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Gender, Social Hierarchies, and Negative Emotions in Liu Xiang's *Biographies of Women*

Current discussions of the emotions in early China, which mainly draw upon philosophical writings, rarely touch upon gender.[1] I attempt to remedy the situation by bringing in a different kind of material, Liu Xiang's (ca. 79–8 BCE) *Lienü zhuan* (*Biographies of Women*; hereafter *Biographies*, cited as *LNZ*). A collection of short narratives about exemplary women, the *Biographies* aims at defining female virtue and is a monumental text in Chinese women's history.[2]

This paper examines the significance of gender in the display and perception of negative emotions (anger, sadness, and shame) in the *Biographies*. In particular, it is concerned with how gender is relevant to the nuanced ways in which these emotions are involved in expressing and navigating social hierarchies. By "negative" emotions I mean those that create an unpleasant physiological and psychological experience in the person undergoing them, and they also typically elicit disagreeable reactions from the person who witnesses them or is at the receiving end. As such, negative emotions are normally the objects of control and avoidance, although this is not necessarily always the case. In fact, all three emotions to be examined in this paper could be positively embraced and may have welcome moral benefits when manifested by the right person for the right reason under the right circumstances.[3] Whether they are disapproved and shunned or potentially beneficial and countenanced, negative emotions, in their expression and reception, are deeply embedded in power relations.[4]

The *Biographies* possesses certain unique merits as a source for investigating gender and emotion. While Liu Xiang's protagonists are women, in most of the biographies they are shown interacting with men, and the narrative form of

1 For representative research, see Geaney (2004), Harbsmeier (2004), Nylan (2018), Puett (2004), Virág (2017), Zhao (2018). Major exceptions may be found in Brown (2003, 2007) and Lewis (2012), which rely on historical writings and funerary inscriptions in examining the emotional bonds of mothers and sons in the Eastern Han (25–220 CE).

2 On the question of these stories' status as putative biographies, see Raphals (1998) 24–26.

3 For a collection of studies on the cognitive, moral, and social benefits of negative emotions, see Parrott (2014).

4 For a general discussion of the roles of emotions in status attainment and hierarchy negotiation, see Steckler/Tracy (2014).

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the accounts provides good contexts for interpreting the characters' emotions. There is no other early Chinese text in which men and women interact as extensively and frequently. In comparison with philosophical writings, the narrative contexts of the biographies also enable us to inquire about the emotions without being overly constrained by terminological considerations. For example, in one of the biographies, a woman who is disappointed with her husband flings the basket she is carrying to the ground and walks out on him then and there. The word "angry" (or any of its cognates) does not appear in the account, but she is clearly very upset, and I discuss her action as a manifestation of anger. Another example concerns sadness. There are many instances in which a person weeps and clearly intends to convey sorrow but is not explicitly said to be sad. I include these cases as expressions of sadness.

The didactic nature of the *Biographies* certainly imposes considerable limitations on its usefulness for an inquiry about gender and emotions in early China. However, it is far from the case that every detail of the narratives of the *Biographies* has been tasked with a didactic function. When the narrator is not deliberately trying to make a point about how things *ought* to be, his account offers us opportunities to tease out information about what things might actually have been like. Moreover, many of the stories in the *Biographies* are put together from earlier historical writings,[5] and they are as useful as any early Chinese historical writings in helping us grasp not only norms and ideals but also practices. In short, comparison between representations of female and male vehicles of negative emotions in the *Biographies* demonstrates the importance of gender for understanding the relationship between power and emotion in early China, mainly as a normative construct but also offering many insights into the lived reality. Moreover, the portrayal of the female paragons' display of and response to anger, sadness, and shame in this paradigmatic text in Chinese women's history will contribute to our understanding of the positive side of negative emotions.[6]

5 See Hinsch (2007), Raphals (1998) Ch. 4, and Shimomi (1989) for the relationship between the *Biographies* and its sources.

6 This consideration helps account for the exclusion of jealousy, an emotion that is normally perceived and condemned as a purely negative emotion and is presented as such in the *Biographies*, from this brief study.

1 Anger

In the *Biographies* there are twelve instances in which men display anger and five in which there is an angry woman. It seems to make sense that there are many more angry men than women, because the free expression of anger, the "prototypical negative emotion,"[7] is the privilege of those in a relative position of power, and there are more men occupying such positions of power.[8] The following shows the identities of the angry men, the objects of their indignation, and the reasons for their anger:

LNZ 1.1: Father of Shun the legendary king (the story takes place when Shun is not yet king but already enjoys considerable standing in the community because of his virtue and abilities. The father is a wicked man who simply hates his virtuous son and does all sorts of things to hurt him, even going so far as to conspire with his wife to kill their filial son. We are told that the parents cannot stop being angry with Shun, but Shun, despite being deeply sad, never relaxes his filial devotion.)

LNZ 5.10: A minister in the state of Zhou (his wife, who is having an affair with a neighbor, tries to kill the minister by serving him poisoned wine. The concubine is charged with presenting the wine to the minister. Wishing neither to kill her master nor to inform on her mistress, the concubine pretends to trip and spills all of the wine. He is enraged at the concubine's apparent clumsiness and has her flogged.)

LNZ 6.3: Duke Ping of Jin (his bow-maker has spent three years making a new bow for the duke. When the duke draws the bow and shoots, he fails to penetrate even one layer of armor. Angry at this, the duke orders that the bow-maker be killed.)

LNZ 6.5: A minister in Chu (when his carriage is passing a woman's carriage on a narrow path, their wheels knock against each other and as a result the axle rod of his carriage is broken. The minister becomes angry and is about to seize and whip the woman.)

LNZ 6.7: Zhao Jianzi, the chief councilor of the state of Jin (he leads his army to a ferry and expects to be ferried across the river, but the ferry official is drunk and cannot perform his duties. Zhao Jianzi becomes angry and wants to kill him.)

