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Taking the Warp for the Weft: Gendered Anger in the *Lienüzhuan*

Alba Curry
Department of Philosophy, University of Leeds, Leeds, United Kingdom
Corresponding Author
albacurry@gmail.com

Lisa Raphals
Department of Comparative Literature and Languages, University of California, Riverside, Riverside, California, USA
lisa.raphals@ucr.edu

Abstract

The emotion of anger has received overall negative treatment in recent moral philosophy. This article explores the gendered representations of anger in the *Lienüzhuan*《列女傳》of Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE). It begins with a brief account of the semantic field of anger and its representation in the *Lienüzhuan*, focusing on three important patterns. Perhaps most important is the didactic role of anger; and how female teachers use it (or avoid it) in instructing male sons, husbands and rulers. Second is the treatment of women's distinct strategies for addressing the effects of being the object of the anger of others. The third is the representation of female anger in accounts of female vice. The representations of anger in the LNZ provides an important alternative to views of anger as motivated by the desire for payback and status. The LNZ, like other pre-Qin texts, understands anger very differently, and focuses on other-regarding anger, based on perceptions of wrongdoing and injustice.

Keywords

anger – *Lienüzhuan*《列女傳》– women – the mother of Mencius – didactic anger – ethics

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《詩》云:「載色載笑,
匪怒匪教。」此之謂也。

The *Odes* says, "With weighted looks and weighted smiles,
She teaches without anger." This describes her.[1]

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The emotion of anger has received relatively negative treatment in recent moral philosophy. For example, Martha Nussbaum considers anger to be always normatively problematic because: "anger includes, conceptually, not only the idea of a serious wrong done to someone or something of significance, but also the idea that it would be a good thing if the wrongdoer suffered some bad

1 Zhen Xiaoxia 鄭曉霞 and Lin Jianyu 林佳郁, eds. *Lienüzhuan Huibian*《列女傳匯編》, 10 volumes (Beijing: Beijing Tushuguan, 2007), volume 4, 446, quoting the *Shijing* ode "Pan Shui" 泮水 (Ode 299). The phrase 匪怒伊教 (she teaches without anger) is transcribed in the the *Lienüzhuan* (hereafter, LNZ) as 匪教匪教. Translation our own.

consequences somehow."[2] Her view is grounded in an Aristotelian definition of anger as grounded in the desire for revenge:

> Anger (ὀργή) may be defined as an impulse (ὄρεξις), accompanied by a pain (λύπης), to a conspicuous revenge (τιμωρίας) for a conspicuous slight (ὀλιγωρίαν) directed without justification (μὴ προσήκοντος) towards what concerns oneself or towards what concerns one's friends.[3]

Others define anger without reference to revenge. For example, Emily McRae draws on Indo-Tibetan perspectives to argue for "the metabolization of anger for the sake of the liberation from suffering of self and others," and highlights the importance of such "liberation" for members of oppressed groups who are particularly vulnerable to the psychological and moral burdens imposed by many definitions of anger.[4] Her focus is on anger's potential to cause harm, both to its subject and to its object. We are warned against acting on anger, even cultivated or "virtuous" anger, and are urged to effect a radical transformation of anger into something else. Other definitions point to the political power of anger, but most remain negative.[5]

If we follow Nussbaum's claim that payback and personal status are necessary components of anger, we are led to the curious conclusion that the people described in ancient Chinese texts did not feel anger. The reason for this counter-intuitive conclusion is that pre-Qin texts do not understand anger as focused on revenge or revolving around personal slights and matters of status. These are cases of what has been called *self-regarding anger*, which often coincides with verbal or physical violence. Overall, when early Chinese texts discuss anger, they are interested in *other-regarding anger*, which signals wrongdoing to the agent of the anger, but wrongdoing not concerned with personal status or slight. It is not linked with pride or honor, but with a more generalizable injustice and it always aims at change, not punishment or revenge.[6]

This paper explores the gendered representations of anger in the *Lienüzhuan* 《列女傳》 (henceforward LNZ) or *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, attributed to Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE).[7] We begin with a brief account of the semantic field of anger and its representation in the LNZ, and then focus on three important patterns. One is the didactic role of anger; and how female teachers use it – or refrain from using it – to good effect. A second is women's distinct strategies against the anger of others. The third is the representation of female anger in accounts of female vice.

1 Introduction

The LNZ is one of the few early Chinese sources dedicated to stories about women. It presents historiographical problems, since its life stories

2 Martha Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5.

3 Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1378a31–33, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, cited from the Loeb Classical Library editions.

4 Emily McRae, "Anger and the Oppressed: Indo-Tibetan Perspectives" in *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, eds. Myisha Cherry and Owen Flanagan (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 106.

5 Céline Leboeuf defends anger on a phenomenological basis, arguing that anger can help a black person undo her bodily alienation. See "Anger as a Political Emotion: A Phenomenological Perspective," in *Moral Psychology*, Cherry and Flanagan, 15–29. More recently, Myisha Cherry defends what she calls "Lordean anger," which aims at racial injustice. See *The Case For Rage: Why Anger is Essential to Anti-Racist Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 23.

