

An Annotated Translation of Mao Xiang's
*Reminiscences of the Convent of Shadowy
Plum-blossoms* (Part Three)

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Mao Xiang recorded his memory of his concubine Dong Xiaowan years after her untimely death in the upheaval after the fall of the Ming Dynasty. Dong Xiaowan was a courtesan in the Qinhuai district of the Ming Southern capital of Nanjing when she met Mao Xiang.

I have translated the first part of *Reminiscences of the Convent of Shadowy Plum-blossoms* describing the circumstances surrounding Dong Xiaowan's marriage to Mao Xiang and her relationship with his family and the second part describing their daily life together. The first two sections form the first two installments of this series. In this installment I translate the third and final section.

The section part of *Reminiscences of the Convent of Shadowy Plum-blossoms* begins with anecdotes from their life together. Mao describes Dong's love of flowers and her careful cultivation of various plants that filled her room with blooms throughout the seasons. Dong also had a refined palate. Mao went out of his way to supply her with exceptional delicacies such as a syrup made with flower blossoms and a delicate seasoning derived from fermented beans.

The Ming Dynasty collapsed, however, in 1644 and Manchu troops invaded placid Jiangnan the following year. In this moment of crisis Mao distinguished herself by quick wits, earning the deep respect of Mao's family for her help in obtaining refuge. In 1647, and in 1649, Mao suffered serious illness, but was lovingly nursed around the clock by his devoted Dong Xiaowan. The hardships of this period after the fall of the Ming are described in a most vivid style.

Mao mentions some omens that suggested Dong's untimely death in the course of his narrative. When he draws a fortuneteller's lot predicting his future, his card contained the word for "rememberance". After Dong's death, Mao interprets that card as an indication that he was fated to spend the rest of his life remembering her.