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7 Hess (2014) 55.

8 On the long-standing double standard in the perception of male and female fury, see Traister (2018). In her exploration of the positive side to anger, Hess (2014) acknowledges that the situation is not quite the same for women as for men.

LNZ 7.2: King Zhou, the last ruler of the Shang Dynasty (his infatuation with a favorite consort leads him to engage in extravagant, irresponsible, and brutal behaviors that alienate the people and cause the vassal lords to rebel. Angry with a loyal minister who remonstrates with him, and abetted by the depraved consort, the king has the minister's heart opened).

LNZ 7.5: Duke Huan of Lu (his wife, Wen Jiang, repeatedly engages in an incestuous affair with her own brother, Duke Xiang of Qi. The enraged Duke Huan tries to stop her but to no avail.)

LNZ 7.10: Duke Ling of Qi (his wife commits adultery with a minister. When another minister finds out about the affair and is about to investigate it, the duchess trumps up charges against him and accuses him of plotting to oust Duke Ling. The duke becomes angry and punishes the alleged conspirators, exiling two of them and cutting off the feet of another.)

LNZ 7.11: Cui Zhu, minister of Qi, and his two sons by his first wife, named Cheng and Qiang (Cui Zhu denies a request by Cheng because of the objection of his new wife's brother and her son from a previous marriage. Cheng and Qiang become angry and kill the two "outsiders" who insert themselves into the Cui family's affairs. This in turn makes Cui Zhu angry, and his retaliation results in the deaths of Cheng and Qiang.)

LNZ 7.12: Duke Ling of Wei (his wife commits adultery with a prince of her native state. This comes to the knowledge of Duke Ling's crown prince and incurs his displeasure. The duchess slanders the crown prince to Duke Ling, alleging that he wants to kill her. Duke Ling becomes very angry, causing the crown prince to flee out of the state.)

In all of the cases above, the angry man is in a position of power over the object of his anger and he becomes angry because the other person has encroached upon the privileges reserved for himself or has disobeyed his wishes in any number of ways, including failure to meet job performance expectations. Of these, there are only two instances in which the man's anger is not described in a negative light. One involves Duke Huan of Lu, whose anger at his incestuous and adulterous wife appears to be the normal reaction of any man. The other concerns Zhao Jianzi, who gets angry at the ferry official because the latter is in a drunken stupor and cannot fulfill his duty to ferry the army across the river. Here the military commander's anger seems justified. In yet another two cases, those featuring Cheng and Qiang, the two disaffected sons of Cui Zhu, their anger at their stepmother's brother and son from a previous marriage for taking away Cui Zhu's love for them and for interfering in the Cui family's affairs, is also understandable in the context of contemporary lineage rules, although the way they take out their anger and its consequences are horrendous and do not warrant great sympathy.

As for the other eight cases, they all feature an angry man who is rash, foolish, abusive, and unreasonable. The father of Shun has no redeeming qualities. He is just an evil old man, whom the most loving and obedient son in the world can only manage to displease and enrage. Duke Ping of Jin gets angry at the bow-maker and sentences him to death, not realizing that his own lack of skills, not the quality of the new bow, is the reason why he cannot even pierce through one layer of armor. The enraged minister of Zhou has his concubine flogged because she has tripped and spilled the wine, but he does not know that she has deliberately done that to save him from being poisoned; even without this knowledge, his reaction is excessive. The minister of Zheng flies into a rage and wants to whip the woman whose carriage collides with his on a narrow path, when she has already moved over as far as she could while he is not willing to give way in the least. Duke Ling of Qi becomes angry and punishes his officials harshly, not knowing that his wife has trumped up charges against them because they constitute obstacles to her adultery (like Duke Ling of Qi, Duke Ling of Wei succumbs to the lie of his adulterous wife and gets angry at the crown prince, causing him to flee and plunging the state into a long period of instability). Cui Zhu, becoming mad when he learns that his two sons by his first wife have killed his new wife's brother and her son from a previous marriage, organizes an attack on his two sons and ends up killing them both; one cannot fail to be struck by the total senselessness in this family tragedy driven by the indignation of a few angry men. In short, in all these examples, the angry man suffers from a lack of good judgment, due to a combination of his being accustomed to having his wishes obeyed vis-à-vis his social inferiors and the loss of his senses under the assault of strong emotions. It can be said that, when displayed by men, anger generally appears as a highly negative emotion in the *Biographies*.

Most of the objects of anger in the twelve examples above are men, but two are women. One of them, the concubine of the minister of Zhou, endures his anger and flogging without explaining her clumsy handling of the wine. She chooses endurance, not because she is meek, but because telling the truth will destroy her mistress. The other, the woman who faces a whipping by the minister of Zheng after the collision of their carriages, stands up against him and points out to him how badly he has behaved on a number of fronts. He has not made the least attempt to make room while she has moved her carriage to the far side of the road; his driver is to blame for the damage thus caused to his carriage but he takes out his anger on her, who is innocent; his seizing her and wanting to whip her shows that he has failed to live up to the standards of conduct for a man in a ministerial position and is merely a bully picking on the weak and vulnerable. The woman's reproach makes the minister ashamed of himself; he releases her and even asks her to return with him (i.e., marry him),

but she answers that she is already married. In this story, while the angry minister behaves as an arrogant and inconsiderate man, the woman puts him in his place by making him realize how unjustified and unbecoming his rage is.