6 A full discussion of this point is beyond the scope of the present discussion. For details see Alba Curry, *An Apologia for Anger with Regards to Early China and Ancient Greece* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Riverside, 2022).

7 Unless otherwise noted, citations from the LNZ are from *Lienüzhuan Huibian*, volume 4. (For full citation, see n. 1.) LNZ translations are based on Anne Behnke Kinney, *Exemplary Women of Early China: The Lienüzhuan of Liu Xiang*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), often modified.

present idealized depictions of women. In the context of the present discussion, it is these very idealizations that make it a rich source for the study of the normative status of anger.[8] The characters showcased as exemplary will be represented as dealing with anger in an exemplary way, if there is room for anger there at all, and the people that are presented as vicious will deal with anger viciously.[9]

The stories in the LNZ have a consistent structure of at least three components: (1) a brief statement of the subject's virtues, accomplishments, and abilities; (2) one or more "life stories" that illustrate these virtues in practice in her life, including an assessment of the life story and (usually) an illustrative quotation from the *Classic of Odes* (*Shijing* 《詩經》); and (3) a "eulogy" (*song* 頌), which summarizes the subject's virtuous deeds and lists her virtues. It is striking that four eulogies refer to anger specifically.

The LNZ consists of 125 exemplary life stories of women from legendary times to the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). The work itself is thematically divided into seven chapters based on types of women in their relation to their particular virtue (or vice): (1) Maternal Rectitude (*Mu Yi* 〈母義〉); (2) Sage Intelligence (*Xian Ming* 〈賢明〉); (3) Benevolent Wisdom (*Ren Zhi* 〈仁知〉); (4) Purity and Obedience (*Zhen Shun* 〈真順〉); (5) Chastity and Righteousness (*Jie Yi* 〈節義〉); (6) Skill in Argument (*Bian Tong* 〈辯通〉): and (7) The Pernicious and Depraved (*Nie Bi* 〈孽嬖〉). A final chapter (8) "Supplementary Lives of Virtuous Women" (*Xu Lienüzhuan* 〈續列女傳〉) presents supplementary biographies from later periods.

Twenty-eight LNZ stories mention anger explicitly.[10] Four stories mention anger in the verse summary of the life story which showcase the main concerns with regards to anger in the LNZ: (1) the didactic role of anger, both because of its motivational role for the agent and the patient, and because of its didactic role, and (2) the democratic power of rhetoric in mitigating or placating the anger of one's superiors. It is those two roles to which we turn to next.

Uses of anger in the LNZ are largely typical of the semantic fields of terms for anger in Warring States and Han China.[11] Six terms overlap with English "anger": *nu* 怒, *fen* 忿, *yun* 慍, *hui* 恚, *yuan* 怨, and *ji* 疾; the two most common terms are *nu* and *fen*. *Nu* refers to a reaction to a perceived wrong. It closely corresponds to English "anger," but leaves ambiguous both intensity and direction, which are determined by context.[12] *Fen* refers to a disposition towards aggressiveness and violence; its connotations are usually negative. It is akin to "ferociousness" in English and it often denotes the behavior of predatory animals. *Yun* denotes a negative feeling that ranges from something akin to indignation to extreme dissatisfaction, pure dislike or hatred. Two other terms are less common. *Hui* refers to intense rage or wrath. *Ji*, a term that frequently denotes illness, can also denote a

8 For additional historical sources see Clara Wing-chung Ho, ed., *Overt & Covert Treasures: Essays on the Sources for Chinese Women's History* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2012). For women and virtue in the LNZ see Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). For additional bibliography see Curry, *Anger*, chapter 3.

9 The fragmentation of "virtue" into individual virtues in the organization of the LNZ presents certain difficulties, since a woman might be virtuous with respect to one virtue but not others.

10 We do not discuss *yuan* 怨, "resentment," because we take it to be a close but different emotion than anger. For a discussion of *yuan* in Confucian sources see: Michael D. K. Ing, "Born of Resentment: *Yuan* 怨 in Early Confucian Thought," *Dao* 15, no. 1 (2016): 19–33 and Winnie Sung, "The Early Confucian Worry About *Yuan* (Resentment)," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 54, no. 2 (2019): 257–271.

11 A semantic field refers to a consistent association of a group of words over a long period of time and their consistent distinction from other words of different usage.

12 In a second usage, it denotes a hopeful guiding force for action, for example in the Zhuangzi's description of the flight of the Peng bird or of the courage or spirit of a praying mantis.

kind of anger that harms its agent. It resembles the sensibility of the English phrase, "it sickens me," and must be expelled for the health of the agent. Finally, *yuan* is a more passive, backward looking attitude of not having what one deserves. It implies an inability to act directly against the perceived injustice or unfairness of the situation. Although often translated as "anger," its contexts and the normative attitudes towards it are sufficiently different to consider it a different emotion; it's better translated as "resentment."[13] The representation of anger in the LNZ is consistent with Warring States texts. The predominant term is *nu* *Fen* appears three times and *hui* only once.

