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Expressive Depths: Dialogic Performance of Bridal Lamentation in Rural South China

Through the lens of dialogism, a performance-sensitive perspective, and the conception of emotion as evocative and transformative, this research explores the “expressive depths” of bridal lamentation that was practiced in rural south China. Carrying multiple layers of meaning, bridal lamentation provides all its participants—not only the bride but also her interlocutor and audience—diverse expressive niches from which they intertextually formulate the social wisdom that facilitates identity reconfiguration, emotional transformation, and humanistic cultivation of empathetic listening and the moral spirit of fortitude that would equip the bride for her lifetime.

平時下樓看待娘 / 今天下樓聽女愁 ... / 龍年撿日子好 / 安葬紅花老墳邊 ...
/ 一怨爺娘壓迫女 / 二怨媳娘想不開 / 我娘有墳不會葬 / 葬進深山不顯陽 /
人的青天好過日 / 是我烏雲一世愁。

[On ordinary days, I go downstairs to see my mother,
Today I come to lament. . . .
In a dragon year my mother picks an auspicious day
To bury her red flower (daughter) among old graves. . . .
I lament that my parent oppresses her daughter;
I grieve that my mother fails to think it through.
She picks for the daughter a grave nowhere
But in deep mountains, without sunshine.
Others have clear sky and lead an easy life;
But mine is covered with black clouds and will bring nothing but suffering.]¹

THESE LINES COME FROM A BRIDAL LAMENT performed in 1960 by a village woman named Nengci (b. 1939) from Jiangyong County, a village-based agrarian community located in Hunan Province in South China. Called *kuge* 哭歌 (crying song) or *kujia ge* 哭嫁歌 (wedding crying song), this particular lament captures the generic affect of Jiangyong bridal wailing, namely, *kelian* 可憐 or misery. It also highlights *kuge* as a form of “licensed expression” (Blake 1978:13) or “poetic license” (Vail and White 1991:75). It allowed women to express the inexpressible—for example, complaints toward parents or protests against androcentric Confucian in-

stitutions. Moreover, though this point is often ignored, the license to lament poses a threat to the auspiciousness that characterizes Chinese wedding rituals. This raises the question of why negative feelings and imageries of misfortune were permitted and even encouraged in the course of a rite meant to announce a woman's promising destiny in marital happiness.

The incongruence of lamentation amidst the propitious celebrations of Jiangyong weddings had puzzled me since my first bout of fieldwork in 1992–93. It was not until I recognized a largely overlooked dimension of kuge—its dialogic aspect—that I was able to get at the deeper-layered meanings that transcend simple lamentation. In Jiangyong, as expressions of *kelian*, kuge do not merely consist of the bride's solo performance (as is often mistakenly believed), but involve collaboration between the bride and her interlocutors, who are usually female, although men are not excluded. Referred to as *peiku* 陪哭 (to cry along with) or *yiku yipei* 一哭一陪 (one cries, the other accompanies), these dialogic forms of participation suggest that the *kelian* expressed in kuge denotes a mix of a bride's personal feelings (prompted by leaving home due to a village-exogamous patrilocality) and her interlocutor's own sentiments of suffering. Additionally, since this sort of ritual performance was expected to elicit tears from its audiences (Feld 1982; Schieffelin 1976), Jiangyong kuge also constituted a social field where a "community of sentiment" (Appadurai 1990:94) was constructed and "resonance" (Wikan 1992) experienced, which manifests the social ideal of empathetic communication.

With an emphasis on intertextually structured *peiku* laments, this article explores the "expressive depths" of Jiangyong kuge: the multiple layers of meaning that kuge engages, ranging from identity construction to emotional, moral, and humanistic transformation, as well as the diverse expressive niches that kuge produces for appropriation by various participating roles, including the bride and her interlocutor and the audience. This discussion will examine Jiangyong kuge from three mutually inspired perspectives: Bakhtin's (1981, 1984a) dialogic approach, a performance-sensitive view (e.g., Austin [1962] 1975; Bauman 1977; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Hymes 1975), and from the conception of emotion as constative, performative, and evocative and transformative (Bakhtin 1986; Grima 1992; Liu 2004a; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990). Informed by an urgent sense of salvaging an endangered oral tradition, my research reconstructs and investigates how dialogic wedding laments constituted both a reflexive and reformational arena wherein Jiangyong women reflected upon their lived reality, articulated *kelian* sentiments, and transformed that articulated *kelian* into moral aspirations and humanistic concerns, most notably the virtue of fortitude when confronting hardship and the ability to listen with sympathy to others' misery discourses. In this way, the protagonists are able to find their self-worth and reconfigure their sense of being. Jiangyong kuge thus not only (re) defines a bride's "social persona" in a rite of passage exercise (Kligman 1984: 168), but also presents a body of social texts that all participants may ponder and interact with. In this sense, kuge was less an act of bemoaning than one of nurturing the wisdom needed for emotional, social, and humanistic growth and for qualifying one as a mature adult.

Dialogicality, Performance, and Emotion

According to Bakhtin (1984a:271), dialogue is fundamental to “the thinking human consciousness.” Three concepts are central to Bakhtin’s formulation of dialogue: addressivity (in terms of speech targets), utterances (speech contents), and the quality of being unfinalized (in the sense of ongoing circulation). At the addressivity level, dialogue may be directed toward an immediate person (face-to-face communication), an existing utterance or reported speech (Bakhtin 1984a; Vološinov 1986), or a “superaddressee” in the form of an imaginary or spatially/temporally distant recipient (Bakhtin 1986:126). Bakhtin (1986) also distinguishes between semantics (the referential meanings) and expressivity (the emotional aura) of utterances. Bakhtin’s framework of dialogue, structured by the dual axes of addressivity and utterances, establishes an ever-expanding communication matrix in which all speech events consist of simultaneous authoring and answering. This contains the potential to call forth additional thoughts and feelings, thus leading to the third dialogic construct, that is, unfinalizedness (Morson 1986), which speaks to the infinite potentialities of human transformation.

Bakhtin’s dialogic—also glossed as intertextuality (Kristeva 1980), dialogism (Holquist 1990), and interdiscursivity (Bauman 2005)—encourages us to investigate the social formations, power, and authority that go beyond immediate interactions. In the case of kuge research, it broadens the analytical scope from brides alone to brides plus their interlocutors and (super)addressees, from semantics to emotionality, from individual articulation to mutual embeddedness, and from instantaneous interactions to ongoing processes. The dialogicality concept can be further expanded by incorporating performance perspectives developed in linguistic anthropology and folklore studies, a dimension underused by the Bakhtin group (Bauman 2005). The performance approach can help refine Bakhtin’s interlocutor-addressee formulation into a more complex participation framework consisting of speaker (author, animator, and principal), hearer (ratified participant or overhearer), and audience (collective and dispersed) (Barber 1997; Goffman [1979] 1981; Irvine 1996). More relevant to the present research, a performance perspective provides avenues for identifying the web of interaction and unpacking just how such interactions engage sensibilities capable of transforming the participants’ lifeworlds, especially when it comes to performing emotion (Austin [1962] 1975; Briggs 1992; Grima 1992).

