

The Concubine Slaves of the Portuguese in the China Sea Region

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In sixteenth-century East Asia, many Portuguese sailors brought consorts with them on their voyages. Most often, these consorts were not wives, but rather slave concubines. There is little research on them: only Charles Boxer's famous article on the Muitsai, and a few brief discussions in larger studies on slavery or on women in Portuguese Asia.¹ This chapter thus seeks to lay down some basic information, with particular emphasis on their mentalities. First, I will give a demographic portrait of who these women were. Then, I will seek to explain a certain enigma: the fact that so many of them seem, at least at first glance, to passively accept their condition.

This study's limits should be noted. It primarily focuses on the concubine slave women of Portuguese men (generally sailors) on the China Sea in the sixteenth century. That is to say, the geographic range is fairly restricted. Furthermore, it neglects a vast number of other slave women working in Portuguese Asia: the domestic workers, the attendants, the shopkeepers, the field laborers, etc. Finally, it also leaves out another widespread form of sex trafficking: slave prostitution and brothels. In short, there remains much research to be done in the future.

1 A Demographic Portrait

Let us start with a demographic portrait of the Portuguese concubine slaves in the region of the South China Sea.

In regard to the ethnicity of these women, there is little hard data. It seems that many were Chinese. Already in the 1560's, the Ming official Ye Quan visited

1 Charles R. Boxer, *Fidalgos in the Far East, 1550–1770* (New York: Oxford University, 1968), 220–241. Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, *A Outra Metade do Céu* (Hong Kong: Saint Joseph, 2011), 19–91. Leonor Diaz de Seabra and Maria de Deus Beites Manso, "Escravidão, concubinação e casamento em Macau: séculos XVI–XVIII," *Afro-Ásia* 49 (2014): 107–110, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0002-05912014000100004>. Lúcio de Sousa, *The Portuguese slave trade in early modern Japan: merchants, Jesuits and Japanese, Chinese, and Korean slaves* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 22–24.

Macau and wrote with alarm: “On the island, men and women are made into slaves and concubines of the foreigners—not less than a thousand, all children from decent Chinese households!”² In 1637, Peter Mundy visited Macau, and also noticed the Chinese ethnic predominance: “By report but one woman in all this towne that was borne in Portugall; their wives either Chinesas or of that Race heretoffore Married to Portugalls.”³ However, not all were Chinese. It seems that there were people from many regions of Asia: Japanese, Malay, Javanese, and Indian.⁴

In regard to age, these women were relatively young. Many of them may have already been enslaved in China, where they had been raised specifically to be sold as consorts and performers.⁵ The few extant sales contracts for prostitute slaves within China suggest that such people were usually sold between thirteen and eighteen years of age.⁶ This matches with what is known about the ages of slaves whom the Portuguese purchased. For example, the *Yue shan cong tan* 月山叢談 [Collection of writings from Moonlit Mountains] written in the mid-sixteenth-century, said that “[Chinese criminals] secretly sell children of ten or more years of age.”⁷ As will be seen, most of the women who appear in the sources seem to be mothers of young children.

In regard to population numbers, we can only make guesses. In Melaka, there were probably about as many concubine slaves as there were Portuguese. It was largely a city of single men—usually around two hundred at any given time—with very few families.⁸ In 1550, Father Nicolao Lancilotto wrote: “generally, the other men who have enough to be able to have a slave woman, almost all of them have one as a friend, in addition to other dishonesties.”⁹ The practice of slave concubinage was apparently the norm among men there. Francis Xavier was shocked by the immorality that he witnessed in Melaka. When he

2 Ye Quan 葉權, *Xian bo bian* 賢博編 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju, 1987), 卷3, 46.

3 Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy*, vol. 3, ed. Richard Carnac Temple (London: Hakluyt, 1919), 262.