2 Didactic Anger

It is important to note that anger has both epistemic and didactic roles, but anger is prominently used for didactic purposes in the LNZ. In accounts of what we will call *epistemic anger*, both the characters in the story and the reader learn from the depiction of anger in the story. In accounts of *didactic anger,* the expression of anger is deliberate and for a didactic purpose. Didactic anger is therefore narrower in its effects than epistemic anger. In the LNZ there are important differences of gender in the use of didactic anger.

There are many examples of female didactic anger, and we focus on two biographies which the text explicitly categorizes as being about anger and teaching. But there is a tension in the relationship between teaching and anger: should didactic anger be pure performance – meaning that the agent is not in fact angry but is rather performing anger as a method of motivating change – or can the didactically angry agent also experience anger? In other words, does the LNZ value the felt anger of didactic agents, or does it recommend an attitude of distance and reservation from this strong emotion?

2.1 *The Mother of Juan Buyi*

"The Mother of Juan Buyi" (*Juan Buyi Mu* 隽不疑母) oversees her son's work as Han Governor of the Capital:

> 還，其母輒問所平反，母喜笑。飲食言語異於他時；或無所出，母怒，為之不食。由是故不疑為吏，嚴不殘。
>
> When he returned, his mother would always immediately ask if he had overturned any convictions and inquire how many people had been spared the death penalty. When Buyi had overturned the convictions of many people, his mother would smile, drink, eat, and talk with a great joy that was markedly different from her usual behavior. But if no one had been released, his mother would become angry and refuse to eat. Because of this, Buyi was strict but not cruel in the administration of his official duties.[14]

She manifests approval at her son's compassion, and manifests anger (*nu*) when he is cruel. Juan Buyi clearly values her opinion, and she uses it to shape his morality. This seems to be an example of anger without reservation, and it is typical of many LNZ accounts of female didactic anger. The story ends with this assessment:

> 君子謂:「不疑母能以仁教。」《詩》云:「昊天疾威，敷于下土。」言天道好生，疾威虐之行於下土也。
>
> A man of discernment would say, "Buyi's mother was able to teach with benevolence." The *Odes* says, "Vast Heaven severe and strong/extends throughout the world below." This means that the *dao* of Heaven loves life and hates cruelty in the world.[15]

13 For a more detailed account of this lexicon see Curry, *Anger*, Introduction.

14 LNZ 8.8, 650, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 162.

15 Ibid. The quotation is from Ode 195. Our translation of this quotation differs from Kinney's.

Juan Buyi's mother, who teaches with anger, is praised for her benevolence (*ren* 仁) and compared to Heaven's vastness and severity (*ji wei* 疾威) toward tyranny and cruelty. By contrast, Mencius's mother is praised as a virtuous mother for teaching without anger.

2.2 *The Mother of Mencius*

"The Mother of Meng Ke of Zou" (*Zou Meng Ke Mu* 鄒孟軻母) describes four didactic incidents at four points in Mencius's life. First, the story describes the mother of Mencius (henceforward Mengmu 孟母) moving house three times in order to find a suitable environment to raise her son. Second, when he fails to advance in his studies, she uses a knife to slash her weaving, and terrifies Mencius into improving in his studies. After his marriage, she intervenes in a disagreement, reproaches him, and asks him to apologize to his wife. Finally, in her old age, when Mencius is worried about his future in Qi, she says she, a widow, must now obey her adult son. The assessment praises her for "understanding the *dao* of women" (*zhi fu dao* 知婦道) and for "teaching without anger" (*fei nu fei jiao* 匪怒匪教).[16]

Although the LNZ did not describe her as angry, Mengmu's life story nonetheless suggests didactic anger. When her son under-performs in his studies, her response is dramatic. When he asks why she cut her weaving, she frightens him by explaining that a woman's livelihood rests on weaving and a man's on study. Was she angry or was this a performance of feigned anger? It is hard to say, but the LNZ strongly associates knives and violence with anger and rarely depicts a woman with a knife, which makes this passage even more dramatic. It is telling that the quotation of *Ode* 299 on "teaching without anger" (discussed below) appears only after the fourth incident in the life story. At this time in their lives, she is a widow and he is an adult; she no longer needs to teach him with anger. Even if she did not welcome the prospect of his leaving Qi, her virtuous anger is always other-regarding, never self-regarding.

There is some apparent tension between the portrayals of anger in these two life stories. Mengmu is a virtuous mother because she taught without anger; Juan's mother is virtuous because she used anger in teaching her son. How can we reconcile these two views? One explanation is differences of time frame and context. The life story of Juan Buyi's mother describes one incident, while that of Mengmu describes interactions over many years. Nor can we take the "teaching without anger" slogan as a blanket endorsement because "anger" means different things in different contexts. The "anger" of Juan Buyi's mother is evidence of her moral character because it shows that she values and dislikes the right things; she teaches what is right and wrong as a result of her compassionate feelings. She also expresses disapproval in an appropriate way, by refusing to eat. Mengmu's anger manifests in the context of her role as an elderly widow; here the emphasis is on correct ritual, rather than benevolence. It was appropriate for her to express anger as a parent to a young child, but not as a widow to a mature adult. In addition, Mencius and Juan Buyi are acting badly in very different ways. The only victim of the young Mencius' negligence is the adult Mencius, whereas Juan's judicial decisions hold the power of life or death.

