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Authenticity and Humanity: Women in Ming Dynasty Theatre

Since the dawn of theatrical performances, women had very limited opportunities for participation and presence in productions, often being portrayed onstage by male actors in untruthful, borderline degrading drag, which fortunately was not the case for the Ming Dynasty. My research investigates the societal roles and customs that women in the Ming Dynasty were initially assigned to and the shift they experienced in these roles; this shift empowered women to have more agency in every aspect of their everyday lives, especially in participating in performances. Methodologically, I consider the feminist/gender lens of Karl Marx's Critical Theory and the opera *The Peony Pavilion*, along with performance clips from this opera and an article from the actress who originated the role of protagonist Tu Lianiang. This project will interest gender/womens' historians and theatre practitioners alike; it provides historians insight into how women in early Chinese history adapted to changes in cultural and societal standards, and for theatre practitioners, an angle to analyze the importance of truth, humanity, and earnestness in an actress' craft.