In two other examples where a man is the object of a powerful man's ire, it is a woman who steps forward to defend and rescue the victim. When Duke Ping of Jin is about to have the bow-maker killed, the hapless man's wife requests an audience with the ruler and successfully convinces him that he has made a wrong decision. She first cites famous benevolent rulers in history to make the point that a good ruler should not harm innocent people. Then she explains how much work and what fine material went into the making of the new bow, with the conclusion that the problem cannot possibly be with the bow and that it must be because the duke does not know how to shoot. After receiving some coaching from the woman on archery, the duke pierces through seven layers of armor, and he immediately sets the bow-maker free and rewards him with gold. In the other example, when Zhao Jianzi is about to kill the intoxicated ferry official, the drunkard's daughter pleads with the irate commander. She first explains that her father drank because he was sacrificing to the river deity in prayer for safe passage for the army that was going to cross the river and he was unfortunately overcome by the alcohol – in other words, he meant well. Next she offers to die in her father's place, but Zhao Jianzi denies her request, saying that she is not the guilty party. Then she asks to delay administering the death penalty until the culprit has woken up, because it would be pointless to punish a man when he is not even conscious. Persuaded by her reasoning and also impressed by her courage and filial devotion, Zhao Jianzi releases the ferry official.

In the two stories just recounted, the male characters are portrayed rather differently, with Duke Ping appearing dim-witted, and Zhao Jianzi reasonable, but they both serve as foils for the brave and intelligent heroines. The bow-maker's wife tells Duke Ping straightforwardly that he is "absurd" in blaming the bow instead of himself for his poor performance, and she then proves herself correct by showing him how to improve his archery skills. Thanks to her forceful argument and the satisfactory result she brings, the woman turns the angry duke into a happy man, winning not only her husband's release but also a handsome reward. The ferry official's daughter faces a different situation (her father is indeed guilty of dereliction of duties and Zhao Jianzi is not being dumb and whimsical), and she approaches it differently. She starts out trying to appease Zhao Jianzi by explaining the mitigating circumstances of her father's inebriation, then she offers to die in his stead, and when that is declined, she comes up with the most sensible argument that the punishment be stayed until the drunkard has regained consciousness and is able to realize what he

has done wrong. Her pleading is so earnest, smart, and compelling that it effectively assuages Zhao Jianzi's anger and secures a pardon for her father.

The stories of the bow-maker's wife and the woman who argues with a minister over a traffic accident praise women whose courage and intelligence enable them to criticize and check the unjustified anger of powerful but unwise and undisciplined men. The story of the ferry official's daughter, by eulogizing her filial piety and her successful handling of the crisis, also portrays Zhao Jianzi in a positive light, inasmuch as he is wise and compassionate enough to react favorably to the young woman's pleading and allow his emotions to change from anger to appreciation and eventually to admiration (after further interaction, he realizes that she is the woman he wants to marry and he proposes). This openness and flexibility is depicted as the trait of a good leader.

In view of the generally negative way in which anger is portrayed in the *Biographies* in the case of men, we might well expect the same of the images of its female protagonists. Indeed, the biography of Mencius' mother, famous in Chinese history for the teaching and guidance that she gave her son, the future Second Sage, concludes by praising her as follows, "The Gentleman says that Mencius' mother understands the Way of Women. As it is stated in the *Odes*, 'With agreeable looks and smiles, teaching without anger" (*LNZ* 1.11). As commonly understood, the verses quoted to lend approval for Mencius' mother were originally composed as a eulogy of a duke in the seventh century BCE who influenced and taught his people with his gentle and graceful manners. Judging from the wording of the passage from the *Biographies*, it seems that, whereas "teaching without anger" is an ideal for both men and women who are in a position to influence and guide others, it is particularly true of women. Mencius' mother, who fits that model, is commended as someone who "understands the Way of Women."

The ideal notwithstanding, of course women got angry, just as men did. Now we move on to women who are represented as displaying anger in the *Biographies*. There are five of them:

LNZ 1.1: Mother of Shun (she is a full accomplice of her husband in hating and mistreating their model of filial son. She shares in his "non-stop anger" at Shun.)

LNZ 1.9: Jing Jiang (her son Wenbo, who is a minister in Lu, feasts guests at home. One of them is offended and leaves the banquet when he is served a tortoise that is small. Jing Jiang becomes angry when she learns of this, scolds Wenbo for being stingy, and expels him from the house. It is only five days later that she allows him back, after a minister has interceded on his behalf.)

LNZ 2.9: Mother of Dazi (her son, who is serving as an official, has not garnered a good reputation for his performance but has greatly enriched himself. When he returns home for a visit with great fanfare, relatives all congratulate

him, but his wife alone weeps. This makes the mother angry. The wife explains her concern that Dazi's self-enrichment and poor acquittal of his government duties may lead to a disaster, and she asks to leave with her young son. The indignant mother drives her away.)

LNZ 2.14: Wife of Laolai the hermit (when the king visits Laolai and invites him to take up a government post, he consents. When Laolai's wife returns from work outside and learns what has happened, she reproaches him for giving up freedom to be someone's slave and says that she cannot join him in that lifestyle. She throws the basket she is carrying to the ground and walks away. He implores her to stay and promises to reconsider. They go into hiding together.)

LNZ 7.10: Wife of Duke Ling of Qi (already encountered above. When her affair with a minister is discovered by several of his colleagues and he stops meeting with her for a long time, she becomes angry at them and accuses them of trying to overthrow Duke Ling, with the result that the duke cuts off the feet of one of the offending ministers and sends the other two into exile.)

As can be seen from this summary, women in power can be just as abusive, unreasonable, and foolish in exhibiting anger as their male counterparts. Shun's mother is consistently mentioned along with his father in the biography's account of the persecution he endures from his evil parents. Dazi's mother is angry at her son's wife and expels her, because she fails to appreciate the daughter-in-law's discernment and concern; the irony is that only one year later Dazi and his entire family are put to death for graft, the mother being the only one who is spared because of her old age, and at this juncture the divorced daughter-in-law returns with her young son to take care of the mother. The wife of Duke Ling of Qi gets angry at those who impede her pursuit of an affair and takes relentless revenge against them. The victims in these examples include an adult son, a daughter-in-law, and a husband's male subordinates. The actions of the angry women and the identities of the objects of their rage show that the experience and display of anger are first and foremost represented as an expression of power relationships, in which gender is not an independent determinant. Within the family, generational seniority takes precedence over gender hierarchy. Outside the family, a woman, by virtue of the high status enjoyed by her male kin, may well feel that she is entitled to express and act on her anger against those in a lower position. Notably, of the three examples, only the wife of Duke Ling is overtly condemned for her actions (adultery and revenge), whereas the rage of Shun's mother and Dazi's mother receives neither protest from the objects of their anger nor criticism from the narrator but rather serves to bring out the unconditional devotion and obedience of the filial son and daughter-in-law.

