

Essay Questions for Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*

1st quarter = Preface, Chapter One.

1. Describe the authors of and characterize each of the three main sources employed by Spence. Why do all three books tend to accentuate the negative about T'an-ch'eng? How does this contrast with Kaplan's textlectures' treatment of 17th century China? How can both Spence and Kaplan both be right? What evidence is there that people were still using Ji Ran's explanation of the grain price cycle in the 17th century? What were the chief kinds of troubles that the county had to endure during the third quarter of the 17th century? Which segments of society and why these were hit worst by each?
2. Contrast the attitudes toward women of ex-magistrate Feng K'o-ts'an, Magistrate Huang Liu-hung and the shorter story writer and essayist P'u Sung-ling. Which of the three is closest to what you consider to be the attitude toward women most characteristic of contemporary America? Give specific examples from Spence to illustrate your main points.

2nd quarter = Chapter Two.

3. Describe the geographic-administrative hierarchy of T'an-ch'eng from county down through village and explain how the taxation aspect of the hierarchy related to the policing-control function. What concessions did the rules for tax-paying make to the near universal poverty of rural tax-payers?
4. What were the main methods for tax avoidance, both in the countryside and in the towns? To what extent and in what ways, nominally legal as well as illegal, could the poor participate in each of these tax avoidance ploys?

3rd quarter = Chapter Three, Chapter Four.

5. What kinds of obstacles did widows have to overcome to be considered successes as widows? Describe some successful widows from the sources Spence mobilizes. Why do such stories about widows overcoming specific social and legal obstacles tend to come from P'u Sung-ling rather than from the *Local History*? What could happen to widows when they were unable to overcome the obstacles their society's customs and laws threw up? Describe some unsuccessful widows from the instances narrated by Spence.
6. Where, when and in what ways did P'u Sung-ling get his earliest ideas about the human capacity for nastiness? In what ways did the fictional Wangs in P'u's story of Violent Ts'ui and their real life analogs in T'an-ch'eng as described in Magistrate Huang's handbook resemble each other? To what degree and how were the forces of law and order able to prevail over these real life gangsters?

4th quarter = Chapter Five, Epilogue.

7. Describe the range of options in marriage for women and their outcomes that P'u Sung-ling uses in the plots of his stories. Would any of these have fit the marriage of the real-life Woman Wang and her husband Jen? What elements of the characters of Woman Wang and Jen rendered their marriage disfunctional?
8. What punishments was Woman Wang liable for once she ran away with her paramour? What *could* she have done to avoid these punishments? What *did* she do? What was Jen's legal position once he took her back? What were the circumstances of her murder, the subsequent trial and Jen's

conviction and punishment? What do we know about neighbor Kao's role in this business? What further can we surmise about his role?