PART I

Histories and Hierarchies

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Knowing and Remembering

This book is both less and more than an imaginative reconstruction of the lives of Shanghai prostitutes from the late nineteenth century to the present.[1] Less, because prostitutes, like every other nonelite group, did not record their own lives. It is extremely rare to find instances where prostitutes speak or represent themselves directly (although, as I will argue later, they are not entirely silent, either). Rather, they entered into the historical record when someone wanted to appreciate, castigate, count, regulate, cure, pathologize, warn about, rescue, eliminate, or deploy them as a symbol in a larger social panorama. The sources that document their existence are varied, and include but are not limited to guidebooks to the pleasure quarters; collections of anecdotes, portraits, and poetry to and by high-class courtesans; gossip columns devoted to courtesans in the tabloid press; municipal regulations prohibiting street soliciting; police interrogations of streetwalkers and those accused of trafficking in women; newspaper reports of court cases involving both courtesans and streetwalkers; polemics by Chinese and foreign reformers arguing the merits of licensing versus abolition; learned articles by Chinese scholars commenting on the world history of prostitution and analyzing its local causes; surveys by doctors and social workers on the incidence of sexually transmitted disease in various Shanghai populations; records by relief agencies of kidnapping and trafficking cases in which women were sold to brothels; and fictionalized accounts of the scams and sufferings of prostitutes. Each of these sources has its uses; as a group, they are most informative about how prerevolutionary elites constructed and sought to contain categories of the subordinated "other." In short, they tell us much more about the classificatory strategies of the authors than about the experiences of prostitutes. As the reformer Zeng Die commented sardonically in 1935:

> Actually, these are prostitutes as they exist in the brains and ears of the writers. If you ask such a writer, "What, after all, do these women eat, what do they wear, are they willing to lead this type of life or not?" he is unable to answer.

Whether one perused the tabloid gossip columns, reformist fiction, or racy descriptions of Japanese and White Russian prostitutes in Shanghai, Zeng complained, one could not find a single straightforward statement by a prostitute.[2]

The very rich historical record on prostitution, then, is not spoken in the voice of the prostitute. And the much-sought "voices of prostitutes themselves," if we could hear them, would not be unmediated, either; their daily lives, struggles, and self-perception were surely constructed in part by these other voices and institutions. It is impossible, then, for even the most assiduous historian to apply the retrieval method of history making, where energetic digging in neglected documents can be made to yield up a formerly inaudible voice. The impossibility of such an enterprise, in fact, calls into question the retrieval model itself. It directs attention to the ways in which all historical records are products of a nexus of relationships that can be only dimly apprehended or guessed at across the enforced distance of time, by historians with their own localized preoccupations.

Yet if this study is a humbling meditation on the limits of history-as-retrieval, it also aims at more than a transparent exercise in reconstruction. Prostitution was not only a changing site of work for women but also a metaphor, a medium of articulation in which the city's changing elites and emerging middle classes discussed their problems, fears, agendas, and visions. In Shanghai over the past century, prostitution was variously understood as a source of urbanized pleasures, a profession full of unscrupulous and greedy schemers, a site of moral danger and physical disease, and a marker of national decay. It was also discussed as a painful economic choice on the part of women and their families, since it was sometimes the best or only income-producing activity available to women seeking employment in Shanghai. The categories through which prostitution was understood were not fixed, and tracing them requires attention to questions of urban history, colonial and anticolonial state making, and the intersection of sexuality, particularly female sexuality, with an emerging nationalist discourse. Every social class and gender grouping used prostitution as a different kind of reference point, and, depending on where they were situated, it meant something different to each.

The shifting and multiple meanings assigned to the prostitute demand that we move beyond transhistorical references to "the world's oldest profession," or dynasty-by-dynasty catalogs of written references to courtesans,[3] and begin instead to historicize and localize sex work. Prostitution is always about the sale of sexual services, but much more can be learned from that

transaction: about sexual meanings, about other social relations, about sex as a medium through which people talked about political power and cultural transformation, about nationhood and cultural identity.

