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**THE HARMONIOUS CONCLUSIONS OF *PEONY PAVILION & THE LUTE***

A Thesis Presented

by

ALEXANDER P. MCCARTIN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

September 2016

Chinese

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**THE HARMONIOUS CONCLUSIONS OF *PEONY PAVILION* & *THE LUTE***

A Thesis Presented

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ALEXANDER P. MCCARTIN

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my parents Philip and Lorraine McCartin for their encouragement and support throughout the writing of this thesis. I could not have done it without them.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to first and foremost thank my advisor Professor Elena Suet-Ying Chiu for her dedication and assistance with my thesis. It would not be complete without her help. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee members Professor David K. Schneider and Professor Zhijun Wang for their help with this endeavor.

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**ABSTRACT**

**THE HARMONIOUS CONCLUSIONS OF PEONY PAVILION & THE LUTE**

**SEPTEMBER 2016**

**ALEXANDER P. MCCARTIN, B.A., HOBART & WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGES**

**M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS**

**Directed by: Professor Elena Suet-Ying Chiu**

This thesis explores the harmonious endings of two different Chinese plays *The Lute* and *Peony Pavilion*. The harmonious conclusions reflect unique aspects of Chinese culture such as Confucian ethics and norms. The analysis of these harmonious conclusions provides a further analysis of the text throughout the plays. The happy endings do not occur without strife. The conflict found in the plays is examined to demonstrate the factors that lead to the transformation from conflict to harmony.

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## INTRODUCTION

Life could be depicted as a stage and humans through thoughts and actions craft their own destiny through a performance of sorts. Time passes by with no intermission from beginning to end birth to death, and despite the part we are dealt in the evolution of modern civilization how we express our individual style and voice plays such an important role. Time after time the rich legacy left behind by Chinese drama has such a deep tradition and strength despite the changes in society across thousands of years. Two particular literary works that have become iconic elements of this legacy are *Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭 and *The Lute* 琵琶记. The authors of both plays, Tang Xianzu (1550-1616) and Kao Ming (1305-1370), contributed immensely to the progression of Chinese theater through their masterpieces. *Peony Pavilion* is particularly well known within and beyond the Chinese sphere of theater and drama, but both plays have their own significance across space and time. Both depict a main protagonist undergoing various changes through adversity amongst other matters. The similarities begin with such aspects as filial piety. The differences are more extensive involving individual choice and the tone of the play amongst other respects. A comparison and contrast of both texts can be analyzed from such a foundational approach.

As with every other major culture and civilization in the world, the ways in which human nature manifests itself was ripe for debate, discussion, and inquiry. From the early times of Confucianism in China, the essence of human nature has been a primary focus for such rhetorical discourse. Confucian ideas regarding human nature influence

both *The Lute* and *Peony Pavilion*. Philosophers such as *Xunzi* 荀子 maintained that left to their own devices humans have harmful tendencies and must rely on education and other scholastic pursuits to stay morally virtuous.<sup>1</sup> In addition to scholarly pursuits, family honor was another attribute highly venerated by Confucius, “The family was therefore assumed to be the paradigm of the moral life of every individual and was put forward as a model for all society. According to this view, social life was studded with a complex structure of obligations founded on specific norms, and the norms of good conduct that are inspired by these rites.”<sup>2</sup> Such a structure provided a sense of order in society. Even a link with this world and the supernatural world could be established through such an arrangement.<sup>3</sup> A movement toward abiding by such social norms paved the way for a harmonious conclusion to the plays. Therefore, dualities such as peace versus conflict, and the human world versus the supernatural world are integral parts of these two plays. Another duality in Chinese culture involves the interaction of the concepts *li* 理 and *qing* 情.

There is a deep historical relationship between *li* and *qing* in Chinese culture. *Li* is a concept that has garnered much respect throughout Chinese literature. However, *qing* has not received the same types of positive attributes. There has been much speculation over the benefits or harmful effects that *qing* has on individuals. It has long been believed that *qing* promotes wants and desires in people that can lead to unwanted

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<sup>1</sup> Maurizio Scarpari. “The Debate on Human Nature in Early Confucian Literature.” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 53 No. 3 (July 2003), 324.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 324.

