both a private and a public space for women.

The core members of this female community included not only Hu and her prominent female disciples, but also Hu’s two daughters. Hu’s surviving poems about group excursions not only indicate close interactions among Hu, her two daughters, and Hu’s other female disciples; they also present an unusual image of women transcending their inner chambers. Beyond elegant indoor gatherings, social activities among the community include outdoor excursions and ascending hills. For example, a work written by Xu Shuhui recorded an excursion with the Shi sisters to the Terrace of Emperor Yu 禹王台 in the spring.³³ Another

³¹ The Shi sisters were the daughters of Chen’s friend Shi Zhaolong 師兆龍 originating from Hancheng 韓城, Shanxi 陝西. A possible link between the Shi family from Hancheng and Chen and Hu based in the Jiangnan region might be Shi Zhaolong’s official tenure as a magistrate in Changzhou 常州. Local gazetteer of Jiashan (1894).

³² While Shi Miaoying compiled a *qin* anthology titled *Xiecuixuan qinpu* 寫翠軒琴譜, her younger sister, Miaoling, was the compiler and editor of *Meihuaxianguan qinpu* 梅花仙館琴譜. The surviving manuscript of *Meihuaxianguan qinpu* 梅花仙館琴譜 suggests that Shi Miaoling from Hancheng was the compiler and editor. See the original Chinese texts: 韓城女士師妙靈訂. A seal with Chinese characters *xiachang* 霞裳 in the manuscript further corroborates the author was Shi Miaoling, as *xiacheng* was her courtesy name. A manuscript and a transcription of Miaoling’s *qin* anthology are now housed in the rare book archives in Shanghai Library in China.

³³ Xu Shuhui 許淑慧, “On the Ninth Day of the February in the Year of Renchen (1832), Climbing the Yuwang Terrace Again with the Two Younger Sisters of Master Shi to See the Chrysanthemums” 菩薩蠻: 壬辰閏月九日復同師氏二妹登禹王臺看菊, in Xu Shuhui, *Shouyin ci* 瘦吟詞. Chinese Text Project, Zhongguo zhexueshu dianzihua jihua 中國哲學書電子化計劃.
<https://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&file=148760&page=78&remap=gb#%E7%A6%B9%E7%8E%8B>.

poem by Hu suggests that she once ascended the Tiger Hill accompanied by her two daughters and several female students on the Double Ninth Festival. The poem reveals the unusualness of this group excursion by depicting women who seldom left home ascending the heights on a rainy day:

In the Rain on Double Ninth Festival, Ascended Tiger Hill with the Accompaniment of Shuxian, Shuhui, and Several Female Disciples

九日雨中攜淑賢淑慧暨諸女弟子虎阜登高

Amidst the lingering clouds, the shadow of Lianyun Pagoda is indistinct,
連雲塔影有無間,

Layered green trees protect the Buddha's sanctuary.
碧樹層層護佛關。

Who wants to be like the secluded women in their orchid chambers?

誰似蘭閨足幽與,

Let's ascend the heights and brave the rain on autumn mountains.³⁴

登高冒雨上秋山。

The last two lines indicate Hu's unwillingness to remain a secluded woman staying at home in her boudoir, like most of her female contemporaries.

In addition to including her two daughters in a cultural circle among her female disciples, Hu also sought to develop nominal kinship with elite families beyond her original kin ties by having her daughter become the non-biological daughter of another gentry woman. This effort suggests how Hu aimed to build a wider and stronger network of companions and elites for her daughters to secure their social standing. In a poem titled "On the Nineteenth Day, Revisiting Hanbi Pavilion with Sister Pei Shan for A Small Gathering, Having My Elder Daughter Shuxian Become Lady Shu Xia's Godchild, and Presenting Four Poems," Hu recorded a visit to Lady Shuxia with her close friend Gui Maoyi and her elder

³⁴ Hu Xiangduan, "In the Rain on Double Ninth Festival, Ascended Tiger Hill with the Accompaniment of Shuxian, Shuhui, and Several Female Disciples" 九日雨中攜淑賢淑慧暨諸女弟子虎阜登高, in in Hu Xiangduan, *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 453.

daughter, Xu Shuxian 許淑賢, where Lady Shuxia became the godmother of Hu's daughter.

Lady Shuxia was the wife of Wu Yusong 吳玉松, a local prefect (*taishou* 太守) and an old friend of Hu's father. Because of her husband's high official position, Lady Shuxia belonged to a more elite family and possessed a higher social status compared to Hu. The poem alludes to the social status differences between these two families and the motivation for establishing a nominal kinship.

Following along was my young daughter, who was so tender and innocent,
隨行穉女太嬌痴,
Gratefully receiving the loving care from another mom.
偏荷垂憐阿嬭慈。
She was like grass, ashamed of its weak roots,
小草自慚根太弱,
Grateful to be allowed to cling to the highest branch.³⁵
寄生許附最高枝。

Given the title and context of the poem, in the second line, “a-mi 阿嬭,” a form of address to one's mother, likely refers to Lady Shuxia who became a nominal and non-biological mother to Hu's daughter, instead of Hu herself. In the last two lines, Hu used a pair of contrasts and metaphors, small grass and the highest branch, to allude to the relationship between her daughter, Shuxian, and Lady Shuxia. Thus, the metaphor also alludes to the relationship between the two families. By establishing nominal kinship with a more elite family, Hu developed a stronger relationship from the existing family network that her daughter and the family could rely on. In doing so, she secured and elevated her daughter's social standing and expanded the family's resources.

³⁵ Hu Xiangduan, “On the Nineteenth Day, Revisiting Hanbi Pavilion with Sister Pei Shan for A Small Gathering, Having My Elder Daughter Shuxian Become Lady Shu Xia's Godchild, and Presenting Four Poems” 十九日偕佩珊姊重過涵碧樓小集以長女淑賢寄漱霞夫人膝下再呈四絕句, in Hu Xiangduan, *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 409.

Hu's social interactions with women presents a highly mobile picture of her befriending many cultured women beyond her kin ties and transcending the physical boundaries of her inner chamber by traveling to her students' homes. Hu's social life with women—which centered on her teachings in *qin* music, painting, and poetry writing—also offers an unusual example of women becoming involved in outdoor excursions and ascending activities, which were traditionally reserved for men. The next section will discuss Hu's mixed-gender interactions with her contemporaries.

Hu's Mixed-gender Interactions with Contemporary Men

While upper-class women would have been expected to only interact with family and family acquaintances in late imperial China, the number and range of Hu's contacts with men reveals an unusual feature of her social life and suggests a mode of mixed-gender interactions beyond her kinship. In Hu's two individual collections, I identify at least 55 men with whom Hu had contact (see Table 2). Besides men in her kinship circle, Hu also interacted with a number of officials and literati outside of her kinship ties (see Table 1).

This section will first explore the forms of Hu's socialization with contemporary men, with a focus on mutual visits and elegant gatherings centered on literary and painting creation as well as *qin* musicking. I will then examine Hu's social image as a versatile female talent and her rising fame among men. Finally, I will discuss the economic dimension of Hu's mixed-gender social and artistic relationships.

While poetic correspondences and painting exchanges were common forms of Hu's interactions with men, her mixed-gender sociability also included in-person visits. Hu's poems reveal that she occasionally met with her male friends in person during visits or

elegant gatherings.³⁶ Sometimes, she even initiated these visits, leaving her home to meet a male friend in the company of her close female friends.³⁷ This suggests that Hu enjoyed a greater degree of freedom in terms of physical mobility and gender relations in her social life than most upper-class women of her time.