If we look back at the reception of the anger displayed by men in the *Biographies*, we find that Shun's father and Zhao Jianzi are the only two men whose expression of anger elicits neither explicit criticism from the narrator nor resistance from the person upon whom the anger is visited. Zhao Jianzi receives this distinction because, as I have argued, his anger is both justified and open to palliation. The case of Shun's father, on the other hand, is of the same nature as those of Shun's mother and Dazi's mother. Taken together, they suggest that, whereas rulers, masters, and other people of high social standing (both male and female) can all be subjected to explicit criticism and outspoken protest for their improper display of anger, parents are to a great extent spared moral stricture for the expression of anger. As shown by the cases of Shun and Dazi's wife, the totally unreasonable indignation of bad and stupid parents turns out to provide the ultimate test and indisputable proof of the filial piety of the son and daughter-in-law.[9]

We still need to examine the two remaining examples of angry women in the *Biographies*: Jing Jiang, who gets mad at her son Wenbo for failing his duties in hospitality, and Laolai's wife, who angrily leaves her husband because he has accepted a government position and abandoned the eremitic ideal. Jing Jiang's biography is the longest in Liu Xiang's text, and the length itself is an index of his esteem for this meticulous, austere and strong-willed aristocratic matron living in sixth-century BCE Lu. In the episode in question, as in several other narrative components in the *Biographies*, she receives unreserved praise for teaching her son moral principles and correcting his misconduct. Offending a guest because of the size of a dish and earning a reputation for being stingy is extremely ill-advised, and a principled matriarch like Jing Jiang cannot tolerate the harm that such a petty incident would cause to her distinguished house. So she reacts swiftly and imposes a severe punishment on Wenbo, intending it as a highly visible gesture to the public of the family's determination to uphold the strictest standards in the observation of social protocol. It takes five days and then with the intercession of a minister to pacify Jing Jiang's rage and allow the recall of Wenbo. In Liu Xiang's narrative, Jing Jiang's fury over Wenbo's faux pas is righteous, necessary, and well-measured, wholly befitting a high-minded female guardian of an aristocratic house. In view of the fact that

9 In the tragedy involving Cui Zhu's family, if the two sons had refrained from becoming angry over the favorite treatment that Cui Zhu gives his new wife's brother and son from a previous marriage, the series of bloody events that lead to the destruction of the family would not have happened. Cui Zhu's fury is an insane reaction to the consequences of his sons' angry actions. Of course, in Liu Xiang's narrative, Cui Zhu's new wife is the primary culprit blamed for causing utter chaos in the family.

terrible parents such as Shun's father and mother are spared despite the emotional abuse they inflict on their son and their incessant rage, because the purpose of the narrative is to demonstrate Shun's filial piety, it is not surprising that Jing Jiang's fury, which is for the good of her son and the family and expressed in the right manner, should be depicted as evidence of her impeccable virtue.

In Liu Xiang's account of the interaction between Laolai and his wife, we encounter something new: a wife getting angry at her husband and walking out on him as soon as she has made her disappointment clear. Laolai's wife is praised for her firm dedication to the lofty principle of eremitism, which provides a model for her husband and prevents him from deviating from their common ideal.[10] There are many female exemplars in the *Biographies* who advise, remonstrate with, and challenge their husbands,[11] but none is as feisty and free-spirited as Laolai's wife in so doing. Whereas the other wives typically offer their opinions and suggestions out of consideration for the interest and honor of the family represented by their husbands, Laolai's wife sees herself as an equal partner and independent individual vis-à-vis her husband. Only such a wife can react to her husband's acceptance of a king's invitation with an instant and vigorous expression of her rejection of him and simultaneous declaration of her independence and freedom. Her anger testifies to the self-assured and non-negotiable nature of her moral commitment, and Laolai's pleading for her to stay and his pledge to change his mind for her sake bespeaks the power of her anger and his acknowledgement of her moral superiority. Other male characters in the *Biographies*, when they endorse the advice of a remonstrating woman, usually convey their approval by terse phrases such as "Great" and "Wonderful," acting as social superiors wisely and graciously accepting the well-meaning input of their subordinates.

2 Sadness

Reversing the ratio of 12:5 in the numbers of men and women displaying anger in the *Biographies*, the same text shows three males and eleven females expressing sadness (I use the shedding of tears as the index of sadness). Just as the gender ratio in the manifestation of anger is indicative of the power differential between men and women as well as the different social expectations for male and female

10 On the association of eremitism with freedom and independence in early Chinese culture, see Vervoon (1990).

11 Raphals (1998) Ch. 2.

conduct, it also makes sense that there are many more sad females than males, because the expression of sadness reveals a person's weakness and vulnerability, conditions that are more often associated with women than men.

The three males in tears are:

LNZ 1.1: Shun (treated to his parents' never-ending anger, Shun goes out into the fields, wailing and weeping, and calling out to Heaven and his parents. Despite such suffering, however, Shun's devotion and love for his parents is never diminished.)

LNZ 3.5: Sunshu Ao (when Sunshu Ao the boy sees a two-headed snake, he kills it and buries it. Returning home and seeing his mother, he weeps, because he has heard that those who have laid their eyes on two-headed snakes will die. When the mother finds out that the boy has killed and buried the snake to prevent other people from seeing it again, she assures him that because of this good deed he not only will not die but also is destined to rise to eminence. Indeed, Sunshu Ao will become the country's chief councilor when he grows up.)

