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SOCIAL EXCHANGE AND POWER RELATIONS IN *JIN PING MEI*: AN ANALYSIS OF A CLASSIC CHINESE NOVEL ²

Abstract: This paper aims to apply the theory of social exchange in the analysis of power relations in the Classic Chinese novel *Jin Ping Mei*, better known in English as *The Golden Lotus*, or in a later translation as *The Plum in the Golden Vase*. Treating the novel as a satirical commentary on the decaying society of the late Ming period, it sets to identify the main dyadic relations between Ximen Qing, a rich and spoiled merchant, and the state officials on different levels of official hierarchy. The novel is rich with minute descriptions of social exchange, i.e. the exchange of valuable goods and coins, favors, and useful information. The analysis shows that each of the three dyadic relationships is specifically determined by the power relationships imbedded in them.

Keywords: theory of social exchange, power relations, patron-client relations, Chinese literature, Ming dynasty.

Introduction

About the novel and the late Ming society

Jin Ping Mei is a famous Chinese Classic, a novel known in English translations first as *The Golden Lotus* (1938), and then as *The Plum in the Golden Vase* (1993-2011). ³ It was written in the latter part of the Ming

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³ This text is based on the analysis of the first English translation of the novel, entitled the *The Golden Lotus* by Clement Egerton, published in four volumes in 1938 (Egerton 1938/1972). While the names here were phonetically transcribed in Wade-Giles transcription, which was dominantly used at the time, here the Pin Yin system

dynasty (1368-1662) by an unknown author who signed the text with the name Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng, clearly a pseudonym meaning "The Scoffing Scholar of Lanling".⁴

The narrative describes the downfall of a rich household during the Northern Song Dynasty (1111-1127), headed by a young and spoiled merchant Ximen Qing.⁵ The hero's life is depicted through everyday interaction with his large household, comprising the wives, concubines, maids and servants, as well as with the wide network of relatives, business partners and state officials.

With the narrative situated in the 12th century, Jin Ping Mei, in fact, vividly captures the flavor of urban life on the turn of the 17th century China, when the Ming dynasty experiences both its height and deep erosion. It displays an abundance of detailed descriptions of indulgence in worldly pleasures and immorality. It is widely known for the numerous naturalistic descriptions of the hero's sexual encounters with an array of women surrounding him. Nevertheless, Jin Ping Mei also offers a stage upon which a complex network of social exchanges is acted out (Egerton 1972).

Relying upon the classic theory of social exchange,⁶ as the starting point for analysis, this paper will depict the nature of gift-exchange as recreated in

will be applied. Thus, the corresponding transcription "Ch'in P'ing Mei" in Pin Yin will be "Jin Ping Mei". The more recent translation by David Tod Roy is known as *The Plum in the Golden Vase*, of which the four volumes appeared in succession from 1993 to 2011.

⁴ Lanling is the old name of the present-day Shandong province, where the plot of the novel is situated.

⁵ Ximen Qing is pronounced as Shimən Ch'ing.

⁶ The analysis of social exchange in Jin Ping Mei lends itself to application of the theory of social exchange created in the seminal works that brought together the theoretical and empirical experiences from social psychology, sociology and anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s. Our starting point are the concepts defined by Alvin W. Gouldner (1960), Marshall Shalin (1965), Harumi Befu (1966, 1977), and Takie Sugiyama Lebra (1975). We also rely on theory that developed the concept of power within the social exchange theory, such as in the works of Peter M. Blau (1964), Eric Wolf (1966), and Richard M. Emerson (1962, 1972). The work of Harumi Befu, an American sociologist of Japanese descent, has been especially valuable since his empirical research was performed in Japan, where the contemporary social exchange models resembled the exchange that was characteristic of the traditional Chinese society. While in the post-WW2 Japan the traditional social norms had continuity, the anti-traditionalist ideology in the post-revolution China did not preserve recognizable models of historic social norms, and thus the models of social exchange. On the other hand, the more recent literature on the contemporary Chinese social relations of power and dependence, influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Arjun Appadurai (1986) has been consulted. The most important

this novel. It will simultaneously try to show how a literary work may be used as an important source in the historical investigation of a particular society and culture.

The approach taken will be a somewhat modified functionalist approach. Thus, the synchronic cut through the late Ming period, besides dealing with the social processes that order the system, will capture the points of crisis, which announced initiation into a new state of affairs – complete erosion and downfall. This more dynamic outlook should be able to point to the main tensions specific to the society in great flux.⁷

Ximen household is here viewed as a microcosm which reflects the larger political, economic, and social processes that were taking place during the late Ming dynasty. The novel describes Ximen Qing's climb upon the ladder of local (provincial) officialdom and the resulting economic gains, yet at the same time, it describes his moral and physical downfall.