In some respects China's modern debates about prostitution echoed those of Europe and the United States. Recent feminist scholarship has explored the ways in which prostitution illuminates

> a society's organization of class and gender: the power arrangements between men and women's economic and social status; the prevailing sexual ideology; . . . the ways in which female erotic and procreative sexuality are channeled into specific institutional arrangements; and the cross-class alliances and antagonisms between reformers and prostitutes.[4]

Although this literature is far too complex to summarize here, several recurrent themes have implications for the study of Shanghai. First is the difficulty of working with sources generated largely by regulators, reformers, journalists, fiction writers, and others while trying simultaneously to hear "a language that comes from the work and experiences of prostitutes themselves."[5] Second is the attention to prostitution's powerful use as a symbol. "What was written and said about prostitution," writes Alain Corbin of nineteenth-century France, "was then a focus for collective delusions and a meeting point for all manner of anxieties."[6] For France such anxieties included fear of "venereal disease, social revolution, and 'immorality,' however defined,"[7] as well as a more generalized sense of threat to male mastery.[8] For the United States in the early twentieth century, the list of anxieties also encompassed "unrestricted immigration, . . . the anonymity of the city, the evils of liquor, the growth of a working-class urban culture, and, most important of all, the changing role of women in society."[9]

A third theme common to much of this scholarship is the insistence on regarding prostitution as a form of labor, even if not always one freely chosen, rather than (as many reformers believed) a state of degradation or a moral failing.[10] Some scholars argue that prostitutes themselves saw their activities as a form of work.[11] Prostitutes' labor, and the earnings that accrued from it, could both facilitate independence from the constrictions of family (as it did in nineteenth-century New York) and help to maintain the economic health of the women's families (as it did in colonial Nairobi).[12]

A fourth theme in recent scholarship is the attempt to move beyond characterizations of prostitutes as victims and to find the historical agency, however limited, exercised by women in the sex trades.[13] This requires attention to the entrepreneurial talents of madams,[14] as well as critiques of the polarized image of the prostitute as "the innocent victim or the sinister polluter."[15] In spite of considerable public hysteria about the traffic in women in both Britain[16] and the United States, Ruth Rosen writes that "the vast majority of women who practiced prostitution were not dragged, drugged, or clubbed

into involuntary servitude."[17] Rather, as Christine Stansell comments, "[p]rostitution was one of a number of choices fraught with hardship and moral ambiguity."[18] Under certain conditions, it offered women a limited degree of control, as Judith Walkowitz explains:

> Superficially, prostitution seemed to operate as an arena of male supremacy, where women were bartered and sold as commodities. In reality, women often controlled the trade and tended to live together as part of a distinct female subgroup. Prostitutes were still not free of male domination, but neither were they simply passive victims of male sexual abuse. They could act in their own defense, both individually and collectively. They negotiated their own prices, and they were as likely to exploit their clients as to suffer humiliation at male hands.[19]

A final theme that dominates much of the recent scholarship on prostitution is the heated debate that raged between state authorities and reformers in a variety of nations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Crudely summarized, state functionaries, bolstered by medical authorities, argued that prostitution was a necessary evil to be regulated through the registration and medical inspection of prostitutes. Reformers of many types, including Christians and women's-rights activists, countered that prostitution was a social evil that should be abolished. Variations on the regulationist approach shaped the organization of prostitution in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France, England, Scotland, Italy, and Russia.[20] When exported to the colonies, regulationism had a racial edge as well, stigmatizing native prostitutes and seeking to protect the colonizers (particularly soldiers) from the menace of disease and the purported uncleanliness of women of color.[21]

Neither regulation nor abolition was beneficial to prostitutes. Under regulationist regimes, women were subjected to intricate registration requirements that isolated them from the working-class communities of which they had been a part, increased clandestine prostitution, and led to police harassment of all working-class women on suspicion of being prostitutes.[22] Ironically, the upper-class women reformers who opposed regulation, on the grounds that licensing and inspection degraded women, did little better by their "fallen sisters." Many feminist groups saw themselves as striking a blow against the sexual exploitation of women and the larger problem of male domination. All too often, however, abolitionist laws made the lives of working-class women more difficult. State repression of prostitutes increased. Driven into clandestine prostitution and harassed by the police, for instance, many women turned to pimps as a source of protection, only to pay dearly—in loss of income, control, and personal safety—for the arrangement.[23]

Each of these themes was important in the course of Shanghai prostitution as well. But in China, prostitution was also invoked in urgent public dis-

cussions about what kind of sex and gender relationships could help to constitute a modern nation in a threatening semicolonial situation. China was never completely colonized by a single power. Rather, from the mid-nineteenth century European powers, the United States, and Japan established themselves in treaty-port cities and larger spheres of influence that encompassed both urban and rural territory. Mao Zedong coined the term "semifeudal, semicolonial" to describe this situation, in which a weak national government exercised limited authority over rural elites while foreigners dominated the modern sector of the economy and intervened in regional and national politics. Direct foreign political control, economic activity, and intellectual influence were most concentrated in the concession areas of treaty-port cities.