Two or three decades of work on the anthropology of emotion has produced conceptualizations of emotion as constative (describing the protagonist’s inner world), performative (putting heartfelt or socially expected feelings on display), and more importantly, as evocative and transformative. Specifically, emotion is not simply a culturally constructed sensory perception through which a person receives and responds to the world; it also functions as a “discourse” (in the Foucauldian sense) (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990) and an “energy flow” (Liu 2004a:423) that will “do something to the world” (Reddy 2001:111). This perception inspires us to examine not only how kelian speaks to its performer’s phenomenological existence, but also how it evokes thoughts or feelings that go beyond what kelian semantically denotes.

Existing scholarship on Chinese bridal lamentation tends to approach kuge from two principal orientations. One explores the ritual power of bridal wailing: as a psychological mechanism for transforming a bride's liminality (Blake 1978) and a tool for expelling evil spirits on behalf of the bride's natal community (McLaren 2008). The other investigates the bride's emotions in the face of impending marriage: her resistance to the "feudal" system (Tan 1990:94–5), sadness and loss upon leaving home, and grievance at her inability to perform filial piety after marriage (Watson 1996; Zhang 1969). A bride might also use the poetic expression of kuge to demonstrate her talents and virtues (Zhang 1969), articulate her understanding or perception of woman's fate (Ho 2005), reinforce affective ties with her natal family (McLaren 2008), and address the irresolvable contradictions inherent in a woman's life as daughter, friend, and wife (Liu 2011; Watson 1996).

These analyses tend to center around the bride as the anchor performer, with an eye to lamentation as a reflection of the bride's phenomenological existence. To open up the conceptual horizon, this article will focus on the dialogic dimension of kuge known as *peiku*. I will investigate how *peiku* provides the bride, her interlocutor, and her audience distinct niches from which to articulate the various discourses of *kelian*. While functioning as a catharsis mechanism, the articulation of *kelian* also elicits consolation and prompts resonance among the participants and thus transforms the sentimental semantics of *kelian* into moral aspirations and humanistic concerns. Through their performance of dialogic lamentation, Jiangyong women learn to appreciate one another's existence, and moreover, they collaboratively construct a rural edition of the female admonitory text, a body of literature manifesting the female conception of adulthood and formulation of social wisdom needed for dealing with life's challenges. Scholarship on Chinese women in traditional rural settings, especially those born prior to Liberation in 1949, is still limited. My discussion here is an attempt to improve our knowledge in this regard in light of how Jiangyong women exerted their agency and established their subjectivity in the event of kuge. In addition, it also aims to reconstruct Jiangyong's endangered kuge heritage, specifically its dialogic aspect, before it disappears under pressure from a rapidly changing modern China.

Reconstructing Dialogic Lamentation

Bridal lamentation was once practiced widely in south and southwestern China among both Han people and minority ethnic groups for centuries. This oral tradition began to fade after the establishment of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule in 1949. In its efforts to establish "a new China," the party-state marked for elimination the old customs, the so-called "feudal poisons," such as bridal lamentations and associated rituals, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The social-political atmosphere that discouraged the perpetuation of "feudal traditions" also censored any research on those practices. Investigations of Chinese bridal lamentations had to be conducted in then-colonized Hong Kong (Blake 1978; Ho 2005; Watson 1996; Zhang 1969). Only recently has research been extended into China proper, including studies of the Tujia minority group (Yu 2002) and the Shanghai

region (McLaren 2008). Fieldwork regulations have been relaxed, but finding practitioners or witnesses to kuge traditions becomes more challenging as elders die and customs are disrupted.

My Jiangyong fieldwork began in 1992–93, when I was conducting research on *nüshu* 女書 (female writing), a recently discovered but disappearing written system that has been used for centuries exclusively among women in rural Jiangyong. During my stay in Heyuan Village of Jiangyong (my main field site), I was also drawn to the kuge heritage, largely because many female elders took the initiative to fill my cassette tapes with their bridal laments—an effort that indicated their deep attachment to this nearly lost cultural practice. It remains “nearly lost” in the sense that even if elders try to initiate wailing at weddings, the young brides now fail to follow. This is true not only in Heyuan but in many other Jiangyong villages as well. My understanding of Jiangyong kuge was therefore based primarily on my informants’ recollections of them, laments they had witnessed or participated in between 1910 and the early 1960s, plus a few accounts from a minor kuge revival that occurred from the mid-1970s to early 1990s—after the Cultural Revolution but before the large-scale migration of adolescents to coastal cities for factory employment. Nowadays, although only a very few women can still write *nüshu*, almost everyone born before Liberation had performed kuge at their weddings.

It is worth noting that the kuge I collected at Heyuan were mostly solo bridal laments and contained no pieces of *peiku* (see Xie 1991 and Zhao 1992, 2005 for examples of solo laments).² A major reason for this is, as one woman explained: “We all married in from different villages and did not know each other well enough to spark the sensation necessary to create a genuinely moving *peiku* wailing.” Indeed, the village was structured by patrilocal exogamy; most women capable of performing kuge had never interacted with each other as bride and interlocutor, and thus found it difficult to lament in tune with one another. Even my two sworn sisters Nengci and Liang (b. 1943) from Heyuan, who tried to create a *peiku* scene for me in 2002, failed. Given these difficulties, the dialogic lamentation reproduced by Xiao (b. 1936) and her elder sister Huan (b. 1933), discussed below, is rare and invaluable; it lends insights into the disappearing *peiku* performance.

Xiao is the paternal aunt of my best friend in Jiangyong, a high school teacher born in the 1960s, named Ming. Because of my connection to Ming, Xiao extended her kinship affinity to me, a common phenomenon in rural China, and felt obligated to assist me in any way she could. It turns out that Xiao was a perfect candidate for demonstrating local *peiku* knowledge: three of her daughters and Ming’s elder sister all had performed kuge at their weddings in the 1970s and 1980s, with Xiao serving as their kuge tutor. Since the mid-1970s, kuge performances have reflected personal choice rather than compulsion. According to Ming’s illiterate elder sister, performing kuge was a means of “expressing gratitude toward parents.” In contrast, Ming’s wife, a primary school teacher educated under the Cultural Revolution rubric of “breaking with the four traditions,”³ considered the kuge “backward and of affectation” and thus refused to lament at her own wedding. The stigmatization of lamentations as a “primitive” tradition practiced by uneducated rural people has also been reported in Bangladesh and other modernizing countries (Wilce 2002, 2005).

