

# A Desexualized Pirate in Yuan Yung-Lun's Ching Hai-Fen Chi: Analysis of Ching Yih Saou's Body and Gender from a Perspective of Butlerian Theory

Yoriko Ishida

National Institute of Technology, Oshima College, Yamaguchi, Japan

**Email address:**

[yoriko@oshima-k.ac.jp](mailto:yoriko@oshima-k.ac.jp)

**To cite this article:**

Yoriko Ishida. A Desexualized Pirate in Yuan Yung-Lun's Ching Hai-Fen Chi: Analysis of Ching Yih Saou's Body and Gender from a Perspective of Butlerian Theory. *International Journal of Literature and Arts*. Vol. 6, No. 6, 2018, pp. 83-93.

doi: 10.11648/j.ijla.20180606.11

**Received:** November 14, 2018; **Accepted:** December 16, 2018; **Published:** January 14, 2019

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**Abstract:** When the ethical view for women in Confucianism is typified by the principle that “three follow the road,” there is no wonder that men’s predominance of women should be regarded as obligatory in China. The stereotype that women have to be barred from official society and kept imprisoned in their homes has thoroughly penetrated the country. However, Chinese women have presented the impression that they are powerful. The most striking examples are Lü Zhi, Wu Zetian, and Empress Dowager Cixi, who wielded their authority over the country as empresses after their husbands’ deaths. Considering that they are real figures in Chinese history, the fact of powerful women in China cannot be altogether impossible. Now there is a contradiction that some autocratic empresses, without parallel in the world, have existed in the history of a country that has always valued the ideology of women’s subjection to men. An opinion should be that “the differences called sexual difference cannot be applied to all men and women. Rather, this difference is meaningful only when comparing the nature of men and women as groups, that is, at the statistical level,” and the same can be applied to the way Chinese women live. It should be understood that not all women in China were oppressed and that some of them could hold the reins of power, depending on their ages and status. Focusing on maritime history especially reveals the limitations of the stereotype that Chinese women were supposed to be driven out of official roles and oppressed in homes. Take, for example, the pirates who were active on the South China coast, where some communities had members who lived their whole lives aboard ships without landing. Ching Yih Saou the most famous female pirate in Chinese maritime history, was active from the end of the 18th century to the first half of the 19th century. The aim of this paper is very innovative. Judith Butler, in forwarding a different position from sex–gender dualism, argues that human beings can exhibit the characteristics of men and women without reference to physical difference. This paper adopts Butler’s theory and reveals that Ching Yih Saou is a picture of it. First, this paper follows up on her activities in Yuan Yung-lun's Ching hai-fen chi as a primary source and then deconstructs sexual identities of masculinity or femininity by considering Ching Yih Saou’s life as an example of Butler’s theory.

**Keywords:** Ching Yih Saou, Chinese Pirates, Women Pirates, Judith Butler, Gender, Sex, Sexual Difference

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## 1. Introduction

When the ethical view for women in Confucianism is typified by the principle that “three follow the road,”<sup>1</sup> there is

no wonder that men’s predominance of women should be regarded as obligatory in China. The stereotype that women have to be barred from official society and kept imprisoned in their homes has thoroughly penetrated the country.<sup>2</sup> Foot-

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<sup>1</sup> “Three follow the road” has come down from ancient times, an aphorism that indicates women’s way of life in China, showing women’s subordination within the family. This aphorism comes from the Confucian philosophy, as seen in *the Book of Rites*, which states that “women have to obey to their fathers in their natal home, to their husbands after marriage, and to their sons in old age.”

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<sup>2</sup> China has had a traditional division of labor according to sex since ancient times, which meant that the male was supposed to work in the field, and the female should spin thread inside the home. This division was reasonable in the earliest years because it allotted a portion of work according to sexual difference in bodily strength. However, the spread of the Confucian philosophy encouraged

binding, a Chinese convention for women for more than ten thousand years, indicates how much women have been oppressed in China [14]. In total contrast to this stereotype, however, Chinese women have presented the impression that they are powerful. The most striking examples are Lü Zhi,<sup>3</sup> Wu Zetian,<sup>4</sup> and Empress Dowager Cixi<sup>5</sup>, who wielded their authority over the country as empresses after their husbands' deaths. Considering that they are real figures in Chinese history, the fact of powerful women in China cannot be altogether impossible. Now there is a contradiction that some autocratic empresses, without parallel in the world, have existed in the history of a country that has always valued the ideology of women's subjection to men. It seems that there is a contradiction, but it can be possible to resolve it. An opinion should be that "the differences called sexual difference cannot be applied to all men and women. Rather, this difference is meaningful only when comparing the nature of men and women as groups, that is, at the statistical level," and the same can be applied to the way Chinese women live. Even if most Chinese women were forced to have their feet bound and live their lives trapped inside a house, these conditions were not universal. This is accountable if considering that the stereotype of Chinese women is based on a merely statistical impression. It should be understood that not all women in China were oppressed and that some of them could hold the reins of power, depending on their ages and status. These women made the fullest possible use of their powers to an extent that earned their places in history. In fact, in China, a legal wife is recognized as her husband's successor right after his death and may do whatever she pleases [13].

Of course, privileged women were not necessarily the wives of emperors. Focusing on maritime history especially reveals the limitations of the stereotype that Chinese women were supposed to be driven out of official roles and oppressed in homes [15]. Take, for example, the pirates who were active on the South China coast, where some communities had members who lived their whole lives aboard ships without landing. On crowded ships that were shared by all members of the family, it was not unusual for women to do as much work as men [24]. Fanny Loviot, an American woman who was captured by Chinese pirates in 1853, wrote that "the pirates of the Chinese seas make their junks their homes, and carry their wives and children with

them on every expedition. The women assist in working the ships, and are chiefly employed in landing and unloading the merchandise" [17]. Richard Glasspoole, captured by Chinese pirates like Loviot, also reported that "the Ladrões have no settled residence on shore, but live constantly in their vessels" [8], and "women command their junks" [8]. And according to Philip Maughan, first lieutenant of the HC *Bombay Marine*, many women worked aboard ships [20].<sup>6</sup>

In the maritime world of China, women participated in almost all aspects of life. They stayed and worked with their husbands aboard ships and were also responsible for much of the navigating. For such women, their presence on pirate ships was merely a regular daily event. Therefore, the concept that the maritime world should be dominated only by men never developed in China, which allows us to conclude that the presence of women aboard pirate ships in China was not unusual as in the West.