LNZ 4.12: Son of the concubine of a lord in Wei (the lord dies, leaving behind his childless wife and the concubine, who has a son. The concubine serves the wife diligently. After eight years have passed, the wife feels that, as a childless woman, she does not deserve such treatment from the concubine, the mother of the family's heir, and she offers to move out. The concubine will not hear of it. After some back and forth between the two women, the concubine withdraws and plans to commit suicide because she cannot stand the idea of having the wife move out, which would constitute a violation of the hierarchy between wife and concubine. The concubine's son weeps and tries to stop her, but she will not listen. The wife is frightened by this turn of events and agrees to stay.)

All three cases above involve a son crying either in the presence of a parent or for reasons related to his parents, who command indisputable authority over their children. The weeping of Sunshu Ao, a young boy who has just encountered a strange creature and believes that he is going to die, befits the behavior of a normal child under those circumstances. Rather than a comment on Sunshu Ao, this story is intended to praise the mother's perspicacity, which enables her to discredit what is apparently a popular belief, as she affirms the boy's good deed and correctly predicts a great future for him. The power relationship between the crying little boy and the mother as a consoler and guide in this narrative is clear. We are not told the age of the Wei concubine's son, who tearfully pleads with his mother not to kill herself. He does seem to be devoted to his mother and concerned with her welfare, but begging is the only thing he can do, and his earnestly expressed wishes are overruled. It takes a gesture

from the wife, who occupies a higher position in the family hierarchy than the concubine and whose seniority is precisely what the concubine is willing to uphold at the cost of her own life, to resolve the crisis.

It can be argued that the sons' expressions of sadness in the above two examples reflect the power dynamics between mothers and sons but are not endowed with special moral significance. It is a different case in Shun's story. Shun, subjected to senseless persecution from his parents, expresses his pain – but also his acceptance – by leaving the house to cry in the fields. While we may think that wailing and weeping may have performed a cathartic function and enabled Shun to carry on as the unconditionally loving son, to early Chinese readers his tears no doubt are pure testament to his deep and unwavering filial piety. The subdued sorrow that Shun, who has already been identified as a potential successor to the ruler of the realm, expresses in reaction to his horrible parents shows that filial piety is regarded as an immutable, life-long duty. Shun's example demonstrates that, whether a male is a boy or an adult, he is in an inferior and vulnerable position vis-à-vis his parents, and his showing it by tears is not only socially acceptable but is regarded as persuasive evidence of his devotion and obedience, qualities of a good son.

Now we come to the women who express sadness in the *Biographies*. They are listed in the following:

LNZ 1.7: Ding Jiang of Wei (her son died soon after getting married. After his wife has observed three years of mourning for him, Ding Jiang sends her back to her natal family. As she accompanies the young woman to the outskirts of the city, Ding Jiang's heart is filled with affection and sorrow. Waving goodbye to the departing traveler, Ding Jiang weeps and composes a poem to express her sorrow.)

LNZ 1.13: the Loving Mother in Wei (married to Mang Mao, she has three sons. Mang Mao's previous wife left behind five sons, none of whom feels any affection for their stepmother, despite the fact that she goes out of her way to treat them with love, at the expense of her own children. Then one of those five sons commits a capital offense. The Loving Mother is so sad that she loses a great deal of weight, and she works day and night in an effort to save him. Moved by her genuine love for her stepson, the king grants her appeal. From then on the five sons all become attached to her.)

LNZ 2.9: Wife of Dazi of Tao (encountered before. When everybody else is celebrating her husband's apparent success in office, she weeps and her angry mother-in-law expels her.)

LNZ 3.9: Mother of Zang Wenzhong of Lu (before her son goes on a diplomatic mission to Qi, she warns him of the dangers that are in store for him on this trip. It turns out that Wenzhong indeed is arrested in Qi. He sends a secret

missive to the duke of Lu, writing it in a cryptic language for fear of its being intercepted. The duke asks Wenzhong's mother to help decipher the letter. She reads it and starts weeping, as she understands from it that her son is in shackles.)

LNZ 4.8: Wife of Qiliang (after her husband dies in a battle, she wails over his body for ten days, so sorrowfully that the city wall collapses.[12] Having no children or close relatives, she commits suicide after completing the funerary rites for her husband.)

LNZ 4.12: Concubine of the Lord of Wei (encountered above. When the childless wife feels that she does not deserve to be waited upon by the loyal concubine and wants to move out, the concubine weeps and begs to be allowed to continue performing her duties to the rightful mistress of the household.)

LNZ 5.7: Lady Zhao of Dai (her brother murders her husband by a ruse. When the news reaches her, she weeps, cries out to Heaven, and kills herself with a sharpened hairpin.)

LNZ 5.8: Righteous Stepmother of Qi (her son and stepson are both present at the scene of a murder, and they both confess to the crime. Still unable to determine who the real killer is after a year, the authorities ask the mother to pick a son to be sentenced to death. The mother, weeping, chooses her own son. When asked why, she answers that she promised her deceased husband to take care of his previous wife's son and she must keep the promise.)

LNZ 5.13: Righteous mother and daughter of Zhuya (the mother has a nine-year-old boy, her own son, and a thirteen-year-old stepdaughter. When her husband dies while serving as a magistrate in Zhuya, which is famous for its pearls, the three travel back home with his casket. The boy places some large pearls in his mother's toiletry case, not knowing that it is against the law to take pearls out of the region. When the pearls are discovered by customs officials, mother and daughter vie to claim responsibility, each thinking that the other is guilty. As they argue and try to shield each other, they both become emotional and start weeping.)[13]

LNZ 6.15: Ti Ying (she is the youngest of her father's five daughters. He has been convicted of a crime and is due to receive corporal punishment. When he is about to be taken to the capital for punishment, he laments that he has no

12 We are told that all passersby are moved to tears. Partly because the gender makeup of these people is unknown and partly because they are not the story's main actors, I have not included them in the case count.