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, Shanghai was a treaty port—a place where Westerners governed part of the city, where Western and Japanese businessmen, sailors, industrialists, and adventurers made their homes and sometimes their fortunes. Shanghai was also China's biggest industrial and commercial city, a magnet for merchants from around the country and for peasants of both sexes seeking work, and the birthplace of the Chinese Communist Party. Shanghai embraced populations from various nations, regions, and classes, and harbored political agitators ranging from Christian moral reformers to Marxist revolutionaries—all presided over by three different municipal governments (International Settlement, French Concession, and Chinese city). The International Settlement and the French Concession were governed by councils elected by foreign ratepayers; foreign investors were active in commerce and light industry; foreign educators dominated many of the city's new educational institutions.[24]

In this volatile and virtually colonized Shanghai environment Chinese elites, themselves undergoing profound economic and political transformations, keenly felt the instability of China's semicolonial situation, the fragility of China's sovereignty. The very incompleteness of China's colonization generated particular anxieties, different from those of fully colonized territories. The situation could always get worse (and frequently threatened to do so); conversely, perhaps purposeful human activity could stave off further political disaster. Many varieties of nationalism flourished in Shanghai. Most nationalists took as their goal the establishment of a strong, modern nation that could appropriate and adapt the methods of the colonizers to thwart the colonial enterprises, to keep "semicolonialism" from deepening and ultimately to roll it back.

The modernity sought by this heterogeneous lot of reformers and revolutionaries was not clearly delimited. It was a shifting and receding target, one that encompassed economic and military strength but would also, many felt, require a thorough overhaul of cultural practices. Debates over prostitution, sexuality, marriage, and public health were inseparable from attempts

to define a Chinese modernity that could irreversibly consign semicolonialism to the past. And yet these conversations, incited and shaped by the significant foreign presence in Shanghai, seldom made direct reference to that presence. When Chinese writers invoked foreigners, they usually did so to make a comparative point about prostitution or marriage in Europe, the United States, or Japan. The foreign prostitutes who worked in Shanghai, their foreign patrons, the foreigners who sought out Chinese prostitutes, and the larger operations of semicolonial power that provided so much of the city's shape and history received only perfunctory mention in most of the literature on prostitution. This was a determinedly domestic conversation about modernity conducted in the urban interstices of a semicolonized space.

What it meant (to participants and observers) for a woman in Shanghai to sell sexual services to a man changed across the hierarchy of prostitution and over time, as understandings of prostitution were shaped, contested, renegotiated, and appropriated by many participants: the prostitutes, their madams, their patrons, their lovers and husbands, their natal families, their in-laws, the police, the courts, doctors, the city government, missionaries, social reformers, students, and revolutionaries. Studying prostitution and its changes thus illuminates the thinking and social practices of many strata of Shanghai society. And since the debates about prostitution often took place in regional or national publications, such a study also suggests the contours of conflicts about gender and modernity in twentieth-century Chinese society.

Across the century I am investigating here, the changing figure of the prostitute performed important ideological work in elite discussions.[25] Elite men (and occasionally elite women) wrote a great deal about prostitution, but the types of attention they devoted to it changed over time. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the upper-class prostitute[26] appeared in elite discourse as the embodiment and arbiter of sophisticated urbanity. Guidebooks, memoirs, and gossipy tabloid newspapers known as the "mosquito press"[27] devoted themselves to the appreciation of beautiful courtesans and the depiction, often in titillating detail, of their romantic liaisons with the city's rich and powerful. This literature also contained warnings about the capacity of courtesans to engage in financial strategizing at the expense of the customer. Embedded in such writings was a highly detailed set of instructions on how the sophisticated customer should display knowledge and power to courtesans and other customers; guidebooks became primers for the production of elite masculinity. Side by side with this literature of appreciation, the local news page of the mainstream dailies and the foreign press carried accounts of the activities of lower-class streetwalkers, who were portrayed as victims of kidnapping, human trafficking, and abuse by madams, as well as disturbers of urban peace and spreaders of venereal disease.