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike in the West, Chinese pirates have been marginalized in history, so there are few historical documents in classical Chinese that focus mainly on pirates. However, strangely enough, details of Chinese pirates have better known in the West than in the home country. The main reason is that some captured Westerners, such as Richard Glasspoole, Philip Maughan, James Turner, and so on, provided information about Chinese pirates after being released and returning home. It is common knowledge that Great Britain established the East India Company in the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, from which the country acquired immense wealth, and from there has extended its influence to almost all of Asia. Great Britain attached great importance to a trade with China in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, so Great Britain-flag commercial fleets frequently appeared in the South China Sea. The biggest problem in their trade there was that they had to strengthen their measures against Chinese pirates, which grew to a mammoth size. Many English ships were captured by Chinese pirates, with the result that some were killed and others were released in return for a ransom. Almost all reports about Chinese pirates were written by victims, and booklets by Glasspoole, Maughan, and Turner can be mentioned as the most famous: Richard Glasspoole, "A Brief Narrative of My Captivity and Treatment amongst the Ladrões" in *Sketches of Chinese Customs and Manners in 1811-12 Taken During a Voyage to the Cape, etc. With Some Account of the Ladrões, in a Series of Letters to a Friend* by George Wilkinson (Bath: n.p., 1814) [9]; Richard Glasspoole, "Substance of Mr. Glasspoole's Relation, Upon His Return to England, Respecting the Ladrões" in *Further Statement of the Ladrões on the Coast of China; Intended as a Contribution to the Accounts Published by Mr. Dalrymple* (n.p.: Land, Darling, and Co., 1812), 40-45 [8]; John Turner, "Account of the Captives of J. L. Turner, amongst the Ladrões; accompanied by some Observations respecting those Pirates" in *Naval Chronicle*, 20 (1808), 456-72 [30]; Philip Maughan, "An Account of the Ladrões who infested the Coast of China" in *Further Statement of the Ladrões on the Coast of China; Intended as a Contribution to the Accounts Published by Mr. Dalrymple* (n.p.: Land, Darling, and Co., 1812), 26 [20].

Richard Glasspoole was an officer of the East India Company ship *Marquis Ely*. On September 21, 1809, he was captured and held by Chinese pirates on with his seven seafarers until December 7th. He wrote an entry in his diary about his experience for preparing for the East India Company and presented it to the Company after his release. His reports contain several battles of pirates and their movement up the various branches of the Pearl and West rivers to "levy contributions on the towns and villages" [9]. James Turner, chief officer of the country ship *Tay*, was captured by the Red Flag Fleet in December of 1806, and he reported the details of his captivity after his release [30]. Philip Maughan, first lieutenant of the HC *Bombay Marine*, arrived in China in May of 1806, and was involved in some battles with the pirates [27]. These accounts provide us with some sort of information about the way Chinese pirates lived and conducted themselves aboard ships, so they should be considered valuable and available historical documents for acquiring knowledge of Chinese pirates. Their reports have become important texts for almost all historical books about Chinese pirates published in the West [29].

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the fixing of the female's gender role beyond the division of labor, producing sexual discrimination in labor. That is, we can say that Confucian philosophy has developed into sexism: male domination and female subordination [25].

<sup>3</sup> Lü Zhi (241–180 BC), commonly known as Empress Lü, was the empress consort of Emperor Gaozu, the founder and first ruler of the Han Dynasty. She was the first woman to assume the title of Empress of China. After Emperor Gaozu's death she was honoured as Empress Dowager.

<sup>4</sup> Wu Zetian (624–705), alternatively named Wu Zhao, Wu Hou, and in English Empress Consort Wu, was a Chinese sovereign who ruled unofficially as empress consort and empress dowager and officially as empress regnant during the Zhou dynasty.

<sup>5</sup> Empress Dowager Cixi (1835–1908) was a Chinese empress dowager and regent who effectively controlled the Chinese government in the late Qing dynasty for 47 years from 1861 until her death in 1908.

Piracy in China goes back as far as the fourth century BC [28]. Some famous female pirates appeared in the West, but China produced a female pirate unlike any other. Ching Yih Saou (1775-1844), the most famous female pirate in Chinese maritime history, was active from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> Ching Yih Saou was a Cantonese prostitute who was also known as Shih Hsiang-ku or Shih Yang. In 1801, she married Cheng I, the leader of a fleet of pirates, whom she became an excellent assistant at commanding [27]. After her husband's death, she was inducted as a leader of the fleet in deed as well as in name, having all the power of a chieftain. In the end she negotiated with the Chinese government to secure the position of a titled aristocrat for herself and those of government officials for her followers. At the same time, she was a capable businesswoman, operating an infamous gambling house [27]. She died at age 69 in 1844.

Ching Yih Saou could be recognized as the most eminent female pirate of maritime history in the entire world and be extremely divorced from the Confucian doctrine and the stereotype of Chinese women. She had uncommon abilities in every aspect: to lead, fight, negotiate, and fascinate men. When considering her character, it is possible to picture that her presence raised questions about "sexual differences between men and women" or "gender difference." Knowing of her life should make us duly aware that there is no point in masculinity and femininity specific to sexual differences.