Similarly, the late Ming epoch was characterized by great technological, scientific, and artistic advancement that came along with the generalization of the monetary economy based on silver, commercialization of crafts and agricultural production, expansion of sea-born trade, and urban expansion. And yet, the deficient state budget and inner political disagreements, the uprisings of the dissatisfied lower classes, the overspending and moral decadence of the elites – the old elite stemming from emperor's court, and the new elites developed from the rising banking, merchant and trader classes⁸ –

such studies were written by Alan Smart on *guanxi* in contemporary business relations (Smart 1993), Mayfair Mei-hui Yang on gifts, favors and banquets (Yang 1994), Yunxiang Yan on the flow of gifts in a Chinese village (Yan 1996), and Andrew Kipnis on producing "friendly relations" in a northern Chinese village (Kipnis 1997). At last, within the similar theoretical framework, but also adding the approaches of historical and literary analysis, a few studies considering the flow of objects/gifts in Jin Ping Mei appeared more recently (Dauncey 2003, Volpp 2005), but they took an approach divergent from the one taken here.

⁷ In her analysis of Jin Ping Mei, Sophie Volpp follows how the narrative relates the circulation of objects to the breakdown of normative social relations. The emphasis on circulation of gifts by Ximen Qing "comes at the cost of Confucian virtues associated with stable, hierarchical relationships (loyalty to one's sovereign, friends and brothers; filiality; and chastity)." Volpp further concentrates her attention on the deviant consumption of the python robe, a specific, highly valued regalia (Volpp 2005). Another recent study concentrates on the exchange of female gifts in Jin Ping Mei. In this process of social exchange, Sarah Dauncey identifies situations of bonding, benevolence, barter and bribery, and relates them to the norms and realities of the women's world during the late Ming dynasty (Dauncey 2003).

⁸ The money-changers and bankers, ship-owners, and great merchants formed a new

all contributed to the weakening of the state so that it could not resist the outside threat of the Mongols, who finally destroyed the empire and founded their own, the Qing dynasty (Gernet 1982, 406-460, Peterson 1979, 67-80).

Theory of social exchange and the main questions asked

According to the classic theory of social exchange, a norm of reciprocity, in its universal form, makes two interrelated, minimal demands: first, people should help those who have helped them, and second, people should not injure those who have helped them (Gouldner 1960, 171). At the same time, social reciprocity may be viewed as functioning at different social levels, namely individual, family or household, and collective (Befu 1966, 162-64).

Jin Ping Mei lends itself to the analysis on all three levels. Ximen Qing, the hero of the novel, may be treated as the point of reference in all of the created social processes. He feels strongly attached to the large household, and his decision-making is inevitably attentive to the family members. However, besides being the head of one of the richest merchant families in Shandong Province, Ximen is also "freed" to enter into individual coalitions.

On one hand, he is the eldest of the brotherhood which is formed through long-existing friendship as well as a commonality of economic interest. Such horizontal social interaction of "business buddies" may be characterized as that of instrumental friendship (Wolf 1966, 12-14). On the other hand, while climbing the ladder of success, Ximen engages in hierarchical relationships with the representatives of the central state officialdom. Social exchanges in the latter connection, known as patron-client relationships, will be the focus of this paper. Specific dyadic power-relationships described in the novel, should be able to reflect social tensions existing among wider social strata.

Power will be treated here as a property of social relations, and not an attribute of an actor. The power as the property stems out of an asymmetrical distribution of resources in the society, namely, economic goods, political influence, knowledge, and women. The differential access to these resources also leads to differences in the capacity for social maneuver (Wolf 1966, 5-7).

Searching through the novel in order to uncover the nature of reciprocity between Ximen and the representatives of state officialdom, basic questions were asked, namely: "who", "when", "what", "how much", and "why".

"When" addresses the types of occasions involved. The first category includes those occasions which are fixed by the official calendar, such as the

class of "businessmen". "The richest owned their wealth to their involvement in a state economy and played the part of suppliers to the armies. They dealt in products consumed on a large scale – rice, salt, cereals and cloth." (Gernet, 1972/1982, 429)

New Year. The second consists of those occurring at different points in the life cycle, ritually celebrated as "rites de passage", such as birthdays, betrothals, weddings, and funerals. The third category includes all others, which occur at irregular intervals and on special occasions, such as the travel, building of a new house, or visits and parties (Befu 1966, 165).

"What" of the "who, when, what and how much, and why", addresses the resource types: the principal distinction in this case being between gifts or presents, or on the other hand, favors, services, professional advice or information. However, differential types of resources participate in the social exchange in differing ways. On one hand, every "cultural context"⁹ posits the universal norm of reciprocity as well as the rules of exchange, involving a prescription of a range of acceptable kinds and quantities of resources. On the other hand, the strategy of exchange has to do with the operation of an individual's motivations by which cultural rules are exploited (Befu 1977, 260-61).