One might conclude that there was one discourse on upper-class prostitution and another on lower-class prostitution. But as Shanghai moved through the second quarter of the twentieth century, the themes of victimization and sexual danger gradually increased in volume, all but drowning out the discourse of pleasure by the 1940s. During the 1920s and 1930s, the prostitute was widely represented as a victimized, disorderly, dangerous embodiment of social trouble. Reformers regularly decried prostitution as exploitation of women and a national shame, indeed as one of the keys to China's national weakness, since it was argued that a system that permitted the treatment of women as inferior human beings would inevitably give rise to a weak nation.[28]

At the same time the press and popular-fiction writers began to pay more attention to the less privileged and protected sectors of the trade. This was part of a more general development of muckraking reportage and fiction targeted at an emerging middle-class urban audience. Such writings paid attention to a wide variety of social ills that included but were not limited to begging, public sanitation, the mistreatment of domestic workers, and prostitution.[29] During the same period, the police and the courts, extending their authority into new realms in urban life, undertook to regulate prostitution, at least at the margins where it involved the sale into prostitution of "women of good families," or street soliciting that was seen as a threat to public order. By the 1940s, prostitutes were clearly marked off from respectable people, particularly the respectable "petty urbanites."[30] They had been relegated to the category of urban disorder.

This set of transformations was less orderly than the neat schematic account given here implies. The portraits of prostitution as sites of pleasure and of danger overlapped and coexisted in time. Nevertheless, the increasing attention to disorder and danger, and the development of regulatory regimes to contain them, had multiple consequences for the daily lives, identities, and actions of Shanghai prostitutes. Indeed, they even helped to determine who was considered a prostitute. Changes in migration patterns and economic opportunities might have increased the number of prostitutes and the alarm over them. But changes in elite notions about the link between women's status and national strength helped create the language through which a rise in prostitution acquired meaning—even gave it the most commonly used modern term for prostitute, *jinü* (prostitute female), which displaced the earlier *mingji* (famous prostitute).[31] And the elite shaped the institutions that emerged to classify, reform, or regulate prostitution—all of which in turn became part of the material environment in which prostitutes lived. Shanghai prostitution is a rich venue in which to explore the interlocking of material and ideological changes, since neither alone can be regarded as determinative of the conditions of prostitutes' lives.[32]

THE KNOWING HISTORIAN

Central to this study is the investigation of how things are known and later remembered, and how, later still, they are simultaneously apprehended and reinvented by the historian. Here the writer of local and national history must confront larger questions of contemporary historical practice. Just when the epistemological crisis engendered by poststructuralism appears to be waning in many academic fields, it has been taken up by that most curmudgeonly of disciplines, history. Historians wonder, with an agony no less heartfelt for being so belated: How can we let go of the belief that there is an objective, knowable, recoverable past out there, and still write history? If there is no there there, then what is it we spend our scholarly lives creating? Is history, ultimately, no more than a collection of the representations we fashion in the present, forever constrained by the limits and the politics of our contemporary concerns?[33]

This set of questions, important as it is, still assumes that the past—although no longer sitting out there waiting to be discovered—somehow awaits our touch to bring it into being as history, as a set of textual representations. Yet if we try to imagine the conditions under which the textual traces of the past were themselves produced, we realize immediately that before we ever take them up as the raw materials of our trade, they are already sedimented into historical conversations of their own.