In her poetry collections, Hu recorded several gatherings at her home where she was the host. Unlike the traditional depiction of private and secluded boudoirs, where girls and married women were shielded from outside males, Hu's portrayal of her home was both a private and public space open to mixed-gender socialization. In a series of poems inscribed on a painting, Hu depicted an elegant gathering at her home, the Chamber of Scattering Flowers, where friends with different genders and diverse backgrounds came together, sharing their artistic enthusiasm for poetry and painting, and engaging in collaborative creations.

On the Fifth Day of Lunar February, Mr. Shuangshu, Mr. Xinqing, Xiaozhen, Mr. Qiao Maocai, and Mr. Hongxue Visited the Chamber of Scattering Flowers from Heaven. Ms. Peishan Also Came By. We Lingered All Day. Mr. Hongxue Created A Painting for Our Gathering, on Which I Inscribed These Poems.

仲春之望，雙樹先生偕心青太史小真茂才紅雪山人過散花天室，適珮珊女史亦至，流連竟日，山人為作雅集圖，即題其上

Common people, eccentric guests, and robed immortals
布衣狂客錦袍仙，
Engaged in lively conversation in the gathering.

³⁶ For example, a series of poetic correspondences indicates that Hu and Xu Dan'an 徐澹安, a literatus and doctor, would visit each other occasionally. Beyond the doctor-patient relationship, Hu also exchanged poems and paintings with Xu and thus fostered an artistic friendship with him. See Hu Xiangduan, "Reply to Mr. Xu Danan" 酬徐澹安先生, "Suffering from Illness Again, Presented to Mr. Xu Danan" 復病呈澹安先生, "Recovering from Illness, Visiting Mr. Xu Danan Again", in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 367, 379.

³⁷ For instance, frequent poems to Wu Yusong allude to Hu's several visits to Wu's place, usually in the company of her close female friends, such as Gui Peishan 歸珮珊 and Zhulin 珠林. See Hu Xiangduan, "Visiting Prefect Yu Song's Hanbi Tower with Sister Peishan and Leaving an Poem" 偕珮珊姊過玉松太守涵碧樓留題, "On the Nineteenth Day, Revisiting Hanbi Pavilion with Sister Pei Shan for A Small Gathering, Having My Elder Daughter Shuxian Become Lady Shu Xia's Godchild, and Presenting Four Poems" 十九日偕珮珊姊重過涵碧樓小集以長女淑賢寄漱霞夫人膝下再呈四絕句, "In Early Summer, Visiting Prefect Yu Song's New Residence at Shantang with Zhu Lin and Lan Jun" 初夏攜珠林蘭君過山塘玉松太守新居, in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 406, 409, 425.

揮塵高談壓四筵。

Among us, there were ladies of the fragrant boudoir,

更有蘭閨女都講，

Reciting new poems before the blossoms.

新詩脫口誦花前。

The full moon slowly rose above the trees,

遲遲圓月出林端，

Guests lingered, their enthusiasm unabated.

客尚流連興未闌。

Touched, we wrote down this elegant gathering,

多感濡毫傳雅集，

Beneath the jade plum blossoms, we painted the scene.³⁸

玉梅花下寫圖看。

The title of the poems recounts the background of this gathering of friends. The first line highlights the diversity of social classes among the attendees, including officials, commoners, and hermits. The third line emphasizes the mixed-gender nature of the gathering and their social interactions. Since the event was not exclusively for men or women, the poems reveal a mode of mixed-gender social community.

These poems suggest that Hu's artistic creation was more than just a means of self-expression; it was also a tool for social participation. Her talents and involvement in poetry and painting not only connected her with artistic communities but also invited her to engage in collaborative creations that facilitated, celebrated, and strengthened social bonds. One product of this elegant gathering, a painting by Mr. Hongxue inscribed with Hu's poems, exemplifies this process. This composite work—a painting featuring poems presented in calligraphic form—served as a material agent for fostering bonds and friendships. By involving participants in this collaborative project, where each contributor's unique artistic expression was essential to its completion, it provided an avenue for them to explore and

³⁸ Hu Xiangduan 胡相端, "On the Fifth Day of Lunar February, Mr. Shuangshu, Mr. Xinqing, Xiaozhen, Mr. Qiao Maocai, and Mr. Hongxue Visited the Chamber of Scattering Flowers from Heaven. Ms. Peishan Also Came By. We Lingered All Day. Mr. Hongxue Created A Painting for Our Gathering, on Which I Inscribed These Poems." 仲春之望, 雙樹先生偕心青太史小真茂才紅雪山人過散花天室, 適珮珊女史亦至, 流連竟日, 山人為作雅集圖, 即題其上, in *Baoyuelou xiaolü* 抱月樓小律(1816), 320-321.

celebrate their relationships. Through their joint artistic endeavors, participants, including Hu, co-created meanings and reaffirmed connections with one another.

Furthermore, Hu's socialization in elegant gatherings include not only literary and painting activities, but also *qin* musicking.³⁹ This musical practice offered her an alternative means to forge connections and articulate her own agency. During one gathering in the spring, another group of like-minded friends visited Hu's home, where they spent the day drinking, reciting poems, and engaging in *qin* musicking.

On the Sixth Day of Lunar February, Mr. Zixiao Came To Visit Me With Mr. Yuanfeng, Mr. Wu Shouzhi, and Mr. Li Xiaoxia After Coming Back From Dengwei to Appreciate the Plum Blossoms. We Spent A Day Drinking and Reciting Poems. Ms. Xiaoxia Created A Painting Titled 'Carrying a Qin to Visit another Qin,' and Gave It to Me As A Gift, Where I Inscribed These Two Poems.

仲春六日，子瀟太史自鄧尉探梅歸，同遠峰丈吳壽芝李小霞過訪，觴詠竟日，小霞復作攜琴訪琴圖見貽，為題二絕

Carrying a *qin*, returning from Dengwei in the snow,
攜琴鄧尉雪中歸，
My friend came to knock on my plain white door in the southern city.
來叩南城白板扉。
Plucking the icy strings, playing a tune—
重拂冰弦彈一曲，
The lingering fragrance still fills the thirteen studs.
殘香猶滿十三徽。

Accustomed to borrowing the withered paulownia to express my sorrow,
寫愁僂慣借枯桐，
I admit that I have not yet fully understood the profound principles of the *qin*.
琴理深慚尚未通。
Deeply moved by the verses my friends composed as gifts,
多感諸君題句贈，
May I, like the gentle breeze through the woods, embody refinement and grace.⁴⁰

³⁹ I appropriate the term “musicking,” coined by Christopher Small, to emphasize the notion that music is not merely a product but an activity. To music is to participate in any capacity in a musical performance, whether by performing, listening, rehearsing, practicing, or providing materials for the performance. Thus, the act of musicking creates a set of relationships in the context where it occurs, and its meanings lie within these relationships. Built on Small's notion, Joseph Lam's study on the music and male bonding in late imperial China sheds new light on how musicking contributed to male sociability and emotional resonance. See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 1-18; and Joseph Lam, “Music and Male Bonding in Ming China”, in *Male Friendship in Ming China*, ed. Martin Huang (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁴⁰ Hu Xiangduan 胡相端, “On the Sixth Day of Lunar February, Mr. Zixiao Came To Visit Me With Mr. Yuanfeng, Mr. Wu Shouzhi, and Mr. Li Xiaoxia After Coming Back From Dengwei to Appreciate the Plum

許從林下托清風。

Once again, the title of the poems reveals the mixed-gender nature of this elegant gathering, a social gathering that was now accessible to women like Hu. The participants named in the title indicate that this was a distinct musical and artistic group, different from the literary and painting community discussed previously.

