This article will investigate the links between *yangsheng* 養生 (Nourishing Life) culture dating back to the Western Han dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE) and the Ming/Qing era sex illustrations (late 14th to early 20th century), as transmitted through the discourse of *fangzhong shu* 房中術 (the Art of the Bedchamber). From the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) onwards, we see an efflorescence of Chinese erotic art, such as that collected by Robert van Gulik in his 1951 book *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming*. Comparisons will be drawn between the Japanese tradition of erotic art known as *shunga* 春畫 and the Chinese erotic art of *chungong hua* 春宮畫. The difference between these two genres highlights the latter’s continuing reference to the formulas of the ancient sexology texts, while the former expresses a more directly pornographic approach to erotic imagery, notwithstanding the availability in Japanese culture of the more directly pornographic *Ishimpō* 性愛插圖 (lit. ‘Spring pictures’). Such a prince’s palace – and is also a term for erotica.

1. The term ‘pornography’ is a problematic one in relation to Asian sexual culture since it is essentially a reflection of Western sexual taboos, or alternatively a way of critiquing the ‘morality’ of the ‘other’. Here it is simply used as shorthand to denote the most directly explicit sexual imagery. See Screech 1999, pp. 13–38.

2. *Yangsheng* consists of a group of practices and literature aimed at enhancing the well-being of the practitioner. It does so through the operation of Qi 氣 within and without the body of the practitioner(s), and with particular reference to Yin Yang philosophy. In the earliest known texts dating from the Western Han, the discourse of *yangsheng* merges seamlessly with the then emerging themes of Chinese medicine. The earliest recorded forms of *yangsheng* physical exercises, called *daoyin* 教引 (Guiding and Pulling [of Qi]), are the forerunners of modern Qigong and Taiji quan, together with a number of other longstanding exercise practices like the *wuqin xi* 五禽戲 (The Five Animal Mimes). Besides exercise and breath control practices, *yangsheng* includes rules and principles for most aspects of daily life with particular concern for food, dietetics and sexology. *Yangsheng* in a broad sense still exerts a powerful influence on the way ordinary people think about and manage their health to this day. However at the time of its emergence as a distinct philosophy of life in the late Warring States era (4th and 3rd centuries BCE), it was, in the eyes of many, clearly connected with the search for transcendence and immortality as practised by the *xian* 仙 cults which flourished in practice until the late Tang (618–907) – and in legend and literature ever since. However from their inception, the philosophies and purposes of *yangsheng*, medicine and immortality cults were the subject of broad dispute. Works attributed to the philosopher Zhuangzi 莊子 (4th century BCE), have equivocal attitudes to the pursuit of immortality, both speaking of transcendence and mocking those who just stretch and shake their bodies, while the Eastern Han sceptic, Wang Chong 王充 (27 CE–100 CE), both mocked and criticised the *xian* immortality cults while acknowledging the value of straightforward *yangsheng*.²

3. The definitions provided below aim at outlining the cultural and religious contexts which shape the terms *yangsheng* and *fangzhong shu*. The term ‘yangsheng’ (*yangsheng*) can be translated as ‘Nourishing Life’, but this is a bit of a misnomer. The term *yangsheng* is used within the context of a wide range of practices and philosophies, such as those of Daoism, confucianism, Buddhism, and more. While *fangzhong shu* (*fangzhong shu*) can be translated as ‘The Art of the Bedchamber’, this is a bit of a misnomer as well. The term *fangzhong shu* is used within the context of a wide range of practices and philosophies, such as those of Daoism, confucianism, Buddhism, and more.

4. For more on *wuqin xi*, see Wang and Barrett 2006.

5. Both *waidan* 外丹 (External, chemical, alchemy) and *neidan* 内丹 (Internal, spiritual, alchemy).
with yangsheng practices and the xian immortality cults, while there is a substantial overlap between yangsheng and fangzhong shu, the two categories are nonetheless separate and distinguishable, the more so as time goes on.\(^7\)

**Basic Principles of Yangsheng Sexology**

Yangsheng sexual techniques have a series of interlinked and clearly defined objectives:

- to sexually satisfy the female partner by bringing her to orgasm one or more times;
- to preserve the physical wellbeing of the male partner;
- to augment the physical and psychological health of the male partner by absorbing female Yin Qi 陰氣;
- to maximise the opportunities for the conception of healthy male heirs;
- to allow the male partner to control conception;
- to cure female ailments;
- to establish and maintain social and domestic harmony between a couple.

