Chinese Women in the Imperial Past

New Perspectives

Edited by
Harriet Zurndorfer

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CHINESE WOMEN IN THE IMPERIAL PAST

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EDITED BY

W.L. IDEMA

IN COOPERATION WITH

P.K. BOL • D.R. KNECHTGES • E.S. RAWSKI
E. ZÜRCHER • H.T. ZURNDORFER

VOLUME XLIV

To Maria H.W. Huijerman-van Aalderen

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The papers in this book, with the exception of one, were all presented at the Workshop 'New Directions in the Study of Chinese Women 1000-1800', held at Leiden University, September 12-13, 1996. This meeting marked the first occasion in Europe where senior and junior European and Asian scholars representing different disciplines in the humanities and social sciences had the opportunity to exchange information concerning Chinese women during the mid-to-late imperial era. The International Institute for Asian Studies, the Leiden University Fund, the Faculty of Letters, and the Foundation for the Promotion of Chinese Studies at Leiden University generously funded the Workshop. Special thanks is also extended to Wilt L. Idema who helped secure this financial support.

In addition to those scholars whose contributions are included in this volume, the Workshop benefited significantly from the input by other participants, including Francesca Bray, Hsiung Ping-chen, Theodore Zeldin, and Zhao Shiyu. Joanna Handlin Smith served as the principal discussant and gave much insight and advice on the long-term perspectives for studying Chinese women during the imperial era. As editor of this volume, I alone remain responsible for the final version of these papers.

As a result of the widespread interest and enthusiasm the Workshop generated, I approached the publisher Brill about the possibility of creating a continuing forum for the study of Chinese women and gender before the twentieth century. The result is the new journal publication, *NAN NÜ: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China*, now first out in 1999. It is edited by a group of international scholars and appears twice a year.

The essays in this volume are part of a new and expanding specialization within the discipline of Chinese studies. It is hoped that the efforts of the individuals writing here and that of others will help continue to stimulate academic interest in Chinese women and gender, a subject which until now has not received the full attention it deserves.

Harriet T. Zurndorfer
Spring 1999

CONTRIBUTORS

Mark Elvin is of Anglo-American descent, spent his teenage years in France, and lives in Australia, where he is a research professor at the Australian National University. He has written and edited books on Chinese economic history (*The Pattern of the Chinese Path*), Chinese urban history (*The Chinese City Between Two Worlds*, with G.W. Skinner), China's historical geography (*A Cultural Atlas of China*, with C. Blunden), China's political, social, and intellectual history (*Another History: Essays on China from a European Perspective*, and *Changing Stories in the Chinese World*), and most recently, China's environmental history (*Sediments of Time*, with Ts'ui-jung Liu). He lives in the bush with his wife, writes children's stories, and is active in the universities' trade union.

Anne T. Gerritsen is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. Her dissertation focuses on the incursion of state power on local religious cultures in Ji'an Prefecture (Jiangxi) during the Sung to Ming transition era.

Beata Grant is Associate Professor of Chinese, and Chairman of the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages and Literatures at Washington University in St. Louis. Her research interests are primarily in the area of religion and literature; she is currently working on a study of the poetry of Buddhist nuns of the Ming-Ch'ing period.

Clara Wing-chung Ho was born in Hong Kong. She is now associate professor in history at Hong Kong Baptist University. She has published in Chinese several books on the history of women, child-rearing, and more than thirty articles appearing in academic journals of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. She also served as the volume editor of *The Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Women: The Qing Period, 1644-1911.*

Wilt L. Idema, born 1944, studied Chinese literature at Leiden, Hokkaido (Sapporo), and Kyoto Universities. Since 1976 he was Professor of Chinese literature at Leiden University. He has

published extensively on Chinese literature both in English and Dutch, and serves as co-editor of T'OUNG PAO. His most recent publication, which he wrote with Lloyd L. Haft, is *A Guide to Chinese Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1997). He is now professor of Chinese literature at Harvard University.

Angela Ki Che Leung was educated in Hong Kong and received her doctoral degree at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. She has published in Chinese, English, and French on social and cultural history of premodern China. Her book (in Chinese) on Ming-Ch'ing philanthropic organizations was published in Taipei in 1997. She is now working on medicine in premodern Chinese society.

Paola Paderni teaches Chinese history at the Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli. Her main interest is women and gender history. She has published her research in LATE IMPERIAL CHINA and ÉTUDES CHINOISES.

Christian de Pee is Fang-Tu Teaching Fellow in East Asian Studies at Columbia University. He is preparing a book manscript with the working title "Text as Practice: Weddings and Texts in Song and Yuan China."