The aim of this paper is very innovative. Judith Butler, in forwarding a different position from sex-gender dualism, argues that human beings can exhibit the characteristics of men and women without reference to physical difference. This paper adopts Butler's theory and reveals that Ching Yih Saou is a picture of it. She states that "when the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" [4], arguing that it is nonsense to even distinguish sex from gender. Now a question arises that what an individual's sexual identity is, and what grounds for sexualizing individuals, identifying male or female are. Is it possible to say that Butler's theory deconstructs sexual identity, which has been always taken for granted, and her theory means that individuals cannot be sexed at birth but their sex and gender should be identified by

7 The names of Chinese pirates are complicated because their spellings differ from account to account, and it is difficult to convert Chinese characters into English alphabet letters. "Wade-Giles" became the standard system of transliteration in the late 19th century. Ching Yih Saou's name is written as "Cheng: in some accounts, and her husband appears in many accounts as "Cheng Yih," although his name is Romanized in the Wade-Giles system as "Chen I." The spelling "Cheng I Sao," of the Wade-Giles system, can be said to be the most popular, meaning "Wife of Cheng I" in Chinese. Her name appears in some Western texts in various spellings, for example, "Ching Yih Sao," "Madame Cheng," "Ching Yih Szaou." I adopt the spelling "Ching Yih Saou" in this paper, because Charles Friedrich Neumann adopts it in *History of the Pirates*, which is a translated version of Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching hai-fen chi*, a primary source of this paper.

their traits. Answers to these questions can be acquired from Ching Yih Saou's life as a pirate.

First, this paper follows up on her activities in Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching hai-fen chi* as a primary source<sup>8</sup> and then deconstructs sexual identities of masculinity or femininity by considering Ching Yih Saou's life as an example of Butler's theory.

## 2. The Interpretation of Chinese Pirates

### 2.1. Differences from and Similarities to Western Pirates

Pirates in China have some peculiar features. It is necessary to provide a conspectus of Chinese pirates as compared to Western pirates before analyzing Ching Yih Saou. The word "pirate" reminds us of Western culture and history, such as movies like *Pirates of the Caribbean* and works of literature like *Peter Pan* and *Treasure Island*. That is, The western pirates can be unconsciously recalled when hearing the word "pirate." Moreover, because of these artistic works, the term "pirates" has been taken as synonymous with "nautical fictions," which makes piracy sound somehow romantic and exciting even when one knows that pirates were recognized as criminals. Of course, people are influenced by the strongly rooted impression that only Westerners embarked on maritime adventures. In other word, piracy in and of itself has been westernized. However, in actual history pirates existed all over the world, not just in the West.

The westernization of the idea of pirates does not depend on only movies and tales. Political circumstances also likely had an appreciable effect. The art of navigation was developed in Europe as late as the 15th century, which meant that ships were recognized as the most important instrument for the discovery of new lands and territorial expansion. Maritime warfare was a daily occurrence, in which pirates played important roles as privateers under a commission of war. However, the situation was different in China, where the building of an enormous empire involved little maritime warfare. By the early 16th century, the dynamics of Chinese nation-building in the form of a unified agrarian bureaucracy based on the principles of Confucian Legalism were almost completed, by which an enormous empire has been established. David Cordingly points out that in the process, the nomads of interior areas rather than invaders from the sea became a military threat for China [5]. In other words, the West developed their force at sea, but China did so mainly onshore. It can be grasped from context that Chinese pirates were not provided with the opportunity to take part in warfare for the government during most of the country's history. Furthermore, Akira Matsuura states that almost all descriptions of Chinese history have focused not on events offshore but those onshore, which has minimized the existence of Chinese pirates [19].

According to Matsuura, although most successive

8 Charles Friedrich Neuman's *History of the Pirates Who Infested the China Sea from 1807 to 1810*, a translated version of Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching hai-fen chi*, must be actually available as a text, because I lack understanding of Chinese.

dynasties in China had established their capitals at internal regions such as Changan and Luoyang, whereby almost all historical accounts focus on inland areas, quite a few Chinese pirates operated in the South China Sea and East China Sea [19]. Unlike in the West, they were not offered opportunities to become war heroes in naval battle and were neglected in history because of the absence of accounts about them, so they naturally do not appear as adventurous spirits in various types of artistic works such as novels and movies. In China, pirates were nothing except for bandits at sea.

However, we should consider why people have descended into piracy as well as whether pirates contribute to a nation's war of expansion as privateers. As for this latter consideration, Chinese pirates could be similar to Western pirates. From the end of the 18th century to the first ten years of the 19th century, China saw an explosive population growth, which bothered the government [29]. The sea was a great site not only for getting booty by piracy but also for countercharging against the world by people stricken by poverty. Needless to say, a main cause of piracy was a desire to deprive other people of their property, but another factor can be mentioned: a rebellion against a structure in which wealth and power cannot be equally distributed to all, and the wealthy dominate and oppress the poor. People who suffer from poverty and cannot emerge from it often resort to stealing to get their bread. Furthermore, the more oppressed they become, the more vengeful they may be. Thus crime occurs. Pirates were more vulnerable to criticism than a gang of robbers onshore because they were not only scoundrels but also an unstable group of workers operating outside the main social structure. This logic can be applied to Chinese pirates. The logic that poverty can incite people to crime is common to all ages and all places. Since the 17th century, the import of sweet potatoes and corns from a new continent and the development of agricultural land in inland provinces like Sichuan province brought huge population increases in many areas in China. The population doubled to two hundred million, and in the 19th century it further redoubled to four hundred millions [29]. Although the food situation would have to be improved by the development of many cultivated areas, all people could permanently have sufficient food. Flood or drought damage would lead to overpopulation instantly. People were starving, and there were sharp increases in refugees. Yasufumi Toyooka states that in the late 1780s, the harmful effects of population growth were disclosed, when the economy of the Qing dynasty entered a recessionary phase [29]. An increasing of the pirate population occurred in the same period. It can be easily guessed a major cause of growth of the ranks of pirates: food and land shortages owing to overpopulation incited people to run away from the shore and go to sea to commit theft. After all, in the sense that piracy was an economic survival strategy for people who could make it no other way in society, Chinese pirates had the same backgrounds as pirates in the West. In China, most constituent members of pirate fleets were fishermen or coastal farmers who were captured by pirates. Of course, a few people resisted at the risk of their

lives and were killed or were released thanks to ransom as an exceptional case. But most victims decided to stay in piracy, and some of them became leaders [29]. The pirates who captured the people had no way to sell them for money, so they made full use of them as the labor force on pirate ships. Chang Paou was also a fisherman's son. He was captured by Ching Yih, a husband of Ching Yih Saou. Chang Paou joined the pirates at fifteen, married Ching Yih Saou and became her right-hand man after the death of Ching Yih.