Since Xiao, living in Tangbei Village, felt the same as my Heyuan informants about the difficulty of dialogically lamenting with affinal villagers, she invited her elder sister Huan from Cengshan Village to join us, explaining: “We have partaken in many common kuge occasions and therefore would be able to collaboratively reproduce those performances.” Reproduction, of course, can never be purely mimetic, since it involves one’s memories of the past and the selection or mediation of those memories in the present (Casey 1987; Wilce 2002). As Crites (1986:165) puts it, we “live forward” and “understand backward.” In one instance, Xiao “decontextualized” a lament that originally lasted for one hour and “recontextualized” it as a thirteen-minute version (see Bauman and Briggs 1990). The modifications of her performance were multilayered: they referred to the generic context of kuge, her personal context, and the audience-oriented performance context. While displaying her kuge “competence” and “responsibility” (Bauman 1977) to me (an outside researcher), she also used the opportunity to express grievances and solicit support from her nephew-audience—Ming, the representative heir of her husband’s lineage. Her kuge reproduction thus manifested what she felt and lamented at past kuge events as well as her current concerns: Xiao has no son but only daughters, and she relies on Ming to speak on her behalf. Rather than impairing the “authenticity” (Bendix 1997) of her reproduction, the addition of present-day anxieties demonstrated her sincerity and the manner in which kuge, as a speech genre, is “figured by its always new and present co(n)text” (Silverstein and Urban 1996:4).

In order to assure myself that Xiao’s peiku reflected the general scenario of Jiangyong kuge, I played part of her recorded performance to my Jiangyong sworn sister, Nengci (the most prolific nüshu writer of today), who is three years younger than Xiao. As Nengci watched the video clip, her laughter mixed with tears, and she said, “You are a bad girl. How can you show such a film to draw tears from an old woman like me? It calls out my miserable past, long gone by.” Xiao’s wailing had obviously touched Nengci’s heart, and this I believe speaks to the representative quality of Xiao’s reproduction performance.⁴

The Kuge Genre in Jiangyong

Jiangyong, located in southern Hunan Province, is surrounded by mountains. The mountainous areas and southern Jiangyong are populated by the Yao minority; the central and northern Jiangyong by Han Chinese and sinicized Yao. Life in central-northern Jiangyong, the geographic locus of this investigation, was traditionally characterized by the Confucian tripartite structure of patrilineality, patrilocal village exogamy, and an agrarian economy based on sexual division of labor whereby women shared no obligation to work in the rice field (largely because of foot binding). Since 1949, village exogamy is no longer strictly observed, although patrilineality and patrilocal persist. In the past two decades, the village formation has undergone further changes, with a large number of adolescents leaving home to find factory jobs in coastal cities. Romantic love has become more popular than arranged marriage.

Patrilocal and arranged marriages were the key practices from which bridal lamentations were born. Prior to the establishment of the Communist state, mar-

riages were arranged by parents in childhood, and the two young people were prohibited from visiting each other. Due to the lack of prior interaction, marriage entailed major adjustments for a bride, who was required to leave her home to live in a strange environment where she had to cope with new social relations, most critically “his mother” (*ta niang* 他娘), a term for mother-in-law that carries no little tinge of alienation. Her situation was further complicated by the incompatibility of the new bride’s dual social roles as filial daughter and dutiful daughter-in-law (Liu 2011; Watson 1996). In the face of these drastic changes, kuge permitted women to express their “self-reflective metacommentaries” (Seremetakis 1991:2) on society and their feelings about the life transition they had no choice but to accept.

Kuge is part of Jiangyong’s rich female lyric tradition, which is comprised of both written *nüshu* and oral *nüge* 女歌 (female song).⁵ While *nüge* is associated with a range of themes that include nursery rhymes, funny stories, extraordinary events, and ritual performances for weddings and funerals, written *nüshu* is mostly tied to lamenting *kelian* (Liu 2004a).⁶ The kuge genre has a similarly strong association with expressions of *kelian*, especially those imposed by the Confucian doctrine of *sancong* 三從 (thrice-dependence), which defines women as subject in their relation to fathers, husbands, and sons.

In Jiangyong, kuge was performed in conjunction with a ritual known as *zuo getang* 坐歌堂 (sitting at the singing court), which was held for three consecutive days prior to a wedding.⁷ During this rite the bride performed kuge, and her peers, called *changge nü* 唱歌女 (singing girls), sang *nüge* as a group to underscore the solemnity of the event. Broadly defined, *zuo getang* might occur over a period as long as six months, with dozens of singing girls (depending on the size of the village) invited to stay with the bride day and night. During this socialization period, the girls did needlework together, shared social knowledge or gossip, and learned *nüshu*, *nüge*, and kuge. As it was described, “If you did not go to school, you would not know the rites and etiquette. If you did not enter the singing court, you would not learn the tunes and tempos” (不進學堂就不知禮節 / 不進歌堂就不知曲節).⁸ This learning process differs from that in Hong Kong where bridal laments were taught by a specialist (Watson 1996) and in Shanghai where they were learned from one’s mother (McLaren 2008). However, as in Hong Kong and Shanghai, a good command of kuge was considered a mark of the bride’s upbringing, talent, and virtue (McLaren 2008; Zhang 1969). In today’s Jiangyong, while kuge has faded away, the *zuo getang* ritual survives, although traditional *nüge* have been replaced by socialist revolution melodies or popular songs learned at school or from television.

The three-day kuge ritual was initiated by the ceremony of *kaisheng* 開聲 (initiating vocalization). A “good-fortune matron” would be chosen as the *kaisheng* mistress to lead the ritual. At the opening of the ceremony, she stood on the third step of the stairs in the bride’s house, with the singing girls nearby and the bride at the head of the stairs to the second floor. As soon as the *kaisheng* matron pronounced her first line, the singing girls immediately joined in with a chorus known as *wugeng chou* 五更愁 (heartbreak through all the five watches) as the bride initiated her lament. In other words, the three parties—the bride, the singing girls, and *kaisheng* matron—sing simultaneously, yet each sings separate lyrics and melodies, which respectively sym-

bolize the bride's past (girlhood days), her present (liminal transition), and her future (a happy and fortunate married woman).