This is where the "how much" enters as a consideration. Gift-giving is a socially sanctioned behavior; however, the amount given plays a determining role in characterizing the symmetry in reciprocity. The essential question here is: When in fact is it proper to say that one overpays, or conversely underpays, or that the exchange is balanced. Or, to ask in the way Sahlins would do: when can we call the reciprocity "generalized", "balanced", or "negative"?¹⁰

When the social exchange involves both the material resources and immaterial (services, favors, professional advice and information), it is especially difficult to measure the balance of one thing in relation to another. Money and commercial gifts, which in the market of economic exchange originally did have a monetary value now transplanted into the market of social exchange to serve as lubricants of social interaction, adopt a new value, while still partly preserving commercial value. On the other hand, immaterial

⁹ i.e. the cultural and social environment within which a model of social exchange is constructed.

¹⁰ According to Marshal Sahlins, in generalized reciprocity "the material side of the transaction is repressed by the social (...), the counter is not stipulated by time, quantity, or quality, the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite (...), receiving goods lays on a diffuse obligation to reciprocate when necessary to the donor and/or possibly for the recipient. The requital thus may be very soon, but then again it may be never." Balanced reciprocity is characterized by precise balance: "(...) the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received and is without delay (...) Balanced reciprocity may be more loosely applied to transactions which stipulate returns of commensurate worth or utility within a finite and narrow period." Negative reciprocity "is the attempt to get something for nothing with impunity, the several forms of appropriation, transactions opened and conducted toward net utilitarian advantage." (Sahlins 1965, 147-48)

resources of exchange are also judged through the commercial value of objects given in return. As Befu concludes, "the people are aware of the value of social objects and acts in the market of social exchange." (Befu 1966, 168)

Lastly, the "why", or the question of the motive for gift-giving should be considered. On one hand, action is applied as the acknowledgement of, and thus, maintenance of the already established social relation, or on the other hand, for initiation of a new relationship.

When the purpose is expressive, the existing status relationship between the giver and the receiver determines the conditions of gift-exchange (the kind and value of the gift). In the case where the purpose is instrumental, reversely, the conditions of exchange determine the status relationship – that is, one manipulates the status relations by manipulating gift-giving (Befu 1966, 173-74).

Social exchange between Ximen Qing and the state officials

The novel Jin Ping Mei is here interpreted as a satirical commentary on the disintegrating Ming Empire, thus, the situations which deal with social exchange, especially, with gift-giving are considered somewhat exaggerated.¹¹ However, even if the "businesslike realism" does exaggerate somewhat the scale, it intrinsically contains the "rules of exchange" (socially prescribed range of acceptable kinds and quantities of resources) and the "strategies of exchange" (individual desires and ways to maximize the opportunity for ones benefit/profit), characteristic of the particular cultural context. After all, the author is the participant of the life in the late Ming epoch, who built in his emic perspective¹² into the literary fiction, setting the plot safely five centuries before his time. This premise serves as the basis for the whole further analysis presented in the paper.

The narrative of Jin Ping Mei recreates a tightly knit structure of hierarchical relationships and the social exchanges within them.¹³

Our hero starts the climb upon the ladder of official success by attaining a lowly local militia post through paying off the local official, Hejiou, with 10 taels (liang) of silver. Then, he had to prevent the extermination of his own branch of the family, by disconnecting their affinal kinship ties from Marshall

¹¹ A concrete example of such comment is to be found in C. T. Hsia 1980, 174-76.

¹² The etic perspective on the exchange of gifts in Ming China can be found in: Ricci 1953, 62. For the evolution and use of the "emic and etic distinction", see Pike 1967, Goodenough 1970, and Harris 1976.

¹³ See: Befu 1966, 173-74.

Yang, who was to be persecuted by Grand Tutor Cai.¹⁴ This existentially important act is facilitated through Comptroller Zhai,¹⁵ who as a secretary to the Grand Tutor, is in possession of great informal influence. It seems that 500 dan of rice was sufficient for this favor (book I: 248)¹⁶

Ties with Comptroller Zhai continue, and are the channel to express acknowledgement of the Grand Tutor's position. The first big occasion that allows direct expression of gratitude to the Tutor appears for his birthday, when Ximen Qing sends a valuable birthday gift. This act of attention, in turn, becomes instrumental to Ximen, who is appropriated office of the Junior Magistrate for the Shandong Province. Soon, Ximen is concerned about fulfilling the favor for Comptroller Zhai in finding him a wife and adding up to the cost of wedding gifts in anything that exceeds 10 taels of silver, sent to him by Zhai.