The story of Mengmu raises important issues about the perceived status of anger and the perceived nature of anger. The LNZ shows a great concern for egotistical and violent tendencies of anger, particularly in those in positions of power. For these reasons, Mengmu is a virtuous mother because she has distilled what is useful about anger, and most important for didactic purposes: signaling that certain behavior is wrong and motivating change.

In summary, these differences in the expression and representation of anger exemplify two different attitudes toward the two virtues of benevolence and ritual. Appropriate anger is the result of the correct mediation of those two

16 LNZ 1.11, 443. Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 18. See the epigram to this paper, above.

virtues. The expression of anger signals what we value, both internally and externally. Anger is good when it sprouts from compassion for others and, when expressed by someone in a position of authority, has the power to signal wrongdoing and motivate change.

2.3 *Didactic Anger by Wives*

The LNZ has several accounts of wives using didactic anger to admonish their husbands. These stories are more complex than the stories of mothers' didactic anger, and their success is less clear. "The Wife and Daughter of Wang Zhang" (*Wang Zhang Qi Nü* 王章妻女) provides two examples of a wife admonishing her husband, but her anger is validated by her husband in only one case.[17] In their youth, she saves him from illness and despair by her angry criticism of his behavior:[18]

> 仲卿為書生，孝於長安，獨與妻居。疾病，無被，臥牛衣中；與妻訣，泣涕。妻呵怒曰：「仲卿尊貴在朝廷，誰愈於仲卿者？今疾病困厄，不自激昂，乃反涕泣，何鄙也！」後章仕宦至京兆尹。
>
> As a student, Zhongqing studied in Chang'an, living alone with his wife. Once he fell ill, and lacking a quilt, he slept under cattle-warming blankets. When he began to utter dying words, weeping profusely, his wife snorted and became angry, saying "You are honored and valued at court. Indeed, who is more honored than you? But now that you have become ill and fallen on hard times, you don't rouse yourself to action but instead weep and snivel. How pathetic!" Afterward, Zhang's official rank reached that of Governor of the Capital.[19]

Wang's wife is angry because he is harming himself by giving in to despair; her anger motivates him to overcome illness and poverty.

In a second admonition she tries to prevent him from endangering his life by opposing a powerful patron, but she fails and he dies in prison. Wang's wife is praised for knowing when to act and when to stand back; by contrast, her husband fails to rouse himself to action when he should, and acts when he should not. Even so, he claims that women do not know about court matters, and dies for failing to listened to her second admonition. Importantly, even when her admonition failed, she was not angry, but simply reminded him of his previous errors in assessing situations. (Had she expressed anger, it might have become self-regarding anger.) Despite her history of better judgment, he continues to insist that a woman cannot understand matters of the court. The passage goes on to show that both his wife and his daughter understood the injustices of the court better than he.

The expression of anger figures in differences between the remonstrances of mothers or wives and ministers. Admonition and anger very often go explicitly hand in hand in the LNZ, in ways that would never occur in a minister's remonstrance to a ruler; it is appropriate for a wife to express anger toward her husband or son, but never for a minister toward a ruler.[20]

For both women and men in the LNZ, anger is a first resort for an agent who perceives a wrong and desires change. If the expression of anger fails, they resort to other strategies, such as self-harm, tears, withdrawal, or departure. The strategies vary but they share the same goal, which is the desire for change, rather than for "payback."

17 LNZ 8.13.

18 His name is Wang Zhang, also known as Wang Zhongqing.

19 LNZ 8.13, 659, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 167.

20 For example, the Wife of Dazi of Tao "repeatedly admonished him but it was of no use" (其妻數諫不用). The LNZ portrays her standing alone, holding her child and weeping. While this is not a direct expression of anger, it clearly shows her dissatisfaction. Then, much like a minister in comparable circumstances, she requests to leave her husband. LNZ 2.9, 469, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 36.

As the foregoing discussion had shown, there are important differences between the manifestation of anger by mothers toward sons and by wives toward husbands. These few examples provide a brief illustration of how one's perceived status in the social hierarchy affects the efficacy of anger. In the case of mothers and sons, these dynamics inevitably change over time; whereas the dynamics of husband-wife relationships vary according to circumstance.

Finally, it is important to note that all these "performances" of anger are always other-regarding, and never involve personal slight, offense, payback or punishment. Instead, the LNZ agents of anger act for the sake of the virtuous future of their sons, husbands, and families. Nonetheless, there are no guarantees of success, which depends on the patient of the anger respects the authority of the agent.