After uttering her first lament, the bride went down the stairs, indexing her stepping away from the girlhood days, since upstairs was where the unmarried girls' chambers were located. As she reached the ground, she asserted her autonomy in the succeeding *kuge*, in which she took the lead as to whom or what she lamented. This performance could include two styles: solo lamentation (especially when targeting male kin and children who could not rejoin in the lamentation) and dialogic lamentation in which the bride and her immediate family, relatives, and friends (known as the "six relations") performed collaboratively. Similar to lamentation traditions in other cultures, the Jiangyong *kuge* involve polyphonic expression containing elements of poetry (i.e., lines of equal length), bodily gestures (e.g., wiping tears with a handkerchief), crying sounds, and tunefulness (see Urban 1988). As text-artifacts, *kuge* consist of both formulaic and improvised compositions (Lord 1960; Sawyer 1996). Composed of seven-word verses, the improvisational text reflects the performer's personal situation. In contrast, the formulaic or ritualized expressions are where "individual experience and shared concerns intersect[ed]" (Barber 1997:357).

The formulaic content of *kuge* embodies women's complex but common sentiments toward marriage. Faced with the fate of being married out, a bride expresses sorrow, grief, and protest against patrilocality and female denigration, using phrases such as "I was wrongly born a woman, worthless, and therefore must go his village, to another's home" (度錯女人不抵錢 / 去到他鄉別人家).⁹ These complaints are often mixed with self-criticism for failure to fulfill filial piety:

養大嬌兒有天好 / 養大紅花沒馳恩 / 女像深山野獸鳥 / 養得毛長各自飛

[When your sons are grown they will pay you back,
But when daughters grow up, they won't.
Daughters are like wild birds in the deep mountains,
They fly off when full-fledged.]¹⁰

Note that sentiments of protest or criticism are addressed mainly to parents and sometimes brothers (who assume paternal roles upon their fathers' deaths), but no one else—which is different from the bridal curses targeting the matchmaker or the groom's family as seen in Hong Kong (Blake 1978). For example, a lament to the bride's paternal kin expresses sentiments of intimacy nurtured by geographic proximity: "I visit her three times a day; I stay there from sunrise to sunset" (一日來行三幾道 / 從光行到日頭沉).¹¹ Other *kuge* express gratitude to the bride's maternal uncle, who represents not only the origins of the bride's mother, but also a third authority vis-à-vis the bride's paternal lineage for such important functions as witnessing the division of family property:

三百鷗鷺站兩行 / 鷗鷺再謝山頭水 / 外甥再謝舅出身

[There stand three hundred cormorants in two rows.
Cormorants thank the mountains and the waters;

I thank my maternal uncle, for he is where I come from.]¹²

When singing laments to their peers, brides often express wishes for the perpetuation of their sisterhood “as long as the river flows” (水長流).¹³ These kuge also give brides opportunities to reveal anxiety about interacting with “his mother” (i.e., the brides’ mothers-in-law):

姊娘先試他娘心 / 一試他娘好不好 / 二試他娘難不難

[Sister, you have known the heart of his mother.

Does his mother treat you well?

Does his mother give you a hard time?]¹⁴

When aiming kuge at younger cousins, nieces, and nephews, the bride could demonstrate her admonitory responsibilities, for instance: “Advise my younger brother not to stand by gambling; there is no promise in the gambling house” (請弟不站賭錢場 / 賭錢場上無天地) or “The household won’t be better off if a man is not diligent. The trousseau won’t be full if a woman does not work hard” (男不勤儉家不富 / 女不勤儉箱不滿).¹⁵ When directed toward general friends or distant relatives, the tone changes to one of courtesy and euphemism. For example, the bride may compliment a man’s possession of literacy (an indication of power), such as: “You don’t need to seek help for writing, nor do you seek help for reading” (上也不求人寫字 / 下也不求看字人),¹⁶ or a woman’s dowry (a symbol of a supportive family), saying: “Sister, your room is replete with everything, including a gold lacquered washbasin and a silver stand” (姊的房中樣樣有 / 金漆盆子銀水架).¹⁷

These generic kuge expressions, found in almost every bride’s wedding lamentation I collected, captured both local women’s ways of seeing and modes for expressing their worldviews. Although these women were mostly illiterate, in both the female-specific nüshu and the official *hanzi* 漢字 scripts, they demonstrated their literary skills by using everyday images as metaphors—“bird” for transience and “flowing river” for perpetuity. The cormorant imagery is particularly lively. As the singer explained: “The gesture of the cormorant catching fish from the river resembles a deep bow from the waist, with one’s gaze aimed at the ground. It is therefore used to express respect and gratitude.”

Dialogic Peiku

While formulaic kuge content manifests the bride’s concerns, anxieties, resistance, talent, self-definition, and social relations, the improvisational format of peiku lends itself to interaction between brides and their interlocutors, and leads listeners to shed tears. Peiku provides an expressive arena for participants to “actively constitute, reinscribe, challenge, or incrementally renegotiate the terms through which they are connected as a community” (Sugarman 1997:3), thereby illuminating how meaning is prompted not by a single individual, but by two or more who are “hooked together” (Vološinov 1986:103), as shown in Xiao’s peiku reproductions.

These performances took place in Ming’s father’s house at Tangbei Village in 2002.

Xiao and Huan collaboratively performed four pieces of peiku that they had previously participated in, until Xiao became too emotionally engaged and had to stop. Huan continued, directing solo lamentations toward everyone present, including Ming, Ming's father, and myself. There was no expectation that any of us would lament in return. One note to add: all the laments performed by Xiao that day had been sung to me before, but this was the first time they were presented with rejoinders.

The peiku reproduction began with a passage Xiao had sung to her already-married sister Huan at her own wedding in the 1950s (Audio 1):¹⁸

哦，姑娘啊 / 問妳一聲疼不疼 / 問妳二聲捨得不

[Oh, my elder sister,
I ask if you feel pain;
I ask can you bear to part from me.]

At this point, Xiao suddenly stopped and turned to Huan, asking: "Why don't you accompany?"

"Not the time yet," Huan replied. "I have to wait until I know what your laments are about, don't I?"

Indeed, what Xiao had just sung was a formulaic opening lament aimed at the bride's immediate family. Xiao thus nodded, with an embarrassed smile, and continued:

金箔紙，貼龍床

[The golden foil paper, pasted on the dragon bed.]

At which point Huan joined in:

哦，妹娘啊

[Oh, my younger sister . . .]

