

Memory and Historical Judgment in Early Qing Yangzhou

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In the eye-witness account about the Ming-Qing conflict best known to modern readers, “An Account of Ten Days in Yangzhou,” Wang Xiuchu condemns women who shamelessly consorted with the Manchu invaders and their Han collaborators and tried to profit from their looting: “Alas, this is why China is in chaos!” It is an uncharacteristically explicit judgment in a prose otherwise more intent on description. As is well known, this account first came to light only in early to mid nineteenth century. However, its focus on women as the crucible of historical judgment finds echoes in early Qing writings. In this paper I will use examples from early Qing prose, poetry, and fiction to examine how Yangzhou women are tied to the historical associations of its various landmarks and how their representations determine memory and judgments of the Ming-Qing transition, especially the 1645 massacre.