2.4 *Male Didactic Anger*

Male didactic anger is rare in the LNZ.[21] A potential example appears in 1.9 "Jing Jiang of the Lineage of Lu" (*Lu Ji Jing Jiang* 魯季敬姜), where Wenbo 文伯 uses the supposed anger of a powerful minister to convince his mother Jing Jiang 敬姜 to stop spinning:

> 文伯曰:「以歜之家，而主猶績，懼干季孫之怒，其以歜為不能事主乎！」
>
> 敬姜歎曰:「魯其亡乎！使童子備官而未之聞耶！居，吾語汝。昔聖王之處民也，擇瘠土而處之，勞其民而用之，故長王天下。夫民勞則思，思則善心生，逸則淫，淫則忘善，忘善則惡心生。」
>
> Wenbo said, "In a family such as mine, though you are the matriarch, you continue to spin. I'm afraid this will provoke Jisun's anger. Won't he think that I am incapable of providing for you?"
>
> Jing Jiang sighed, saying, "Lu must be going to perish. They order youths who know nothing about such things to fill office. Sit. Let me explain this to you. In antiquity, when the sage kings settled the people, they chose poor land and settled them there. They utilized the populace by putting them to work, so their rule of all under Heaven endured. Now, when the people labor they become thoughtful, and if they are thoughtful they develop hearts that are good. If they are idle they become dissolute, if they become dissolute they forget goodness, and if they forget goodness they develop hearts that are bad."[22]

It is interesting that he appeals to the anger of a duke to try to convince his mother to stop doing something. Wenbo's tactic fails, because he is more interested in Jisun's good opinion of him than in actually being a good son. She makes clear that, were she to stop spinning and weaving, she would cease to be a good mother, which in turn could harm Wenbo. Her correction does succeed, and Wenbo continues to benefit from her instruction, including the performance of anger.

Anger is clearly gendered in the LNZ. There appears to be an important difference in the LNZ between female didactic anger, which is always other-regarding, and male anger, which generally tends to be self-regarding. Male anger is typically expressed through violence, either as payback or as corrective punishment.[23] Furthermore, the text often addresses how male anger can go wrong. Most of the stories in Chapter Six, "The Accomplished

21 For another possible instance of ineffective male didactic anger, see "Wen Jiang of Duke Zhuang of Lu" (*Lu Huan Wen Jiang* 魯桓文姜), LNZ 7.5, 619, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 140.

22 LNZ 1.9, 437, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 12.

23 For examples of male anger see "The Loyal Concubine of the Master of Zhou" (Zhou Zhu Zhong Qie 周主忠妾) LNZ 5.10, 563, Kinney, Exemplary Women, 100–102; "Juan, The Woman of the Ferry of Zhao" (Zhao Jin Nü Juan 趙津女娟) LNZ 6.7, 587, Kinney, Exemplary Women, 118–120; and "The Mother of Bi Xi of Zhao" (Zhao Fu Xi Mu 趙佛肹母) LNZ 6.8, 589, Kinney, Exemplary Women, 120–1.

Rhetoricians," describe women's attempts to remedy the consequences of violent male anger.[24] These stories address the dangers of male anger and what it means for a woman to navigate it virtuously, and even how women can help their male relatives deal with the anger of their hierarchical superiors within the family. A different way of putting this is Kate Manne's observation that women are positioned as human *givers* and men as human *beings*.[25] If so, the men of the *LNZ* teach through punishment because they are interested in avoiding their own discomfort, whereas the very virtue of the women of the LNZ depends on their providing moral support.

3 Patients of Anger

Other LNZ stories address the strategies and responses of the patients of anger, especially those faced with inappropriate anger. In the context of the LNZ, inappropriate anger occurs when agents make mistakes in appraising situations: by thinking that a wrong has been committed when it has not, by casting blame in the wrong place, or when the LNZ itself seems to understate the importance of a wrong that has been committed, where anger seems to be appropriate.

The LNZ emphasizes two main strategies as virtuous. One is the ability to endure anger from others. The other is the ability to use argument to placate others' anger. The text also praises two corresponding abilities: the ability to avoid experiencing resentment (*yuan* 怨) even when faced with incessant and inappropriate anger, and the ability to argue one's way out of others' anger.

3.1 *Avoiding Resentment*

The LNZ starts with the biography of Ehuang 娥皇 and Nüying 女英, the two consorts of the sage king Shun 舜, and how they placated the anger of Shun's father. As daughters of the sage king Yao 堯, they are superior to Shun in social rank, but the text praises them for taking a deliberately subordinate role:

> 承舜於下，以尊事卑，終能勞苦，瞽叟和寧，卒享福祐。
>
> They followed Shun as his subordinates. Though nobly born, they willingly served the humble, and to the end they were able to labor and bear hardships. They placated Gusou, and finally enjoyed happiness and blessings.[26]

In the biography of the two consorts, Shun's mother hates (*zeng* 憎) him and loves his brother Xiang 象 despite the fact that the sage king Yao notices Shun's virtue, and Xiang is dissolute. Shun's father is described as perverse (*wan* 頑), and his mother as duplicitous (*yin* 闇), yet Shun was able to harmonize and placate (*xie rou* 諧柔) them. He maintained internal composure (*nie zhi* 內治) and harbored no ill will (*jian ji* 姦意). This story is puzzling for several reasons. Placed within the chapter on "maternal models" it is about consorts, not mothers, with more emphasis on Shun than on his wives.

One possibility is that they are exercising maternal roles, insofar as they observe, guide, and support Shun on Yao's behalf. As daughters of the Son of Heaven, they are his superiors, but as consorts, they deliberately take on a subordinate role, and their moral authority over him inevitably reaches an end point. Finally, their role in the story is focused on their service to Shun, as Mengmu's is to Mencius.