In the first poem, Hu demonstrated her cultural repertoire not only through poetry but also through *qin* music by using specific language and terms. The “lingering fragrance” alludes to the use of incense in the performance space, a common practice associated with the *qin* music. “The thirteen studs” refers to a physical component of the *qin*, the inlaid markers used as pitch references, and the “icy strings” indicate the texture of the silk-made *qin* strings. In doing so, Hu evokes a multi-sensory experience during the *qin* performance: while immersed in the fragrance of burning incense, attendees appreciated the sublime melody and observed the elegant motions of the performer, whose fingers plucked the icy strings.

To grasp the unwritten implications of these two poems, they must be read within the context of the culture of *qin* music in late imperial China. Regarded as possessing a unique and exalted status among musical instruments, *qin* was closely intertwined with literati culture and elite masculinity during this period.⁴¹ While primarily played for personal enjoyment in private spaces, it was also performed at intimate gatherings with close friends, serving not only as a means of self-cultivation for the literati but also as a way to foster male

Blossoms. We Spent A Day Drinking and Reciting Poems. Ms. Xiaoxia Created A Painting Titled ‘Carrying a Qin to Visit another Qin,’ and Gave It to Me As A Gift, Where I Inscribed These Two Poems.”仲春六日，子瀟太史自鄧尉探梅歸，同遠峰丈吳壽芝李小霞過訪，觴詠竟日，小霞復作攜琴訪琴圖見貽，為題二絕，in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿 (1823), 412.

⁴¹ Joseph Lam examines how elite males manipulated notated anthologies of *qin* music to negotiate and advance their masculinity in late Ming China. Additionally, Zeyuan Wu discusses how literati devoted to *qin* learning sought alternative careers to officialdom while pursuing their self-cultivation goals in late imperial China. See Joseph Lam, “Music and Masculinities in Late Ming China,” *Asian Music* 42, no. 2 (2011): 112–34; and Zeyuan Wu, “Becoming Sages: Qin Song and Self-Cultivation in Late Imperial China,” PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2020.

homosocial bonds and intimacy.⁴² This dynamic echoes the exemplary friendship between Yu Boya 俞伯牙 and Zhong Ziqi 鐘子期 in Chinese history, whose deep connection was realized through the communication of inner feelings via *qin* music.

Given this cultural context, Hu's poems reveal that the elegant gathering and practice of *qin* musicking provided participants with an avenue to nurture friendships and intimacy, communicate musical sound and inner emotions, and reaffirm a collective identity rooted in the shared knowledge of *qin* music and its culture.

Furthermore, Hu's participation in *qin* musicking also tweaks a typical depiction of this art form as a vehicle for cultivating elite masculinity and reinforcing male bonds. Despite the self-effacing language she employed in the second poem, Hu positioned herself prominently as both the author and performer. By musically expressing her emotional sensitivity and intimate feelings through the *qin*, as well as demonstrating her intellectual understanding of *qin* theories, she established her identity as a graceful woman and a talented *qin* player in a mixed-gender social setting.

In summary, while elegant gatherings have a long tradition in literati culture, Hu's poems about her participation in these activities offer insights into women's embodied experiences within this traditionally male domain. Through her artistic creations in poetry, painting, and *qin* musicking, Hu was able to connect with broader networks of like-minded individuals and carve out more public and social space for herself in cultures and communities historically dominated by men. Moreover, in the context of these elegant gatherings, she positioned herself as a host and a core member of the group, actively participating as an equal alongside her male friends in her roles as a poet, painter, *qin* musician, versatile artist, and graceful woman. This portrayal stands in stark contrast to the

⁴² Bell Yung, "An Audience of One: The Private Music of the Chinese Literati", *Ethnomusicology* 61, Issue 3 (2017): 506–539.

traditional image of female attendees at male gatherings as subordinate entertainers. These social interactions provided critical avenues for Hu to negotiate, assert, and develop her identities while articulating her agency.

Furthermore, Hu's vibrant social life, built upon her artistic versatility, not only facilitated her connections with various artistic and social communities but also brought her public fame and a distinctive image among the gentry. In several prefaces to Hu's individual collections, several eminent male literati emphasized her multiple talents as a poet, painter, and *qin* master.⁴³ The consistent portrayal of Hu's public image in these prefaces reveals her unique identity in the eyes of these men. For instance, Chen Wenshu 陳文述 (1771-1843) highlighted Hu's talents in poetry, painting, and *qin* music by comparing her to notable women in history as well as her renowned contemporaries, including Gui Peishan 歸珮珊 (1762-1832) and Liao Xianyun 廖纖雲 (1766-1835), who were celebrated female talents in poetry and painting in the Jiangnan region at that time. In doing so, Chen posited that Hu could be regarded as a "third master" alongside Gui and Liao. Moreover, by likening the experience of reading her poetry collection to hearing a piece of sublime *qin* music, Chen implicitly praised Hu's musical talent.⁴⁴

Hu's public image as a versatile female talent also attracted the attention of prominent cultural women, such as Yun Zhu 惲珠 (1771-1833) and Shen Shanbao 沈善寶 (1808-1862).⁴⁵ In an anthology of women's poetry compiled by Yun Zhu, Hu was portrayed as a woman gifted in both poetry and painting, as well as a wife who shared similar interests with

⁴³ A preface by Li Tingfang 李廷芳 emphasized Hu's talents in poetry, *qin* music, and painting, while a preface by Qian Shi 錢棻 highlights Hu's artistic expertise in various areas and praises her as an exemplary figure among talented women. See Li Tingfang 李廷芳, "preface" in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 465; and Qian Shi 錢棻, "preface", in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 469.

⁴⁴ Chen Wenshu 陳文述, "preface", in *Baoyuelou xiao xiaolü* 抱月樓小律(1816), 239.

⁴⁵ In Shen's commentaries on the elite women writers, she foregrounds Hu's great passion for *qin* music, highlighting Hu's poems on her musical experiences and her exceptional elegance. Shen Shanbao 沈善寶, *Mingyuan shihua* 名媛詩話 (1846), volume 9, 4.

her husband. In doing so, Yun Zhu implicitly regarded Hu's talents and artistic practices as a means to foster marital relationships, reconciling Hu's extraordinary role as a female talent with the more traditional role of a wife.⁴⁶

In Hu's second individual collection, the increased number of contacts with her contemporaries indicates her greater involvement with officials, writers, painters, and musicians, and likely reflecting a rising fame among the gentry and literati. Some high-status officials and prominent literati occasionally visited Hu's home.⁴⁷ Additionally, she became more actively engaged in providing endorsements for literary collections and artworks by both male literati and cultural women.⁴⁸ A poem by Hu about the frequent correspondences she received, even while living in seclusion, illustrates how she may have experienced a rise in fame.

Living In Seclusion In the Southern City And Yet Still Receiving Many Letters with
Poems to Me, I Thus Composed This Quatrain.