Before continuing, allow me to point out that my original vision of peiku was antiphonal, with interlocutors taking turns to lament and pausing slightly before rejoining. But to my surprise, Xiao did not stop once Huan began to sing, and the two voices remained concurrent throughout the performance. In other words, one had to wail while listening to and incorporating the interlocutor's utterances into her succeeding lamentation. To illustrate how this works, in the remaining excerpts, I will indent and italicize rejoinders to distinguish them from the bride's comments:

姊到他家做嫂娘	不想回家做姊娘
久時聽聞他揀日	身在房中心不安
久時兩徠齊相會 . . .	
他家也有他家事	沒有回家伴妹娘
隔灶湊柴隔灶炊	隔日六宵望姊歸
做女歡樂偷身出	做媳歡樂問他娘
望姊歸家無別事	望姊歸家伴妹娘
日頭照入茅垂下	女不低頭要低頭
伴的一時抵一天	伴的一天抵一年

他鄉不比娘鄉洞	不比在家做女時
左手接過青龍傘	右手接過姊金陀
石山難移性易改	改變性情待六親
姊的金陀賽贏人 . . .	
一就姑娘二就馳	三就世間十分難 . . .

[My sister has married into his family.
Once I heard that the date had been selected,
 She didn't care to come home to be my sister.
My mind was never at ease in his room.
 We two used to spend all our time together . . .
There was always something to take care of at his house.
That's why I didn't come home earlier to keep you company.
 (Now) we each will work at separate stoves.
As a daughter, you can always steal some free moments.
 I have been longing for my sister to return home,
As a daughter-in-law, joys are controlled by his mother.
 To return home for no reason
When the sun is high, the twitch grass is down.
 But to keep her younger sister company.
Being a woman, whatever the situation, you have to lower your head.
 To accompany her for one hour, which counts as an entire day.
His village is not like our natal one.
 To accompany her for one day, which counts as an entire year.
Life there is not like that of a daughter.
 With my left hand I take the umbrella she carries;
A stone mountain is hard to move, but your temperament should change.
 With my right hand I hold the golden son she brings with her.
Change your temperament to serve the six relations:
 The golden son of my sister will be better than anyone else. . .
First, to yield to the girls in the house, and second, to submit to your parents-in-law;
Third, to accommodate all the people in the world, despite facing all difficulties.]

The above presence of separate but corresponding discourses, presented in a manner that prevents the subsumption of either one, is a fine example of Bakhtin's (1981, 1984b) dialogic and heteroglossic ideals. For Jiangyong villagers, the dialogic format ensures the aesthetic qualities of kuge and promotes mutual inspiration. Xiao explained: "If we took turns rather than lamenting simultaneously, the sound would be *bu haoting* 不好聽 (not pleasant). Without mutual correspondence, the performance would be *bu weidao* 不味道 (flavorless). With no one to interact with, it would be *ku buchang* 哭不長 (little to wail about)."

The above excerpt is representative of a formulaic lamentation between blood sisters, consisting of complaints and admonitions. The bride expresses disappointment over what she perceives as her married sister's negligence of her natal family, and the elder sister responds by instructing her sister in one of many social realities she will confront as a married woman and advising her to make the necessary adjustments so as to "accommodate all the people in the world."

Although formulaic textually, Xiao's performance touched the heart of a seventy-year-old woman named Mei, who was in Tangbei for a visit to her father and who did not expect to encounter a kuge lamentation. Overhearing the performance, she

entered the house and sat to one side. She wiped away tears throughout, and as soon as the lamentation ended, she remarked: “True! So true! His village is not like our natal one. No matter what you do, your in-laws always find fault with you. That is why the elder sister has to warn the bride in advance. Tears just flow whenever I think of those days.”

“Those days” were in 1950, when she was newly married and subjected to a new land allotment policy announced by the CCP. By having added a daughter-in-law, Mei’s new family expected to receive an extra share of land, but their above-average economic standing prevented that. Deeply disappointed, they vented all their frustration on Mei. They gave her a basket with a pair of chopsticks, meaning that she was expelled from the family and would have to beg for food. A party cadre heard about Mei’s situation, and she was granted a divorce by the CCP’s village committee. This gave Mei a second chance to build her own happiness—in traditional Jiangyong, a woman tended to remarry when she had no son or in cases where her very survival was in question (Liu 2001). She is now the mother of seven children. Even though she was living contentedly with her sons, old emotions from fifty years back were evoked by the kuge reproduction. Her response illustrates that kuge is not merely defined by those who perform, but functions as an open field that invites various voices (in the form of utterances or memories) to “co-textualize” or “recontextualize,” thereby constituting an unfinalized intertextual network of experience (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Silverstein and Urban 1996).

Edification and Reflexivity

The next excerpt is from a peiku originally performed by Xiao and her niece bride, Huan’s daughter, in 1976. In the reproduction I witnessed, Huan played the role of the bride. The lament was initially sung to Xiao’s husband. Even though men rarely respond, in the original version Xiao’s husband did answer with a few phrases before stepping back and giving control to his wife. This explains the shift from addressing a *shu* 叔 or *shuye* 叔爺 (literally “father’s younger brother” but broadly defined as any man from a father’s generation) to a *yi* 姨 or *yi’niang* 姨娘 (literally “mother’s sister” but also referring to any woman from a mother’s generation) (Audio 2):¹⁹

面前有兜懸錢樹	朝早落金夜落銀
甥不開聲我自愁	久時聽聞他揀日
落金落銀叔不愛	叔是愛雙讀書郎
是我窮人沒日空	
愛雙姑娘樓上坐 . . .	
手把不到天頭月	腳踩不到月亮彎
三十三雙入府考	四十四雙入學堂
好樹紅花好不來	前世不修命壓我
上也不求孔夫子 . . .	
壓低命步就世間	去到人家跟人貴
城牆腳下多有伴	不光姨娘你一個 . . .
貴子貴孫賽贏人	不像姨娘我一樣
上屋竹園遲出筍 . . .	遲陪金孫賽贏人
站出四邊不如人	在家淒寒日子淺

河底無魚蝦公貴 家中沒仔女為貴
 算是去到人家賽贏人 不算苦瓜落入苦瓜園
 爺爺（父親）死早弟郎細 自苦自賤
 弟郎長大有名聲 有日回報父母恩
 你去人家學老成 永遠歸家看望馳 . . .