To take an example from the subject being fashioned here: I come to the history of sex work in recent China with a particular set of questions informed by Marxism, feminism, poststructuralism, the late-twentieth-century demise of revolutionary regimes, and assorted political and intellectual commitments of both the coherent and the fragmentary variety. To summarize crudely: Marxism has shaped my interest in the historical workings of power, the centrality of material life, the analysis of capitalism and colonialism, the history of nonelites, and labor history. Feminist writings by scholars and activists have insisted that gender is central to the workings of all societies and that prostitution is sex work, a form of labor. In addition, feminist historians of European and American prostitution have raised many issues about female agency, resistance, sexuality, and the state; this book enters an ongoing conversation about those issues. From poststructuralist critics I have learned to pay attention to to the instability of all categories and to language as constitutive, not merely reflective. I have become suspicious of seamless narratives in the sources and less eager to create a seamless narrative myself; I have learned to hear silences in the historical record as more than simple absence. And yet I remain unwilling to give up the weaving of historical narratives. No longer sure that it is feasible, ethical, or wise to give order to the stories of others, suspicious as to whether historians can move beyond sophisticated ventriloquism on behalf of the oppressed, I am still unwilling to

contemplate a world in which histories are unwritten or denied outright. Such a possibility takes on particular poignancy in the postsocialist period, in the wake of regimes that claimed to speak for the oppressed even while silencing history and reordering collective memory. The demise of revolutionary regimes has raised anew the question of what modernity might mean for China, a question articulated by several generations of reformers and revolutionaries described in this book. But the end of revolutionary socialism raises questions as well for those of us living in late capitalism. How do we know that capitalism is "late," for instance, rather than middle-aged or just coming into its own? What visions of equity, what workings of power, what deployments of gender and sexuality will animate postsocialist subjects on both sides of what used to be called, in a simpler time devoted to the enforcement of binaries, the Iron Curtain?

Such is a partial catalog of one historian's current preoccupations. But the writings about Chinese courtesans that were produced by cultivated gentlemen of the late Qing and early Republican eras, although they may yield answers to my questions, tell me a great deal more than what I might ask if left to my own limited contemporary devices. Many of these men were themselves writing about their own recent past—were lovingly, poignantly, nostalgically recalling the courtesans of twenty years before their own time. What we are reading, then, is not a transparent recording of the "facts" of a particular woman's native place, work history, physical charms, major liaisons, poetic talents, and so forth, but rather a story already rendered nostalgically. Courtesans here are brought into the written record—and become accessible to my own contemporary musings—only because men a century ago recalled them with longing and sadness as part of a world that they, and China, had forever lost.[34]

A similar process of sedimentation characterizes the writings about lower-class streetwalkers. Concerned about the health and strength of the Chinese nation in a world dominated by imperialist powers, many elite Chinese from the 1910s on called for an end to prostitution. Creating origin stories in support of the reform cause, they assembled a radically dichotomized, even incoherent, portrait of streetwalkers: innocent, passive adolescents torn from their families and communities by evil traffickers, or aggressive harridans purveying disease in a new and dangerous urban environment. Rather than looking nostalgically to a cherished past, the reformers gazed with apprehension at a degenerate present and an imperiled future. Streetwalkers entered into history as emblems of national disaster.

This is not merely a question of the aesthetics of nostalgia or the trajectory of particular reform campaigns. The narrativized traces that form the historical record of courtesans and lower-class prostitutes are also a set of congealed relations of power. Men defined themselves in relationship to each other by performing and then creating in textual form certain social rituals

with courtesans, or by asserting themselves as advocates for reform of prostitution. In the act of writing about prostitutes, they captured, even created, their connections with other elite men by situating themselves with respect to a nostalgically recalled Chinese past, an unsatisfactory present, and a range of imagined national futures. As figures through whom such concerns were spoken, prostitutes were not marginal on the twentieth-century urban scene. Rather, they were key elements in the stories that men told about pleasure, danger, gender, and the nation—stories in which the shifting fields of power between women and men were sometimes made to stand for the equally unstable power relationships between families and the nation, or the nation and the outside world. Prostitutes are brought into history embedded in the histories and the contests for power of those who first fashioned their stories.

"Embedded" here does not imply "immobile," however. What appears to us as a concrete, examinable textual trace is in fact part of a movable past, a shifting set of relationships between historicized and historicizer, in which my entry as historian is only the latest ripple. And the fact that these gentlemen authors would not have called their appreciative or cautionary writings "history"—but would rather have labeled them memoirs, belles lettres, remonstrations with government authorities, or even historical romance—only alerts us to the important role that shifting boundaries of genre play in constituting what we now, in the inclusive mood of the late twentieth century, broadly call the historical record.