<sup>3</sup> Maurizio Scarpari. “The Debate on Human Nature in Early Confucian Literature.” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 53 No. 3 (July 2003), 324.

results in the spectrum of immorality and beyond. *Li*, through its emphasis on social order under Confucius, provides a blueprint according to such philosophers as *Xunzi* for the world and people to be united in a cohesive and virtuous way.<sup>4</sup> Through dutiful study of classic works and scholastic inquiry, people are able to develop qualities that make them better people for the benefit of their families and societies.<sup>5</sup> Individuals are also able to comprehend how society functions in a more enhanced fashion through dutiful pursuit of scholarly works within the social structure of *li*. In order to be a good person, one must continue to engage in *li* oriented activities. Therefore, according to Confucianism the negative aspects of human nature could be minimized.<sup>6</sup> The ways in both *li* and *qing* have been conceptualized throughout Chinese history is imperative to be discussed in order to establish how they were not only established but also how change has occurred over time.

The classic compilation *The Analects* by Confucius provides a manifest for the capabilities of *li* to impact society at the collective and individual levels. Through the Confucian social order of customs and rituals known as *li*, people are able to establish a highly organized, functional society. One passage of *The Analects* contains the following antidote: “Do not look unless it is in accordance with the rites (*li*); do not listen unless it is in accordance with the rites; do not speak unless it is in accordance with the rites; do

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<sup>4</sup> Maurizio Scarpari. “The Debate on Human Nature in Early Confucian Literature.” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 53 No. 3 (July 2003), 325.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>6</sup> Maurizio Scarpari. “The Debate on Human Nature in Early Confucian Literature.” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 53 No. 3 (July 2003), 327.

not move unless it is in accordance with the rites. (Analects 12.1)<sup>7</sup> Thus, the precepts of *li* have had an extremely powerful effect on shaping Chinese culture and society.

The notion of *qing* has evolved throughout Chinese history. During the Ming Dynasty there was a particular fascination with the essence of *qing* in literary works. *Qing* has been labeled a number of various ways, for there is no English word to directly correspond with its meaning.<sup>8</sup> The definition of *qing* meaning love or desire does not fully encompass the full meaning of this complex, broad, far reaching term. There is a complexity to the notion of *qing* in Chinese literature that has both intrigued and puzzled many in the literary field. Due to such an intrigue, during the Ming Dynasty there was a particular fascination with *qing* among such writers as Tang Xianzu. A change in the general view toward desire had a correlation to the rise of *qing* related themes found in various literary texts.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it has been widely seen as an attempt by the literati during this time period to assert their view as the masters of the Confucian legacy in Chinese culture.<sup>10</sup> Only this time in a new dimension, a new vantage point, a new light.

Where can the origination of *qing* be found in Chinese literature? Chinese philosopher *Xunzi* defined *qing* as “the feelings of liking and disliking, of delight and

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<sup>7</sup> Sor-hoon Tan. “The Dao of Politics: Li (Rituals/Rites) And Laws As Pragmatic Tools Of Government.” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 61 No. 2 (July 2011), 469.

<sup>8</sup> Martin W. Huang. “Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of *Qing* in Ming-*Qing* Literature.” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 20 (Dec. 1998), 153.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 153.

<sup>10</sup> Martin W. Huang. “Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of *Qing* in Ming-*Qing* Literature.” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 20 (Dec. 1998), 153.

anger, and of sorrow and joy that are inborn in our nature are called 'emotions.'"<sup>11</sup>

Thus, a relation to one's innate self has been long associated with the concept of *qing*. A range of emotions including sadness, elation, romance, and passion are all included under the umbrella of emotions relating to *qing*. Song era writer *Zhu Xi* wrote that *qing* involves mental activity, "'The mind commands man's nature and feelings.' Desire emanates from feelings. The mind is comparable to water, nature is comparable to the tranquility of still water, feeling is comparable to the flow of water, and desire is comparable to its waves."<sup>12</sup> In addition, desire can either produce good or bad results according to *Zhu Xi*. While *qing* has a historic root in Chinese civilization and literature, it was not until the Ming Dynasty that the greatest level of attention to *qing* occurred.