4 Seabra, “Escravatura,” 106–107.

5 On these women, see Wang Xueping 王雪萍, *16–18 shi ji bi nü sheng cun zhuang tai yan jiu*. 16–18 世纪婢女生存状态研究 (Ha'erbin Shi: Heilongjiang da xue chu ban she, 2008).

6 See the sales contracts of Qian Banggui 錢邦貴 and of Wang Taitai 王太太 (Madame Wang): Anhui sheng bo wu guan 安徽省博物館, *Ming Qing Huizhou she hui jing ji zi liao cong bian* 明清徽州社会经济资料丛编 (Beijing: Zhongguo she hui chu ban she, 1988), 555–557.

7 The text, no longer extant in its entirety, is quoted in Gu Yanwu 顧炎武, *Tian xia jun guo li bing shu* 天下郡國利病書 (Shanghai: Shanghai ke xue ji shu wen xian chu ban she, 2002), 第三十三冊, 2735.

8 Ian A. Macgregor, “Notes on the Portuguese in Malaya,” *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28:2 (May 1955): 6–12.

9 Lancilotto, *Documenta Indica* 11, 130.

left the city in 1547, it is said that he shook the dust off his feet, and committed the sinful place to destruction.¹⁰

This study will also consider Goa, the capital city of Portuguese India, since many of the East Asian slaves ended up there. In Goa, the demographics for concubinage are impossible to track. It was a city with more families and more figures of wealth and social standing. Consequently, concubine slavery was not practiced openly, as in Melaka. The rich swore that they treated their slaves with integrity, and society pretended to believe them. For example, when François Pyrard de Laval visited Goa in 1608–1610, he said that the Portuguese “do not take it as a sin to have the company of a slave woman whom one has bought if she is not married; for, since the master is the one who marries her off, he cannot make use of her after he has given his word.”¹¹ Thus, for Goa, we have many rumors and gossip about concubine slavery, but few concrete numbers.

2 The Alternatives to Concubine Slavery

As mentioned, this chapter seeks to explain why so many concubine slaves seem to passively accept their condition. This idea of “acceptance” implies that they had a choice between various options. In this section, I will explain what those other options were, and consider why women slaves did not choose these alternatives.

One option was to violently resist. It was not uncommon for male slaves to revolt in Melaka: for example, turning their weapons against their owners in the midst of battle, or mutinying aboard a ship, etc.¹² In theory, women slaves could have done so as well. However, I have never found a single record of a slave woman violently attacking her Portuguese master. Both external social pressures and internal value systems discouraged them from engaging in such violence. In any case, this is not unique to Portuguese Asia: similar trends have been noted among women slaves in many other locations.¹³

10 Xavier, *Scripta Varia*, 286, 292.

11 François Pyrard de Laval, *Voyage de François Pyrard de Laval*, vol. 2 (Paris: Louis Billaine, 1679), 37–38, <https://books.google.com/books?id=GCVOiYXECIC>.

12 For example, during the siege on Melaka of 1551, some slaves reportedly turned on their masters in the midst of battle. See Francisco Perez to the Brothers in Goa, Nov 24, 1551, in *Documenta Indica II*, 211. On a ship mutiny, see Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz, “A escravatura em Malaca no século XVI,” *STUDIA* (1994): 272–273.

13 On the rarity of women slaves violently rebelling against their masters, see Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, “Introduction: Strategies of Women and Constraints of Enslavement in the Modern Americas,” in *Women and Slavery: Volume 2: The Modern Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 9.

Another option was to flee. There are many records of male slaves fleeing in the China Sea Region.¹⁴ There are also cases of women slaves fleeing in the Atlantic world.¹⁵ However, I have found no record of a woman slave fleeing in the South China Sea region. It was probably more difficult here than in other regions. This was a world of ports and ethnic enclaves within ports. In order to flee, a woman needed to find a willing (and trustworthy) ship captain. Furthermore, there were strong social biases against solitary, single women. Both Muslim Malay society and Confucian east Asian society tended to associate them with prostitutes.¹⁶ Probably any slave woman who dared to flee from one man risked being re-enslaved by others.