24 See in particular, "The Discriminating Woman of the Chu Countryside" (Chu Ye Bian Nü 楚野辯女) LNZ 6.5, 583, Kinney, Exemplary Women, 116–7, LNZ 6.7, 587, Kinney, Exemplary Women, 118–20, and LNZ 6.8, 589, Kinney, Exemplary Women, 120–1.

25 Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), xxi.

26 LNZ 1.1, 423–24, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 3.

The story shows them supporting Shun's filiality despite extreme, and unjustified anger imposed on him:

> 父母欲殺舜，舜猶不怨，怒之不已。舜往于田號泣，日呼旻天，呼父母。惟害若茲，思慕不已。不怨其弟，篤厚不怠。
>
> Although Shun's parents wanted to kill him, Shun never harbored resentment towards them. They raged against him incessantly, so that Shun would go forth into the fields, wailing and weeping. Daily he cried out to merciful Heaven; he cried out to his father and mother. Though they tried to harm him, his feeling of affection for them endured. He bore no resentment against his younger brother but treated him with sincere and unfailing generosity.[27]

It is rare in the LNZ to present anger in this way, but the story is only effective if the anger portrayed is excessive. It is because the anger of Shun's family had no basis that it is a test of his filiality. Ehuang and Nüying advise him meet all his family's demands, despite his awareness of their plot to kill him; and they devise ways to protect him without impeding his ability to do this.

The wife of Dazi of Tao (see footnote 20) presents another example of avoiding resentment at anger. When she fails to correct Dazi's behavior, her mother-in-law reacts with anger (*nu*). Even after she explains the situation and asks to leave her husband, the mother-in-law remains angry (*nu*) and expels them. Nonetheless, after Dazi is put to death, his wife returns to care for the mother-in-law, despite their differences, and the text explicitly praises her for this.[28]

Shun and the wife of Dazi show that one's position with respect to the agent of the anger, and one's relationship with them, is what determines what is considered a virtuous response. Shun is a sage king, but also a son. The wife of Dazi, can express her disapproval to him, but can do little to convince her mother-in-law.

3.2 *Skill in Argument*

Now we turn to the second virtue and skill, the ability to use argument to placate others' anger. The LNZ depicts many instances of unjust anger by the powerful, and it is often wives or daughters who intervene to save their male relatives from a superior's punitive anger.[29]

In 6.3 "The Wife of the Bow Maker of Jin" (*Jin Gong Gong Qi* 晉弓工妻), Duke Ping has waited three years for a bow he ordered, but when he shoots, his arrows do not pierce even one layer of the target. He blames the bow maker taking three years to make a terrible bow. He is angry (*nu*) and wants to execute the man. The wife of the bow maker intervenes. She introduces herself as the daughter of an armor craftsman and the wife of a bow maker. She makes three arguments to dissuade the duke from killing her husband. The first focuses on the benevolence of former kings, who were able to forgive actual bandits: "Duke Mu of Qin encountered bandits who ate the meat of his fine steed, but he gave them wine to drink."[30] The second addresses the question of blameworthiness: Duke Ping has put blame on the wrong person. He does not understand the labor and exquisite materials that went into the bow, and wrongly directs his anger at the bow maker, rather than himself:

> 此四者，皆天下之妙選也，而君不能以穿一札，是君之不能射也，而反欲殺妾之夫，不亦謬乎！
>
> Since these four things are among the most select and extraordinary materials in the

27 Ibid., 3.

28 Cf. 5.10 "The Loyal Concubine of the Master of Zhou" (*Zhou Zhu Zhong Qie* 周主忠妾), LNZ 563.

29 In none of the examples are the rhetoricians persuading someone to get over justified anger.

30 秦穆公, 有盜食其駿馬之肉, 反飲之以酒. LNZ 2.9, 579. The arguments used by these masters of rhetoric are of particular interest insofar that they show what stands in opposition to the anger of the dukes.

> world, your inability to pierce even one layer of armor must be due to your inability to shoot. Yet you want to kill my husband, isn't this mistaken?[31]

Her arguments run as follows:

(1) Even were my husband guilty, a good ruler would extend kindness and benevolence towards him and help him instead of kill him (as the sage king did to the bandits), and would be so remembered in posterity.

(2) You perceived the situation incorrectly. The materials and work involved in the making of the bow are the best available. Sage kings have been satisfied with less. My husband, therefore, cannot be guilty.

She then proceeds to instruct him in the way of archery.

(3) If, having mastered the way of archery, you still cannot pierce the target, it is my husband's fault. If not, it was all you.[32]

Her skill is shown to be far superior to many others. She has no status with respect to the duke, she is the daughter and wife of craftsmen. Yet, she manages to convince the duke to let go of his anger. Her argument does rely very slightly in appealing to his self-interest and on the authority of the past, but her main argument is that the duke's anger is not only the opposite of benevolence, which kings should have, and most importantly it focuses on dissolving blame. Ultimately, what dissuades the duke is empirical proof that he misappraised the situation and blamed the wrong person. Perhaps, she knew that appealing to benevolence might work with some people, but ultimately what makes anger dissolve is the realization that no wrong was committed.