During the Ming Dynastic era, a new interpretation and focus on *qing* took place. Tang Xianzu was a literary figure during this time who in particular focused on the concept of *qing*. A suspicion and skepticism of *qing* remained, however, as the debate over whether such desires produced more harmful effects than good ones. The debate over desires themselves being morally and spiritually righteous or immoral was a frequent element of literature during this time period. Could morality and desire be compatible? Such a question was a frequent focal point for debate. Various Ming thinkers had a great interest in the concept of *qing*, and sought to reevaluate the traditional views on this matter. For instance, Wei Yong a writer during the Ming times

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<sup>11</sup> Martin W. Huang. "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of *Qing* in Ming-*Qing* Literature." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 20 (Dec. 1998), 154.

<sup>12</sup> Martin W. Huang. "Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of *Qing* in Ming-*Qing* Literature." *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 20 (Dec. 1998), 155.

commented that “*Qing* is that for which the living could die and because of which the dead could be resurrected.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it is a powerful force in society according to Wei Yong and others. Such a quote is relatable to the plot of *Peony Pavilion* in which Bridal Du dies of heartbreak and is later resurrected.

One of the Ming thinkers to support *qing* as a legitimate, powerful force in society was Tang Xianzu, and a prime example of this is in his masterful play *Peony Pavilion*. Thinkers of the Late Ming time period attempted to justify a conceptualization of *qing* as having esoteric qualities by giving it a mystical association. Thus, the antithetical position of *qing* versus *li* is again put forth in such an instance. The death and resurrection of Bridal Du are beyond reason, and are thus examples of the power of *qing* according to Tang Xianzu. Further attempts to justify the presence of virtue and morality is further promoted during Ming times. The tension between *li* and *qing* is prevalent in *Peony Pavilion*. The happy ending occurs when following a more *li* oriented way of living takes place. Order is restored, and harmony occurs.

*Peony Pavilion* despite its linear trajectory has a variety of complex elements within the text that makes it a very compelling piece. The main character Bridal Du undergoes drastic transformations throughout the play. She begins as a young, vulnerable girl who is drawn to rebel against the conventional norms of society. In a dream a man appears, and they have a passionate encounter. The experience is so powerful and influential on her that it soon consumes her entire being and she passes

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<sup>13</sup> Martin W. Huang. “Sentiments of Desire: Thoughts on the Cult of *Qing* in Ming-*Qing* Literature.” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 20 (Dec. 1998), 163.

away. Eventually through her resurrection true love is able to be found as a human being through her second chance at life. However, Bridal Du's relationship to such concepts as filial piety evolves as well in terms of her relationship to her parents. Realities also change in relation to her bond with the man of her dream Liu Mengmei. The harmonious ending of the play will be of particular focus in this thesis.

In Gao Ming's *The Lute*, the play begins with the dilemma Cai faces in being a dutiful son versus being a dutiful scholar. When Cai feels compelled to enlist as a civil servant in the capital, his wife Wuniang is left to maintain the household. Hardship strikes, and the quest to overcome great tragedy for survival plays itself out prominently throughout the play. Despite extreme hardship Wuniang puts her entire being into serving her in-laws as a faithful wife and daughter-in-law. Meanwhile Cai faces challenges of his own in the capital. He longs to return home but under great pressure he remains in service to the Emperor. He also marries a second wife. The climax of the play occurs when the spheres of Cai's world collide when Wuniang leaves to find him, and he leaves for home with his wife Princess Niu. One sphere of Cai's world is the life he has been living in the capital. The other sphere is the life he left behind. The behavior of other characters is of great significance in the play. Wuniang's disposition, for instance, particularly impacted the outcome of the play. Her strength is shown through such acts as playing a lute to provide compensation for her journey.

