

The Landscape of Sentiment in Song Dynasty China

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Abstract

Throughout the world, most notably in China and in Europe, expressions of private, internal states of mind tend to assume an important role in public discourse only after the influence of heredity as a determinant of identity declines. The reason for this may be that, deprived of fixed, inherited roles, individuals are forced to develop a public persona which can negotiate roles different from those of one's ancestors. In China, the grip of hereditary status declined relatively early so that by Song times we find individuals making use of personal artifacts for the construction of personal identities. During this same period the technology of printing made possible the rise of several new genres of literary expression in which highly personal, often confessional views could be articulated for public consumption. These included new forms of poetry appreciative of mundane subject matter, personal notes (*biji*), poetry chats (*shihua*), lyric chats (*cihua*), prefaces (*xu*) and colophons (*tiba*). The latter were usually written on the spur of the moment, and often at social gatherings. The first three genres often record touching stories of personal sentiment, flirtation or romance. The last two frequently served as arenas for the expression of personal and original views on art, society, or literature. Alongside these literary media there developed a market for fan paintings. Highly portable and relatively cheap, fans were often given as gifts to friends or lovers. In time fan

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painters developed themes hinting at those personal sentiments their buyers wished to express in hidden or indirect ways, and so we find scenes of empty bridges, weeping willows and sunset landscapes, what I would call the landscape of sentiment. Previously mistaken as ordinary nature scenes, many landscapes in the fan format are laden with sentimental imagery and incorporate features of style which resonate with verbal tropes for sentiment. This paper explores these landscapes and their impact on power relations between men and women.