Another option was to seek legal protection from their masters. This basically meant asking the Catholic Church to intervene. As mentioned earlier, the Jesuits in Melaka were constantly pressuring the local sailors to either free their concubine slaves or marry them. It is never explained what the priest would do if a concubine slave asked for help, but a fair conjecture can be made. When Christian slaves asked priests to help them get away from non-Christian masters, the church purchased the slaves and resold them to Christian masters.¹⁷ By analogy, one can surmise that if a concubine slave asked for help, the church would probably purchase her and resell her to a respectable Christian *casada*.

However, it seems that concubine slaves rarely, if ever, sought such help. While there are numerous records of Jesuits preaching to Portuguese men in the region about chastity (as will be seen in a moment), I have not found a single case in which a woman actually asked for their help. On the contrary, the sources tend to suggest that the women did not want the priests to intervene. For example, let us note a description of the slave women whom the Jesuit priests forced to leave Macau in 1563: "In the last ship that left for Melaka," wrote Francisco de Sousa, there embarked another two hundred [slave women], who

14 Thomaz, "Escravidura," 275–276.

15 See, for example, Barbara Krauthamer, "A Particular Kind of Freedom: Black Women, Slavery, Kinship, and Freedom in the American Southeast," in *Women and Slavery: Volume 2: The Modern Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 100–127.

16 On the notion that women should stay within the private sphere that was prevalent during this period, see Patricia Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1993). On the association of solitary women with prostitutes, see, for example, Alessandro Valignano, *Historia del principio y progreso de la Compañía de Jesús en las Indias Orientales (1542–64)*. Ed. Josef Wicki (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1944): 183–184.

17 "Primeiro Concílio Provincial de Goa, 1567," *Documentação para a história das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente: Índia 10*, ed. António da Silva Rêgo (Lisbon, 1953), 353. <http://purl.pt/26745/4/>.

were the most dangerous and most difficult to be expelled out.”¹⁸ These “most dangerous” slave women were presumably the concubines and prostitutes. They did not willingly comply with the priests.

A last option was manumission. In the Atlantic world, many slave women were able to purchase their own freedom.¹⁹ However, it seems that this was uncommon for concubine slaves in the China Sea region. The problem was that in this region, women’s manumission was closely linked to marriage. Documents from Macau describe them either purchasing their freedom, or being granted it, specifically in order to get married.²⁰ As mentioned, there was a cultural distrust of single, unmarried women, which apparently prevented slave women from independently freeing themselves. This was problematic for concubine slaves. Their masters were hardly inclined to marry them off to other man. And many of these women already had children with their masters, which further complicated nuptial matters. Consequently, concubines generally had only one path towards manumission: to marry their own master.

To summarize, these women did have alternatives to concubinage: they could violently attack their owner, they could flee, they could ask for help from the church, or they could seek manumission. But for various reasons, none of these alternatives was realistic or attractive.

3 Mentalities of Concubinage: Amorous Feelings

I have stated that the concubine slave women in this region seem to have “accepted” their condition. But what does acceptance mean? And what kind of life were they accepting? In this section, I will explore three different types of mentalities—that is to say, three different forms of ‘acceptance’. I will also consider the conditions in which such mentalities may have appeared.

First, it is possible that some concubine slaves had amorous feelings towards their masters. While we must handle such notions with great caution, there was a prevalent stereotype of slave women being love-struck and infatuated. For example, the poet Luís de Camões portrayed the concubine-master relationship as one of erotic romance, singing of Barbara, the “captive / who holds

18 Francisco de Sousa, *Oriente conquistado a Jesus Cristo: pelos padres da Companhia de Jesus da província de Goa*, vol. 1 (Lisbon: Valentim da Costa Deslandes, 1710), IV.D.II.38, 739, <https://books.google.com/books?id=dKdFAAAAcAAJ&dq>.