The key concept is that the female partner is a potentially inexhaustible source of Yin Qi. Males by contrast are always in danger of exhausting their supply of Yang Qi 陽氣 by careless or wanton sexual behaviour, while their vital Yin Qi is constantly under threat of natural depletion. Women are therefore inherently sexually stronger than men. The highest form of female Yin Qi is released by a woman at orgasm. This Yin Qi can be absorbed by the male to benefit his own health because his own inner organs require Yin Qi to nourish them, a process called gubai 固白 (consolidating white).\(^9\)

The early yangsheng texts place the emphasis on the male partner's ability to bring his companion to orgasm through close observation of her behaviour and an appropriate response in his foreplay to take her to a higher level of excitement.\(^10\) Once the woman is ready for coitus, detailed prescriptions are given for the types, sequences and numbers of penetrations the man should make and the various positions in which they can be achieved. Ejaculation control is the key technique that the male needs to apply to his own body.

But as Donald Harper makes clear in a discussion of the aphrodisiac recipes and philtres found at Mawangdui 馬王堆, Dunhuang 敦煌 and in the Ishimpō,\(^11\) the case for a pure tradition of esoteric sexual cultivation, completely divorced from normal human sexual desire and lust, is hard to evidence. In later fangzhong shu works, the idea of augmenting male health becomes a ‘battle’ in which males seek to garner as much Yin energy from as many partners as possible while not losing any of their own Yang Qi. In this way, men can achieve immortality. This idea is present in the Han dynasty in the legend of Peng Zu 彭祖, the original master of fangzhong shu, who is supposed to have lived to 800 or 900 years through his skill in sexual cultivation. The legend is a clear expression of the influence of the immortality cults. In other legends, and their later corresponding popular stories, females are able to attain immortality through the seduction of multiple male partners.\(^12\) Similarly in later Daoist practice, the principle of non-ejaculation becomes huanjing bunao 還精補腦 (returning the sperm to nourish the brain) – the idea that not only did the man not ejaculate, but that he was able to conserve his jing 精 (essence) and guide it up to his brain. This was in some cases regarded as a physical practice, in others as a purely meditative one. In both cases, the aim was the achievement of spiritual immortality. Both the idea of ‘stealing’ Yin and that of an absolute prohibition on ejaculation (as opposed to an enjoinder to restrict it to the minimum possible) can be considered as deviations from yangsheng, and in the eyes of the 5th-century CE Daoist physician and Patriarch Tao Hongjing 陶弘景, the latter not only offends against true Daoism but also against the Confucian ideal of xiao 孝 (filiality), in that one would thereby be depriving one’s parents and ancestors of descendants.

**Ishimpō**

During the Tang dynasty (618–907), Japanese scholar monks travelled extensively in China, absorbing and recording all they could of Chinese culture. One product of this was the Ishimpō, compiled by Tamba no Yasuyori 丹波康頼 in 984 CE. It provides us with the most complete record of Chinese

---

7 Furth in Gilmartin et al. (eds) 1994, p. 133, notes the increasing criticism in yangsheng texts of ‘non yangsheng’ fangzhong shu practices in the later empire.

8 Ibid. p. 134. Furth objects to this ‘inexhaustible’ idea, however inexhaustibility does seem to be consistent with the ideas in the early yangsheng texts, though they do also stress the need not to damage female health and/or Qi through mis-practice.

9 The term gubai 固白 (consolidating white) appears in the fourth and 10th dialogues of the text excavated from Mawangdui Tomb 3 given the modern title of Shiwen (Ten Questions). Especially, the 10th dialogue explains the condition indicated by this term in relation to the accumulation of Qi in the five internal organs: Shiwen, p. 147, p. 152.

10 The text with the modern title He yinyang 合陰陽 (Uniting Yin and Yang), also from Mawangdui Tomb no. 3 (dated to 168 BCE), is one of the best examples of these techniques. See Harper 1998.

11 Harper 2005.

12 See Needham and Lu 1983, pp. 194–5 on the Xi Wang Mu 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West) and Ming novellas like the Zhalan yeshi 株林野史 (The Secret of the Bamboo Grove).
medical at the time (as opposed to single-authored or single author attributed texts), in addition to giving details of texts recorded in the dynastic histories but subsequently lost or suppressed in the intervening centuries. A number of the Ishimpō texts concern sexology and it was a re-translation of the Ishimpō into Chinese that inspired the late Qing scholar Ye Dehui (葉德輝, 1864–1927) in his investigations into the ancient sexual arts in general. Ishimpō remained the main source available in this field until the recovery of the Han dynasty yangsheng sexology texts in the tomb finds at Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan张家山 in the 1970s and 1980s.

**Shunga**

Hayakawa Monta早川聞多 defines Japanese erotic art, *shunga*, as follows: ‘It is the pictures and drawings that illustrate sexual intercourse, and various customs and manners concerning sexual activities’. It can be taken to correspond to a large extent to the Chinese genre of sexual imagery called *chungong hua*. These art works would nowadays be classified in English as erotica or pornography, and the category contains images of all varieties of sexual activity, not least homosexual. For the purposes of this chapter, the authors will confine their comments to those images that depict sexual activity between actors of the opposite sex. This is because *yangsheng* and *fangzhong shu* texts only direct themselves explicitly to heterosexual relations or solo practices. The authors offer no comment as to whether the ideas and principles there enshrined could apply to same-sex relationships. Interestingly however, Screech in his discussion of Nanshoku男色 cites the idea in 15th –16th century Japan of men having sex only with other males as a means of retaining Yang Qi during intercourse.