As a result, Chinese pirate fleets grew to up to several thousand members. In both the West and China, people at the bottom of the heap gave up their lives onshore, going to sea for piracy; however, an essential difference from the West was that China's population was too big, so the size and structure of the Chinese pirate fleet rapidly swelled beyond comparison with those in the West.

## 2.2. *Chinese Pirates as Privateers*

As mentioned in the previous section, although Chinese politics offered little encouragement as privateers to Chinese pirates, there was one exceptional period in the long history of Chinese pirates. A full-scale rebellion called "the Tay-son Rebellion" broke out in Vietnam at the end of the 18th century. Tay-son was the name of a short Vietnamese dynasty that lasted from 1778 to 1802, which was established through the Tay-son Rebellion. In 1771 the Tay-son Rebellion broke out in what was the southern Vietnamese. Its leaders were three brothers, Nguyen Van Nhap, Nguyen Van Lu, and Nguyen Van Hue. By 1773 they and their followers managed to seize the provincial capital at Qui Nhon. From there the movement spread and the rebellion became a massive upheaval. The Tay-son had a great deal of popular support, not only from the poor farmers, but from some of the indigenous highland tribes. The three brothers established their dynasty, "the Tay-son dynasty," and Nguyễn Văn Nháp proclaimed himself Emperor in 1778.

This new nation-building in Vietnam through the rebellion presented a huge opportunity for Chinese pirates to be identified as privateers because it adopted the Western system of using pirates' fighting power [5]. The Tay-son dynasty existed for only 24 years, from 1778 to 1802. Its emperor's controlling power was gradually decreased in 1792 so that it became appropriate for the scale and power of Chinese pirates. Thereafter, Chinese pirates took part in every main Tay-son naval combat [5].

Chinese pirates, sponsored by Vietnam's Tay-son rulers, increased between 1792 and 1802, becoming associations of several hundred people and several dozen junks [27]. The Chings were recognized as the most able pirate fleet, and their leader was Ching Ch'i, Ching Yih's distant cousin. The turning point in the Chings' careers came in July 1802, when the dynasty was ruined. The privateering lives of Chinese pirates in Vietnam came to an end, and Ching Ch'i died in a fierce battle in Hanoi.

After the disintegration of the Tay-son dynasty, Chinese pirates returned to China, having an intense contention with one another. This conflict among the pirates continued until

1805, and in the end they became controlled by the most able leader, Ching Yih, a husband of Ching Yih Saou. The pirate fleet differed under Ching Yih and Ching Yih Saou: Chinese pirates were just gangs at sea before the Tay-son, but after the downfall of the Tay-son, they were developed into “the confederation,” which was rigidly organized on concepts of hierarchy and their pirate codes, which made Ching Yih and Ching Yih saou “admirals,” not just leaders. In hindsight, a secondary result of the Tay-son Rebellion was that they could climb to the top of their fleet as an “admiral.”

### 3. Cheng I Sao as a Real Character Among Chinese Pirates

#### 3.1. Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching Hai-Fen* as a Historical Document About Cheng I Sao and Chinese Pirates

Detailed historical accounts about women are fewer than those about men, and if any such accounts exist, it may be difficult to get them, as is true of female pirates. Of course, there cannot be autobiographies of female pirates. There is the common sense to understand that any pirates, even if they were literate, would not want to keep written accounts of their activities that might fall into the hands of authorities and would immediately convict the pirates. As already mentioned, pirates in the West appeared as a main theme in some historical academic books by prominent scholars, such as Marcus Rediker and David Cordingly, and pirates were also noticed in fiction despite fiction's tendency to romanticize the subject to such an extent that we have to determine what is true or not. In China, by contrast, there are no fictions about pirates, let alone historical accounts. Pirates have been ignored or marginalized in history rather than romanticized in China. As stated in the previous section, strangely, there is so much information about Chinese pirates in the West, thanks to the publications of reports about Chinese pirates by Westerners, that they became well known in the West. While pirates can be considered an important part of maritime history in the West, they cannot in China. Even Ching Yih Saou was no exception. While she has scarcely drawn scholarly attention in historical studies, she has been well known in the West. For this reason, Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching hai-fen chi*, a historical document providing Ching Yih Saou's biographical information, was translated into English and published in the West. *Ching hai-fen chi* should be very valuable because it is a reliable and unique documents that provides Ching Yih Saou's biographical information and is written in classical Chinese by the hands of a Chinese, although there are some English documents that mention Ching Yih Saou and are written by the English.<sup>9</sup> Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching hai-fen chi* was

<sup>9</sup> Among experience reports about Chinese pirates, the next ones mention Ching Yih Saou: Richard Glasspoole, “A Brief Narrative of My Captivity and Treatment amongst the Ladrões” in *Sketches of Chinese Customs and Manners in 1811-12 Taken During a Voyage to the Cape, etc. With Some Account of the Ladrões, in a Series of Letters to a Friend* by George Wilkinson (Bath: n.p., 1814).

published in Canton in 1830, and in 1831 it was translated into English by Charles Friedrich Neumann, being published as *History of Pirates Who Infested the China Sea from 1807 to 1810* in England. Indeed, Ching Yih Saou is not a main character in his book, and her name appears only twenty times in the Chinese text of 102 pages, because the theme of the book is primarily the activities of the Red, Black, and White Flag Pirate Fleets, who sailed in the waters off Macao and Canton between 1807 and 1810 [27]. The name of Ching Yih Saou appears only in conjunction with their operations in this book. However, *Ching hai-fen chi* should be a valuable book for two reasons: one is that it is a unique historical account in classic Chinese, which contains scrupulous records of Chinese pirates' activities, and the other is that it reports on Ching Yih Saou in a detached manner without any embroideries, which can provide us the truth. Yuan Yung-lun does not describe Ching Yih Saou as “a beautiful woman” or “the most powerful pirate all over the world,” so the reader determines whether she could be acknowledged as “the most powerful pirate” or not. Yuan Yun-lun was an employee of a governor general's yamen and a friend of several Chinese officials killed in combat against pirates. He stated that he himself felt compelled to write an objective account of the pirates and their activities, so he carried out rigorous research on whatever took place [27].