[In front of his house stands a money-hanging tree,
I feel sad even before my niece begins to lament.
 From which falls gold in the morning and silver at night.
I knew of the date selected (for the wedding).
 But gold and silver are not what my *shu* loves.
 What *shu* loves is having a pair of scholarly sons,
But being poor, I enjoyed no free time.
 And a pair of daughters sitting upstairs (doing needlework). . .
My hands cannot reach the moon above;
My feet cannot step on its crescent.
 Thirty and three pairs will take the civil entrance exam.
Nice trees and red flowers are not things I can ask for and be granted.
 Forty and four pairs will study in the academy.
I did not cultivate my fate in past lives and therefore I am oppressed.
 You will never seek help from Confucius. . .
I am oppressed by my fate; I can only accept the reality.
 Under the city wall there are many people just like you.
You are going to his house and will become better and noble.
 Yi is not the only one.
You will have noble sons and noble grandchildren who can compete with anyone.
 The bamboo-fenced house next to us grew a bamboo shoot (descendant) late. . .
You won't be like your yi'niang,
 But the late-arriving golden grandson can still compete with anyone.
Who cannot compete with anyone from anywhere.
 When you catch no fish in the river, shrimp are equally valuable.
My days at home, though impoverished, were not meant to last.
 When no son is in the house, the daughter is equally precious.
I imagined that in marriage my life would become better.
Who ever thought that I would become a bitter gourd that falls into a garden of bitter gourds?
My father died when my younger brother was just born.
We were poor and miserable,
 But with a hope that by bringing up the brother,
 He would return the mother's grace.
 To live in his house you must learn to be mature.
And never forget to come home to see your mother. . .]

This kuge contains wishes for the recipient's good fortune and images of the best type of son any family can hope for: a scholar—literacy in rural Jiangyong was considered invaluable symbolic capital. After Xiao replaces her husband as the co-interlocutor, the lament returns to the more common female complaints, her helplessness and frustration of not being able to bear a son: "My hands cannot reach the moon above; my feet cannot step on its crescent." After the bride responds with comforting words, Xiao gives her instructions to be grateful, thoughtful, and mature.

This peiku interaction creates distinct expressive spaces for both the bride and her interlocutor. For the bride this entails edification, switching from being the recipient of advice to a young adult knowing when and how to give consolation, even to her

seniors. According to Jiangyong protocols, one could not refer to another's suffering until it was brought up by the protagonist; otherwise, words offered with good intentions would most likely be interpreted as disdainful. Therefore, a bride always starts her lamentations with praise and compliments, proof that she has learned propriety and social skills. In the above example, when the interlocutor begins lamenting her own misery, the bride demonstrates maturity by giving suggestions for strengthening one's vulnerable self: holding onto self-esteem in a sonless situation (since misfortune can befall anyone); maintaining hope that a male child might come, though late; and being grateful, believing that daughters are as precious as sons. Required demonstrations of such knowledge were considered educational in that they compelled the bride to cultivate the skill and wisdom needed to cope with real-life difficulties the bride might have to deal with later.

From the interlocutor's perspective, *peiku* performance prompts self-reflection, especially regarding *kelian*. In the above excerpt, Xiao describes herself as "a bitter gourd"—an image referring to a childhood in which her father died when she was thirteen, just after the birth of her only brother. Her family was too impoverished to afford a coffin, and no one was willing to lend them money for a burial—assuming that they would be unable to repay the debt. In the interest of financial security, some acquaintances suggested remarriage for the thirty-six-year-old widow, but Huan and Xiao fiercely resisted, driving off all matchmakers that approached their house. The mother eventually gave in to her daughters' wishes and agreed to raise the children by herself. Life with neither a male head nor family assets was extremely difficult, and as an adolescent, Xiao never imagined that her own marriage would put her in an even worse situation—a "garden of bitter gourds"—when she failed to give birth to a son.

The actual performance of this *kuge* took more than an hour: When Xiao became too emotional, Huan feared for her daughter's (the bride's) inexperience at handling such intensity, and took over the lamenting role. Collaboratively recalling the miserable past, the two sisters wailed on and on until their mother finally asked them to stop, considering their *kuge* performance *tai shangshen* 太傷神 (too draining). This emotional intensity prevailed also in the reproduced scene. In my presence, Xiao began to sob as soon as this particular *kuge* started, since she knew its content was comfort offered in the face of her lacking a male child and a wish that she would bear one late in life. That wish had been acceptable when the lament was originally delivered twenty-five years earlier, but it had proved to be wishful thinking, and the reproduction of this particular *kuge* was a reminder of how the son-bearing issue had become a painful wedge between Xiao and her husband: "My husband blames me for all this failure. He even yelled at me: 'Go back and die at Fengxiatang (her natal village). You have no share of anything here. Go back and die there!'"²⁰

Although Xiao directed this comment at me, it was perhaps intended for Ming, who was sitting next to me. Only a few weeks prior, Xiao's husband had beaten her to the point of causing serious injury because he suspected her stealing fifty Chinese dollars (RMB) from him. The situation was eventually mediated by Ming. Xiao has no heir; Ming (the son of her husband's only brother) is her only hope for justice and fair treatment.

Xiao attributed her kelian to destiny—"I didn't cultivate my fate in past lives and therefore I am oppressed"—a common discourse often seen in nüshu and nüge. Her husband also bemoaned his personal fate. During a conversation with Mei, when he learned that they had both been born in the astrological year of the monkey (1932), he commented, "Monkey plays around, so the sign is more auspicious for women than men. You left [because of patrilocality], so you had a beautiful fate [with sons and daughters]. I stayed, and therefore I didn't." His belief that these failures were his fate may explain why he participated in the lament in the first place—in Jiangyong, a man would lament with the bride only when he was sonless or widowed. He was clearly aware that dialogic peiku was an occasion where miseries could be expressed and released, and he hoped that the negative sentiments would be reformulated into positive ones via articulation.

Articulation and Reformulation

While the above peiku textualizes Xiao's lack of father and son, the next excerpt focuses on another source of suffering among women: widowhood. This peiku was originally performed by Xiao's daughter at her wedding in 1984, and offered to a woman (referred to as *yi* or *yi'niang*) who struggled under the hardship of raising children on her own (Audio 3):²¹

門前有棵香花樹 . . .	四圍遮起姨命乖
大河鯉魚得個泡	是我得名又得聲
姨的命好人人妒	孫曾滿堂動一聲
銅鎚打鼓名聲大	不算我可憐刀割心
檯頭數錢錢三十	檯尾數錢四十文
田塘水深舀不乾	是我可憐訴不清
三十不該姨守寡	四十不該姨當家
田塘水深舀得乾	是我可憐訴不清
調作留歸姨爺在	姨娘一個上命人
放倒門柳就地步	上下可憐就世間
上也不求人寫字	下也不求看字人
人家吃好我不妒	砍柴賣竹維生活
面前命乖見第一	孫孫曾曾賽贏人 . . .
養大嬌兒有日好	人家給的吃不飽
調作度做金兒子	在於馳邊見抵錢
自己做來得吃多	我肚飢做出大門樣
錯度紅花不抵錢	錯度紅花出遠鄉
沒有做出大家腔	子子女女聽我講
抵飢受餓多可憐	我嬌兒細時無爺跟娘做
勸姨一聲自想遠	勸姨二聲自想開
世界之上多有伴	沒光姨娘是一人
我勸姨娘不記在	養大金陀賽贏人

[A wide-spreading, fragrant tree . . .