**The Images**

While there are many talismanic or practical artefacts which use sexual imagery or references from the pre-Song eras, there are none associated directly with *yangsheng* or *fangzhong shu* texts. Both van Gulik and the modern Chinese scholar Professor Liu Dalian劉達臨 posit the existence of ancient sex manuals with illustrations. As evidence, van Gulik quotes a poem found at Dunhuang, where erotic imagery also survives amidst the fresco paintings. The poem van Gulik relies upon is the *Tiandi yinyang jiao huan dalefu*天地陰陽交歡大樂賦 (The Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang Songs of Great Satisfaction in Sexual Pleasure, hereafter referred to as The Songs of Great Satisfaction), which was possibly composed during the Tang dynasty. He refers in particular to the line: ‘they read the Canon of the Plain Girl and look at the erotic pictures on the holding screen’. Van Gulik clearly understands ‘the erotic pictures’ as depicting the contents of *Sunü jing*素女經 (The Canon of the Plain Girl). However, this reading is open to question. Thus we would hesitate to accept van Gulik’s and Liu’s suggestion that *illustrated* sex manuals really did exist from ancient times.

By the Ming Era the situation had changed radically. A flourishing publishing industry produced numerous lascivious stories. The Ming period also saw the composition and first publication of the ‘secret’ masterpiece of Chinese literature, *Jinpeng mei*金瓶梅 (Golden Lotus, or lately in David Roy’s modern translation, the more appropriately suggestive Plum in the Golden Vase). *Jinpeng mei* is a savage and shockingly explicit picaresque novel, which satirises contemporary mores in great detail and which itself is seen as prefiguring the accepted pre-eminent masterpiece of classical Chinese literature, *Honglou meng*紅樓夢 (Dream of Red Mansions), mid-18th century. It also finds echoes in the mid-17th-century erotic satire *Roupu tuan*肉蒲團 (The Carnal Prayer Mat, or ‘Bedclothes of Flesh’), in which the hero, Weiyangsheng 未央生 (Vesperus), torn between spiritual and carnal quests, has his penis enlarged with the insertion of a dog’s sexual endowment, the better to pursue the latter path. Both *Roupu tuan* and *Jinpeng mei* make reference to the collections of erotic imagery available at that time. In the former, Vesperus buys a collection of erotic art to give his wife, indicating that such collections of erotic drawings could be freely bought in the marketplace. Two collections are mentioned by name: *Sanshi gongchun*三十宮春 (Thirty Palaces of Spring) in both *Roupu tuan* and *Jinpeng mei*, and *Ershi si jie*二四解 (Twenty-four Descriptions) in *Jinpeng mei*. Shen Defu沈德符 (1578–1642), a leading intellectual of the Ming era, also reported that erotic items including pictures were sold in many local shops.

---

13 Shirakura and Hayakawa (eds) 2003, p. 14.
14 Screech, 1999, p. 84. However from this account, the concern for Yang Qi seems to stem from a sociological rather than physiological perspective.
15 Van Gulik 1974 [1961], pp. 200–6; Liu 2003, p. 242.
16 *Tiandi yinyang jiao huan dalefu* (Ye Dehui 1995 edn), p. 102.
17 First published in 1610, but circulated in handwritten copies for several decades previously.
18 *Roupu tuan*, attr. Li Yu 李漁 (1610–80), was composed in 1657 and published in 1693.
19 Wu 2005, p. 156.
20 Ibid., p. 155.
Two Ming artists in particular, 仇英 (1500–60) and Tang Yin唐寅 (1470–1523), are believed to have created a great deal of erotic material. However, due to the anonymity of their working practice as well as the existence of large number of forgeries, it is quite difficult to provide accurate attributions for each picture. According to Fukuda’s research, most hand-drawn pictures do not have a signature or seal and it is not possible to trace a publisher for most of the printed drawings. Thus it is very difficult not only to attribute but also to date much of the extant erotic art. Some writers of the Ming and Qing period report the existence of wealthy women fond of producing erotic pictures, but most of the material would have been the work of anonymous professional artists and artisans living in society at large. The idea of erotic painting as an aristocratic female art form would be consistent with the hedonistic or decadent atmosphere attributed by many to the Ming era. It would also be supported by the evidence of the Jinping mei. However, it should be borne in mind that the Qing historians have a vested interest in portraying the preceding dynasty as degenerate. In fact from the evidence emerging from Liu Dalian’s research, erotic and pornographic art proliferated as never before under the outwardly strait-laced Qing. The Qing sources are so extensive that the increase can hardly be attributed simply to the era’s relative historical proximity or to improved techniques of production.