For these reasons, Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching hai-fen chi* can be considered a primary text for this paper.

As mentioned earlier, while Ching Yih Saou has been marginalized in Chinese history, strangely she has drawn as much attention in the West as Anne Bonny and Mary Read or more: there are some historical books, even if dressed-up, that contain her activities.<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly the primarily reason for this is that Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching hai-fen chi* was translated into English by Charles Friedrich Neumann, which enable Westerners to read it in English. Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching hai-fen chi* can be recognized to have a great value in the sense that it provided Ching Yih Saou's information to Westerners and had a significant influence on their historical studies.

#### 3.2. Cheng I Sao as an Admiral of the Chinese Pirate Fleet: Her Good Judgment and Managerial and Strategic Ability as a Dominator

The most important attainment of Ching Yih and his wife was to unite many pirate fleets into a powerful pirate confederation after the Tay-son's collapse. After Ching Yih's death in 1807, his wife, Ching Yih Saou, succeeded to the

<sup>10</sup> Besides Yuan Yung-lun's *Ching hai-fen chi*, books containing information on Ching Yih Saou's life are as follows: Philip Gosse, *The History of Piracy* (New York: Dover Publications, 2007) [12]; Joseph Gollomb, *Pirates Old and New* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2010)[10]; Linda Grant Pauw, *Seafaring Women* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982); Jorge Luis Borges, *The Widow Ching-Pirate* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011) [2]. All of them embellish her life to the extent of adding material that was not written in *Ching hai-fen chi*, rather than providing an accurate description. For instance, Philip Gosse's *The History of Piracy* provided a motivation for Ching Yih Saou's appearance in one of *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies [29].

role of “admiral.” Her succession is described in the very beginning of *Ching hai-fen chi*, the story being proceeded with her as an actual leader.

It happened, that on the seventeenth day of the tenth month moon, in the twentieth year of Kea king (about the end of 1807), Ching yah perished in a heavy gale, and his legitimate wife Shih placed the whole crew under the sway of Pain; but so that she herself should be considered the Commander of all the squadrons together, — for this reason the division Ching yah was then called Ching yah saou, or the wife of Ching yah. [22]

Her pirate squadron was composed of six fleets divided by their flags: the red, the yellow, the green, the blue, the black, and the white. Each fleet had respective leaders, and Ching Yih Saou was a leader of the red until her husband's death, after which she became the leader of the whole squadron as an admiral, whose growth was spectacular [22]. In 1805, her pirate squadron contained as many as four hundred junks and seventeen thousand pirates, which meant that she should be considered the most powerful leader of the biggest pirate fleet in Chinese history. It was her power and abilities that completely brought the huge numbers of pirates together. Her pirate squadron was not a mere unification of petty pirate gangs but a confederation with a written agreement developed by seven leaders in Guangdong. Namely, her pirate squadron could be recognized not only for its big scale but its formal and orderly discipline. The squadron was like a “nation” and Ching Yih Saou a “queen” rather than a pirate leader.

What made her acquire her position at the top of the pirate hierarchy was to select a submissive right-hand individual to whom she could entrust her rights of an admiral and who had to have an absolute loyalty to the Ching family as well as be accepted and respected by her followers. An individual who filled the requirements was Chang Paon, an adopted son of her husband. *Ching hai-fen chi* describes that Chang Paon enjoyed the fullest confidence of Ching Yih, having leadership potential:

Chang paon was a native of Sin hwy, near the mouth of the river, and the son of a fisherman. Being fifteen years of age, he went with his father a fishing in the sea, and they were consequently taken prisoners by Ching yah, who roamed about the mouth of the river, ravaging and plundering. Ching yah saw Paon, and liked him so much, that he could not depart from him. Paon was indeed a clever fellow — he managed all business very well; being also a fine young man, he became a favorite of Ching yah and was made a head-man or captain. [22]

As stated in the previous section, Chang Paon was a fisherman's son who was captured by Ching Yih at fifteen and considered his adopted son. After Ching Yih's death, he became Ching Yih Saou's lover and finally her husband. One of her excellent abilities was her good judgment of character: an ability that determined who was the most reliable, whom she should select as her strongest support for her absolute domination.

While pirates were required to have fighting strength and

bravery, Ching Yih Saou was endowed with more abilities. She possessed an organized capacity in various spheres such as good judgment of character, managerial ability, fighting skill, and negotiating power, which female pirates could not exercise, for becoming the most powerful pirate leader.

First of all, she made Chang Paon new regulations as follows:

He made the three following regulations:

First:

If any man goes privately on shore, or what is called transgressing the bars, he shall be taken and his ears be perforated in the presence of the whole fleet; repeating the same act, he shall suffer death.

Second:

Not the least thing shall be taken privately from the stolen and plundered goods. All shall be registered, and the private receive for himself, out of ten parts, only two; eight parts belong to the storehouse, called the general fund; taking any thing out of this general fund, without permission, shall be death.

Third:

No person shall debauch at his pleasure captive women taken in the villages and open places, and brought on board a ship; he must first request the ship's purser for permission, and then go aside in the ship's hold. To use violence against any woman, or to wed her without permission, shall be punished with death. [22]

*Ching hai-fen chi* states that it was not Ching Yih Saou but who Chang Paon who instituted the regulations; however, considering the phrase “but so that she herself should be considered the Commander of all the squadrons together” [22], it should be apparent that Ching Yih Saou ordered Chang Paon to establish them. According to Glasspoole, Ching Yih Saou's code was short and severe. He reported that pirates who had violated the code were flogged, put in irons, or quartered, and the code was strictly enforced and punished with an efficiency that seemed “almost incredible” [8]. While her pirate code was similar to the Western pirates' in some respects, the difference between them was that her code was not merely obligatory but assumed an organized and confederate character by being followed, not the rules of a jumbled pirate gang. Mostly piracy should be considered a survival method for outsiders at sea, and it is usual that pirates attack and capture ships encountered by chance. On the other hand, Ching Yih Saou's squadron made well-designed advance captures. They optimized the utility of their big size, getting information about marine navigation of merchant ships ahead of time, enabling them to aim large ships. Furthermore, Ching Yih Saou controlled financial operations that extended beyond the occasional robbery common in piracy. For example, her squadron played a role as a convoy in coastal waters. She placed importance on selling “safe passage” to almost all coastal fishermen and merchant shippers and collecting forced contributions by convoying them. In other words, her squadron was organized not by piracy but by the establishment of financial offices [27].