Another polite letter arrives from the Comptroller, introducing Cai Yiqūan, the holder of Zhungyuan, the highest state examination degree,¹⁷ who is on his way to his home province, and is passing through Shandong. The request for hospitality, worded "would you please keep him for a meal and I will never dare to forget that," is appropriately satisfied. The recommended guest as well as his traveling companion, An Jingshi, the holder of the Jinshi degree, are

¹⁴ The title of the "Grand Tutor" was definitely one of highest ranking titles in the Ming state administrative structure. However, due to the fact that the administrative system during the Ming dynasty kept changing, we cannot be certain about the precise function of the "Grand Tutor" as treated by the novel. According to some scholars, this title is analogous to that of the Prime Minister (Volpp 2005, 146), while the other think it resembled more the position of a "minister with no portfolio" (Hucker 1966, 40)

¹⁵ The "Comptroller" had a function of a financial control officer, and was employed in the Ministry of Revenue, in charge of gathering census data, collecting taxes, and handling state revenues.

¹⁶ The references are made according to the version used in this analysis, which is was published by Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1972.

¹⁷ After the reign of Emperor Hongwu (1373-84), who staffed his bureaus by recommendations only – the scholar-officials who populated the many ranks of bureaucracy were otherwise recruited through a rigorous examination system that was first established by the Sui Dynasty (581–618). The focus of the examination was classical Confucian texts, while in the Ming era (since 1487) completion of the "eight-legged essay" was required as well. The exams increased in difficulty as the student progressed from the local to the central government level, and appropriate titles were awarded to successful applicants. Officials were classified in nine hierarchic grades, each grade divided into two degrees, with ranging salaries (nominally paid in rice) according to their rank. While provincial graduates who were appointed to office were immediately assigned to low-ranking posts, those who passed the palace examination were awarded a *jinshi* ("presented scholar") degree and assured a high-level position (Hucker 1958, 11-14).

warmly received and presented with the following gifts: Cai Yiqūan's box was filled with 1 roll of gold silk, 2 rolls of silk for making collars, 500 bottles of perfume, and 100 taels of white gold. His companion's box contained valuables as well, however, of proportionately smaller value, namely: 1 roll of colored silk, 1 roll of silk for collars, 300 bottles of perfume, and 30 taels of white gold. (book II: 137)

The young guests of great potential in political influence thank for the hospitality and depart in the following manner: "Then, if a slight measure of advancement should come to us, we shall do something to return your kindness." (book II: 137)

One day a servant of the Mian family killed his master, then presented Junior Magistrate Ximen Qing and Magistrate Xia Tixing with 1000 taels of silver to free himself from the legal charges. This proves to be too large a sum to be hidden away. Censor Zeng accuses the two officials of bribery, but Comptroller Zhai pulls the strings of fate and directs the events on the political stage at the court. Grand Tutor's brother-in-law, Censor and Commissioner of the Shenxi Province accuses Censor Zeng and Ximen's case is forgotten. (book II: ch. 48)

The situation at the court still unresolved, yet Junior Magistrate Ximen and Magistrate Xia forward the appropriate presents to the Comptroller. Ximen's reward consists of 300 taels of silver and the belt, inlaid with jade, gold and silver ornaments, while Xia sends 200 taels of silver and 2 silver teapots.

Upon returning from the capital with news that the matter is settled, Ximen's servants bring a letter from the Comptroller with valuable information about the new regulations about the salt business that were not yet officially announced.

"Recently, the Imperial Tutor sent a Memorial to the Emperor with seven suggestions which his Majesty will approve. The Imperial Tutor's relative Han, the Vice-President of the Board of Domestic Affairs, proposes to open the salt monopoly in Shenxi, and, in every district, to set up official granaries for the sale of rice. Wealthy people will pay their contribution of rice to these granaries and get their official receipt from them. The government will issue salt certificates. The old grain certificates will rate at seventy per cent, and the new ones at thirty. Some time ago, we and your relative Qiao [the family to become Ximen's relatives through affinity: his baby-son was betrothed to their daughter] put in to the excise office of Kao Yang thirty thousand grain certificates and thirty thousand salt certificates. The Board of Domestic Affairs has now appointed Cai, the President of the Academy [referring to Cai Yiqūan, once the Zhungyuan holder], to be Salt Commissioner for the Two Huais. He is to leave the Capital shortly. He will certainly make an excellent inspector."¹⁸

¹⁸ The fragmentary report about the salt business is analogous to the regulations incorporated into the so called Zhe Si Fa system, which regulated production,

Ximen Qing soon has an opportunity to invite Cai Yiqian, now Censor and Salt Commissioner, and through him, Censor Sung.¹⁹ During the dinner party, the two guests are presented with the list of presents, which reveals that the content of the food-boxes for each guest is identical, containing the following exquisite objects: 2 jars filled with wine, 2 sheep, 2 pairs of golden flowers, 2 rolls of red silk, 1 set of gold dishes, 2 silver wine-pots, 10 silver wine-cups, 2 small silver jars, and 1 pair of ivory chopsticks. (book II: 297)

Towards the end of the joyous party, Salt Commissioner Cai gets the chance to do something favorable for his host. He promises that Ximen Qing's friends and Qian (to be in-law) will be entitled to their 30,000 yin of salt one month earlier.

