



The Beauty and the Book
*Women and Fiction in Nineteenth-
Century China*

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The Beauty and the Book
*Women and Fiction in Nineteenth-
Century China*

Ellen Widmer

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For Ted and Matt



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These accumulations, in the form of debts, are matched by at least one outstanding instance of deterioration. I refer to my copy of Hu Wenkai's *Lidai funü zhuzuo kao*, which I bought in 1985. Ten years back, when the project got going in earnest, it could still be termed pristine, but it is now decrepit beyond the point of easy usability, having lost its cover and otherwise suffered from the frequency and intensity of my engagement with it. I never met Hu Wenkai, but I was fortunate once to visit Tan Zhengbi and his daughter Tan Xun in their one-room apartment in Shanghai. This was just as China was emerging from the Cultural Revolution. I cannot say which touched me more, the depth of their devotion to their research or the humble circumstances under which they lived. The reference material assembled by Hu and the two Tans have been vital resources for this project. As far as my other major subject, fiction, is concerned, I have been greatly inspired by Wu Xiaoling, who (thanks to Patrick Hanan's introduction) took me by the hand during my first visits to China in the 1980s. I never mention Wu's work specifically, but I was greatly informed by his guided tours of bookshops and his frequent advice on libraries and other matters. Liu Shide is another who shepherded me around during my early China years. Without the guidance provided by these major predecessors, I would have little if any story to tell.

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E.W.



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