In the Ming, artefacts like silk paintings not amenable to mass production would have been costly and exclusive, while on the other hand, the line engravings used to illustrate the aforementioned erotic literature would have enjoyed a mass circulation. One might reasonably assume that those high-production images would have been destined for limited circulation among officials and the wealthy merchant classes. Certainly this is van Gulik’s view, but he believed that at the same time these images also had considerable impact on ordinary society. In the case of the collections mentioned in Roupu t’uan and Jinping mei, they could often have formed part of the trousseau of the well-to-do bride as an educational guide in what her husband might expect of her. In the Qing dynasty higher-quality images started to be produced on a systematic basis, notably in the Guangdong area, where several art studios established techniques for the manufacture of large quantities of colour prints and paintings on Chinese subjects in general for export to the West. These included a considerable amount of erotic material. It was also from the Ming era onwards that Japanese erotic illustrations, shunga, were imported into China, where they were reportedly much sought after.

Chungong Hua and Fangzhong Shu
In her paper ‘Re-thinking van Gulik’, Charlotte Furth says: ‘In bedchamber manuals natural philosophy continues to frame the discussion of sex as a microscopic human re-enactment of primary creative processes’. This is unequivocally true of some of the Han dynasty yangsheng sexology but must be open to question with regard to the broader category of fangzhong shu that had opened up by the Ming era. The purposes of the texts had in many cases moved on, and not necessarily to a more elevated level. The increasing sophistication of the medical discourse in the intervening centuries had stripped the texts of much of their didactic purpose. As we see from Sun Simiao’s 孫思邈 (581–682) Qianjin yaofang 千金要方 (Essential prescriptions worth 1,000 gold pieces) and the Ishimpō, sexology for health had become incorporated into a specifically medicalised discourse. On the other hand the Tang dynasty has also been identified as the era in which an unashamedly recreational erotic literature starts to appear. Thus in the Ming era we find erotic illustrations without attached text and un-illustrated Bedchamber texts from previous eras. Can any connection be made between them?

Roel Sterckx in his paper in this volume makes the valuable distinction between performative and illustrative images. The former type consists of depictions that invite the observer to actively invoke the image as part of a performance (e.g. an incantation, a healing procedure, a mnemonic act). The latter comprises images that complement an existing narrative, mostly texts. While the performative image may be accompanied by explanatory texts, in principle, text remains subsidiary to the image. In the case of the illustrative image, the image offers a type of annotation or commentary to the text.

The classic line illustrations that accompany the text of the Jinping mei are the most obvious example of this latter case. They are simply there to enhance the reader’s pleasure—and ensure that the published versions will appeal to the widest possible market, including those who may not be able to appreciate the full literary depth of the novel.

21 Fukuda 1981, p. 16.
22 Liu 2003, p. 242.
23 Van Gulik, 1974, p. 332.
However, many of the *chungong hua* can be said to have some simple performative value by virtue of the fact that most of us share basically recognisable bodily traits and a similar range of movements. The question is to what extent the images can be said or seen to comply with specifically *yangsheng* values, indicating a performative dimension that can connect them with *fangzhong shu*. In this regard, the contrast between *chungong hua* and *shunga* can be seen to be illuminating.

**Shunga and Chungong Hua**

Besides use as pornography or instruction as to how to enjoy sexual relations, it is often noted that Japanese erotic art served a humorous function. While much Chinese erotic art could also have been intended for merriment, the styles of humour in Japanese and Chinese examples are quite different.

One of the key humorous mechanisms in Japanese *shunga* is exaggeration. As in Figure 2, male and female sex organs are frequently depicted vividly and realistically, but enlarged to an impossible size. This intense emphasis on the penis and vagina can be related to the Japanese orientation to the ‘close-up view’.

In addition *shunga* reflects the influence of the Japanese dramatic tradition of *Kabuki* 財舞伎, which was particularly popular in the Edo period (1603–1867), when much Japanese erotic art was produced. In a Kabuki play, actors make up their faces in a unique manner to express the characteristics of the role they are playing and then exaggerate their actions to ensure the audience understands every detail of emotion the character feels. A notable feature of Kabuki is *mie* 見得, which means to strike an impressive pose. Fukuda suggests that the exaggeration of genital organs comes from this aspect of Kabuki; stage techniques to entertain an audience are effectively lifted to another ‘stage’, that of erotic art.

He further points out the fact that male and female figures as well as male and female organs in Japanese erotic art are placed symmetrically or vertically. He calls such composition ‘combat style’ and regards it as derived from the stage arrangements in Kabuki.