The next episode brings our hero into the Eastern Capital, where he expresses his reverence to the Grand Tutor and congratulates him for his birthday.

"A small box was opened and the inventory taken from it. It said: One crimson dragon robe; one green dragon robe; twenty rolls of Han-figured satin; twenty rolls of Sichuan silk; twenty rolls of foreign cloth; other rolls, forty, both plain and figured; a girdle of a lion's head in jade' another girdle mounted in gold of tagaraka wood; of jade goblets and horn goblets, each ten pairs; four pairs of golden wine cups with flowers for decoration; ten fine pearls and two hundred taels of gold. These were the present." (book III: 21)

At the afternoon party, where Ximen Qing was personally invited by the Grand Tutor, he becomes the Adopted Son (ganzi) of the Tutor, whereby he in return calls him Father (ganye), thus securing the guardianship of the highest-ranking official in the Empire.

transportation and sale from 1492 to 1644. This system substituted the early Ming Ben Se Fa, or the system where the merchants could get salt only if exchanging it for grain after it was transported to the border provinces. There, salt merchants would often establish farm colonies to avoid long and expensive transportation. The new system allowed the exchange of salt for silver. That is, the frontier grain could be commuted into silver, and upon payment of cash, the frontier merchants were give the salt tickets at new rate which was favorable to the government. Thus, government gets more income, and the merchants from the borders move into the city. Otherwise, the Commissioner for Salt was always an official directly connected to the central government, with the task to channel the salt tax directly into Emperor's coffers (Ho 1954, 135-36).

¹⁹ During most of the Ming dynasty, the central government comprised Three Departments and Six Ministries (Personnel, Revenue, Rites, War, Justice, and Public Works). The Departments were: the Secretariat, the Censorate, and the Chief Military Commission. The censors were traveling inspectors discharged by the Censorate to monitor the work of the provincial administrators (Hucker 1966, 26, 38)

The next big event comes for the Winter Festival, when the military officials were summoned to the Eastern Capital to express gratitude to the Emperor. Ximen's and Xia's host is again Comptroller Zhai. Presents brought for the Grand Tutor, consisting of 2 rolls of golden satin and 2 rolls of figured satin on Xia's part, and 1 roll of scarlet silk with embroidered dragons, 1 roll of black silk, also embroidered, and 2 rolls of official silk on Ximen's part.

Presents for the grand Tutor are forwarded. On the one hand, the Comptroller accepts only part of the presents brought for him. He accepts a roll of dark, green velvet presented by Ximen, and refuses to accept the silver from either (10 liang from Xia, and 30 from Ximen). "It would not be right," he said, "if I took money from you, it would be as though we were not good friends." (book III: 276)

Upon returning from the Capital, recognizing the traditional occasion for sending gifts for the New Year, Ximen sends a pig, two jars of wine, a roll of red silk, a roll of black silk, and 100 fruit-pies to Censor Sung. (book IV: 47) Censor in turn reciprocates gifts right away, by sending 100 copies of the New Calendar, 40,000 sheets of paper, and a pig.

Opportunities for Ximen to do favors and services for Censor Sung, the highest Provincial official, are numerous. He arranges, and to a great extent finances the semi-official parties for the high officials. For this purpose Censor sends him some money, never sufficiently paying for the expenses, whereby, Ximen provides food, drinks, and entertainment of the singing, dancing, and drama troupes. One occasion called for the entertainment of the new Governor. The Censor took the role of the host, offering wine, flowers, and silk to his guest, and ordering food to be taken to his office. After two acts, Governor Hou ordered 5 taels of silver to be distributed among the cooks, waiters, musicians and servants. (book IV: 6-8) Soon, a favor came from Censor Sung. He saw to it that Uncle Wu, the brother of Ximen's first wife got a new appointment.

Friendly connections with other high officials also bring benefits. Thus, Ximen's clerks were happy to announce that, thanks to the letter of certain "Lordship Qien," the merchandise tax-collectors charged them a meager sum for all the goods they were carrying. (book III: 73)

Character of reciprocity and power structures in three hierarchical relationships

As we have seen so far, the structure of Jin Ping Mei reveals a complexly intertwined network of social exchange occurring between the merchant and speculator, living in the prefectural capital of Shandong province and those occupying positions of the highest rank of the central government.