Harriet T. Zurndorfer has taught Chinese history at Leiden University since 1978. Her publications include *Change and Continuity in Chinese Local History: The Development of Hui-chou Prefecture 800-1800* (1989), and *China Bibliography: A Research Guide to Reference Works about China Past and Present* (1995). She is co-editor and co-author of *Conflict and Accommodation in Early Modern East Asia: Essays in Honour of Erik Zürcher* (1993). Since 1991 she has served as managing editor of the JOURNAL OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE ORIENT. She is also founder and managing editor of the journal NAN NÜ: MEN, WOMEN AND GENDER IN EARLY AND IMPERIAL CHINA.

CONTENTS

TABLE 15
Mean number of sons per widow surviving at bereavement in Tsun-hua omitting cases with no information

Sons / Age w-years	0	1	2	3	4	5	Sons per mother: Each year	5-year blocks	Model
14	1	1					0.500		
15							-	-	-
16	3	2					0.400		
17	3	7					0.700		
18	12	17					0.586	0.588	0.092 (6.4)
19	8	9	1				0.611		
20	12	14					0.538		
21	24	27	6				0.684		
22	14	20	2				0.667		
23	6	18	2				0.846	0.675	0.301 (2.2)
24	13	15	7	2			0.946		
25	12	16	2				0.667		
26	10	18	5				0.848		
27	7	24	5	3	1		1.175		
28	14	25	12	1	1		1.057	0.965	0.606 (1.6)

Note: The figures in the right-hand column are taken from Table 16 below and are given here to show how the data rates compare to the model presented there.

years as in the data figures. (That is, they are not simple arithmetic means of the proportions, though fairly close to them). The last column contains the comparable figures derived from the model developed in the following section, and presented in more detail in Table 16. This simulation uses the mean of the two values of α and β for each of these two areas as already determined to calculate annual survival rates of children after birth, together with the 'natural fertility' rates of birth at each year of age in the relevant ages,[156] the proportions of women marrying at each year of age as established above for each of the two areas, and an assumed sex ratio at birth of 106.

It is apparent from Tables 14 and 15 that the overrepresentation in the data of cases with surviving sons is high for the first block of ages, but decreases rapidly for the second two, though

[156] Provided by Dr Basia Zaba, to whom my grateful thanks.

still significant. The ratio of overstatement in the data figures for each age-block is placed in parentheses in the 'model' column. It is interesting that, despite the difference in absolute levels between Kuei-yang and Tsun-hua, these age-block-specific ratios are essentially the same for both areas. More examples would be needed to let one adjudicate whether or not this is coincidence, but these rates will be borrowed for Chia-hsing in the next section.

These ratios suggest the possibility that the presence of at least one surviving son may have significantly increased the likelihood of a widow opting for fidelity rather than remarriage when she was in her teens, a band of ages when she could relatively easily be found a replacement husband, but that this was increasingly less the case later.

It is obvious from Table 16 that the ratios given in parentheses in Tables 14 and 15, measuring the overrepresentation of

TABLE 16

Model: sons surviving per reproductively active mother on the assumption of the mean of the alpha and beta life-table values established previously, the annual rates for marriage in the data, and a stationary population, in Kuei-yang and Tsun-hua during the Ch'ing dynasty

Age w-yrs	'Natural' Fertility	Sons surviving per reproductively active mother Kuei-yang Mid-year Levels	Tsun-hua
12	0.175	0.036	0.025
13	0.225	0.054	0.045
14	0.275	0.076	0.050
15	0.325	0.104	0.074
16	0.375	0.139	0.096
17	0.421	0.193	0.107
18	0.460	0.253	0.134
19	0.475	0.333	0.186
20	0.477	0.410	0.238
21	0.475	0.488	0.300
22	0.470	0.568	0.362
23	0.465	0.649	0.421
24	0.460	0.732	0.485
25	0.455	0.816	0.548
26	0.449	0.898	0.610
27	0.442	0.982	0.663
28	0.428	1.067	0.724

TABLE 17

Approximate values of the reciprocals of the proportions of sons surviving to reproductively active mothers ('non-orphans') in Kuei-yang and Tsun-hua during the Ch'ing dynasty, with proportion of sons being the 'eldest'