19 Campbell, Miers, and Miller, “Introduction,” 17–19.

20 See Fonseca, *escravos*, 91–94; Seabra, “Escravidura,” 116–120.

me captive.”²¹ The Dutch voyager Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, who visited Goa in the 1580’s, also shared this view. Writing about slave women in general, he claimed that:

If a slave woman chance to have a Portingal or a white man to her lover, she is so proud, that she thinketh no woman comparable unto her, and among themselves doe bragge [thereof].²²

Such positive feelings doubtless appeared in cases where more intimate relations existed between the master and slave. Indeed, it seems that sometimes the couples lived together much like husband and wife. For example, the Jesuit Luis de Almeida wrote that as he traveled across the southwestern coast of Japan in the winter of 1562, he came upon a solitary Portuguese ship. He dined with the captain, Afonso Vaz Almeida wrote:

I gave him a sermon on how important it was for him to extricate himself from mortal sin. He showed himself to be very thankful for what I told him, and before I left his house, he married his slave girl, with whom he had two children.²³

The passage is brief, but offers hints as to the living conditions of this couple. They sailed together, and they must have been doing so for many years, for they had multiple children. Afonso Vaz apparently considered his slave to basically be his wife. The proof of this is that when Almeida asked him to formally marry her, he agreed.

Another example is that of a young man named Alvaro Gentile, whom Francis Xavier met in Melaka in 1552. The father wrote that he had urged Gentile to “not delay any longer lawful marriage with a woman who, because they were illicitly living together, had born children to him.”²⁴ Given the paucity of free women in Melaka in the 1550’s, it seems likely that Gentile was in a pseudo-conjugal relationship with a concubine slave. Xavier wrote that Gentile wished to get married, but was hindered by his vow to become a priest! Gentile was not a unique case. While in Melaka, Xavier confronted many men

21 Luis de Camões, “Endechas a Bárbara escrava,” in *Pretidão de amor. Endechas de Camões a Barbara escrava*, ed. Xavier da Cunha (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1893), 289.

22 Linschoten, *Voyage*, 216.

23 Luis d’Almeida to the Brothers, October 25, 1562, in *Documentos del Japón*, 660. All translations are mine.

24 Francis Xavier to Gaspar Barzaeus, July 13, 1552, in *Sancti Francisci Xaverii epistolae atque aliaque scripta complectens*, Vol. 1 of *Monumenta Xaveriana* (Madrid: Augustinus Auriol, 1900), 762.

over the question of concubinage. One of the local officials, Diogo de Abreu, said that he saw the father “in Melaka, marry many men to their slave girls, and others, he separated them from sin.”²⁵

One fairly clear example of a master and slave who became husband and wife can be found in the travelogue of the French traveler Jean Mocquet. After Mocquet arrived in Goa in 1609, he found lodging with an Indian man.²⁶ That man’s wife, Mocquet’s hostess, was Chinese. They often spoke, and she later told him the story of how she had been enslaved.²⁷ We know little else about her life, but given those details, one can surmise that she had probably been a concubine slave. By the time Mocquet met her, she was the matriarch of the household. She and her husband ran the hostel together, with him handling rent payment and finances, and her handling room and board for clients.²⁸ It thus seems that over the decades, she had left behind the status of slave concubine and fully assumed the status of lawful wife.

Doubtless, we should not romanticize these situations, nor should we assume that the relationships were completely free from violence and inequality. But it does seem that in some cases, the slave woman might have accepted the relationship out of sincere feelings of affection.

4 Entalities of Concubinage: In Search of Material Security

Portuguese Asia had a stereotype which could also be found in the Atlantic world: that of the concubine slave as a Jezebel seductress.²⁹ This stereotype often appears in the writings of priests. Let us note one passage from Father Gomes Vaz’s advice for confessors in Melaka, written around 1600:³⁰

Prostitutes who willingly present themselves to their priests during Lent, throwing themselves down before them in order to confess their sins: it is

25 Xavier, *Scripta Varia*, 283.

26 Jean Mocquet, *Voyages en Afrique, Asie, Indes Orientales et Occidentales faits par Jean Mocquet* (Paris: Migneret, 1830), 234, <https://books.google.com/books?id=GUL4H5okbsAC&dq>.