Equally Hayakawa observes that the degree of elaboration in the depictions of faces and genital organs is similar, and that the faces and conjoined genitals are aligned in the composition. Thus this arrangement of figures and sex organs is one of the special elements in Japanese erotic art and it further suggests the intensive nature of its focus.

This type of exaggeration can also be related to the growing scientific interests of the Japanese in that era. Erotic pictures as a part of *ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 (Pictures of the Floating World) were enjoyed mainly by people living in and around Edo, today’s Tokyo. Meanwhile parody books called *Tengōmonono* 転合物 (Joke Goods) became popular in the west of Japan. Such joke books usually imitated didactic, moralistic or medical texts in common circulation. Japan
at that time was receiving Dutch medical ideas including anatomical knowledge. Under this Dutch influence, these parody books sometimes discussed the quality of male and female organs, occasionally with detailed illustrations. Sometimes, such books provided quite accurate anatomical descriptions of the organs, female ones being specifically called Ōtsubie 大開絵 (Wide Open Pictures), a not so subtle reference to the anatomical pose necessary for inspection. Thus in shunga, we can identify a series of rationales for the type of imagery from a ‘scientific interest’ to the attraction to the ‘close-up view’, the influence of Kabuki style dramatisation and a ribald popular sense of humour based on exaggeration.

In contrast to the shunga images with their essential preoccupation with the moment of penetration, Chinese chungong hua show large numbers of images of foreplay, and rarely, if ever, show penetration in the sort of detail that would have been seen in the imported shunga (as in Figure 2 above). This interest in foreplay can be seen, at least at some level, as carrying a cultural memory of yangsheng, for the Han dynasty texts often expound on the need for the man and woman to achieve emotional harmony before penetration begins – and indeed on the health risks of failing to do so. As mentioned before, the man is specifically enjoined to carefully observe his partner’s level of arousal and to act accordingly. Some scholars, from Japan in particular, have noted the lack of passion expressed in the faces portrayed in Chinese chungong hua. This is also in keeping with the yangsheng concept, very much discussed at the time, of the need to avoid extremes; and extreme emotions were seen as being especially damaging to the health.36 Unlike shunga, the figures in the Chinese images are often set in natural locations like gardens or spectacular scenery of ‘mountains and rivers’,37 where the whole environment is an expression of the Yin and Yang of the cosmos – and the human actors are therefore merely playing their small part in it. In other cases, the arrangement of details in the image, such as Taihushi 太湖石 (Lake Tai Stones), expresses the same idea.

However the key to connecting any performative attributes of yangsheng  fangzhong shu to chungong hua must come down to a consideration of the positions for coitus enjoyed by the couples. In shunga, realism in this matter is not a necessary requirement. Yangsheng texts however do give detailed sexual positions for the remedy of ailments and the enhancement of the couple’s well-being according to specific circumstances. These positions reappear in the Ming illustrations.

Sexual Positioning in Chinese Erotic Art

In particular it is through a number of texts like Dongxuan zì洞玄子 (The Master Dongxuan) and the Qisun bayi 七損八益 (Seven Disadvantages and Eight Advantages) recorded in the Ishimpō 38 that we have details of the use of specific positions to cure or alleviate ailments. The Qisun bayi lists seven sexual positions to cure seven ailments or unhealthy conditions in the male, and eight further sexual positions to enhance male health.39 The positions of the Bayi – the Eight Benefits – are set out in Table 1.40 Here the sexual satisfaction of the female is secondary to the health benefits available to each partner. The benefits for the female are listed separately without reference to the particular position but with emphasis on the number of penetrations and their required frequency.

In contrast, sexual positioning in erotic pictures did not have such a clear focus on health benefits. Rather, sexual positions are treated as examples of how best to enjoy sexual relations. In spite of this, erotic pictures do still reflect the thinking of the sex manuals, in that the positional variations shown would all have served the primary goal of female orgasm with different positions to be used according to the female’s state of arousal and personal preference. Modern Western sexology with its ‘discovery’ of the G-spot makes this plausible to the modern reader. But let us return to the Qisun bayi and the Seven Disadvantages.

---

36 Gao Lian 高濂 (c. 1527–1623), Zunsheng bajian 遵生八牋 (Eight Discourses on Respecting Life, 1591). See Chen Hsiu-fen 2008, pp. 29–45.
37 Shan Shui 山水 (Mountains and Rivers) is itself one of the great traditional forms of Chinese art.
38 See Ishimpō 28 (‘fangnei’), 1955 edn, pp.63–8; Umekawa 2004, pp. 132–7.
39 Ishimpō 28 (‘fangnei’), 1955 edn, pp. 642–3.
40 Ibid. p. 642.
Table 15.1  Positions, Effects and Number of Insertions of the Eight Benefits