In another example, 6.5 "The Discriminating Woman of the Chu Countryside" (*Chu Ye Bian Nü* 楚野辯女), another nameless woman uses her rhetorical skills to dissuade an angry duke from whipping her when her carriage wheel bumps into his carriage on a narrow road. Her argument relies on two now familiar strategies. She points out that the fault lies with his driver, not with her. Then she appeals to the *Book of Zhou* (*Zhoushu* 《周書》): "You look down on those who are less important and weaker than you."[33] This case is interesting because the woman of Chu is using her skills in self-defense, rather than on behalf of others, as in most other life stories. The story further emphasizes her virtue when, having convinced the duke that his anger was inappropriate, she declines his offer to follow him to his state for her husband is waiting for her at home. It is also significant that she does not criticize the duke for his anger per se: what is wrong is being angry at the wrong person for the wrong reason.

4 Vicious Anger

Another group of life stories from Chapter 7, "The Pernicious and Depraved," portray women engaging in destructive anger in two contexts: the discovery of an illicit relationship, or loss of favor or status at court. In both contexts, anger is the outward expression and evidence of a vicious character.[34]

Sheng Ji 聲姬, in 7.10 "Sheng Ji of Duke Ling of Qi" (*Qi Ling Sheng Ji* 齊靈聲姬) is having illicit relations with a grandee named Qing Ke 慶剋. She becomes angry when their relationship is discovered, her husband's assistant Guo Zuo 國佐 reproves Qing Ke, and he avoids her.[35] Unlike some other life stories, her response to the situation is

31 LNZ 6.3, 579, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 113.

32 For further details, see Raphals, "Arguments by Women in Early Chinese Texts," *Nan Nü* 3, no. 2 (2001): 157–195.

33 釋僕執妾, 輕其微弱, LNZ 6.5, 583, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 116.

34 For more on this topic, see Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 17, 61–83.

35 "For a long time afterward, Qing Ke did not venture out, but told Meng Zi, "Guo Zuo reproved me." This infuriated Meng Zi." (慶剋久不出, 以告孟子曰:「國佐非我。」孟子怒.)

anger, rather than fear.[36] She reacts with punitive aggression and slanders both Guo Zuo and the man who informed him of the situation.[37] Her actions lead to disorder in the state, which is only resolved by the eventual death of Sheng Ji. The LNZ portrays her anger as unjustified because of the illicit nature of the relationship. Here, as in many other contexts, an adulterous relationship is a threat to the established order of things.

The long story of the anger of "Xian, Wife of Huo Guang" (*Huo Furen Xian* 霍夫人顯) is linked to her desire for status. Xian is "extravagant, dissolute, and cruel, and disregarded laws and regulations."[38] Her "loyal and cautious" (*zhong shen* 忠慎) husband had supported the young emperor when his father died. Xian was not satisfied with the honors and status he received, and seeking a noble rank for her daughter Chengjun 成君, poisoned the Empress Xu 許后 during childbirth to secure an opening for her daughter. The scheme fails, and Xian becomes so angry that she spits blood, refuses to eat, and plots (unsuccessfully) to kill the new emperor. After her husband's death, her son receives a title and Xian attains the wealth and status she has always sought. Eventually, her role in the death of the former empress comes to light. Xian foments an unsuccessful rebellion. She was executed by being cut in two at the waist and her body was exposed in the market place as a cautionary tale.

A final example is the jealous anger of "Zhao Feiyan of the Han" (*Han Zhao Feiyan* 漢趙飛燕). The sisters Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 and Brilliant Companion 昭儀 are described as arrogant, seductive, unyielding, regarding everyone in the palace with jealous suspicion.[39] When one of them discovers that a concubine of the emperor was pregnant:

> 生懟，手自捶，以頭擎柱，從床上自投地，涕泣不食，曰:「今當安置我？我欲歸爾！」
>
> She became angry, striking herself with her own hands and dashing her head against a pillar. She then flung herself from the bed to the floor, weeping and refusing to eat, saying [to the emperor], "Now what are you going to do with me? Just let me die!"[40]

The emperor does not understand why she is angry (*dui* 懟),[41] and he too refuses to eat. Brilliant Companion takes this as a sign of remorse for implied wrongdoing: going back on a promise (*fu yue* 負約) that he would never turn his back on her.[42] Their solution is to kill the concubine's child, and to kill the child (or even unborn child) of every woman the emperor chooses to favor, sometimes killing the mother as well. Brilliant Companion again becomes angry (*nu*) when one of the women refuses to kill her child. In all of these examples, female anger is portrayed as vicious because it is self-regarding.

4.1 *Male and Female Anger*

These stories show important differences in the LNZ portrayal of male and female anger. Angry men are consistently redeemable, whereas

36 See LNZ 5.10, 563, "The Loyal Concubine of the Master of Zhou" (*Zhou Zhu Zhong Qie* 周主忠妾), Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 100.

37 For another example of women slandering others see LNZ 7.12 "The Two Depraved Women of Wei" (*Wei Er Luan Nü* 衛二亂女), 635, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 151.