27 Mocquet, *Voyages*, 284.

28 Mocquet, *Voyages*, 234–235.

29 On this stereotype in the Atlantic world, see, for example, Henrice Altink, “Deviant and Dangerous: Proslavery Representations of Jamaican Slave Women’s Sexuality, ca. 1780–1834” in *Women and Slavery: Volume 2: The Modern Atlantic* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 209–230.

30 On Gomez Vaz and Codex 805, see Manuel Lobato, “Notas e correções para uma edição crítica do Ms. Da Livraria No. 805 (IAN/TT), a propósito da publicação de um tratado do Pe Manuel de Carvalho sj,” *Anais de História de Além-Mar*, Vol. 3 (2002): 393–394.

not appropriate that they confess. For the priest should not wish to hear them unless they have that submission of the soul [...] The same must be said about those who, due to grudges or concubinage, or any other sin which is immovably set in their mind, are not eligible to do confession.³¹

Vaz views concubines quite negatively. He does not consider them to be victims who are unwillingly forced into their situation, but rather to be stubborn and hard-hearted sinners.

In other guidelines, Vaz shows what he believed to be the motivation of such concubine slaves:

If a married man gives something to his concubine, either goods or real estate, or to any other woman with whom he has carnal affection, his wife will be able to revoke the stated thing and have it for herself.³²

Vaz thought that the motivation of the concubine slaves was to gain access to the master's wealth. In this passage, that meant stealing property from its rightful receiver: the wife. Vaz saw the priest as the defender of the innocent (the wife) from the predator (the slave concubine). This stance of the church, defending wives from slaves, was certainly not unique to Asia. Similar cases have been noted in Brazil.³³ In any case, one can understand why many concubine slaves chose not to ask priests for help, as mentioned above.

It is doubtless true that many concubine slaves were seeking to gain material security from their relationship with the master. One can sense this, for example, in François Pyrard de Laval's description of the slave market in Goa:

The slaves themselves, hoping for better treatment by changing masters, display their disposition, throwing themselves in to attract buyers [...] There you can see girls and women, very beautiful and pretty, from all the countries of the Indies, most of whom know how to play instruments, knit, and sew quite delicately.³⁴

In this passage, we see the slave women making use of their sexuality as a kind of tool to attract potential buyers—future masters. On the auction stage, they

31 Gomes Vaz, "Resoluciones aliquot rerum naviarum," in *Manuscritos da Livraria*. Codex 805. PT/TT/MSLIV/0805. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, fols. 241v–242r. <https://digi.tarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=4248690>.

32 "Comentários," Codex 805, fol. 207.

33 Raylane Ramos Gomes, "Vivendo em pecado: concubinato de escravos no maranhão colonial," *Hydra* Vol. 2, No. 4 (March 2019).

34 Pyrard de Laval, *Voyage* 2:37.

show their beauty, play musical instruments, etc. This desire to please is clearly not a matter of amorous feelings, but rather a calculated effort to procure a better living situation. Eduardo Paiva, analyzing concubine slaves in Brazil, has famously argued that this was in fact a form of resistance: the women were empowering themselves in ways that male slaves really could not.³⁵

5 Mentalities of Concubinage: Hopelessness

Both of the previous mentalities assumed that the concubine slaves were not dealing with completely hostile masters, that they could reasonably hope to draw some benefit from the relationship. But there were also cases of crushing abuse, with little or no redeeming aspect. For example, in Father Nicolao Lancilotto's notorious description of Melaka, from 1550, he wrote that: "There are many and many who buy herds of slave girls and sleep with all of them, and then sell them."³⁶ Lancilotto noted a particularly flagrant case: "there was one [man] in Melaka who had twenty-four women of various castes, all his captives, and all of whom he used."³⁷ In such relationships, there was little space for amorous feelings, and little hope for material gain.