| Name                        | Medicinal objective                | Position                                                                 | No. of insertions |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Gujing (coagulation of energy) | To congeal male energy             | The female lies on her side and extends her thighs. The male places himself between her thighs, lying on his side. | 18                |
| Anqi (easing Qi)            | To harmonise male Qi               | The female lies on her back, places her head on a high pillow and extends her legs. The male kneels between her legs. | 27                |
| Lizang (benefiting storage) | To harmonise male Qi               | The female lies on her side and bends her knees. The male lies on his side behind her. | 36                |
| Qianggu (strengthening bones) | To harmonise male joints          | The female lies on her side with her left knee bent and her right leg extended. The male lies upon her. | 45                |
| Tiaomai (regulating the vessels) | To smooth male vessels            | The female lies on her side with her right knee bent and her left leg extended. The male supports himself on the ground. | 54                |
| Xuxue (depositing blood)    | To make the male more robust      | The male lies on his back. The female kneels on him, placing her buttocks on him to insert the penis deeply. | 63                |
| Yiye (benefiting secretion) | To strengthen the male bones      | The female lies on her face and raises her back. The male rides on her.             | 72                |
| Daoti (body of the way)     | To fill the male bones             | The female lies on her back and bends her legs so that her toes are placed under her buttocks. The male holds her under the arms. | 81                |
Table 15.2  Therapeutic Sexual Intercourse for the Seven Disadvantages41

| Condition       | Cause                                           | Symptoms                                                                 | Position for remedy                                                                 | Insertion instruction |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Jueqi 绝气      | Unwilling sex                                   | Sweat, decrease of Qi, heat in the heart and dizziness                    | The female lies on her back while the male supports her feet on his shoulders.       | Deeply               |
| Interdicted Qi  | Sex before the harmonious preparation of male and female, emission of semen in the middle of intercourse and sex when drunk | Harm to the lungs which causes disorders of breathing and Qi, coughing, extreme emotional instability, thirst, and fever | The female lies on her back and bends her knees making room for the man between them. | Shallowly, a half cun. |
| Yijing 益精      | Excessive ejaculation                           | Exhaustion of Qi, harm to the spleen, dyspepsia and impotence            | The female lies on her back and wraps her feet around the male’s buttocks. The male supports himself with a seat during penetration. |                      |
| Duomai 奪脈      | Forcing of the channels                        | Exhaustion of Qi, harm to the spleen, dyspepsia and impotence            | The female lies on her back and wraps her feet around the male’s buttocks. The male supports himself with a seat during penetration. |                      |
| Qixie 气泄       | Sex before the sweat is dry because of tiredness| Heat in the abdomen and thirst on the lips                               | The male lies on his back while the female rides on him facing his feet. She supports herself with a seat during penetration. | Shallowly             |
| Leakage of Qi   | Sex before the sweat is dry because of tiredness| Heat in the abdomen and thirst on the lips                               | The male lies on his back while the female rides on him facing his feet. She supports herself with a seat during penetration. | Shallowly             |
| Jiguan 橈闇     | Sex with those who have chronic internal ailments or too soon after defecation/urination | Harm to the liver, dim sight, swellings and impotence                    | The male lies on his back while the female rides on him, face to face.              | Slowly                |
| (jueshang 奚傷)  | Fainting and harm                               | No semen at ejaculation because Qi is exhausted                           | The male lies on his back while the female lies upon him supporting herself with a seat. | Let the female insert the penis. |
| Baibi 百閉      | Involuntary ejaculation due to excess of female sexual desire | No semen at ejaculation because Qi is exhausted                           | The male lies on his back while the female lies upon him supporting herself with a seat. | Let the female insert the penis. |
| Xuejie 血竭      | Sex when extremely fatigued with repeated ejaculation | Drying out of blood, exhaustion of Qi, deterioration of the skin, pain in the penis, wetness of the testicles, emission of blood instead of semen from the penis | The female lies on her back, raises her buttocks high and extends her feet straight. The male kneels between her knees. | Deeply                |

41 Ibid. pp. 642–3.
Let us take an example from one of van Gulik’s pictorial discoveries, *Huaying qinzhen* 花營錦陣 (Variegated Positions of the Flowery Battle). Figure 3 is a picture from this collection called *Wanghai chao* 望海潮 (Watching the Rising Tide). It is identical to the posture *Beifei fu* 背飛凫 (Duck Flying on the Back) (Diagram 1) described in *Dongxuan zi* 洞玄子 (The Master Dongxuan), and is designated as treatment for the leakage of Qi (see Table 2). It would appear to be cognate with the posture named ‘rabbit sucking fur’, from the *Xuannü jing* 玄女經 (The Canon of the Dark Girl), which also involves the woman kneeling astride the male, with her back to him. The description here instructs the man to attack her *qinxian* 琴弦 (zither strings), which are located at a depth of approximately 1 *cun* 寸 from the entrance of the vagina.42 Again this appears to correspond to the G-spot. The same location is described in *Yufang mijue* 玉房秘訣 (Secrets of the Jade Chamber)43 as a ‘spot in which Yin and Yang are harmonised’44 and the place ‘in which Yin falls into trouble’.45 The troubled Yin indicates female orgasm, when the best Yin Qi is produced. Thus we can see how the performatve dimension of these images takes shape, where, against the broad background of popular culture, *yangsheng* and medical knowledge provide the context in which they could be perceived to be effective.