13 Also moved to tears are witnesses of the scene, from those in the funeral cortège, to bystanders, to the customs official. For reasons indicated in note 12, these people are not included in the case count.

son and curses his daughters for being of no use to him at this difficult time. Weeping sorrowfully, Ti Ying follows her father into the capital and submits a memorial to the emperor begging for leniency. Moved by her argument, the emperor issues an edict to abolish corporal punishment.)

LNZ 7. 7: Li Ji of Jin (the favorite consort of Duke Xian of Jin, Li Ji has given birth to two sons and schemes to alienate the duke from his other sons. One night, she weeps. When the duke inquires about the reason, she asks him to put her to death because the crown prince has purportedly accused her of infatuating his father and endangering the state. As the conversation continues, Li Ji successfully instills in the duke fears and suspicions about the crown prince. As a result of her slandering, the crown prince and two other of the duke's sons end up committing suicide or fleeing the state.)

Of the eleven cases, two involve simple and straightforward expression of feelings between parents and children: a mother who cries upon learning that her son is in prison (*LNZ* 3.9), and a daughter who weeps for her father who has been convicted of a crime and is being taken to the capital to receive punishment (*LNZ* 6.15). There does not seem to be much to say about these two cases, except that they represent a small portion of the eleven examples, the rest of which all have something less simple and straightforward about them.

The uniqueness of Li Ji's example is obvious. Unlike any of the other cases of crying women, in which the emotion is undoubtedly genuine, Li Ji feigns sadness in order to win the duke's attention and sympathy, portraying herself as a weak victim and impressing upon him that, if he does not take proactive action against the crown prince, he, as her protector, will be toppled in the son's alleged plot to get rid of her bad influence on the duke and the state. Li Ji's shedding of tears is manipulative, taking advantage of its show of vulnerability, helplessness, and submissiveness to beseech the duke's good will and protection.

At first glance, there is no resemblance between Li Ji and the other crying women, but the just-mentioned basic signification of tears in fact helps explain the preponderance of one broad type of human relationship in the ten cases. From the relationship between stepmothers and the children of their husbands' previous marriages in *LNZ* 1.13, 5.8, and 5.13, to the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in *LNZ* 1.7, to the relationship between wife and concubine in *LNZ* 4.12, they alert us to the major inherent fault lines in the Chinese family, where tensions and conflicts are rife and diligent management is necessary. Whereas a biological mother such as Jing Jiang can be stern, overbearing, and angry in teaching and disciplining her son and invite no suspicion about her love for him but receive applause for her guidance, stepmothers are susceptible to such suspicions and criticisms, and they have to go out of their way to prove themselves. The stepmother in each of the three examples under

discussion is exceptionally kind to her stepchildren, to the extent of being willing to sacrifice her own life or the welfare and lives of her own children. The tears they shed in the stories do not merely capture the emotionally charged moments in the dramatic episodes depicted, but they also point us to the tremendous emotional investment these stepmothers have put into their relationship with their stepchildren on a daily basis. Their tears bespeak their love and also their vulnerability and struggle as they negotiate an inherently difficult family relationship. Our earlier examination of both anger and sadness demonstrated the superiority that mothers enjoy over children of either gender and any age. The current discussion complicates the picture by revealing the different situation faced by stepmothers.

Similarly, the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is fraught with tension. The praise that Ding Jiang receives for showing deep sorrow and affection for her widowed daughter-in-law reminds us of the difficulty that often accompanies this relationship and suggests that, instead of always appearing as the authority figure vis-à-vis her son's wife, a good mother-in-law is one who would allow herself to be emotionally vulnerable before the younger woman under her charge. The relationship between concubine and wife, two women of the same generation competing for the attention and affection of the same man and over the status and interest of their offspring, is even more problematic than the one between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The Wei concubine's devoted service to the wife and the wife's appreciation both for the concubine's personal loyalty and for her reproductive contribution to the preservation of the family line make them an exemplary pair. The concubine's shedding of tears at the wife's attempt to move out sends two messages at once: it is a strong indication of her devotion to the wife, and it also conveys her respect and submissiveness – as she states in her speech, the wife's moving out would condemn the concubine to being an inauspicious transgressor of the family hierarchy. The concubine's tears testify to the depth and firmness of her adherence to the prescribed hierarchy.

In short, in as many as five examples, the crying women are in intrinsically challenging family relationships, and their strong expression of sadness both signals their difficult position and suggests that demonstration of their emotional vulnerability could stand them in good stead and earn them approbation for their handling of a delicate relationship. Men, living in patrilocal, patrilineal and patriarchal households, are spared most of the huge practical and emotional challenges of the relationships just examined.

In the remaining two examples, a wife commits suicide after the death of her husband. Her tears testify to her fierce loyalty to her husband and serve as a prelude to her decision to take her own life. While Lady Zhao's suicide is

recorded in earlier texts (*The Annals of Lü Buwei* and *Records of the Grand Historian*), Qiliang's wife is not said to have killed herself in any other source. The celebration of ethically motivated female suicide is a new phenomenon in the *Biographies*, and arguably represents the most innovative and influential part of Liu Xiang's didactic project. In portraying his new heroines who commit suicide in honor of moral principles (including wifely fidelity), Liu Xiang seems to have relied upon three practices: inventing such a woman *ex nihilo* (though we cannot discount the possibility that she is mentioned in sources no longer extant), taking a preexisting female character and reporting suicide as her way of death, and giving speeches to a known female suicide allowing the reader insight into her motivations and moral understanding.[14] The second and third of these apply to Liu Xiang's narratives about Qiliang's wife and Lady Zhao respectively. In other words, while it is natural for a wife to weep and mourn her dead husband, Liu Xiang makes it unusual by enthusiastically lauding women whose intense weeping and mourning precedes the ultimate action that earns them a place in his roster of paragons.