The new, improved, reflexive historian, sensitive to contested meanings and polyvocal perspectives, then, has more to worry about than how she and her contemporary concerns enable the telling of certain stories while occluding others. She must always remember that everything in the historical record itself bears the traces of earlier contests and concerns. This is certainly true in the case of self-conscious nostalgic or cautionary writing, where the authors are putting a subject into history in particular ways. But it is true as well of less obviously crafted pieces of the historical record. Statistics, for instance, can be read as the attempts by particular entities to count, classify, tax, suppress, ameliorate, or otherwise shape that which they are bringing into being by the act of counting it. Police interrogations of street prostitutes can be read as highly formulaic encounters (and in the case of 1940s China their repetitive nature virtually compels this kind of reading) in which law-enforcement officials organize prostitutes into particular categories—classifying them by motivation, for example—and prostitutes quickly learn which type of self-presentation will bring them the most lenient treatment. The historian reads such fragments as immutable "fact" at her peril—not because numbers inevitably lie, or because detained streetwalkers routinely dissemble, but because what we are seeing is not in any simple sense a set of "facts" but the itinerary of their creation, and we need to attend to both

(never forgetting, of course, who "we" are and what historical baggage we carry, but not bludgeoning the reader to death with reminders, either).

In crafting this story of prostitution over the last century or so in China, I attempt to map the shifting connections between facts, fact makers, and fact interpreters, always bearing in mind that facts are constituted, not discovered, in the human process of making meaning. Whether there is such a thing as extralinguistic experience that remains outside this process does not concern me here. Historians, by definition, get to work only with discursive traces, with texts broadly defined. As a historian, I am grateful for the efflorescence of writing about prostitution that has left such a rich textual record. Nevertheless, I must ask why the record is shaped the way it is, and what its bumps, twists, configurations, and cavities can tell us about the people who made that record, their preoccupations, and their sense of place in the world.

This is both less and more than what Robert Berkhofer calls "ethnocontext," the placing of "matters within the context and terms of those living and experiencing it."[35] I have no hope of re-creating categories of meaning exactly as late nineteenth-century literati (much less prostitutes) understood them; at the same time, I have neither the desire to relinquish, nor the possibility of relinquishing, agendas and questions of my own. But if poststructuralist theory has made those of us who are historians more attentive to the process of our craft in producing historical narrative, we should also attend to the trace of craft, as well as the crafty presentation or concealment, that permeates every text we peruse. Rather than search for the past "out there," we need to triangulate the shifting relationship between what was recorded, who was recording it, and ourselves.

Perhaps this process is best described by resorting to a culinary metaphor. If we think of the process of writing history as an onion-peeling exercise, where the historian concentrates on stripping away layer after layer in search of some imagined essential core, she is apt to find herself with nothing left but compost and irritated eyes. On the other hand, if what interests her is the shape and texture of the onion, the way it is constituted by the layers and the spaces between them, the way it appears as a unified whole but breaks apart along initially invisible fault lines, the process by which investigating its interior actually alters the shape of the whole onion, the smell it produces under various circumstances, and the effects that the investigation produces in the person doing the peeling—well, then the onion approach to history can be very productive. Onions are, arguably, prediscursive and "out there" waiting to be peeled, so perhaps the metaphor is not flawless. Yet historians are, after all, examining a *something*. And it could be said that onions are not prediscursive either; they need to be recognized as food in order for peeling to become a worthwhile activity.

This chapter first describes the ways in which prostitution was "known" in various sources. Second, it discusses the way prostitution has been "remem-

bered" in state-sponsored histories since 1949. Third, it sketches certain contemporary historical concerns that animate the reinvention of history in this study: the pursuit of elusive subaltern voices, the quixotic search for agency and resistance, and the exploration of semicolonialism as a social field. Finally, the chapter concludes with a guide to the strategy of storytelling adopted in the remaining fourteen chapters. The reader would do well to remember that these divisions among history-making activities are enforced by an act of will (mine) and a suspension of disbelief (yours): there is no clean line between knowing and remembering, remembering and reinventing, reinventing and storytelling.

KNOWING

Two sets of sources are helpful in thinking about how Shanghai prostitution was known to contemporary observers. Travel essays, guidebooks, and the so-called mosquito press dealt primarily but not exclusively with courtesans as social companions. The mainstream press reported on prostitutes of all ranks, usually as victims of oppressive social relations or threats to social order.