僻居南城投詩者甚眾偶拈一絕

In my secluded boudoir, how dare I associate myself with the renowned?

寒閨何敢附名流，

Yet still, poems are constantly delivered to my doorstep.

屢見詩箋戶外投。

The crystal Canglang flows, a single, unbroken stream.

一曲滄浪水清澈，

South of its waters dwell many poets.⁴⁹

詞人多在水南頭。

⁴⁶ Wanyan Yunzhu 完顏惲珠, *Guochao guixiu Zhengshi ji* 國朝閨秀正始集 (1831).

⁴⁷ For example, a series of four poems by Hu mentions a visit by Cheng Yeyuan 程也園, a high official of the Ministry of the Personnel (*libu*, 吏部). Another series of poems record a time when Tang Zhongmian 唐仲冕 came to visit her and gifted her a copy of his literary collection. In addition, Wang Yu 王豫, a famous poet, was among Hu's male visitors. See Hu Xiangduan, "Four Poems Presented to Cheng Yeyuan, Minister of Personnel, Upon His Visit to My Humble Dwelling" 程也園吏部枉過敝廬賦呈四絕句, "Five Poems Respectfully Presented to Elder Taoshan on June 2nd, Upon His Visit to My Humble Dwelling with His Gift of a Grand Collection" 六月二日陶山年伯枉過敝廬並貽大集謹呈五絕句, "A Visit by Mr. Wang Liucun" 王柳村(豫)徵君過訪, in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 387, 431, 511.

⁴⁸ Most of the endorsements were for the works of those who were outside of her kinship circle, and the number of endorsements for men's works exceed those for women's.

⁴⁹ Hu Xiangduan, "Living In Seclusion In the Southern City And Yet Still Receiving Many Letters with Poems to Me, I Thus Composed This Quatrain." 僻居南城投詩者甚眾偶拈一絕, in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿 (1823), 372.

In this poem, Hu expresses her modesty by distinguishing herself from “the renowned” in the first line. However, the contrast established throughout the poem suggests Hu’s significant fame within literary circles; despite her isolation, poems were continually sent to her home.

While the social connections I have analyzed so far have been primarily cultural and artistic, Hu’s poems also reveal an economic dimension to her artistic endeavors and mixed-gender social interactions. First, Hu’s poems suggest that she transformed her literary and artistic talents into financial resources to partially support her socialization with poets and other like-minded friends. Second, her active connections with many older men, typically either high officials or renowned literati, indicate her pursuit of financial support or patronage from her networks.

Despite the powerful taboos surrounding commercial activity among the literati during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hu, as a daughter and wife from literati families, did not shy away from commodifying her artistic works even in her poetry collections.⁵⁰ A portion of her income was allocated to support her social interactions with friends. For instance, an improvised verse by Hu concludes with a direct reference to converting her paintings into money to fund her gatherings with poets.

On the Full Moon of October, I Moved to the White Apricot Poetry Nest and Improvised These Verses in Response to Visiting Poets.

乙亥十月望移居白杏吟巢諸詩人見過口占奉呈

Let poverty be; I lived off plowing inkstones.

何礙清貧食硯田，

Poets come to visit, lingering all day.

詩人來訪盡流連。

Across the fence, I call for more wine to continuously supply our indulgence,

⁵⁰ Susan Mann reveals how elite women were responsible for family financial management and played an essential role in the masking process that shielded each scholarly family’s commercial activities from view, due to the strong taboos surrounding commercial activity among the literati during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Susan Mann, *The Talented Women of the Zhang Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

隔離呼酒頻供醉，

Anyway, there are always my paintings to sell for money.⁵¹

自有丹青可賣錢。

In the first line, Hu acknowledged her family's economic hardship and employed a metaphor to indicate her source of income. While inkstones were essential tools for writing and painting, the phrase "a life sustained by plowing inkstones" (with the brush) alludes to selling her paintings or literary works to make a living. Despite her lack of wealth, Hu prioritized her relationships with like-minded friends over economic concerns. The tone of the poem conveys the joy and solace that socializing with poets brings her. However, aware of the funds necessary for their gatherings—such as money for drinks to support their artistic endeavors—Hu candidly expresses the commodification of her paintings as a means of generating financial resources.⁵²

In this poem, rather than presenting herself as a secluded woman, Hu portrayed herself as a hospitable host, enjoying visits, gatherings, drinking, and socializing with individuals who shared her artistic interests. While the language she employed mimicked a poem by Du Fu 杜甫(712-770), a renowned Tang poet, Hu seems to appropriate the portrayal of male socializing and friendships to express her own identity.⁵³ By prioritizing her friendships with like-minded individuals, Hu creates a space to rationalize her candid references to money and the commodification of her artworks.

⁵¹ Hu Xiangduan, "On the Full Moon of October, I Moved to the White Apricot Poetry Nest and Improvised These Verses in Response to Visiting Poets." 乙亥十月望移居白杏吟巢諸詩人見過口占奉呈, in *Baoyuelou xiaolü* 抱月樓小律(1816), 340.

⁵² This poem also suggests a market for women's artistic works. In addition, in a preface written by Li Tingfang 李廷芳, he expressed his surprise at often seeing Hu's paintings in art decoration shops. While these paintings might be intended for artistic exchanges among friends, it is also likely that some of them were for sale. See Li Tingfang 李廷芳, "Preface", in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿 (1823), 465.

⁵³ In a verse expressing a warm welcome to a friend, Du Fu wrote: "It's a long way to the market; I can offer you little. Yet here in my cottage, there is old wine for our cups. Shall we summon my elderly neighbor to join us, call him through the fence, and pour the jar dry?" The original Chinese texts are: 盤飧市遠無兼味，樽酒家貧只舊醅。肯與鄰翁相對飲，隔離呼取盡餘杯。 See Du Fu 杜甫, "A Heavy Welcome to Vice-Prefect Cui" 客至, in *A Selection of Du Fu's Poetry*, ed. Siwei Xie 謝思煒(Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2021), 180.

Furthermore, Hu's close connections, including personal visits and many epistolary exchanges, with many older men—typically high officials or renowned literati, many of whom were friends or colleagues of her father—suggest that Hu sought to cultivate economic relationships alongside her poetic and artistic exchanges within her networks.⁵⁴ In her poetic correspondences with these individuals, Hu occasionally alluded to her financial struggles. For instance, in a series of poems addressed to Elder Sun 孫年伯, who had long been connected to Hu's family, she wrote about her economic difficulties and expressed her deep gratitude for Sun's ongoing support.

Poems Presented to Elder Sun
呈孫制府年伯

Occasionally, I sent a letter to convey my name,
偶託魚箋達姓名,
knowing you would remember the old friendship.
知公能念舊交情。
Indeed, your considerate care and warm words were conveyed,
果勞厚恤傳溫語,
how could I not cherish this kindness throughout my life?
爭不啣恩過此生。

My poor, solitary household is so desolate,
單寒門戶太蕭然,
my broken life depending on my inkstone is even more pitiable.
破硯生涯更可憐。
My only support are my two daughters,
宛轉相依惟兩女,
who both reach the age of marriage with concerns.⁵⁵
關心都是及笄年。

⁵⁴ For example, Hu's close contacts with elder men includes Cheng Yeyuan 程也園, Tang Zhongmian 唐仲冕, Wang Yu 王豫, Wu Yusong 吳玉松, and Elder Sun. See Hu Xiangduan, "Four Poems Presented to Cheng Yeyuan, Minister of Personnel, Upon His Visit to My Humble Dwelling" 程也園吏部枉過敝廬賦呈四絕句, "Five Poems Respectfully Presented to Elder Taoshan on June 2nd, Upon His Visit to My Humble Dwelling with His Gift of a Grand Collection" 六月二日陶山年伯枉過敝廬並貽大集謹呈五絕句, "A Visit by Mr. Wang Liucun" 王柳村(豫)徵君過訪, in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿(1823), 387, 431, 511.