Although Ching Yih Saou and her followers were raised to the peerage and bureaucracy after their leaving piracy, there were fierce battles between them and the naval forces of government, as there were for Western pirates. However, she was able to succeed in her negotiation with the government precisely because they never lost the battles against the government, though the government made desperate efforts to suppress them. In 1808, Ching Yih Saou displayed her ability in fighting against the naval forces, which was detached to capture her pirate fleet.

The wife of Ching yah remained quiet; but she ordered Chang paou to make an attack on the front of our line with ten vessels, and Leang po paou to come from behind. Our commander fought in the van and in the rear, and made a dreadful slaughter; but there came suddenly two other pirates. Heang shang url, and Suh put king, who surrounded and attacked our commander on all sides. Our squadron was scattered, thrown into disorder, and consequently cut to pieces; there was a noise which rent the sky; every man fought in his own defense, and scarcely a hundred remained together. The squadron of Ching yah overpowered us by numbers; our commander was not able to protect his lines, they were broken, and we lost fourteen vessels. [22]

When examining her fighting, it is obvious that Ching Yih Saou is an entirely different pirate from Anne Bonny and Mary Read. Her excellence in fighting shows not only her bravery but her implementing of in-depth strategies to win fights against the government. That was exactly why she made a successful transition from a pirate to an aristocrat, which seemed impossible for most pirates. For example, it is undoubted that Anne Bonny and Mary Read were as excellent pirates as men. However, they could not be admitted as leaders of pirate fleets. Moreover, the two female pirates were ultimately defeated in the battle against the Royal Navy. On the contrary, Ching Yih Saou can be recognized as “the most powerful pirate all over the world” not only because she took command of a huge number of pirates but because she saved followers’ lives and her own and raised them to the bureaucracy after their giving up piracy because of her perfect excellence as a leader of pirates.<sup>11</sup> Ching hai-fen chi reports how she went through her negotiation with the government, as follows:

The wife of Ching yah stated to You che chang that it was her earnest wish to submit to government; and Chang paou himself assured the officer of his firm intention to surrender without the least deceit. The governor then ordered You che chang to visit the pirates a second time, accompanied by Pang not, in order to settle all with them regarding their submission..... In consequence of this, Chang paou came

with his wives and children, and with the wife of Ching yah, at Foo young shoo near the town of Heang shan to submit himself to government. Every vessel was provided with pork and wine, and every man received at the same time a bill for a certain quantity of money. Those who wished it, could join the military force of government for pursuing the remaining pirates; and those who objected, disappeared and withdrew into the country. This is the manner by which the red squadron of the pirates was pacified. [22]

Around 1809 the government had not enough military and financial strength to crush her pirate fleet, so they took measures to stimulate pirates to surrender by dangling the possibility of amnesty in front of them rather than putting them down by force. Ching Yih Saou was quick to understand that this offer could bring many advantages to her and her followers, which made her take a lead in encouraging her followers’ surrender and in acquiring advantageous conditions. On April 18, 1810, she visited the governor general’s headquarters in Canton while unarmed, accompanied by her followers and their families. She succeeded in her negotiations. Two days later, the pirates surrendered, attaining much remuneration. Those who offered a voluntary surrender were permitted to save their booty gained from piracy and were bestowed positions in the imperial military bureaucracy. Chang Paou was offered the rank of lieutenant, allowed to obtain a private fleet ranging from 20 and 30 junks, and paid a huge sum of money to establish his followers onshore.

Ching Yih Saou, after leaving piracy, was not to be captured, or to suicide, as her fellows in the West did. On the contrary, she was their total opposite, enjoying the rest of her life: she was to be bestowed a title, being recognized as an aristocrat. She was also a keeper of an infamous gambling house, which shows that her managerial ability exhibited in her past as a pirate was still strong even in later years. She died in 1844 at age 69, her end being extremely different from female pirates’ in the West.

After the death of Ching Yih Saou in 1844, there existed two female pirates between the 1920s and the 1930s in China: Lo Ho Cho and Lai Choi San [27]. Like Ching Yih Saou, they were both wives of pirate leaders, moving into power after their husbands’ death [27]. Lo Ho Cho’s name appeared first in A. Hyatt Verrill’s *The Real Story of the Pirate*. Philip Gosse describes her in *The History of Piracy* on the basis of Verrill’s book [12]. However, Verrill’s accounts should be considered a fictional adventure story about pirates, not a historical account. Moreover, Lo Ho Cho’s activities were described in only a part of the book, so the details about her cannot be grasped. There is no way of knowing what sort of female pirate she was, or when and where she died, because there is no account about her other than *The Real Story of the Pirate*. Although it is undoubted that she is a real figure, she is much veiled in mystery. Lai Choi San is also full of mystery. She appears in only *I Sailed with Chinese Pirates* by Aleko Lilius, an American journalist. This book is a unique account conveying her activities. Lilius described that she commanded her pirate fleet of twelve

11 Yuan Yung-lun just gives an objective account of Ching Yih Saou and her followers and their activities and does not necessarily admire her in Ching hai-fen chi. However, Ching Yih Saou is described in Philip Gosse’s *The History of Piracy*, which was written on the basis of Ching hai-fen chi, thusly: “although no other woman pirate in all history reached so high a pitch of glory and renown as the widow” [12]. Additionally, Dian H. Murray refers to “the piracy of the most famous woman pirates of all” [21], and Linda Grant De Pauw points out that “she must be considered the greatest pirate, male or female, in all history” [6].

junks at around Macao in the 1920s, but his accounts seem to have no credibility. The reason for this is that his book was published as non-fiction, but it has actually been recognized as "a fiction," which means that it does not express the truth objectively [27]. It is unclear whether Lai Choi San centralized all power in her own hands as much as Ching Yih Saou, and Lilius does not describe when and how Lai Choi San's life as a pirate leader came to an end [16].