Spreads over and surrounds the good-fortune *yi'niang*.

A bubble is stirred up by the big carp at the bottom of the river.

The fame or reputation I win.

Yi has a good fate that everyone envies.

Is as loud as a bronze hammer hitting a cymbal,

She has grandchildren and great-grandchildren all around.
But no one knows my misery, knows my knife-cut heart.
 Count the money on this end of the table: it's 30.
The water flowing over the field dikes cannot be cleaned up,
 Count the money on the other end: 40 cents.
Nor can the misery I suffered be fully released.
 Thirty should not be the age my yi widowed;
Even if the water flowing over the field dikes can be dried out,
 Forty should not be the age of my yi carrying all family responsibility.
The misery I suffered can never be fully articulated.
 If my yi's husband had survived,
I took the door plank and made it into a doorstep (for the convenience of the visitors):
 Yi's fate would have been even more superior.
Whatever difficulty facing me, I made accommodations to all the people in the world.
 You don't need to ask for the favor of writing from someone,
I was not envious of others who ate well;
 Nor do you need to ask for reading.
I contented myself with a life of cutting wood and selling bamboo.
 No one has better fate than you:
I knew that everything would become better when my sons grew up.
 To have grandchildren and great-grandchildren that can compete with anyone. . . .
I knew that I wouldn't have enough to eat if I had to rely on offerings from others.
I would have more to eat if I worked on my own.
 If I were born a man,
 I would have stayed with my parents to become worthy.
Even if I was starving, I pretended to be full.
 I was wrongly born as a red flower, worthless.
Even if I had nothing, I acted as though I were from a noble family.
 Wrongly born as a red flower, I had to leave for a faraway village.
You children, listen to what I have to say.
I have starved and suffered; it's truly miserable.
My poor kids have only the mother to count on.
 Let me advise my yi to think far,
 Let me advise my yi to think with an open mind.
 Many people in the world are just like you.
 You are not alone.
 I advise my yi'niang to not take everything to heart,
 For you have brought up children who can compete with anyone.]

As a generic affect, *kelian* occurs in all *kuge*. However, not every bride confronted specific incidents of suffering; sometimes a bride would lament women's collective destiny, such as their status as "worthless" or having to marry out to a "faraway village" (regardless of the actual distance), as shown here. This expressive goal explains the high level of hyperbole found in some *kuge*. However, it does not suggest that the emotions involved were insincere or untruthful. For Xiao, even in a reproduction performance, she lamented with all her heart and was exhausted after reciting a few lamentations. When I met Xiao two years later, she reacted to my presence by exclaiming; "Oh, no! Not again. Not for *kuge* this time? It's too painful to even recall!" [let alone perform].

In the above excerpt, the bride concurrently laments women's communal *kelian* and politely commends her interlocutor on her good fortune (in having children). In re-

sponse, the widow modestly describes herself as a mere bubble stirred up by a large carp and not the precious carp itself. But her true intention was to reveal her hidden “knife-cut heart,” which had suffered poverty, starvation, and the absence of male patronage, and to declare her faith that a better fate had to be earned rather than bestowed. She proclaimed that if her life appeared “superior” and “noble,” it was because she worked hard to prevail over all difficulty and to act as if no misfortune had ever befallen her.

By articulating her *kelian*, the widow not only cathartically released her sentiments of suffering, but more importantly, made known her actual hardship and how she had wisely and resolutely endured life’s challenges, thereby asserting her dignity and inviting respect. This performance allowed her to simultaneously present two discourses, one of suffering and one signifying the female virtues of fortitude and resilience. To the discourse of female virtue, the bride added the principle of a positive life philosophy: to think “far” and “with an open mind.” While such articulation, consolation, and mutual inspiration may not have dissolved the widow’s *kelian*, they underscore a sense of moral spirit consisting of determination, open-mindedness, and endurance, whereby women can develop self-worth and pride to counterbalance their *kelian* sentiments.

A Silent Dialogue with a Superaddressee

The next excerpt is from a solo lamentation performed by Huan and directed toward Zhou (1930–2004), Ming’s father, who is addressed as “elder brother” (Audio 4):²²

今日來到邀哥愁	哥爺來到命中好 ...
門前有棵香花樹	香花腳矮四圍遮 ...
哥的村坊好門坊 ...	上也不求孔夫子 ...

[Today I come . . .
Come to invite my elder brother to wail with me.
My elder brother has a good fortune. . . .
In front of his house grows a fragrant tree.
The fragrant tree spreads widely. . . .
My brother’s village is a good one. . . .
He does not need to ask for favors from Confucius. . . .]

As her sister’s husband’s brother, Zhou is very much a distant relative from Huan’s perspective, which explains her heavy reliance on the most formulaic of expressions in her *kuge*. She demonstrates courtesy by complimenting Zhou for his auspicious birthplace and possession of the two items most valued in Chinese rural communities: offspring (the tree metaphor) and literacy (the image of Confucius). Despite its general characteristics, the song still elicited tears from her lamentee. To my surprise, Zhou said that he in fact barely grasped what was being sung due to his poor hearing, but was nevertheless touched because it reminded him “of the days when my sister held my hands and lamented to me.” Zhou was only six years old when that happened. Adding an annotation to his father’s words, Ming said: “Weddings are truly sentimental. I feel that way probably because I have eight (cousin) sisters and only one

brother, and I saw them marry off one by one. It's really tough emotionally! Even now that I myself have married, whenever I hear a wedding band playing, my sorrow is still triggered."²³

The reactions of these two men hint at the power of monologic kuge to prompt dialogue, perhaps not with an interlocutor but with an internal "superaddressee" (Bakhtin 1986:126)—one who is temporally or spatially distant. Interestingly, what evoked Zhou's engagement was not so much Huan's lyrics but the generic affect of kuge, namely kelian, which awakened his memory and attachment to the married-out sister. This indicates that while men seldom openly wailed with a bride, kuge performances did give them entrance to a world in which they, too, silently authored their own scenarios.