3 Shame

"Shame" translates three terms in the *Biographies*, *can* 慚, *chi* 恥, and *kui* 媿. The following shows the usage of the three terms in the *Biographies*:

	Men	Women
Can	6	2
Chi	2	2
Kui	1	0
Total	9	4

The nine instances in which a man is said to feel ashamed:

LNZ 1.14: Tian Ji, chief councilor of Qi (he receives a monetary bribe from a subordinate and presents it to his mother. She reproaches him for his failure to be a loyal minister of his lord, announces that he is not her son, and asks him

14 On the techniques Liu Xiang employed to reshape his sources, see Hinsch (2007) and Kinney (2014) xxxi-xxxii.

to leave. Feeling ashamed, Tian Ji returns the bribe and requests punishment from the king.)

LNZ 4.9: King Helü of Wu (Wu conquers Chu, and King Zhao of Chu flees. King Helü enters the Chu palace and takes all of the palace women as his consorts. When he comes to Bo Ying, however, she holds a sword in her hand and rebuffs him with a long speech about the impropriety of his action and her determination to defend her honor. King Helü feels ashamed and withdraws from Bo Ying's quarters.)

LNZ 5.9: Qiu Hu (five days after his wedding, Qiu Hu leaves home for a government post in another state. Five years later, he returns for a visit. Before reaching home, he takes a fancy to a woman picking mulberry leaves by the roadside and tries to seduce her, but she rejects his advances. When he gets home, he discovers that the mulberry picker is none other than his own wife, and he feels ashamed.)

LNZ 5.14: Ren Yanshou (he secretly murdered his wife's brother over a family dispute but escaped punishment because of a general amnesty. He subsequently reveals his secret to his wife and asks her to kill him in revenge or to leave with all of his property. She rejects both options, saying that a wife cannot kill her husband, nor does a woman who fails to avenge the death of her brother have a reason to continue living. Feeling ashamed, Yanshou leaves home and does not dare to face his wife.)

LNZ 6.5: The Chu minister involved in a traffic dispute with a woman (encountered above. She criticizes him for failing to measure up to the standards for the conduct of a minister. He feels ashamed and releases her.)

LNZ 6.11: King Min of Qi (while on an outing, he meets an ugly but intelligent and virtuous mulberry picker. Impressed, he wants to make her his consort and orders that she ride back with him to his palace, but she rejects this plan, because a proper marriage has to be arranged by parents. The king feels ashamed and proceeds to follow the relevant ritual protocol for the making of a marriage. Later, when the woman arrives in the palace in her usual plain clothes, her appearance triggers uncontrollable laughter among the palace ladies who have gathered to meet the newcomer. The king feels ashamed and defends himself by saying that ornamentation will significantly improve the ugly woman's looks. She, however, gainsays this defense and gives everybody present a lecture on why virtue is the best ornament. Moved by this speech, the king appoints her his queen.)

LNZ 6.15: Emperor Wen of Han (after arriving in the capital with her father who is to receive corporal punishment for a crime, Ti Ying submits a memorial to the emperor. She points out her father's reputation as an upright and fair official, laments that corporal punishment will inflict irreversible damage to a

person's body and make it hard for him to have a fresh start later in life, and offers to become a government slave in exchange for a reduced sentence for her father. After reading the memorial, the emperor takes pity on the girl and issues an edict, in which he expresses shame for having to rely on cruel punishments instead of virtue to teach his people and hereby orders its abolishment.)

LNZ 7.5: Duke Huan of Lu (encountered above. He is angry at his wife, Wen Jiang, for carrying on an affair with her own brother, Duke Xiang of Qi. When Wen Jiang informs Duke Xiang of her husband's opposition to their relationship, Duke Xiang invites Duke Huan to a banquet and has him murdered. The people of Lu are ashamed by the way their ruler came to his demise and demand that the murderer be handed over for punishment. The request is granted.)

LNZ 7.9: Duke Ling of Chen along with two of his ministers (the duke commits adultery with the beautiful wife of another minister. Xie Ye, also a minister, learns of this and makes a critical comment about the duke's conduct. The duke is displeased by Xie Ye's comment, because although he does not mind anyone else knowing about his indiscretion, Xie Ye's knowing it makes him feel ashamed. He then orders someone to murder Xie Ye.)

In all except two examples in the above, it is a woman who makes a man feel ashamed. The two exceptions in question come from the last chapter of the *Biographies*. In one of them, Duke Ling of Chen is ashamed that Xie Ye knows about and criticizes his adultery and has the critic murdered to solve the problem. In the other, the people of Lu are ashamed that their ruler has been killed upon the orders of his wife's lover and seek to punish the murderer. In these two instances, the shame felt by the men produces consequences that elicit either no moral judgment (the Lu people's killing of the murderer of their ruler) or a negative judgment (Duke Ling's murder of his critic). They do show that shame is an important motivation for action.

In the other seven examples, a man feels shame because of a woman's input, and the sense of shame exerts a positive moral impact on him, making him realize his mistake or shortcoming and enabling him to embark upon self-improvement where there is room to do so. Reprimanded and renounced by his mother, Tian Ji returns the bribe and requests punishment from the king. Denounced by Bo Ying for his licentious behavior, King Helü backs off and leaves her alone. The formerly arrogant Chu minister asks the woman who criticizes him over a traffic dispute to marry him. Touched and enlightened by the physically deformed woman's speech, King Min of Qi makes her his queen. Led by Ti Ying's memorial to reflect on his failure in governance, Emperor Wen abolishes corporal punishment. Women are commended for the wisdom, nobility, and courage with which they bring out the better self in a man.