⁵⁵ Hu Xiangduan, "Poems Presented to Elder Sun" 呈孫制府年伯, in *Sanhuatianshi gao* 散花天室稿 (1823), 452.

The second poem serves as an explicit expression of Hu's poverty. Since her husband held no official positions and the family did not have any sons, Hu referred to her family as a "poor, solitary household." The phrase "broken life depending on my inkstone" alludes to how her livelihood relied on turning her paintings or literary works into financial resources. While she sustained herself with the modest income from her artistic endeavors, she also had concerns about the marriages and dowries of her two daughters. In the first poem, although Hu does not explicitly mention money or material assistance, her deep gratitude for the kindness and consideration shown by Elder Sun suggests the potential financial support she received.

In conclusion, while Hu's interactions with contemporary women may still fit into the traditional paradigm of cultured women's socialization in late imperial times, the extent and variety of her contacts with men reveal a more remarkable aspect of her social life. Hu's socialization with men, built upon complex cultural forms, suggests a mode of mixed-gender social communities that were accessible to women. She was not confined to female-centered social groups, which moral conventions would have restricted her to. The frequent poetic and artistic exchanges, along with her significant involvement with officials, writers, and painters, demonstrate that, in her case, a woman's fame and works could indeed be recognized within the male-dominated sphere.

Hu's substantial interactions with contemporary men and her transgression of prescribed gender segregation are extraordinary when situated within the context of the Qing dynasty's cult of female chastity, during which many women involved in suicides or criminal cases for inappropriate interactions with men that undermined their purity.⁵⁶ However, Hu's case and a few prior studies indicate that her mixed-gender social interactions were not anomalies of her

⁵⁶ The cult of female chastity was fostered by both the state canonization system and private mechanisms. Janet Theiss explores the cult's political significance and practical ramifications in everyday life during the eighteenth century. See Janet Theiss, *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

time.⁵⁷ These instances of mixed-gender socialization suggest a subtle shift in social norms regarding sociability and gender relations that warrant further exploration.

Discussion

In addition to showcasing her literary talent, Hu's individual poetry collections encapsulate her extensive social contacts. Her works offer rich details on her life experiences and her social interactions with her contemporaries—both women and men, and both her family members and acquaintances beyond her kinship. Hu's story illustrates how a talent woman engaged in various cultural forms and an active social life—taking on roles such as poet, painter, musician, and teacher—thereby creating opportunities to transcend the constraints of traditionally female-coded space (domestic sphere) and cultivating mentorships, friendships, patronages, and autonomy.

To what extent did Hu's activities extend beyond the domestic sphere and family context? While Hu was undoubtedly an elite, hyper-mobile, and well-educated woman artist actively embedded within a broad social and public network, her poems subtly reveal how her practices were deeply interconnected with her family roles. The freedom and space Hu enjoyed in her cultural and social endeavors were the result of a collaborative effort within her marital family, involving unspoken negotiations between her and her husband regarding family responsibilities and shared goals to ensure the family's stability.

The intersection of Hu's family roles with her social identity as a versatile artist and itinerant teacher is demonstrated by her pragmatic and skillful use of social networks. Hu

⁵⁷ For example, a case study of Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀, one of Hu's close friends, reveals her significant involvement in literary and artistic relationships with a number of men. Additionally, a case study of He Peizhu 何佩珠(1819-?) also suggests her wide networks with contemporary males and women. See Ellen Widmer, "Border Crossing and the Woman Writer: The Case of Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀 (1762-1835)", in *Hsiang Lectures on Chinese Poetry, Volume 3* (Montreal: Centre for East Asian Research, McGill University, 2001); and Binbin Yang, "New Perspectives on the Writings and Social Circles of Yangzhou Women of Talents: A Case Study of the Social Circle of He Peizhu's Family" 揚州閨秀著述與交遊研究新視野: 以何佩珠一門交遊圈為例, *Journal of Chinese Women Studies*, No.149, (2018).

utilized these networks not only for personal interest but also for the benefit of her family and descendants. First, in contrast to her and her husband's natal families, Hu's marital family was experiencing a decline in social status due to her husband's lack of official positions. In response, Hu's interactions with a wide array of male officials, literati, and cultured women helped them establish a social and cultural identity that could elevate her family's standing. Additionally, the publication of Hu's poetry collections—a collaborative project with involvement from her husband, relatives, and friends as sponsors, editors, and preface writers—served to gather more social and cultural capital for the family.

Second, due to her husband's insufficient income, Hu sought sponsors and patrons for her artistic endeavors, produced art works to generate financial resources, and attracted more students to supplement the family's earnings. These efforts relied on effective outreach and management of the family's social networks. Hu's active social life therefore was intricately tied to the goal of securing greater economic advantages for her family.

Third, in her interactions with female disciples, gentry women, and male officials and literati, Hu, as a mother, expanded her network to simultaneously benefit her two daughters. She aimed to secure her daughters' social status and future prospects by involving them in female communities and cultural circles she developed among her disciples—who were daughters of elite and literati families—by forming nominal kinship ties with a more prestigious family, and by seeking financial help from her father's old friends when her daughters reached a marriageable age. Thus, Hu's socialization never merely centered on her identities as a versatile artist or a successful woman teacher; rather, it was deeply intertwined with her family practices and responsibilities.

Therefore, Hu's life story also suggests a blurred distinction between the family responsibilities of husbands and wives, reflecting an alternative mode of family practice. While the prevailing pattern in elite families during late imperial China involved sojourning

males and sequestered females, Hu's teaching career and itinerant lifestyle present a different model: both men and women in a family could engage in a sojourning life to support the household. Like her husband, Hu actively sought to secure resources for the family through various means. This involved leaving home, traveling, working externally, producing artworks, engaging in publications, and cultivating social networks both within and beyond her kinship circles. These responsibilities compounded her already prescribed household and reproductive duties. Consequently, Hu's versatility in varied cultural forms, coupled with her active social life and the mobility and freedom she experienced, not only provided her with opportunities to transcend the boundaries of the domestic sphere but also transformed traditional roles and responsibilities of women within the family. Nonetheless, Hu's multiple identities and life story reveal the dual burdens she faced within her marital family.

In conclusion, as evidenced by Hu and other case studies, women's socialization during this period projected a more public image. Many literary women developed active social lives that extended beyond the domestic sphere, kinship ties, and homosocial interactions. Their social engagements became publicly visible as they documented their sociability through writing and published works. Hu's case encourages further research into how these social interactions and emerging public visibility transformed family practices, social norms, and gender relations during her time.