The plot of *The Lute* has aspects that go back to a time in which the Confucian social code was dominant amidst a time of tremendous strife under foreign control. During the Yuan Era, the Mongol rulers severely limited the rights and abilities of the



Chinese civil-scholar class and Han Chinese Culture as a whole. Drastic changes in cultural attitudes and norms occurred as well. With the notion of a virtuous wife and the call of civil service, *The Lute* demonstrates an attempt by the author Kao Ming to promote a return to traditional values and order. In order for the claim to be made that the plot of *Peony Pavilion* directly corresponds to a shift in cultural attitudes regarding such concepts as love and desire, an analysis of *The Lute* will provide a contrasting literary example in certain ways. The perception of aspects of humanity such as love and emotion as a healthy antidote to the detriments of individual and collective societies was a revolutionary concept that reached its full peak in the Ming Dynasty. *Peony Pavilion* serves as a direct blueprint for this movement to be documented as a cultural phenomenon.

The Chinese plays *The Lute* and *Peony Pavilion* both have harmonious endings. However, the harmony found in the happy endings is not superficial. Rather, the harmony found at the “grand reunions” of each play contain great complexities. The conclusions of each play, for instance, demonstrate and reflect underlying themes of Confucian ethics such as the need for social order to be restored and harmony in society to occur. Such figures as the Emperor and other characters play important roles in restoring harmony in the plays despite great conflict found throughout the texts. The supernatural realm helps restore the concepts of peace and morality that were not present in the early stages of the plays. A number of factors contributed to the happy endings found in each play.

This thesis attempts to answer the following questions. What underlying factors contribute to the harmonious conclusions of each play? Why is the grand reunions of each play significant? Are there particular motivations that serve the authors in their production of the plays? These and other questions will be analyzed further in this thesis. Such questions are important to answer in order to demonstrate not only how a happy ending occurs in each play, but also why it occurs and in what manner.

The concept of a *da tuanyuan* 大团圆 grand reunion is a common concept in the conclusions of Chinese plays. The significance of this thesis revolves around its theoretical analysis of the grand reunion conclusions from these two particular plays *Peony Pavilion* and *The Lute*. There is also a framework established to provide discourse not only on how the happy endings reflect social norms of Chinese culture, but also additional factors that played an integral role in the emergence of the harmonious conclusions. An example of such a factor would be a transformation of *The Lute* from previous versions of the story by Gao Ming and the significance of such a change. This thesis could contribute greatly to the wider study of Chinese theater in a historical context. Likewise, there is a very limited number of English secondary analytical sources on both texts particularly *The Lute*.

The thesis I am writing would be an additional resource for non-native speakers of Mandarin Chinese to gain a better understanding of Chinese culture and performing arts through the translated texts of both plays. This thesis would also serve as a unique blueprint for others to emulate in their research because of its comparative to two different Chinese plays from two different time periods. Furthermore, the plays each

provide unique examples of how Chinese plays both correlated with the traditions of the times but also possessed unique elements as well. In order for someone to truly conduct successful and meaningful research into the history of Chinese drama, accounting for such phenomena is essential. By seeing the parallels between the plays as well as the respective time periods in which they were situated, one can draw insights into the cultural dynamics of the time period.

There are few research publications that provide a comparative approach to various Chinese plays similar to what this paper will provide. In fact, there are no publications in English that compare these two instrumental works in Chinese literature: *Peony Pavilion* and *The Lute*. There also are not any publications that simultaneously analyze the conclusions of both plays in English. In order to further understand the various methodologies by which Chinese literature and literary works can be analyzed in general, it is important to solidify one's claims in reference to a multitude of primary sources. One can defend one's publication more effectively by being able to properly address the counterargument through the evidence postulated by other original plays, poems, articles, etc. For the two plays that will be analyzed in the thesis, it is important to note how such themes as passion, filial piety, and romance are blended together in a distinctive way that contributes to the harmonious outcome of each play. The themes presented in each play that cater to the popular aesthetics of the time period certainly influence the outcome of the plays.