Ximen Qing cultivates three types of relationships, each with a different type of reciprocity. First there is the relationship with Comptroller Zhai, the secretary of the Grand Tutor, then with the Grand Tutor himself, and lastly, with the Censors Cai and Sung.

Before analyzing the nature of social exchange, or more specifically, the character of reciprocity in the three dyadic relationships, two qualities intrinsic to social exchange should be recognized. Those two qualities form a double strain in the social process – one towards symmetry, the other towards asymmetry.

The first one is convertibility or fluidity of resources, with a tendency to balance off between tangible and intangible resources. Thus, a gift may be converted into a favor, or a service, or even other social values, such as affection, esteem, or loyalty. On the other hand, complementarity leads towards asymmetry through the introduction of the dependency between the parties in control over the resources which each of them values. Thus, complementarity is expressed in mutual dependence between A and B, where A needs the possession which B is willing to give away and vice versa. Disposability (or scarcity) and desirability, as appraised by both parties determine the values of the objects according to the law of supply and demand (Lebra 1975, 554-56).

Ximen Qing's relationship with Comptroller Zhai from the very start contained instrumental motives. The secretary of the Grand Tutor possesses enormous informal influence at the court. Upon receiving the riches, he crosses out the name of Ximen's family from the list of Marshall Yang's affine kin, thus saving their lives. Soon afterwards, he asks a favor in return: Ximen is to find him a wife and pay for most of the wedding gifts. Then, he is to offer hospitality to the holder of Zhungyuan degree as a favor, yet, because of young man's great political potential it turns out to be instrumental to Ximen. Again, Comptroller saves him from Censor's accusation of bribery, and in turn sends the Censor to the executioner's axe. He also sends him valuable information which could be exploited locally in salt business. Every occasion when an existentially important service is performed by the Comptroller, Ximen counters it with valuable gifts: first with 500 dan of rice, then valuable commercial gifts (silk, ornaments), and silver and gold.

The only time Ximen comes with a present without asking for a service, is during his visit to the capital for the New Year's festival. Yet, the secretary then accepts only the velvet, refusing the silver and accentuating the value of their friendship. Yet, by this time, Ximen's political influence has relatively increased. After all, is he not going to pay reverence to the Emperor.

To come back to the questions which were posed at the beginning of this text, the answers to "when, what, and how much" reveal the dynamics of the dyadic relationship. It started with purely instrumental motives, when social

exchange was triggered by Ximen's presents. However, one may wonder whether the gifts were indeed the counterpart of the services performed by the Secretary. On the other side of the exchange Comptroller Zhai creates the channels for Ximen's communication with the Grand Tutor, as well as with the Censors. Was this service at all repayable? It seems that saving lives and establishing hierarchical connections was in demand enough for the market (of social exchange) for such services to exist. Certain tangible economic resources could set off the indebtedness created by the service. This process is a pure exchange of resources – goods for informal political influence and protection. It is a balanced exchange where resources of each party contain certain economic value.

Once established out of instrumental needs, the relationship continued in the same manner, until the time when the Comptroller judged that Ximen's political influence had increased enough to be acknowledged, which in turn, lowered the cost of secretary's services for one of the "favorite customers."

Secretary's social status on the official scale was not high in itself. His power stemmed from informal political influence, and was always a function of the formal political influence of the others. After all, had not he asked Ximen to find him a wife in his small prefectural city. Besides being an instrumental act, then, it also may be a latent expression of the closure of a social circle, within which "the set social structure inhabits social and geographical mobility." (Wolf, 6)

Ximen Qing's attachment to the Grand Tutor is of a different nature. Trips to the Eastern Capital are special occasions, undertaken to congratulate His Highness on his birthday. They are to express loyalty and esteem towards the Grand Tutor. The gifts for the occasion are most exquisite objects. The beauty and uniqueness of craftsmanship displayed in the robes, girdles made of jade and gold, goblets, and wine cups is stunning and invites only admiration. The presented rolls of cloth, namely: Han-figured satin, Sichuan silk, foreign cloth, all are very rare. Pearls and gold are the most precious natural riches. Thus, the original economic value of the material is completely lost by the virtue of the immeasurable value of the objects presented as well as the status of the recipient.