Among the richest sources on Shanghai prostitution are travel essays and guidebooks written by elite authors, devoted either wholly or in substantial part to descriptions of prostitution. Travel essays by visitors to Shanghai offered poetic images of prostitutes as an integral feature of the Shanghai scene. At dusk, one visiting official noted in an 1893 memoir, women, "their powder white and their makeup black and green, all lean on the balustrades and invite in passing guests." Near the end of an opera performance, he added, "the latecomers from the courtesan houses" would make their entrance, "just like the enchantment of summer orchids and musk-scented mist, elegant silk gathering like clouds. Truly it is a fragrant city that knows no night."[36]

The guidebooks derive from a much older genre of reminiscences about prostitution but appear to have been published for a growing urban audience. They have titles like *Precious Mirror of Shanghai, A Sixty-Year History of the Shanghai Flower World, Pictures of the Hundred Beauties of Flowerland, A History of the Charm of the Gentle Village,* and *A Complete Look at Shanghai Philandering,* the last by an author who took the pseudonym Half-Crazy One.[37] Guidebooks included biographies of famous prostitutes; anecdotes about famous customers; directories of courtesan houses and their residents; exhaustive glossaries of the language of the trade; meticulous mappings of brothel organization; descriptions of the proper behavior required of customers when a prostitute made a formal call or helped host a banquet or gambling party; descriptions of fees, billing procedures, and tips; lists of festivals and the obligations of a regular customer at each season; accounts of taboos and religious observances; and tales of various scams run by prostitutes to relieve customers of extra cash.

Guidebooks were one venue where elite men could display their erudition, refinement, and wit to one another. Their accounts were larded with classical references; even their name for the courtesan quarters—*Beili,* or "northern lanes"—was derived from the name of the brothel district in the Tang dynasty capital of Chang'an.[38] Their descriptions of courtesan beauty were lodged in a rich horticultural vocabulary, and in their prefaces they engaged in extended discussions about whether the lotus that grew from the mud unstained (a common trope for courtesans) was more beautiful than all other flowers.[39] Writing prefaces for each other's work, they gently mocked their fellows for devoting attention to women rather than using their talent to help the emperor rule,[40] or imagined that the songs of Shanghai prostitutes sounded grieved and touching in a time of national weakness and failed diplomacy.[41] At the same time these authors also registered appreciation of each other's profound emotions and their attachment to equally emotional courtesans.[42]

Guidebooks, in spite of the prevailing tone of appreciation, occasionally included denunciations of madams, remonstrations with customers to shun the dissolute atmosphere of the courtesan houses, or hortatory pieces aimed at persuading courtesans to leave the profession. These pieces, too, were self-conscious displays of erudition, not only in their refined moral sentiments but in their poetic form. One attack on madams was labeled as "written in the style of the Tang dynasty poet Xu Jingye's attack on [the usurping empress] Wu [Zetian]," while poems directed at customers and courtesans were "written in imitation of a poem by [the Tang poet] Li Bai."[43]

But the writers were equally apt to turn their mastery of literary styles to the production of jokes, producing a counterfeit government order to the effect that underwear and socks not be hung out to dry in the brothel districts, constructing imaginary letters from a courtesan to her customer, even crafting sly sexual jokes such as the following:

> A man named He from Jiangxi was an expert at poetry from his youth. He had the look of a handsome scholar. He visited Shanghai and stayed in a certain inn. An old man in the same inn, from Nanjing, liked most of all to play with words. One day, He and the old man saw the courtesan Xie Shanbao. Because Xie had long since ceased work as a courtesan, they did not speak to each other. But she turned her head and glanced at them in an extremely lingering manner. Because of this, He, borrowing words from the *Suiyuan Poetry Talks,* said to the old man, "The sight of a beauty can nourish the eyes, the poetry of a poet can nourish the heart. This is well said." The old man liked to fabricate vulgar literary allusions and pretend to be cultured. So he said with a straight face, "These two sentences are from the *Records of Qidong.* Following them are four more sentences." [The man named] He clearly knew that he was deceiving him, so he asked about it. The old man said, "I remember the next four sentences as 'Traveling on a