What was the mentality of slave women in unredeemable relationships? Why did they choose to "accept" such conditions? Perhaps they stayed with their master simply because they felt powerless to leave. As examples, let us note certain East Asian sources. While it is true that these stories concern women slaves who belonged to Asian bandits, rather than Portuguese ones, nonetheless they probably can offer some insight.

To begin with, one example of a slave woman who stayed with her master due to feelings of helplessness is a certain Mrs. Zhu 祝婦, the slave-consort of the pirate Ye Ma 葉麻. She is described in a chronicle of the mid-century pirate wars called the *Wo bian shi lue* 倭變事略 [Brief Account of the Japanese War]. The text says that one day Mrs. Zhu wept, wishing to return home. Ye Ma was moved and gave her permission to leave. And so she immediately departed.³⁸ Unfortunately for her, Ye Ma then changed his mind, and recaptured her. Taken

35 Eduardo Paiva, "Mulheres, famílias e resistência escrava nas Minas Gerais do século XVIII" *Varia Historia* Vol. 10, no. 13 (June 1994): 67–77.

36 Nicolao Lancilotto to Ignatius of Loyola, December 5, 1550, in *Documenta Indica II* (1550–1553), ed. Josef Wicki, Vol. 72 of *Monumenta Missionum Societatis Iesu* (Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 1950), 130.

37 Lancilotto, *Documenta Indica II*, 130.

38 Cai Jiude 採九德, *Wo bian shi lue* 倭變事略, in Vol. 7 of *Ming dai wo kou shi liao* 明代倭寇史料, ed. Zheng Liangsheng 鄭梁生 (Taipei: Wen shi zhe chu ban she, 2005), 2750–2751 (Date of 嘉靖三十四年六月初二日).

prisoner once more, she passively followed her captors back to the pirate's base.³⁹ Clearly, she would have preferred to escape from the pirate if she could, but she apparently felt helpless.

Another late sixteenth-century chronicle describes a woman named Wang Cuiqiao 王翠翹, slave-consort of the famous pirate Xu Hai 徐海. The appendix, perhaps written a couple decades after the main text, contains her biography. It claims that she in fact hated Xu Hai. "Publicly, she was close to him, but truly, secretly, she wished for his defeat."⁴⁰ Nonetheless, she remained with him for years, until the Ming army destroyed him. Interestingly, after Ye Ma's death, her attitude changed. She did not receive better treatment from the government. The text euphemistically says that the triumphant Ming officers got drunk and "toyed with Wang Cuiqiao."⁴¹ After that, she committed suicide. After so much helplessness, the act of suicide seems like one last effort to take her destiny into her own hands.

Finally, let us note a particularly striking story from the Joseon Kingdom. Ko Sangan 高尙顔 (高尙顔), in his seventeenth century compilation of tales and stories, tells of a woman whose husband was killed by a bandit in 1594. When the bandit moved to abduct her, Ko gives this description of her reaction:

She could not offer resistance. She followed the bandit and went back with him. She secretly wished to avenge (her husband), and she eagerly awaited an opportunity. For three years, she passively went along. She even gave birth to a child.⁴²

The mentality of this woman resembles that of Wang Cuiqiao and Mrs. Zhu. All apparently hated their abductors, but nonetheless submitted themselves quietly, for years and years. The reason given for why was simply that they never had an opportunity to do otherwise. They felt powerless to leave.

Now, what makes Ko Sangan's story so striking is that in this case, the woman did eventually get her opportunity. One day, she managed to drug her abductor. Then she locked both him and the child that she had born to him in a room, and burned down the house.⁴³ This story is thus the only case that I

39 Cai, *Wo bian*, 2751 (Date of 嘉靖三十四年六月初八日).

40 Mao Kun 茅坤, *Ji jiao chu xu hai ben mo* 紀剿除徐海本末 (Taipei: Wen shi zhe chu ban she, 2005), 2772.

41 Mao, *Ji jiao Xu Hai*, 2772.

42 Ko Sangan 高尙顔 (高尙顔), *Hyobin chapki* 效顰雜記, in *Seolchong* 설총 (說叢), ed. Mun-jung Sō 서문중 (徐文重), (Kyoto University Rare Materials Digital Archive, 1969): 8: 684. <https://rmda.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/item/rb00023437>.