On the other hand, we should look at what is the result of Ximen's reverence to the highest official. After the first visit to the Capital, he is promoted to the position of the second ranking official in the provincial militia. During the second visit, Ximen becomes his ritually adopted son, thus, acquiring Grand Tutor's guardianship. The consequences of the acquisition of the new status are triggered down all the way to Shandong, where his status and thus political and economic influence highly increases. Back home, even the eunuchs come to congratulate him, while his business flourishes, and he celebrates the opening of another thread shop. (book II: 33-36)

It is now time to access the kind of reciprocity that results from the described hierarchical relationship. The asymmetry in this relationship, incurred by one person to another through political, economic and social dependency may be called "indebtedness". The debtor, Ximen Qing can never repay the debt completely by giving gifts, since the material gifts are not quite comparable to the favors of the giver. The Grand Tutor's favors are immeasurably more valuable than the gifts Ximen offered. Thus, this kind of social exchange never has the effect of bringing about the balanced, egalitarian relationship. "It rather serves to symbolize the existing relationship. It is an expression of the gratitude of the debtor (...), and it in fact has an effect of reinforcing the existing hierarchical relationship" (Befu 1966, 169).²⁰ Since Ximen can never sufficiently repay the Grand Tutor, the social exchange between them continuously lends itself to a negative balance.

The most abundant descriptions of hierarchical relations in Jin Ping Mei are those devoted to the interaction between Ximen Qing and the two Censors. Thanks to the acquaintance with Comptroller Zhai, our hero has the opportunity to offer hospitality to Cai Yiqūan when he has just passed the examination with the Zhungyuan degree, and in turn, oblige him for the "return of kindness". Cai Yiqūan and his companion, the holder of Jingshi degree, were given an appropriate sum of money and some silk for new robes and collars – the gifts befitting their future. However, the gifts for the Zhungyuan holder were proportionately more abundant, and the silk he got was of relatively higher value. At the next meeting, the old acquaintance Cai, now the Censor and Salt Commissioner introduces another Censor at Ximen's party. Neatly packed in the food-boxes, the identical gifts were presented to the two honored guests. The table-sets presented contained the most delicious foods as well as valuable, golden and ivory containers.

After settling down in Shandong for a while, Censor Sung, who at the first presentation wondered if it would be appropriate for him to visit a provincial militia officer, established quite intensive social exchange with him. Ximen also took up offering other favors and services, such as arranging, and to a large extent, financing semi-official parties at his home. At the same time, Censor Sung did not avoid services and favors on account of Ximen Qing. When himself, and Censor Cai were asked to allow the conversion of salt-certificates into salt one month in advance, in order to avoid the competitors, they favorably complied. Also, Censor Sung kindly worked out a promotion for Ximen's affine kin, the brother of his principal wife.

²⁰ A very similar kind of power relationship in Japan is called the "on" relationship. Ruth Benedict translated the Japanese expression of "on-debtor" as the one who can only hope to repay one-ten thousandth of his debt (Benedict 1946).

The interaction between Ximen and the highest officials set up in the province is successfully perpetuated on very friendly terms. However, we still need answers to the two crucial questions, namely: How can the character of this complex interchange of gifts, favors, and services be determined? Is any side of the dyad in the position of being over or underpaid?

The narrative of Jin Ping Mei points to overpayment on the part of both parties. Moreover, what Befu calls, "the overwhelming benefaction" may be the proper term for the offering of excessive benefits. Thus, the abundant gifts and favors offered by Ximen can be considered to have gone beyond what society considers a legitimate gift and to have entered the sphere of bribery. On the other hand, the Censors can be called corrupt and unworthy of government office.

However, when the same situation is viewed as the social process of transaction of resources (the convertibility of resources), and functioning according to the law of supply and demand (complementarity), different conclusions may be reached. Thus, resources in possession of each party differ, and are in turn in constant demand by the opposite party. Both, Ximen Qing, merchant and speculator, and one of the wealthiest men in the province, and the high officials do practice "overwhelming benefaction" towards each other.

"By giving more than expected, the giver attempts to create credit and debt so that the receiver cannot repay simply through return of gifts of normal, expected economic value. The ulterior motive of such gift-giving is clear: it is either (1) to create a superior-inferior relationship were it has been absent by permanently indebting the receiver, or (2) to force the receiver to pay back the inordinately valuable gift through some other acts, such as doing some favor for the giver which the receiver is not likely to do otherwise." (Befu 1966, 171)

Both of the mentioned motives are applicable to each party, in possession of different resources. This is balancing the system-created as well as the self-perceived inequalities. Ximen has money and relative political anonymity, while the officials have the imperial emblems of officialdom but no money.²¹

One of the episodes in Jin Ping Mei illustrates the character of this reciprocity. For the New Year Festival, gifts are traditionally sent to relatives