A number of texts in addition to the primary sources were incredibly useful in my analysis. Tina Lu's text *Persons, Roles, And Minds: Identity in Peony Pavilion and Peach*

*Blossom Fan* provided me with thought provoking analysis regarding the true essence of Bridal Du alongside the various facets of her identity. Additional texts including Shu-chu Wei's article "'The *Peony Pavilion*' with Todorov's 'Fantastic'" further explored the interweaving of the supernatural into the play. The article by Wei Hua titled "How Dangerous Can The 'Peony' Be? Textual Space, 'Caizi Mudan Ting,' and Naturalizing the Erotic" sought to explain the nature of sex and sexual desire in the play *Peony Pavilion*. There are numerous other texts and articles that have also contributed greatly to this piece. These works have allowed me to formulate and deliver a unique artistic product for the benefit of future scholarship and readership. A selection of these texts will be presented in the following discourse.

Regina Llamas' article "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama" discusses the pretext to *The Lute* by Gao Ming. "Zhao the Chaste Maid" is a tale from southern "nanxi" 南戏 plays. These plays begin in the Song Dynasty with the emergence of the Chinese southern theater tradition. Plays during this time focused on many issues such as romance and revenge. These plays rely on the theme of the ungrateful scholar who takes the imperial exams and serves the emperor as a scholar while his family is left behind to fend for themselves. There is a general popularity of the theme of the ungrateful scholar in Chinese theater. In the theme of the southern plays during the Song Dynasty, for example, there is a narrative tale of a man who leaves his family and then leaves his wife for another woman.

This genre of ungrateful scholars and retribution are rich with themes such as societal conflicts that gave substance to this theme of the ungrateful scholar. An

example of such a conflict involves the male desire for success in contrast to the female desire for virtue.<sup>14</sup> Llamas argues that male desires represent deficiencies in the education system during this time period, and the female desire for virtue represents traditional moral values.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, throughout the tradition of the “nanxi” 南戏 plays there is great tension between various social issues during the time period. An example of such tension is the duality between the yearnings for success versus abiding by duties to one’s family. Furthermore, reactions to such a desire for success such as acts of vengeance are also of great focus in these plays.

In her article, Regina Llamas analyzes how the southern plays that emerged during the Song Dynasty draw upon certain themes. The plays serve as a critique of the state and its structure that contributes to a disruption of family values and societal cohesion.<sup>16</sup> Scholars who serve the state face a pressure to conform to the wishes of the state while also meeting the needs of their families. The state structure around such institutions as the education system provides the pressure for male scholars to pursue a position of power in society while neglecting other matters.<sup>17</sup> An argument for the need to return to tradition is evoked through the female character’s adherence to virtue and other traditional values in Chinese culture such as filial piety. An argument, on the other hand, against the trend for the male pursuit of prominence and power is embedded in

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<sup>14</sup> Regina Llamas. “Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama” *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 77.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>16</sup> Regina Llamas. “Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama” *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 77.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

the text of the plays as well. In the plays, revenge against the ungrateful scholar occurs through either the actions of the female characters themselves or through supernatural intervention.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, tension and conflict erupt due to the antagonistic desires of the male and female characters in the plays. There is a lack of harmony. The plays serve to critique this societal trend that fosters disharmony through the male pursuit of prestige and the female quest for virtue.