In other examples, a picture named *Fenglou chun* 鳳樓春 (Spring in the Phoenix Tower) in *The Flowery Battle* corresponds to *Hai’ouxiang* 海鷗翔 (Flying Seagull) in *Dongxuan zi*, while *Queqiao xian* 鵲橋仙 (The Immortals of the Magpie Bridge) in *The Flowery Battle* matches the position called *Baibi* 百閉 (Hundred Blockages) in *Dongxuan zi*, which heals one of the seven ailments (see Table 2).

In another example of the correspondence between imagery and the texts, Figure 4 appears to depict a position known as *Yujie shi* 魚唼勢 (Posture of Fishes Kissing) in a sex book called *Sunü miaolun* 素女妙論 (Precise Theory of the Plain Girl). In the *Sunü miaolun*, it is described as follows:

Let one of two girls lie on her back, while the other lies on top of her embracing each other as if in intercourse. Where

---

42 *Ishimpō* 28 (‘fangnei’), p. 640.
43 Also in *Ishimpō*.
44 *Ishimpō* 28 (‘fangnei’), p. 646.
45 Ibid.
Of course, superficial correspondence between images and earlier descriptions cannot be taken as a routine proof. Figure 5 is another of the drawings from The Flowery Battle, titled Houting yan 後庭宴 (Celebration in the Backyard). Superficially it might be seen to correspond to Xuannü jing’s ‘Tiger walking’ or the Dongxuan zi ‘White Tiger Jumping’ (Diagram 2).

White Tiger Jumping: The woman should kneel face downwards. The man should kneel behind her, embrace her waist with his hands, and insert his yujing 玉茎 (Jade Stalk, i.e. the penis) into her zigong 子宮 (Child Palace).

However, Houting yan specifically depicts anal sex. The female’s raised leg is a small but probably technically significant difference in the detail of the image, while the name of the posture is extremely close to a sexual position named in Jinping mei as Litig hua 裏庭花 (Flower in the Back Garden) (Fig. 6), in an explicit description of male-female anal sex between two of the novel’s key protagonists. This is further re-enforced by the symbolism of the chrysanthemum in the background of the image, which has been taken as an analogue of the anus. Like the shunga discussed above, this image was probably designed to induce a humorous as well as erotic reaction.

The Houting yan picture certainly falls into the category of chungong hua, and arguably fangzhong shu, but definitely not yangsheng, which seems to focus exclusively on vaginal penetration. However from our point of view, the most important thing it tells us is that the symbols and details depicted in chungong hua were not arbitrary or random but were indeed composed in relation to a wide range of literary and cultural references. In his study of medicine and literature ‘Fictional Medicine: Doctors, Disease and the Curative properties of Chinese Fiction’, Andrew Schonebaum observes of the works of this period:

The fact that medical manuals and pamphlets still addressed the supposedly outdated notion of nurturing the essence, even if only to debunk it, shows that the subtext of medical texts was essentially the same as that of erotic literature, and that it was part of the same popular imagination.

From what we have seen above, and many other correspondences, we would suggest that the creators of erotic

---

46 Sunü miaolun, 1556 text, in van Gulik 1951, vol. II, p. 153.
47 Ishimpō. 28 (‘fangnei’), p. 641.
48 See Screech 1999, pp. 151–3.
49 The story of Aunt Flora in Roupu tuan makes clear that this was indeed a subject of mirth. See Hanan 1996, pp. 264–74.
50 Schonebaum 2004, p. 271.
The relationship between Chinese erotic art and the art of the bedchamber

perceptions of the body and its relationship to the cosmos were conceived. However, the images were competing in a market place with materials whose purpose was simply to stimulate and entertain and thus were subject to a process of commodification ably described elsewhere by both Craig Clunas and Timothy Brook.

Further research needs to be undertaken on the connections between chungong hua and Ming/Qing society and the popular literature of the time and in particular more work is needed on the evolution of fangzhong shu texts themselves which seem to undergo a dramatic transformation during and after the Song dynasty.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Hanshu 漢書, compiled by Ban Gu 班固, c. 100 CE. Modern edn, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996.

Ishimpo 醫心方 (Formulas of the Heart of Medicine), compiled by Tamba no Yasuyori 丹波康頼, 984–92. Asakuraya edn, Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 1955.