Appendix

Table 1: Members of Hu Xiangduan's social network, drawn from *Short Verses from the Pavilions of Embracing Moon* 抱月樓小律 and *Drafts from the Chamber of Scattering Flowers* 散花天室稿

Sources		Name	Gender	Social relationship
<i>Short Verses from the Pavilion of Embracing Moon</i> , Volume 1 《抱月樓小律》卷一，清嘉慶二十一年（1816）刻本	憶丁巳歲外舅胡衡齋先生擢守楚南蔭基奉甲戌十一月上旬許蔭基書於散愁館	Xu Yinji 許蔭基	Male	Kinship
	嘉慶甲戌重九錢唐陳文述敘於吳門桂葉書堂	Chen Wenshu 陳文述	Male	Non-kinship
	女史題辭 佩珊 歸懋儀	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀	Female	Non-kinship
	道華席佩蘭	Xi Peilan 席佩蘭	Female	Non-kinship
	《玉山講院》	Xu Baoshan 許寶善	Male	Kinship
	《玉峰春遊舅侍御公命和》	Xu Baoshan 許寶善	Male	Kinship
	《西湖避暑和家大人作》	Hu Wenquan 胡文銓	Male	Kinship
	《寄三妹杭州》	Third Sister 三妹	Female	Kinship
	《寄外茸城》	Xu Yinji 許蔭基	Male	Kinship
	《接寧弟粵東書卻寄》	Brother Ning 寧弟	Male	Kinship
	《秋窗雜書寄外》	Xu Yinji 許蔭基	Male	Kinship
	《題菰蘭女士燼餘草》	Huangpu Hui 皇甫蕙	Female	Non-kinship
	《鄭生春塘秋林讀書圖小影》	Zheng Xiaogu 鄭小谷	Male	Non-kinship
	《過錢氏息園口占三絕》	The owner of Xi Garden 息園主人	Male	Non-kinship
	《題蓮卿夫人簪花圖照，息園主人配》	Lady Lianqing 蓮卿夫人，the owner of Xi Garden 息園主人	Male and Female	Non-kinship

	《畫白桃花牡丹小幅贈蓮卿夫人》	Lady Lianqing 蓮卿夫人（沈荷）	Female	Non-kinship
	《偶成》	Daughter 女兒	Female	Kinship
	《課女》	Daughters 女兒	Female	Kinship
	《鈕生耕巖以團扇索畫牡丹因題》	Niu Gengyan 鈕耕巖	Male	Non-kinship
	《寧弟奉母恭人歸自粵東將卜居吳下》	Brother Ning 寧弟， Mother 母親	Male and Female	Kinship
	《讀寧弟感懷詩奉慰》	Brother Ning 寧弟	Male	Kinship
	《鄭生小谷學畫牡丹小幅因題》	Zheng Xiaogu 鄭小谷	Male	Non-kinship
	《贈上海張筠如女史即題其畫卷》	Zhang Junru 張筠如	Female	Non-kinship
	《答歸佩珊夫人六首》	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀	Female	Non-kinship
	《常熟省外祖母蔣太恭人適值八十壽誕作此奉祝》	Grandmother Jiang 外祖母蔣太恭人	Female	Kinship
<i>Short Verses from the Pavilion of Embracing Moon, Volume 2 《抱月樓小律》卷二</i>	《畫牡丹呈陳雲伯明府》	Chen Wenshu 陳文述	Male	Non-kinship
	《上海晤喬氏六姊喜作》	Sister Qiao 喬氏六姊	Female	Kinship
	《題礪城金堅齋先生臥遊圖》	Jin Jianzhai 金堅齋	Male	Non-kinship
	《題申江女士沈吉雲曇影樓遺稿》	Shen Jiyun 沈吉雲	Female	Non-kinship
	《題二卯山人傳奇三種》	Ermao Shanren 二卯山人	Male	Non-kinship
	《喬鷺洲茂才寄示月滿樓秋日之作為和二絕》	Qiao Maocai 喬茂才	Male	Non-kinship

	《從外學畫蘭》	Xu Yinji 許蔭基	Male	Kinship
	《孫心青太史以道華夫人長真閣集見貽書此奉謝》	Sun Xinqing 孫心青太史（孫原湘），Xi Peilan 席佩蘭	Male and Female	Non-kinship
	《口占示兩女》	Daughters 兩位女兒	Female	Kinship
	《寄珮珊夫人》	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀	Female	Non-kinship
	《晤珮珊夫人後又寄》	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀	Female	Non-kinship
	《春夕同長女淑賢》	Xu Shuxian 許淑賢	Female	Kinship
	《喜珮珊夫人過舍》	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀	Female	Non-kinship
	《畫紅綠梅呈舅母廖夫人》	Lady Liao 舅母廖夫人	Female	Kinship
	《仲春之望，雙樹先生偕心青太史小真茂才紅雪山人過散花天室，適珮珊女史亦至，流連竟日，山人為作雅集圖，即題其上》	Chu Linzhi 雙樹先生（儲麟趾），Sun Xinqing 孫心青太史（孫原湘）、Xiaozhen 小真、Qiao Maocai 茂才（喬茂才）、Hongxue Shanren 紅雪山人、Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀	Male and Female	Non-kinship
	《長女淑賢學畫牡丹戲題二絕》	Xu Shuxian 許淑賢	Female	Kinship
	《與外論畫》	Xu Yinji 許蔭基	Male	Kinship
	《書謝香嚴茂才瘦吟別集後》	Qiao Maocai 喬茂才	Male	Non-kinship
	《蔣氏外祖母出示先大人手書悼繼母蔣恭人詩稿感述二首》	Maternal grandmother Lady Jiang 蔣氏外祖母，Stepmother Lady Jiang 繼母蔣恭人	Female	Kinship
	《重過獅子林時李心菴農部寓此口占奉呈》	Li Xinan 李心菴	Male	Non-kinship

	《贈汪小韞夫人》	Wang Duan 汪端	Female	Non-kinship
	《畫荷花贈閨友》	?	Female	?
	《惜花小憩圖 珮珊姊囑題》	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀	Female	Non-kinship
	《聚芳呈瑞圖》	Zhang Zao 張筵、 Ding Jisheng 丁寄生 及其四女、Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀	Male and Female	Non-kinship
	《集和堂雅集口占》	Zhang Junru 張筠如	Female	Non-kinship
	《為鷺洲茂才題玉女名箋冊》	Qiao Maocai 喬茂才	Male	Non-kinship
	《倉蓮莊刺史屬畫蓮因圖系詩四絕》	Zhuang Sisheng 莊斯升	Male	Non-kinship
	《乙亥十月望移居白杏吟巢諸詩人見過口占奉呈》	Poets	?	Non-kinship
	《茸城待潮擬訪纖雲女史不果寄二絕》	Liao Yunjin 廖雲錦	Female	Non-kinship
	《古花朝虞山舟中作》	Women 眾仙	Female	?
	《過陸氏園》	The owner of the Garden of Lu Family 陸氏園主人	?	?
	嘉慶歲次柔兆困敦春窮月既望龍巖林寶手跋	Lin Bao 林寶	Male	Non-kinship
<i>Drafts from the Chamber of Scattering Flowers, Volume 1</i> 《散花天室稿》卷一，清道光三年（1823）刻本	蓉峰聶太史鑒之（定）聶銑敏（待查）	Nie Xianmin 聶銑敏	Male	Non-kinship
	胡智珠女士散花天室詩稿序	Tang Zhongmian 唐仲冕	Male	Non-kinship