#### 4. Was Ching Yih Saou a Wicked Woman: Analysis of Ching Yih Saou's Body and Gender from a Perspective of Butler's Theory

As mentioned at the start, although an ideology of male chauvinism has been encouraged by Confucianism since early times in China, there existed some powerful women, such as Lü Zhi, Wu Zetian, and Empress Dowager Cixi, who took advantage of the large power succeeded from their husband. Therefore, they have been negatively branded as "wicked women" rather than "powerful women." This tendency is not peculiar to Chinese women but rather common to all ages and countries. Why should powerful women be regarded as "wicked woman"? An answer to this question could be found in Mary Douglas's suggestion.

When male dominance is accepted as a central principle of social organisation and applied without inhibition and with full rights of physical coercion, beliefs in sex pollution are not likely to be highly developed. On the other hand, when the principle of male dominance is applied to the ordering of social life but is contradicted by other principles such as that of female independence, or the inherent right of women as the weaker sex to be more protected from violence than men, then sex pollution is likely to flourish. [7]

According to Douglas, when male dominance has been completely penetrated in society, sexual order can be kept good. However, if the principle of male dominance collapses and women come to stand on their independence and rights, "sex pollution" has to flourish. In other words, independent or powerful women can be sexually uninhibited, which disturbs the social order, so such women have to be regarded as "wicked women." Moreover, a logic similar to Douglas's in Judith Butler's indication can be found a logic similar to Douglas's in Judith Butler's indication, who puts forth a position different from sex-gender dualism [3, 4].

Discrete genders are part of what "humanizes" individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right. Because there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis... [4]

Butler states that both sex and gender are socially and culturally constructed, and human beings can exhibit the

characteristics of men and women without reference to physical difference. The word "discrete" in above citation means characteristics that differentiate between men and women. Namely, women who cannot live according to "femininity" are accused of being "wicked women." Furthermore, Butler criticizes the forced system of heterosexuality. According to Butler, sex is not much more than regulation by a system that demands heterosexuality based on the idea of sex dualism, of men or women.

If sexuality is culturally constructed within existing Power relations, then the postulation of a normative sexuality that is "before," "outside," or "beyond" power is a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream, one that Postpones the concrete and contemporary task of rethinking subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity within the terms of power itself. [4]

Judith Butler examines gender from the viewpoint of the forced system of heterosexuality, sex, and gender, and she criticizes that sexuality has been forced to be linked inseparably to the idea of sex dualism. Her insistence is valid for Douglas's logic of wicked women, because Douglas insists that that women are inevitably forfeited their rights and independence in male-dominated society and compelled to limit themselves to heterosexuality with their husbands. According to Douglas, "sex pollution" leads to social confusion and the collapse of male dominance. Sexual liberation, Butler insists, can be considered "sex pollution" in Douglas-speak, and women who demand it have to be recognized as a "wicked woman." After all, women are required to be "dependent," "without any rights," and "chaste." As stated accurately by Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" [1]; all women who become a "woman" avoid becoming a "wicked woman."

Was Ching Yih Saou, who was a completely independent woman who retained powerful rights and was not sexually inhibited a typical wicked woman? Or was she "desexualized," living beyond bodily sexual difference? In Beauvoir's phrase, as for Ching Yih Saou's life, it can be said that "she never became a woman." Judith Butler interprets Beauvoir's assertion as follows:

On the other hand, Simone de Beauvoir suggests it *The Second Sex* that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one." For Beauvoir, gender is "constructed," but implied in her formulation is an agent, a cogito, who somehow takes on or appropriates that gender and could, in principle, take on some other gender. Is gender as variable and volitional as Beauvoir's account seems to suggest? Can "construction" in such a case be reduced to a form of choice? Beauvoir is clear that one "becomes" a woman, but always under a cultural compulsion to become one. And clearly, the compulsion does not come from "sex." There is nothing in her account that guarantees that the "one" who becomes a woman is necessarily female. [4]

Butler also claims that one becomes a woman, and being born as a woman never naturally makes individuals feminine and forces one to play social and cultural roles in femininity. There is no causal connection between being born as a



woman and behaving "like a woman": sex and gender can have no connection. Of course, the female body could have no inevitable factors consistent with the feminine gender, and the male body has no factor in masculinity. As Butler suggests that "there is nothing in her account that guarantees that the 'one' who becomes a woman is necessarily female," in the above citation, a biological male can become feminine. Butler also insists below:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that "women" will interpret only female bodies.....When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and, *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. [4]

As in the quotation above, "there is no necessary relationship between one's body and one's gender," [23], and with a female body, one may not be considered "feminine." There can exist a feminine male or a masculine female. In the case of Ching Yih Saou and her followers, the stereotype that men should be in control and women should follow has been totally reversed. That is, Ching Yih Saou with a female body displayed "masculine" traits, and her followers with a male bodies showed "feminine" traits.

When identifying one's physical descriptions, the first thing that strikes most people is sexual difference, which is male or female in most instances. Sexual difference can be considered the most basic criterion in categorizing individuals. In this sense, "sex" can be significant. However, "sex" is just a biological differentiation offered to individuals' bodies and quite alien to "gender," cultivated by social and cultural criteria. Namely, "sex" carries no special significance other than identifying biological difference. As Butler asserts, "sex" and "gender" should be divided into distinct categories so that "sex" cannot be sufficient ground for "femininity" or "masculinity." It happened that Ching Yih Saou had a female body. She existed as a "pirate" beyond sexual difference, having leadership potential.

Of course, there is no correlation between her female body and her quality as a pirate leader. As Butler suggests, "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the "doer" is variably constructed in and through the deed" [4], Ching Yih Saou constructed her gender identity in the process of living as a pirate. "Gender" should be an entity that has nothing to do with a body or sex. Ching Yih Saou had no traits based on sex but had her distinctive traits as a pirate, without relation to sexual difference. As far as her life as a pirate is concerned, it is apparent that there is no correlation between individuals' bodies, male or female, and individuals' traits. I do not mean that being excellent at leadership display is

masculine. What is important is that the culturally prescribed gender role was totally reversed between Ching Yih Saou and her followers, which means that there is not much point in the predominance of men over women, and an individual with great leadership ability should become a leader, without attention to sexual difference. She established that there is no relevance between leadership ability and sexual difference, so it cannot be said that Ching Yih Saou was a great leader of a pirate squadron *despite her sex*; we have to say that an excellent pirate leader had a biologically female body.