43 Sangan, *Chapki*, 8:685.

have found of a slave concubine who violently killed her own owner (though it is a case from Joseon, rather than Portuguese Asia). In his analysis of the story, Michael Pettid has treated this as a revolt against Confucian behavioral norms for women, and he is doubtless correct.⁴⁴ I would add that the woman's act can probably be compared to the suicide of Wang Cuiqiao: an act of self-destruction, a final effort to take control of her own destiny.

Just as with the previous stereotypes, this image of ill-fated maidens who commit suicide should be handled with caution. It also probably reflects male fantasies—literary tropes of tragic heroines, doomed by fate. Indeed, in the seventeenth century, Wang Cuiqiao's story would become quite famous, inspiring romantic novels and operas.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, there is something quite plausible here. Many concubine slaves must have simply felt that they had no choice. It has been noted that most had little opportunity for manumission, little opportunity for escape. They must have felt trapped.

6 Conclusions

To summarize, I first argued that, in the eastern end of Portuguese Asia, concubine slaves tended to “accept” their situation. That is to say, they chose not to attack their masters, to flee from them, to purchase their own manumission, or to seek aid from the priests. They remained in the relationship. I then considered three possible mentalities behind this “acceptance”: 1) they sincerely loved their master 2) they wished to get the master's property 3) they felt powerless to leave. Let us note that these three mentalities are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps many women were trying to make good (both emotionally and financially) with what they saw as an unchangeable fate.

It is clear that they looked at the matter differently than we do today. For us, the idea of quietly accepting sexual slavery seems almost unthinkable. For these women, in contrast, it may have felt like a regular part of society. As mentioned, many of them had been sold to brothels at a very young age, and had been raised for this very purpose. Across the region, in every port that they

44 Michael J. Pettid, “Fashioning womanly Confucian virtue: the virtuous woman in post-war literary discourse” in *The East Asian War, 1592–1598: International relations, violence, and memory*, ed. James B. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 2015): 370.

45 On the distinction between the historical Wang Cuiqiao and the fictionalized stories about her, see Chen Yiyuan 陳益源, “Wang Cuiqiao gu shi yan hua guo cheng zhong de liang ge mang dian 王翠翹故事演化過程中的兩個盲點,” *Zhongguo su wen hua guo ji xue shu yan tao hui lun wen ji* 中国俗文化研究国际学术研讨会论文集 1 (2002): 99–102.

entered, they could see the lives of other slaves. They may have known about the brutal exploitation, without remuneration, of prostitute slaves within the Ming Empire.⁴⁶ They may have known that in Rajput society, slave dancers generally felt honored to be elevated to the status of concubines.⁴⁷ They found themselves in a world that seemed universally bound in sexual and social inequality. If they had a relatively less abusive master, perhaps they might have even considered themselves fortunate.

One might say that broadly, the slave concubines of the region had the mentality of realists. They did not seem to give themselves to dreams of an independent, prosperous life. They accepted the lot that fate had given to them, and tried to do the best that they could with it.

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46 On this topic, see the horrible description of brothels in China, written around 1500, by 'Ali Akbar Khata'i 阿里·阿克巴尔, *Khatay Namih* 中国纪行, trans. Zhang Zhishan 张至善 (Beijing: Sheng huo du shu xinzhì san lian shu dian, 2016), Ch. 11, 107–111.

47 Ramya Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines: Female Slaves in Rajput Polity, 1500–1850," in *Slavery and South Asian History*, eds. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Eaton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 144–145.

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