Expressive Depths: Multilayered Voices and Expressive Niches

As we have seen, kuge performances provided an expressive arena open to all members of the community, both males and females. Intertextually constructed through dialogic lamentation, this arena allowed diverse expression among the different kuge participants: brides, interlocutors, and audiences. For brides, kuge triggered reflection on their separation from home and anxieties about life as out-married women, and expressed resentment against prevailing social ideologies. The role of interlocutors was to respond with counter-discourses that would illuminate the path toward a bride's maturity. Formulaic or ritualized, these responses contained straightforward advice aimed at taming unruly temperaments to thoughtfulness and subservience; this reflects the mainstream heritage of female admonition practiced among the Chinese gentry since Ban Zhao 班昭 (AD 45–117) wrote *Precepts for Women* (*Nüjie* 女戒) for her daughter bride two thousand years ago (for further discussion, see Mann 1994).

However, unlike the straightforward advice of gentry women, rural Jiangyong women also explored kuge's improvised expressive space and called on personal experience (especially kelian) to create open-ended social texts that the bride could think about and think through. In response to an interlocutor's kelian, a bride was expected to provide consolation. Three advising discourses were commonly employed: putting things into long-term perspective (to "think far"); throwing personal suffering into the "community of sentiment" (Appadurai 1990:94) ("many people in the world are just like you"); and cultivating a positive life attitude ("with an open mind" and being "grateful") in the face of difficulties. These rationales attributed suffering to issues of time, collectivity, and philosophy, rather than social construction, thus keeping the existing order intact. More importantly, the demands of performing kuge helped a bride internalize the reflective tools that would be required by her new station.

Ideally, the process was to result in a reconfigured bride who was capable of giving counsel, even to seniors; paradoxically, the counsel she offered endorsed the same androcentrism that was the target of her protests. This, however, does not suggest that the bride had to overwrite her original resistance with compliance; rather, the interactive lamentation put the two competing discourses into a centripetal-centrifugal relationship (Bakhtin 1984b) that expanded the bride's worldview. Through dialogic coun-

seling she learned how perspectives are formulated according to social roles and to be lenient about differences and flexible in confrontations.

In addition to tutoring the bride, the interlocutor also uses *peiku* to articulate her own *kelian* in order to transform it. Transformation by virtue of articulation makes public one's inner world—which not only denotes the protagonist's phenomenological situation (the confronted suffering), but also declares her resilience and fortitude in surviving life's ordeals. In other words, the act of articulation itself sets off a chemical reaction to the emotion articulated; *kelian* in this sense thus simultaneously signifies vulnerability (misery) and its opposite (fortitude, resilience, etc.), in which the vulnerable self finds self-worth and wins respect. In addition to articulation, transformation may also be achieved by pairing *kelian* with destiny. Framing one's present fate in terms of past causes that cannot be undone leads to acceptance of one's current reality. However, instead of permitting indulgence in a sense of fatalism, acceptance among Ji-angyong women meant redirecting attention from past causes to present efforts, thereby manifesting belief in the possibility of a better fate. Functioning as a black hole or bottomless well for absorbing suffering, the concept of destiny emphasizes the metaphysical aspects of *kelian* and encourages faith in the potential for future change.

As for those who witnessed *kuge* or *peiku* performances (whether they had ties to the bride or were merely casual onlookers), participation invoked memories of past misfortune as well as feelings of contentment with their current situations, as shown in Mei's response. *Kuge* even served as a surrogate outlet for discharging sentiments of misery for males, who could not fully lament their situations. In Zhou's case, it was a metaphysical vehicle that allowed him to travel to a certain time-space where conversation with a superaddressee was possible.

These diverse expressive niches and the entire interactive process—lamentation, consolation, admonition, self-reflection, and mutual inspiration—open up the vocal horizons of bridal lamentations. Beneath their performative horizon, the articulation of *kelian*, one finds a protagonist's proclamation of the virtues of fortitude and self-worth that resist misfortune, as well as an empathetic understanding built upon sensible listening and appreciation rather than suppression or dismissal of others' experiences. *Kelian* in this sense transcends its commonly accepted characteristics to encompass moral virtues. Incorporated into the wedding ritual, bridal lamentations gave shape to peasant women's conception of adulthood in the reformulation of the individual's social position and cultivation of social wisdom entailing emotional transformability, humanistic concern with others, and moral aspirations that would equip the bride for her lifetime. Through these transformations, the bride was readied to face a brand new world and all possible life situations.

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Notes

1. Sung by Nengci and recorded on December 13, 1993. The four audio recordings referred to throughout this paper also appear as supplementary material on the *Journal of American Folklore* companion website (<http://jaf.press.illinois.edu/496/>).

2. Note that bridal laments traditionally were not written in nüshu, although they are compiled into current nüshu collections (e.g., Xie 1991; Zhao 1992, 2005).

3. The “four traditions” to be eradicated include the old thoughts, old cultural heritages (institutions), old folk practices (e.g., wedding rituals), and old customs (e.g., modes of behavior).

4. Xiao has a very good command of oral nüge but is illiterate in nüshu; by contrast, Nengci can write both nüshu and the official Chinese *hanzi* characters.

5. Most nüshu and nüge are interchangeable, such as biographic laments and anecdotes, but some are strictly regulated. For example, nursery rhymes, riddles, bridal wailings, and funeral laments would be performed only orally. By contrast, the sisterhood correspondence, the wedding congratulation literature called *sanzhaoshu* 三朝書 (third-day book), and the worship prayer to local spinster deities must be presented in written form (see Liu 2004b).

6. In addition to composing nüshu for lament, Jiangyong women may also use nüshu to transcribe the male-authored, *hanzi*-written narrative ballads (called *changben* 唱本), such as the popular Liang-Zhu story, in order to enjoy them at their own convenience (see Liu 2010).

7. While kuge was performed by the bride for three consecutive days prior to the wedding, the nüshu wedding literature called *sanzhaoshu* was prepared by the bride’s female associates and given to the bride on the third day of the wedding.

8. Related by Shaozhang, recorded on November 23, 1993.

9. Related by Liang, recorded on June 30, 1993.

10. Related by Jinghua, recorded on November 6, 2001.

11. Related by Fengzhu, recorded on November 29, 1993.

12. Related by Xiao, recorded on September 10, 2005.

13. Related by Huan, recorded on October 23, 2002.

14. Related by Liang, recorded on November 19, 1993.

15. Related by Huan, recorded on October 23, 2002.

16. Related by Xiao, recorded on October 16, 2002.

17. Related by Baozhen, recorded on November 27, 1993.

18. Related by Xiao and Huan, recorded on October 23, 2002.

19. Related by Xiao and Huan, recorded on October 23, 2002.

20. Narrated by Xiao, recorded on October 16, 2002.

21. Sung by Xiao and Huan, recorded on October 23, 2002.

22. Sung by Xiao and Huan, recorded on October 23, 2002.

23. Narrated by Ming, recorded on October 7, 2005.

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