Wilt Idema's publication titled "'What Eyes May Light upon My Sleeping Form?': Tang Xianzu's Transformation of His Sources, with a Translation of 'Du Liniang Craves Sex and Returns to Life'" focuses on a story that inspired Tang Xianzu in his writing of *Peony Pavilion*. The early version of the story that Tang Xianzu used for his play *Peony Pavilion* is titled "Bridal Du Craves Sex and Returns to Life." It is noteworthy to examine the great transformation that Tang Xianzu conducted in the writing of *Peony Pavilion* from the earlier story. The earlier version of *Peony Pavilion* tells a story surrounding Bridal Du and her journey through life. In the tale "Bridal Du Craves Sex and Returns to Life" Bridal Du is also seduced by the garden and the dream that she experiences with Liu Mengmei. Although she is also motivated to pursue an education, at the same time her sexual desires take precedence.<sup>19</sup> There are similarities between the two stories as well as the important creation of Bridal Du's self-portrait. The passion filled relationship

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<sup>18</sup> Regina Llamas. "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 77.

<sup>19</sup> Wilt L. Idema. "'What Eyes May Light upon My Sleeping Form?': Tang Xianzu's Transformation of His Sources, with a Translation of 'Du Liniang Craves Sex and Returns to Life.'" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 16 No. 1 (2003), 120.

that occurs between the couple in fulfillment of their desires for one another is also clearly depicted as well.

In contrast to *Peony Pavilion*, Idema discusses how in the vernacular tale Liu Mengmei's parents play an important role in bringing about a harmonious resolution for Bridal Du. They ensure that a morally appropriate and traditional path is paved for Bridal Du to find a place in society again through such acts as having a proper wedding ceremony for the couple despite her identity as a ghost.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Bridal Du's parents are seen as enabling her departure from virtuous customs and norms for a woman to abide by. Like *Peony Pavilion* despite all of the forces at odds with a peaceful conclusion a harmonious ending does take place with the entire family reunited. Tang Xianzu, despite some significant departures from the original text, indeed used significant aspects of the vernacular tale for the creation of *Peony Pavilion*.<sup>21</sup>

In his article Wilt Idema discusses the text in comparison to plays from the Western European tradition. Idema uses aspects of these tales to both compare and contrast elements of the original tale and *Peony Pavilion* with stories such as the Grimm tales. These tales, although written in the West, do contain similarities with plays like *Peony Pavilion*. Such discourse exhibits how certain themes and character types can be found throughout various cultures and literary traditions.

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<sup>20</sup> Wilt L. Idema. "What Eyes May Light upon My Sleeping Form?": Tang Xianzu's Transformation of His Sources, with a Translation of "Du Liniang Craves Sex and Returns to Life." *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 16 No. 1 (2003), 120.

<sup>21</sup> Wilt L. Idema. "What Eyes May Light upon My Sleeping Form?": Tang Xianzu's Transformation of His Sources, with a Translation of "Du Liniang Craves Sex and Returns to Life." *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 16 No. 1 (2003), 121.

Chenyang Li's article "The Confucian Ideal of Harmony" explores the Confucian concept of harmony *he* 和 as an integral component of Chinese culture. The Confucian concept of harmony refers to the process by which harmony occurs. Such a harmony could be seen more as a harmonization of various aspects of society. There is tension and dueling components as this harmonious synthesis occurs.<sup>22</sup> Confucianism likewise states that proper and moral behavior in government leads to harmony in society. Confucians seek for harmony to occur for human beings in many areas such as between spouses or between rulers and other officials. Harmony with nature is also of utmost importance. Likewise, it is against Confucian ethics to have disharmony in the world. At the same time, there is a difference between harmony and sameness in Confucian ethics.<sup>23</sup> Harmony with one's surroundings is critical, and involves a process in order to achieve such a state of coherence.

Chenyang Li's article focuses on the tension in harmony. Li's article also looks at the various complexities that correspond to this harmony that are resolved through change.<sup>24</sup> Change on a human level that involves finding harmony with other people. An important part of the Confucian view on harmony is overcoming conflict. Conflict is able to be overcome and integrated into the overall harmonization process through such personal attributes as goodness and virtue.<sup>25</sup> In fact, conflict is essential in Confucianism

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<sup>22</sup> Chenyang Li. "The Confucian Ideal of Harmony." *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 56 No. 4 (Oct. 2006), 583.