38 奢淫虐害, 不循軌度. LNZ 8.10, 653, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 163.

39 嬌媚不遜, 嫉妒後宮. LNZ 8.15, 665, Kinney, 172. Envy/jealousy (*ji dou* 嫉妒) appears in the LNZ also as an emotion that virtuous women lack. See LNZ 2.5, 461, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 31, "Fan Ji of King Zhuang of Chu" (*Chu Zhuang Fan Ji* 楚莊樊姬).

40 LNZ 8.15, 665, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 172.

41 *Dui* only appears once in the LNZ. It is rare in general in Pre-Qin and Han texts and seems to denote a negative portrayal of angry feelings, unlike nu which can be neutral.

42 According to Brilliant Companion he always said, "I will never turn my back on you" 陛下常言:約不負汝. LNZ 8.15, 665, Kinney, *Exemplary Women*,172.

angry women are not, because male anger is portrayed as responsive to reason, whereas LNZ characters never attempt to persuade or reason with an angry woman. There is a partial analogy to the LNZ portrayal of vice, which is different for women than for men. One context for male anger in the LNZ is a wife's illicit relationship, which violates male expectations of female chastity that has no male equivalent. Virtuous and vicious women in the LNZ are all extremes, whereas only two men are portrayed as irredeemably vicious: the son of a vicious woman and a man so infatuated by a vicious woman that he accedes to all her wishes.[43]

In the case of some of the irredeemably vicious women, their conduct arises from the desire for status. For example, Brilliant Companion's jealousy and violence arise from this desire, which in her case, depends on being the sole mother of the emperor's male heir. Similarly, Xian, the wife of Huo Guang sought status through her daughter's proximity to the emperor. Both contrast to the virtue of Empress Wang 王后, who becomes angry at attempts to remarry her after her husband's death.[44] Her anger, its violent expression by caning her complicit attendants, and her subsequent illness and suicide, attest to the depth of her chaste and virtuous loyalty to her husband. Empress Wang cares about others, but she also cares for her own image, and is capable of defending it against servants who cannot defend themselves. Faced with an impossible situation, her eventual suicide is entirely consistent with the themes of anger in the LNZ. By contrast, the anger of vicious women is self-regarding anger, which is part of their capriciousness and concern with status. Brilliant Companion's anger has a particularly female flavor since it arises from jealousy, an emotion never attributed to men who are angry at unfaithful wives.

5 Conclusion

In this paper we have explored the gendered representations of appropriate and inappropriate anger in the LNZ, and noted several important gendered differences between male and female anger. First, male anger is always portrayed as eliciting violence, but also as being susceptible to reason and argument. Female anger has a wider range of expressions and fewer curbs; no one in the LNZ ever tries to curb or reason with female inappropriate anger.

Second, male anger is never a sign of bad character, whereas inappropriate female anger is portrayed as representative of character. Women must navigate anger skillfully to avoid a charge of depravity and vice. Similarly, male self-regarding anger is consistently linked to honor,[45] and female self-regarding anger to capriciousness. Usually it is a sign of imminent catastrophe, sometimes extending to the entire state or to several generations in a family.

Nonetheless, some women in the LNZ play a unique role as master rhetoricians and teachers. Ultimately, the LNZ shows that at least in the mind of its imagined audience anger enjoyed a complicated reputation as the figures of Mother Meng, Empress Wang, and the two wives of the sage king Shun show.

However, this apparent ambivalence can be explained by the distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding anger. Self-regarding anger is problematic from a societal point of view due to its associations with violence, often against the innocent. By contrast, the LNZ restricts appropriate anger to didactic anger.

43 See LNZ 3.10 "Shu Ji of Yang of Jin" (*Jin Yang Shu Ji* 晉羊叔姬), 501; 7.2 "Da Ji of Zhou of Yin" (*Yin Zhou Da Ji*), 613; 7.5 "Wen Jiang of Duke Huan of Lu" (*Lu Huan Wen Jiang* 魯桓文姜), 619; and 7.11 "Dongguo Jiang of Qi" (*Qi Dongguo Jiang* 齊東郭姜), 633.

44 See LNZ 8.16, 667, "Empress Wang, Consort of Filial Emperor Ping of the Han" (Han Xiaoping Wanghou 漢孝平王后). For discussion, see Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 18–19, and note 28 and Kinney, *Exemplary Women*, 173.

45 For examples see footnote 23.

Questions remain about "performative" anger, such as that of Mengmu, and these questions ultimately hinge on the question of what an emotion is. Without addressing that question here, we can imagine feigned anger as filling a gap between a strong emotion component of something we truly care about that makes us angry, things we care about, but without the emotional trigger. It is possible that, because Mengmu is concerned with long-term future consequences, she is not "angry," but nonetheless uses feigned anger to communicate the urgency of her instruction to her son. Such feigned anger is clearly other-regarding.

In conclusion, the gendered representations of anger in the LNZ provides an important alternative to views of anger as motivated by the desire for payback and status. The LNZ, like other pre-Qin texts, understands anger very differently, and focuses on other-regarding anger, based on perceptions of wrongdoing and injustice. The LNZ also provides an important focus on the role of didactic anger by women and others.