After all, the question can be clarified. According to Mary Douglas's assertions cited in the beginning of this section, a rhetoric could be structured: a wicked woman can equal an independent woman, because such women could be sexually loose. Furthermore, Judith Butler denied a logic that sex, gender, and sexuality are closely related to one another: namely, the logic that if an individual has a biologically female body, she has to display feminine traits and have a love relationship with a man. While it is obvious that "sexual pollution" in Douglas's assertion means a woman having a sexual relationship with a man other than her husband, let alone a homosexual love, Butler further develops Douglas's assertion because Butler's logic criticizes forced heterosexuality, signifying absolute freedom of sexuality.

Although Ching Yih Saou was not homosexual, after her husband's death she made a puppet of Chang Paon, her husband's favorite follower, and fell in love with him, taking him as her husband in the end, so she can be considered sexually active. Matthew H. Sommer is considered the most eminent scholar of sexual ethics in the Qing dynasty. He analyzes sexual regulations under Qing dynasty law. Matthew points out that while sexual regulations were controlled through "status performance" before the Qing dynasty, "gender performance" became established as a sexual criterion afterward. In that time's sexual morality, "chastity" was a natural qualification required for women, even for widows. Remarriage was considered unfaithful [26].<sup>12</sup>

In the phrase of Butler, in the sense that sexuality, which "is culturally constructed within existing power relations," was postulated "before," "outside," or "beyond" power, it can be suggested that Ching Yih Saou could accomplish "a cultural impossibility and a politically impracticable dream," actualizing "subversive possibilities for sexuality and identity" [4].

Of course, I never engage in a poor argument that Ching Yih Saou did not display a traditional femininity because she was involved in an incestuous relationship with an adopted son of her husband. Instead, it should be interpreted that a marriage between Ching Yih Saou and Cheng Paon was a mere formality, not an ordinary marriage between an

<sup>12</sup> In the Islamic and Christian world and also in Japan, remarriages of widows are generally considered unfaithful and accusable. In China, while widows of government officials were severely prohibited to remarry before the Yuan dynasty, the common people were permitted to do so. An ideology that all widows were strictly prohibited from remarriage arose from the end of Ming dynasty to the Qing dynasty [14].

ordinary man and an ordinary woman. In the context of Butler's theory, we must not be swayed by their biological sexual differences but must notice that Ching Yih Saou happened to have a female body and Cheng Paon a male body, so their being wedded can convey an inadequate impression of marriage. In fact, insofar as the relationship between Ching Yih Saou and Chang Paon after their marriage is concerned, she treated him not as a husband but as a follower. In other words, her remarriage with Chang Paon proved that she was a very individual as a pirate regardless of sexual difference, not that she was unfeminine because of her deviation from traditional sexual morality in China. We may go from this point to the conclusion that Ching Yih Saou was not a wicked woman but a desexualized pirate. Considering that she was "a pirate," it is undoubted that she was "a villain," but her wickedness should not be categorized as male or female because she should be seen as an embodiment of desexualization.

## 5. Conclusions

Before ending this paper, it should be mentioned that it cannot be denied that Ching Yih Saou's path to power is the traditional Chinese path of women rising to power through marriage. She could take over a leadership position from her husband, a leader of a great pirate squadron, because of her status of a lawful wife. Lü Zhi, Wu Zetian, Empress Dowager Cixi, and Jiāng Qīng<sup>13</sup> are well known as women with authority in Chinese history, all of whom were lawful wives of men with power. As stated earlier, a lawful wife of an authority figure could be offered the right to take over her husband's leadership position and actually to come to power after the husband's death. If not emperors or politicians, it was an ordinary procedure for women who came to power to marry into an influential family and inherit powers, even among the common classes. Put another way, if a woman wants to be an authority, all she has to do is to be a lawful wife of a man with power. Conversely speaking, as long as her husband is an authority, power eventually comes to her without any effort [19].

Now a question arises that Ching Yih Saou seems to be an excellent pirate leader who destroyed a gender bias against females, but she was in fact an extremely gendered woman who followed just the same path as her colleagues in Chinese history rather than a desexualized individual. Of course, the answer is no. We should not treat her the same way as women onshore. Almost all women who enjoyed predominance in Chinese history, such as Lü Zhi, Wu Zetian, and Empress Dowager Cixi, married into famous families. For this reason, they could have the protections of a class system that guaranteed them positions in their family, whether they themselves had leadership potential or not. For

example, even in the event that retainers conspired to launch a coup, unlike Ching Yih Saou, none of them would be tested by fire all the way through. On the contrary, Ching Yih Saou as a pirate leader kept giving commands, developing fighting strategies, and achieving benefits under constant threats to her life. When breaking up her squadron, she could save her followers' lives and turn her pirates into bureaucrats with her excellent leadership potential. Moreover, she was always a defier of the Confucian principle. Most importantly, her followers welcomed and respected her as their unique leader who was able to control the pirate squadron.

As for women authorities onshore, their inheritance of powers should be recognized as mere acts of agency in patriarchy, just "a consignment" from men. Their powers were a symbol of male dominance. However, in the case of Ching Yih Saou, when talking too much about "her inheritance from husband," we tend to overlook her own abilities. Even though her catalyst was marriage to a leader of pirates, her exercising of more authority than her husband without any guarantee for her status should be recognized as charismatic, which denied and destroyed patriarchy. We have to conclude that Ching Yih Saou was completely different from emperors' wives.

Unlike an official established organization such as a nation or dynasty, nearly every case of an individual's structuring unofficial group tends to depend on the individual's charisma. Ching Yih Saou is no exception. Her pirate squadron was established on her charisma, not on acts of agency for her husband. No man or woman could control such a great pirate squadron other than Ching Yih Saou. Sexual differences and gender stereotypes had no place in her charisma.

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