²¹ Evidence from historical sources points out that the salaries of the officialdom in the Ming dynasty were the lowest in the whole dynastic history. The official rule was as follows: "Each salary of 1 dan of rice equals to 20 guan (strings of copper coins), and every 200 guan equal to 1 roll of cloth, and every roll equals to 3 qien of silver." Therefore, 10 dan of rice equaled 3 qien of silver. Normally, a lower-ranking provincial official (wenchen) got 3 dan of rice, and one third of a roll of cloth, which equaled one qien of silver. (Yao 1940, 35).

and friends. On this occasion, Ximen sends to Censor Sung a pig, jars of wine, a roll of red and another of black silk, and 100 fruit-pies. The culturally prescribed rules of exchange are fulfilled, by giving food, although in large amounts, and accompanied with commercial presents. The Censor immediately reciprocates with 100 copies of the New Calendar, 40,000 sheets of paper, and a pig. Thus, the official sends objects emblematic of his official status.

The absence of possibility for each of the parties to change the status quo concerning the resources they desire, in fact facilitates continuity to their social interaction. They are satisfied with (relatively) little. Ximen enjoys the services and favors of the officials, which indirectly increases his economic wealth. In his fight against anonymity he also appreciates their company, even when he has to pay for it. At the same time, the officials secure directly economic profit through Ximen Qing. However, in order to obtain this benefit, they have to learn to associate with those whose social status otherwise would not deserve their attention.

Conclusion

The analysis has shown the specifics of each of the three dyadic social exchanges. However, if the "why" was asked on another level – which, besides the manifest functions of social exchange would incorporate the latent functions as well – the answer would contain the "because" for all three relationships.

Functions of social exchange are, on one hand, savings and investment, and on the other, social recognition and integration. It is obvious that all the parties concerned benefited economically, either indirectly or directly. On the other hand, in the process of social integration, there is a tension between validating the established hierarchical differences, and on the other, seeking a different position by climbing upward. Through the presentation of his exquisite gifts, merchant Ximen Qing was expressing submission towards the Grand Tutor, thus, cementing the established hierarchical difference.

By presenting gifts and serving the Censors, the merchant Ximen Qing was seeking to attain status. More or less equalized balance in the exchange of different resources, however, "does not neutralize power, for each party may continue to exert profound control over the other." This unbalanced relationship is unstable for it encourages the use of power which in turn sets in motion two kinds of processes – that of balancing operations, and that of cost reduction (Emerson 1962, 34). Balancing operations "involves structural changes in power-dependence relations which tend to reduce power advantage." In Jin Ping Mei, the weaker party's power to control the formerly

more powerful party (officials) is attained through the increasing merchant's "motivational investment in the relation," through which he acquires status recognition.²²

At the same time, cost reduction amounts to the reduction of resistance shown by one party in meeting the demands of the other. The deterioration of the self-image of the official existing next to the growing power of the merchant causes an alternation of his moral attitudes. Without the support of the Confucian ideology, adopted through painful years of formal education, the official now gives in to the newly developing ideology of the bourgeoisie.²³

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²² The presented Emerson's theoretical solution, however, does not allow for real qualitative change in the structure of power relationships between two socially distinct groups.

²³ This text is a reworked and updated version of that study written during my attendance of the MA program in Regional Studies – East Asia at Harvard University (1984-86). The text is devoted to Prof. Djurdjica Petrović of Belgrade University who stimulated my interest in the anthropological study of material culture, and to Prof. Robin Yates and Prof. Peter Bol of Harvard University, from whom I learned about the complexities of Chinese history.

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**ДРУШТВЕНА РАЗМЕНА И ОДНОСИ МОЋИ У РОМАНУ
ШЉИВИН ЦВЕТ У ВАЗИ ОД ЗЛАТА: АНАЛИЗА КЛАСИЧНОГ
КИНЕСКОГ РОМАНА**

У овом раду теорија друштвене размене примењује се на анализу односа моћи у класичном кинеском роману *Бин Пинг Меи*, познатом у преводу на енглески језик као *Златни лотус* (1938) или као *Шљивин цвет у вази од жада* (1993–2011).²⁴ Третирајући роман као сатирични коментар на друштво у пропадању касне Минг епохе, намера је да се идентификују главни дијадни односи између Симен Ћинга, богатог и размаженог трговца, и државних службеника на различитим нивоима службене хијерархије. Роман је богат детаљним описима друштвене размене, када актери узајамно размењују драгоцене предмете и новац, услуге и пословне информације. Анализа показује да је сваки од три дијадна односа међу главним носиоцима друштвене размене одређен специфичним односима моћи који су у њих уткани.

Кључне речи: теорија друштвене размене, односи моћи, однос патрона и клијента, кинеска књижевност, династија Минг.

²⁴ Роман је у српском преводу издат 1962. године под насловом *Шљивин цвет у вази од жада*, прев. Миленко Поповић. Београд: Просвета.