	（陶山唐仲冕）			
	織雲女史廖雲錦校訂	Liao Yunjin 廖雲錦	Female	Non-kinship
	《月夜聽兩女彈琴》	Daughters 女兒	Female	Kinship
	《題林遠峰山人雙樹圖》	Lin Yuanfeng 林遠峰山人	Male	Non-kinship
	《芍藥花放同長女淑賢作》	Xu Shuxian 許淑賢	Female	Kinship
	《口占寄佩珊姊》	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀	Female	Non-kinship
	《酬徐澹安先生》	Xu Danan 徐澹安	Male	Non-kinship
	《觀長女淑賢畫牡丹小幅》	Xu Shuxian 許淑賢	Female	Kinship
	《題次女淑慧畫墨蘭》	Xu Shuhui 許淑慧	Female	Kinship
	《僻居南城投詩者甚眾偶拈一絕》	Poets 投詩者	?	Non-kinship
	《敬題先舅侍御公蕉陰執卷圖》	Xu Baoshan 許寶善（許穆堂）	Male	Kinship
	《題唐春橋上舍靜虛室稿》	Tang Chunqiao 唐春橋	Male	Non-kinship
	《過南鄰靜虛室賦呈唐太孺人》	Ms. Tang	Female	Non-kinship
	《復病呈澹安先生》	Xu Danan 徐澹安	Male	Non-kinship
	《題次女淑慧花牡丹》	Xu Shuhui 許淑慧	Female	Kinship
	《又題畫芙蓉》	Xu Shuhui 許淑慧	Female	Kinship
	《題耕巖鈕生綠天染翰圖》	Niu Gengyan 鈕耕巖	Male	Non-kinship
	《題小谷鄭生花白荷花》	Zheng Xiaogu 鄭小谷	Male	Non-kinship
	《題孫杏嶠秀才梧陰小憩圖》	Sun Xingqiao 孫杏嶠	Male	Non-kinship

	《題震澤王研農秀才白燕倡和集》	Wang Yannong 王研農	Male	Non-kinship
	《病起重詣澹安先生》	Xu Danan 徐澹安	Male	Non-kinship
	《程也園吏部枉過敝廬賦呈四絕句》	Cheng Yeyuan 程也園	Male	Non-kinship
	《為林硯莊上舍畫紅綠梅小幅》	Lin Yanzhuang 林硯莊	Male	Non-kinship
	《酬徐鴻寶秀才惠筆洗佳墨》	Xu Hongbao 徐鴻寶	Male	Non-kinship
	《題鴻寶鯨掣集》	Xu Hongbao 徐鴻寶	Male	Non-kinship
	《題吳倚雲女士金海樓稿》	Wu Yiyun 吳倚雲 (吳婉桃)	Female	Non-kinship
	《追輓張筠如夫人》	Zhang Junru 張筠如	Female	Non-kinship
	《題筠如畫冊遺蹟》	Zhang Junru 張筠如	Female	Non-kinship
	《紅樓夢傳奇載林顰卿花朝生日，海上喬鷺洲茂才戲于斯辰，招同社諸君以酒果祀花，即為顰卿壽，作徵詩小引和者如雲，為賦四絕》	Qiao Maocai 喬茂才	Male	Non-kinship
	《過畢氏園謁母姨曹蘋香夫人即呈姨丈香塾都尉四首》	Cao Pinxiang 曹蘋香夫人	Female	Kinship
	《詠冬日菊花呈曹氏外祖母》	Maternal grandmother Lady Cao 曹氏外祖母	Female	Kinship
	《畫歲朝圖呈吳玉松太守》	Wu Yusong 吳玉松	Male	Non-kinship
	《偕佩珊姊過玉松太守涵碧樓留題》	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀、 Wu Yusong 吳玉松	Male and Female	Non-kinship

	《題漱霞夫人拈花小影》	Lady Shuxia 漱霞夫人	Female	Non-kinship
	《題長女淑賢畫》	Xu Shuxian 許淑賢	Female	Kinship
	《十九日偕佩珊姊重過涵碧樓小集以長女淑賢寄漱霞夫人膝下再呈四絕句》	Lady Shuxia 漱霞夫人	Female	Non-kinship
	《題周雲巖山人韻蘭草堂圖冊》	Zhou Yunyan 周雲巖	Male	Non-kinship
	《聽兩女讀唐人絕句》	Daughters 女兒	Female	Kinship
	《仲春六日，子瀟太史自鄧尉探梅歸，同遠峰丈吳壽芝李小霞過訪，觴詠竟日，小霞復作攜琴訪琴圖見貽，為題二絕》	Mr.Zixiao 子瀟太史、 Lin Yuanfeng 遠峰、 Wu Shouzhi 吳壽芝、 Li Xiaoxia 李小霞	Male	Non-kinship
	《花朝前三日過夢碧仙館贈珠林同硯》	Zhulin 珠林	Female	Non-kinship
<i>Drafts from the Chamber of Scattering Flowers, Volume 2</i> 《散花天室稿》卷二	佩香女史駱綺蘭校訂	Luo Qilan 駱綺蘭	Female	Non-kinship
	《題玉松太守除夕遊山圖》	Wu Yusong 吳玉松	Male	Non-kinship
	《題秀巖表弟婦先春消息圖》	The wife of Cousin Xiuyan 秀巖表弟婦	Female	Kinship
	《題吳馥秋少府正月三日秦淮雅集圖》	Wu Fuqiu 吳馥秋	Male	Non-kinship
	《季春十日偕珮珊姊暨珠林同硯遊南園諸	Gui Maoyi 歸懋儀、 Zhulin 珠林	Female	Non-kinship

	勝，歸成三絕》			
	《夢碧仙館踐春》	Zhulin 珠林	Female	Non-kinship
	《畫牡丹呈唐年伯陶山觀察》	Tang Zhongmian 唐仲冕	Male	Non-kinship
	《謁石琢堂廉訪賦呈》	Shi Yunyu 石韞玉	Male	Non-kinship
	《扇頭畫薔薇桃花贈趙味辛司馬》	Zhao Weixin 趙味辛	Male	Non-kinship
	《初夏攜珠林蘭君過山塘玉松太守新居》	Zhulin 珠林、Lan Jun 蘭君、Wu Yusong 吳玉松	Male and Female	Non-kinship
	《壽玉松太守》	Wu Yusong 吳玉松	Male	Non-kinship
	《即席有贈》	?	?	?
	《和李湘浦太令扇頭近作二絕即次原韻》	Li Tingfang 李廷芳（李湘浦）	Male	Non-kinship
	《題鶯湖范文如女史遺稿》	Fan Wenru 范文如	Male	Non-kinship
	《六月二日陶山年伯枉過敝廬並貽大集謹呈五絕句》	Tao Nianbo 陶年伯	Male	Non-kinship
	《讀湘浦太令安蔬草堂詩》	Li Tingfang 李廷芳（李湘浦）	Male	Non-kinship
	《畫梅贈月身夫人》	Lady Yueshen 月身夫人	Female	Non-kinship
	《題次女淑慧梅邊香韻圖》	Xu Shuhui 許淑慧	Female	
	《陶山年伯又以舊刻花塢聯吟見贈為題四絕》	Tao Nianbo 陶年伯	Male	Non-kinship
	《畫荷花呈伊存樸廉訪》	Yi Cunpu 伊存樸	Male	Non-kinship
	《七月中旬下榻臬署報平安室課餘偶成》	Female disciples 女弟子	Female	Non-kinship
	《過尚衣署觀瑞雲峰同女弟	Rousheng 柔生、Shunsheng 順生	Female	Non-kinship