Jinping Mei 金瓶梅, attributed to Xiaoxiao Sheng 笑笑生. Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1986.

Lun heng 論衡, Wang Chong 王充 (27–97 CE), ed. and tr. M. Kalinowski 2001, Balance des discours: Destin, providence et divination, Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Shiwen 十問 (Ten Questions). In Mawangdui hanmu bosu zhengli xiaozu 馬王堆漢墓帛書整理小組 (ed.) 1985, Mawangdui Hanmu Bosu 馬王堆漢墓帛書 (The Silk Manuscripts from Mawangdui Han Tombs), Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, vol. 4.

Sunü miaolun 素女妙論 (Precise Theory of the Plain Girl), attributed to a Daoist of Maoshan sect, with a preface by Zhaihonglou Zhuren 摘紅樓主人 dated 1566. In van Gulik, R.H. 1951, Erotic Colour Prints

51 Harper 2005.

52 See Clunas 2004; Brook 1998.
Secondary Sources

Bertholet, F., and Yimen, Rev., 1997, Dreams of Spring Erotic Art in China, Bertholet Collection: Amsterdam, Pepin Press.

Brook, T. 1998, The Confessions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China, Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc.

Chu, C. 2004, Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Furth, C. 1994, 'Rethinking van Gulik: sexuality and reproduction in traditional Chinese medicine', in Gilmartin et al. (eds), 125–46.

Gilmartin et al. (eds) 1994, Shuangmei jing’an congshu 双梅影隨丛书 (The Collection of Shadows under the Double Plum Trees), Haikou: Hainan guoji xinwen chuban she.

Gao Lian, C., G. Hershatter, L. Rofel and T. White (eds) 1994, Hanan, P.

Hanan, P., Fukuda Kazuhiko 1993, 'Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China', in Gilmartin et al. (eds).

Harper, D. 2005, 'Chinese recipes for aphrodisiacs and philtres', Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity, 4. 2, 357–94.

Huang, S. 2001, 'Ài yù: love and sex in Chinese art', in Chügoku no Bungaku – Chügoku no Bungaku (Sexual Culture in Dunhuang), Guangzhou: Guangzhou chubanshe.

Li, P. 1995, 'Sex and immortality – a study of Chinese sexual activities for better-being', PhD diss., University of London.

Ming, early Qing.

Mo, Z. W., and C. Cullen (eds) 2005, Medieval Chinese Medicine, London: Routledge Curzon.

Nakano Miyoko 中野美代 1991, Ryū no Sumu Rando Sukeipu – Chūgokujin no Kūkan Dezain 龍の住むランドスケープ—中国人の空間デザイン (The Landscape where the Dragon Lives: Chinese Design of Space), Tokyo: Fukutake shoten.

Nakano Miyoko 2001, Rōma Zufu – Chūgoku Shunga Ron Jyosetsu 肉麻図譜—中国春画論説 (Genealogy of Obscene Illustrations: Prolegomena for Chinese Erotic Art), Tokyo: Sakuhin sha.

Needham, J., and Lu Gwei-Djen 1983, Science and Civilization in China, vol. 5, pt 5, Cambridge: CUP.

Okeda Naoto 難田直人 2001, Chūgoku no Nenga – Inori to Kisshō no Hanga 中国の年画—祈りと吉祥の版画 (Lucky Charms in China: Printed Illustrations for Prayer and Luck), Tokyo: Taishūkan shoten.

Rekishi ha Yoru Tukurareta 历史は夜をつくり立てる (History is a Creation of the Night), Saitama: Nihon kyōhōsha.

Ryū no Sumu Rando Sukeipu – 新世界の欲楽と幸福 (Literature of Love and Happiness), Tokyo: Sakuhin sha.

Screech, T., 1999, Sex and Floating World: Erotic images in Japan 1700–1820, London: Reaktion Books.

Shi Chengli, Wang Shumin and P. Barrett 2006, 'Profile of a fictional medicine: doctors, disease and the curative properties of Chinese fiction', PhD diss., University of Columbia.

Sterckx, R. 2008, 'The Limits of Illustration: Animalia and Pharmacopeia in Guo Pu to Bencao Gangmu, Asian Medicine, 4. 2, 197–219.

Sumiyo Umekawa 梅川純代

Van Gulik, R.H. 1951, Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming, privately published, Tokyo, 1951. Reissued 2004 with introductions by J. Cahill, W.L. Idema and S. Edgren, Leiden: Brill.

Wang Shumin and P. Barrett 2006, 'Profile of a daoyin tradition: the "five animal mimes"', Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity 2. 2, 225–53.

Wu Cuncun 吴存存 2005, Chūgoku Kinsei no Seiai – Tanbi to Itsuraku no Chūgoku jinmei no Shūhō 天津近代の性愛—谈体与逸乐的中国近代人思想, Taipei: smc Publishing Inc.