W-age	Kuei-yang				Tsun-hua			
	1/ss	'Eldest'	Block mean	cs/RAW	1/ss	'Eldest'	Block mean	cs/RAW
14	13	1.0			20	1.0		
15	10	1.0			14	1.0		
16	7	1.0			10	1.0		
17	5	1.0			9	1.0		
18	4	0.87	0.973	0.149	7	1.0	1.0	0.092
19	3	0.92			5	0.91		
20	2	0.84			4	1.0		
21	2	0.81			3	0.85		
22	1.8	0.75			3	0.92		
23	1.5	0.74	0.814	0.398	2	0.91	0.916	0.276
24	1.4	0.65			2	0.69		
25	1.2	0.63			1.8	0.90		
26	1.1	0.66			1.6	0.82		
27	1.02	0.63			1.5	0.70		
28	0.9	0.66	0.645	0.580	1.4	0.70	0.761	0.466

Note: 'cs/RAW' stands for 'corrected value of the mean number of surviving sons per RAW' to yield number who are 'eldest' sons' and is the value of the age-block means in the model for the surviving sons multiplied by the proportion of surviving sons that are 'eldest' sons as indicated by the data.

sons in the recorded cases, are related to the reciprocals of the 'sons surviving per reproductively active mother'. In Table 17, rounded values of these reciprocals are given for each age. It is equally clear that they overstate the overrepresentation if our hypothesis is correct that the main influence on a widow as to whether or not to opt for virtue was the presence or absence of *one* son, not the number of her sons. In Table 17 the data in Tables 14 and 15 are used to calculate the numbers of surviving sons per reproductively active woman in the model who are 'eldest' (including 'only') for each age and each of the three age-blocks. A better approximation to the overstatement of cases with sons is probably then derived for each age-block from these corrected and somewhat lower values rather than those in Table 16.

The data for a widow-to-be's age at the birth of her first son are presented in Table 18. The mean ages indicated here for the

TABLE 18
Mother's age at birth of the first son surviving at her bereavement

Age w-yrs	First sons: numbers		First sons: percentages (rounded)	
	Kuei-yang	Tsun-hua	Kuei-yang	Tsun-hua
15	2	0		
16	9	1	4.6	1.8
17	15	6		
18	28	11	25.1	39.6
19	17	4		
20	30	9		
21	28	4	35.6	30.2
22	27	3		
23	28	2		
24	16	5	25.1	18.9
25	16	3		
26	8	2		
27	12	2	9.6	11.3
28	3	2		
Totals	239	53	100.00	101.80
Mean ages	21.3	20.7		

Note: Rounding means percentages for Tsun-hua does not sum exactly to 100.

birth of a first surviving son are 21.3 w-years in Kuei-yang, and 20.7 w-years in Tsun-hua. They may not, however, be all they seem. If we assume that the average lapse of time between the birth of a first son and a second was 6 years, we can use the better chances of survival of a Tsun-hua infant to this age (91% versus 66% for his Kuei-yang counterpart) to calculate in extremely approximate fashion percentages corresponding to actual first births of sons. (In other words, in Kuei-yang as compared to Tsun-hua, a higher proportion of actual first sons born will not be eldest surviving sons at their mother's bereavement, having perished in the interim.) These calculations suggest that the mean age for the birth of an actual first son in Kuei-yang may in fact have been a little lower than in Tsun-hua, contrary to the face-value picture given by the unadjusted data. The data are too few in number to justify pursuing the question in any detail.

Maternity

As indicated in the preceding section, we can also model maternity. (This is likewise the case for age-specific relative rates of bereavement.) We now look at these procedures in detail. What rates of reproduction are implied by the life-tables and the first-marriage rates for women reconstructed in earlier sections? What age-specific relative rates of bereavement are implied by specific schedules of mortality, marriage, and differences in ages between spouses?

We can assume a population that is either stationary or else growing slowly, for example at the 0.5% a year that was approximately the rate during most of the Ch'ing dynasty. We need, for this enquiry, the 'natural' fertility rates introduced in the previous section, and an area-specific schedule for the differences in ages between first-marriage spouses such as that in Table 13 above. The underlying idea, which is crude, is to calculate the proportion of women in a cohort who were 'reproductively active' at each age of life (i.e. under 50 w-years and married to a living husband), and then to see what proportion of the 'natural' fertility rates was needed for stasis or the required level of increase. On the assumption that every marriageable woman was eventually married, this means excluding the not-yet-married at younger ages, and those who were widowed, from the life-table proportion of those surviving at each age. We have no way from our data, though, of estimating the re-entry of widows into the reproducing group by remarriage. To this extent, our model will overestimate the proportion of 'natural' fertility required.