	子柔生順生 作》			
	《題松陵女史 殷德徽清映堂 詩》	Yin Dehui 殷德徽	Female	Non-kinship
	《秀水汪孝女 詩》	Wang Fanggu 汪芳姑	Female	Non-kinship
	《屏風詞為寧 太夫人壽》	Lady Ning 寧太夫人	Female	Non-kinship
	《斌笠耕觀察 索詩謹呈四絕 句》	Bin Ligeng 斌笠耕	Male	Non-kinship
	《呈孫制府年 伯》	Sun Nianbo 孫年伯	Male	Non-kinship
	《九日雨中攜 淑賢淑慧暨諸 女弟子虎阜登 高》	Xu Shuxian 許淑賢、 Xu Shuhui 許淑慧、 女弟子	Female	Kinship and non-kinship
	《畫牡丹贈阿 (?) 織造女 公子》	the daughter of Mr.A 阿織造女公子	Female	Non-kinship
	《題次女淑慧 畫荷花障子》	Xu Shuhui 許淑慧	Female	Kinship
	《輓鄭生小 谷》	Zheng Xiaogu 鄭小谷 (鄭治)	Male	Non-kinship
	《為陶山年伯 寫晚香圖繫詩 二絕》	Tao Nianbo 陶年伯	Male	Non-kinship
	姑蘇南倉橋愛 蓮室周宜和刻	Zhou Yie 周宜和	Male	Non-kinship
	散花天室詩二 集序，嘉慶己 卯上巳後一日 濟南李廷芳序	Li Tingfang 李廷芳 (李湘浦)	Male	Non-kinship
<i>Drafts from the Chamber of Scattering Flowers, Volume 3, 《散花天 室稿》卷三</i>	仁和次軒錢栻 謹序	Qian Shi 錢栻	Male	Kinship
	厄我詩人道光 壬午秋七月望 同里魯山陳邦 泰拜敘	Chen Bangtai 陳邦泰	Male	Non-kinship

	《李湘浦明府夫人招往譚氏園小憩歸後寄呈四絕》	the wife of Li Tingfang 李湘浦夫人	Female	Non-kinship
	《送馬太守夫人隨宦彭城》	the wife of Mr.Ma 馬太守夫人	Female	Non-kinship
	《寄懷馬太守夫人》	the wife of Mr.Ma 馬太守夫人	Female	Non-kinship
	《謝湘浦惠玉版（？）筍》	Huiyu 惠玉	Female	Non-kinship
	《題朱秋嵐桐陰課子圖》	Zhu Qiulan 朱秋嵐	Female	Non-kinship
	《題莫城女史畫扇》	Lady Mocheng 莫城女史	Female	Non-kinship
	《題沈西離（濤）明府郡齋坐月圖》	Shen Tao 沈濤	Male	Non-kinship
	《喜晤二姊》	Sister 二姊	Female	Kinship
	《與閨友再泛西湖》	閨友 friends in the inner chamber	Female	?
	《往武林留別外子》	Xu Yinji 許蔭基	Male	Kinship
	《留別畢氏母姨》	Lady Cao Pingxiang 曹蘋香夫人	Female	Kinship
	《哭壻鄭海門》	Zheng Haimen 鄭海門(潮)	Male	Kinship
	《將至揚州湘浦夫人留拙照為記念》	the wife of Li Tingfang 李湘浦夫人	Female	Non-kinship
	《寄懷湘浦夫人》	the wife of Li Tingfang 李湘浦夫人	Female	Non-kinship
	《張觀察夫人相延教讀女公子婉仙兼習琴畫，讀倦繡吟詩草漫題五絕》	Zhang Wanxian 張婉仙	Female	Non-kinship
	《題季青夫弟（乃椿）叢桂招隱圖和郭頻伽韻》	Jiqing 季青、Naichun 乃椿、Guo Pinjia 郭頻伽（郭麐）	Male and Female	Non-kinship
	《菊影和定生次女韻》	Xu Shuhui 許淑慧	Female	Kinship

	《別婉仙婉筠 兩女弟》	Zhang Wanxian 張婉 仙、Zhang Wanjun 張 婉筠	Female	Non-kinship
	《定生畫花笑 圖》	Xu Shuhui 許淑慧	Female	Kinship
	《王柳村 （豫）徵君過 訪》	Wang Yu 王豫	Male	Non-kinship
	《題阮棣未 （亨）珠湖草 堂詩鈔》	Ruan Heng 阮亨	Male	Non-kinship
	《題季青夫弟 無盡意齋稿》	Naichun 乃椿	Male	Non-kinship
	《題吳小亭 （兆慶）雪夜 校書圖》	Wu Zhaoqing 吳兆慶	Male	Non-kinship
	陳邦泰題跋	Chen Bangtai 陳邦泰	Male	Non-kinship
	映薇女士謹題	Lady Yingwei 映薇女士	Female	Non-kinship
	道光壬午秋七 月秋谷拜題	Qiugu 秋谷	Female	Non-kinship
	癸未春晚讀竟 敬題即請智珠 夫人正，小江 潘宗秋草	Pan Zongyi 潘宗秋	Male	Non-kinship
	癸未初夏年家 侍生汪端光閱 讀並識數字	Wang Duanguang 汪 端光	Male	Non-kinship

Table 2: Numbers and names of cultural women and literati mentioned in Hu's poetry collections

Sources	Cultural Women	Literati	Uncertain
<i>Short Verses from the Pavilion of Embracing Moon</i> 抱月樓小律	歸懋儀，席佩蘭，三妹，蓮卿夫人，張筠如，外祖母蔣太恭人，皇甫蕙，喬氏六姊，沈吉雲，道華夫人，廖夫人，蔣氏外祖母，繼母蔣恭人，汪端，丁寄生及其四女，廖雲錦 14	許蔭基，陳文述，胡文銓，許寶善，息園主人，鈕耕巖，寧弟，鄭小谷，金堅齋，二卯山人，喬茂才，孫心青，儲麟趾，紅雪山人，小真，李心菴，張筵，莊斯升，林寶 18	《玉山講院》 《畫荷花贈閨友》，《乙亥十月望移居白杏吟巢諸詩人見過口占奉呈》

<i>Drafts from the Chamber of Scattering Flowers</i> 散花天室稿	許淑賢，許淑慧，吳婉桃，曹蘋香夫人，曹氏外祖母，唐太孺人，漱霞夫人，珠林，駱綺蘭，秀巖表弟婦，蘭君，范文如，月身夫人，柔生，順生，殷德徽，汪芳姑，寧太夫人，阿織造女公子，李湘浦夫人，馬太守夫人，惠玉，莫城女史，二姊，張觀察夫人，張婉仙，張婉筠，季青，曠薇女士，秋谷 32	聶銑敏，唐仲冕，林遠峰山人，徐澹安，唐春橋，孫杏嶠，王研農，程也園，林硯莊，徐鴻寶，吳玉松，周雲巖，子瀟太史，吳壽芝、李小霞，吳馥秋，石韞玉，趙味辛，李廷芳，陶山年伯，李湘浦，伊存樸，斌笠耕，孫年伯，周宜和，錢忭，陳邦泰，朱秋嵐，沈濤，鄭潮，乃椿，郭頻伽，王豫，阮亨，吳兆慶，潘宗秋，汪端光 37	《即席有贈》，《與閨友再泛西湖》
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