However, of the seven cases there are two in which the man ashamed by a woman is not able (and does not have opportunities) to take action to produce the kinds of good results just described. Yanshou's wife, caught in a conflict of loyalties to her brother and her husband, sees no other way out than to kill herself (she cannot stay married to her brother's murderer, nor could she bring herself to marry another man if she were to leave her husband). Qiu Hu's wife, after the revelation that her husband is the very man who had tried to seduce her on his way home, reproaches him for his despicable act and then kills herself by jumping into a river. The reason she gives for her suicide is that she cannot live with such a husband but as a chaste woman she will not consider remarrying either. In these two cases, whatever shame felt by the man is outweighed by the much greater emotional consequences his shameful deed creates for the woman. With her uncompromising moral standards (which come down to the principle of no remarriage for a woman in these two cases), she is compelled to end her own life under the circumstances, whereas he would live on (almost certainly with a new wife), despite his feeling of shame.

According to the Verse Summary in the biography Qiu Hu's wife, she kills herself because she "is ashamed of her husband's unrighteous behavior." This provides a segue into our examination of shame felt by women in the *Biographies*. There are three such cases:

LNZ 4.12: Wife of the Lord of Wei (encountered above. Feeling ashamed by the fact that the concubine has produced the heir of the family but still unfailingly serves her as the mistress of the household, the wife asks to move out.)

LNZ 5.5: Wife of the general of Ge (Ge is conquered by an invading army. The woman reprimands her husband for not killing himself to demonstrate his loyalty to his ruler. Feeling shame for him and declaring it impossible for her to bear this shame, she commits suicide.)

LNZ 6.11: King Min of Qi's palace women (encountered above. They laugh at the ugly but virtuous newcomer's appearance, but after hearing her eloquent speech on virtue as the most important ornament, they all feel ashamed of themselves.)

There is not much to be said about the last example. It shows that women are capable of understanding moral instruction and reacting properly to it. We are not told whether the palace women will put what they have learned from this lecture into practice in the future. The shame felt by the wife of the Lord of Wei is also portrayed as a positive emotion. It demonstrates her respect for the essential service the concubine has provided for the family, her awareness of her own inadequacy, and her willingness to take action to honor the concubine and reduce her burden. This combined biography of the wife and the concubine commends the wife for showing such respect, awareness, and willingness, and

the concubine for firmly upholding the hierarchy between wife and concubine. As portrayed in the biography, the wife's virtue consists in nothing but her expression of shame, an emotion that shows her to be a morally alert and conscientious woman.

The story of the general of Ge's wife is reminiscent of that of Qiu Hu's wife. Both women kill themselves because of the shame their husbands have brought them. Their choice of death seems extraordinary and is meant to demonstrate their exceptionally high moral standards, but we have to look beyond the praises they receive in their biographies and ask why they need to go to that extreme to deal with the shame that their husbands cause them. No man, in the *Biographies* or in any other early Chinese source, has to make the decision to kill himself in the event that his wife has done a shameful deed, and certainly no man was enthusiastically praised for committing suicide in such an event. Qiu Hu's wife explicitly states that she has to die because she can neither continue living with her husband nor allow herself to remarry. (Ren Yanshou's wife also refers to her refusal to remarry before hanging herself.) The general of Ge's wife does not cite the same reason for her suicide and only says that she cannot bear living with him in shame, but clearly she assumes that she has to continue living *with him* if she is to live at all. Leaving the husband, no matter how shameful he is, is not an option for these high-minded women. This moral principle dictates that they pay with their lives for the shameful deeds committed by their husbands. Men, free to remarry and expected to remarry, do not have this constraint and therefore are in a different relationship with the shame caused by their womenfolk.

This brings us back to the wife of the hermit Laolai, who gets angry with her husband and is ready to leave him as soon as she finds out that he has agreed to serve in the government. Her story conveys a drastically different message from the biographies of Qiu Hu's wife and the wife of the Ge general. Neither the marvelously spunky and independent hermit wife nor the two single-minded women who commit suicides represents the average woman in early China.[15] What is important to note is that these atypical paragons would meet with different fates as the *Biographies* steadily gained the status of being the most important text used in premodern Chinese women's education and spawned numerous imitations aimed at popularizing its teachings and updating its collection of exemplars. Laolai's wife would quietly lose favor with Liu

15 The discrepancy between ideal and practice regarding female remarriage in the Han is widely noted. On Liu Xiang's role in the promotion of the ideal, see Chen (2010) 329–341 and Hinsch (2007) 6–7, 18.

Xiang's successors, because she is too feisty and free-spirited.[16] By contrast, passionate suicides in the mode of Qiu Hu's wife and the wife of the Ge general would increasingly become the most exalted moral heroines, because they regard their husbands as the only source of the meaning of their lives.[17]

4 Conclusion

As shown in the *Biographies*, the expression and reception of negative emotions of anger, sadness, and shame are part and parcel of power relations, and gender provides a useful perspective for understanding the role of these emotions in the manifestation and navigation of social hierarchies and in the cultivation of moral virtues. The reversal in ratio in the numbers of males and females displaying anger (12:5) and sadness (3:11) is as revealing as the dominance of mothers among the irate females and of sorrowful sons among the doleful males. A classification of the kinship roles of the sad women points us to several family relationships that are especially and innately difficult and pose much greater challenges for women than for men: stepmother and stepchild, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and wife and concubine. The proper exhibition of anger and sadness forms an important part of the character of the virtuous female paragons. Shame is depicted as a positive moral emotion for both men and women, but the cases in which women commit suicide because of their husbands' shameful acts call our attention to the more severe constraints that tend to be placed on women's life choices. In sum, through their display of and response to negative emotions, Liu Xiang's female exemplars maneuver in challenging and complex power relations (mostly in the home, but occasionally also in the public sphere), and they demonstrate the dangers, and more often, the positive moral potential of these emotions.

16 Elsewhere I examine the eclipse of the early images of exemplary female hermits like Laolai's wife by Meng Guang (first century CE), who, known for the respect and compliance with which she supports and follows her husband in his pursuit of the eremitic life, became the most celebrated hermit wife in the Chinese tradition.

17 The literature on this later development is enormous. Interested readers may begin with Mou (2004).

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