The United Nations model life-tables provide separate patterns for males and females.[157] In principle we need a male life-table to model the deaths of husbands so as to generate the appropriate proportions of widows. The differences between the two tables for the Far Eastern pattern at $e_0 = 35$ are as follows for the l_x at ages 15, 25, and 35 (females first): 0.7063, 0.6076, 0.4928 as against 0.6932, 0.6216, 0.5308. Since there is no way at this point of estimating the relationship of male to female survivorship in our three areas, we will however use the female pattern for both sexes.

[157] United Nations 1982:160 and 181.

Maternity in the present context this means the modelling of the life-table proportions of a child borne at each age by a female cohort through the child-bearing years. Our main concern is not to study fertility as such, since our materials are hardly adequate for this, but to determine plausible rates of the survival of sons per reproductively active woman by each age at bereavement. We only consider only sons in what follows, using a proportion of 0.5145 males, which approximates the common ratio at birth of 106.

The calculation, which needs a computer, can be summarized as follows:

(A) The work is done in terms of intervals between western mid-year points. This is appropriate for the use of the proportions ever-married summarized in percentage form in the right-hand half of Table 10. These are in exact NY c-years and convert at 'w-age = NYc-age – 1.5'.

(B) The proportional increments of newly married by each new NY c-year are multiplied by the matching w-mid-year life-table proportion, and added to the total life-table proportion of 'women reproductively active' each year. (The 'proportions' ever-married in Table 10 are proportions of our data samples, adjusted for the effect of mortality between marriage and being recorded. Hence the need for the multiplication by the life-table proportion.)

(C) Each new wife is assigned one husband; he is distributed in fractional form by the inter-spouse age-gap g over $h(g)$ according to Table 13, and the fractions of these new husbands are multiplied by the matching w-mid-year life-table proportion in the same way as was done for their wives. This gives us a sort of 'platoon' composed of sets of fractional husbands, each spread over a different range of 22 years of age. Each set will initially be associated with wives of one particular year of age, and with $g = 0$ so to speak located at this particular year of age. The set will then move through time year by year with these wives, diminishing with the mortality determined by the appropriate life-table.

(D) The total proportion calculated for reproductively active wives (RAW) at each year of age is reduced during the year that follows by two processes, and slightly increased by a third effect. The first of these is the mortality affecting the women over this year. This is calculated by subtracting from this year's initial total of RAW the annual loss determined by multiplying this year's initial total by '$1 - ((l(x+1))/l(x))$' where x is 'this' year of age.

(E) The second decrease in RAW is due to bereavement. The pro-

portions for the husbands (to women of the age under consideration) dying are determined by ranging over the spouse age-gap distribution g in the 'platoon', and applying in the appropriate $h(g)$ proportion the annual decrement defined by each appropriate pair of years in the life-table, as in (D).

(F) The third effect is double-counting, which has to be removed. The proportion of cases where both spouses die in the same year is determined by multiplying the probabilities of the two individual events, and then multiplying this by the proportion of reproductively active women exposed to such a possibility. Adding this back in slightly increases the proportion of reproductively active women once more. A similar calculation is done to adjust the number of reproductively active husbands, as usual over the spectrum of the range of ages determined by the distribution of differences in ages between spouses.

(G) The proportion of women reproductively active at each year of age is multiplied by the matching age-specific rate for natural fertility, and this then multiplied by 0.5146 to approximate the proportion of sons borne by a woman during that year of age. In a stationary self-replicating population, each cohort of women should exactly replace itself. If the male-to-female sex ratio at birth is close to the common 106:100, then the life-table total of sons should be about 1.06.

(H) The life-table proportion of sons (born to the cohort of women) surviving at a given age of the cohort is calculated by summing births at each age of mother diminished by survivorship ratios up to that given age; and these proportions are then reduced by the loss of mothers and fathers, minus the proportion of cases where both have been lost in the same year, to give the life-table proportion of 'orphans' and its complement of 'non-orphans' (*at least one* missing parent defining 'orphanhood' in this procedure).

A summary of the results is presented in Table 19. This shows the fertility required for the exact replacement of a cohort of sons by age-blocks, mostly of 5 years and chosen to match the other age-blocks used in this analysis, for Kuei-yang, Chia-hsing, and Tsun-hua. At the foot of each column is given the proportion of natural fertility that this represents, given in each case the age-patterns of marriage and of mortality and bereavement that have been established for each of the three areas. (The effect of remarriage is of course missing.) The interpolated figures giving the life-table proportions of reproductively active women let one read off an approximation of what proportion of women