<sup>23</sup> Chenyang Li. "The Confucian Ideal of Harmony." *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. 56 No. 4 (Oct. 2006), 591.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 591.

<sup>25</sup> Chenyang Li. "The Confucian Ideal of Harmony." *Philosophy East and West*. Vol. 56 No. 4 (Oct. 2006), 588.



for harmony to occur. In addition, when human practices are aligned with “the way of Heaven” harmony is able to be achieved. The interplay of tradition with social change is notable in the plays as well especially in *Peony Pavilion*. A sense of social tragedy underlies the emergence of harmony in the play. Such an underlying tragic tone reflects the notion of grand reunions emerging amidst terrible circumstances. Despite human attempts at reconciliation and tranquility their efforts are futile. Only through adherence to Confucian norms can harmony truly occur. Confucianism certainly had an impact on Chinese society during the periods in which these two plays were written as it impacts Chinese society today. The traditions of Confucianism such as family honor are very prominent in *The Lute* as well as *Peony Pavilion*.

According to Tina Lu in her book titled *Persons, Roles, And Minds: Identity in Peony Pavilion and Peach Blossom Fan* Bridal Du undergoes a variety of transformations including multiple changes in identity throughout the course of the *Peony Pavilion* play. There are indeed blurred lines between the human world and supernatural world notably through such experiences as the dream between Bridal Du and Liu Mengmei. In addition, the life and death of Bridal Du is also a pivotal focal point for a distinction between what is an experience belonging to the supernatural realm and what is not. It is indeed fascinating to observe the various ways in which the dream manifests itself as a key element of the text, and serves as a major influence on the play’s evolution. The supernatural realm has significant prominence in the play.

Tina Lu describes in her publication how Bridal Du undergoes a variety of transformations. At one point she is a living girl, later on she remains as a portrait, then

a ghost, and finally as a resurrected woman. It is quite remarkable, and also quite compelling is the fact that not one of the characters in the play ever see Bridal Du in all of her states.<sup>26</sup> Even in Scene Fourteen in which the portrait is painted, she plays both the woman in her current state of severe physical decline and the woman to be painted onto the portrait as an idealized version of herself.<sup>27</sup> Bridal Du even speaks to her painted self as though this individual were a different person entirely from herself, ““Oh, shadow. I will carefully gauge myself against you. Your cheeks so cheerful, just awaiting the mark of a cherry mouth, the stain of a willow brow, and the wash of cloud hair of floating mist. The ends of your brows fade into your hair, and you are in the felicity of the eyes. And the small kingfisher-colored filigreed pale autumn ornaments are so fitting.””<sup>28</sup> Her maid Fragrance, in response to Bridal Du’s query about the quality of the painting, states that is much easier to draw the features of a person than to know the genuine nature of a human being. Such changes in the nature of Bridal Du are integral to the development of the plot from turbulence to tranquility.

Shu-chu Wei’s article “‘The Peony Pavilion’ with Todorov’s ‘Fantastic’” analyzes the reality of the supernatural as a debatable concept. Such an inclusion of the supernatural in the play unravels the conventional distinctions for Heaven and Earth. The dream scene is a particularly important scene in the play, and it clearly depicts the

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<sup>26</sup> Tina Lu. *Persons, Roles, And Minds: Identity in Peony Pavilion and Peach Blossom Fan*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 38.

<sup>27</sup> Tang Xianzu. Trans. By Cyril Birch. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN 2002), 68.

<sup>28</sup> Tina Lu. *Persons, Roles, And Minds: Identity in Peony Pavilion and Peach Blossom Fan*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 35.

distinction between reality and the unreal. But does it? Wei brings up the possibility of a Bridal Du who is experiencing the dream and Bridal Du who is actually a participant in the dream itself. The scene in which Liu Mengmei “who enters bearing a branch of willow in his hand” yells out to Bridal Du and only then does she become aware of his presence is used to present the reasoning behind this confusion over Bridal Du’s true identity.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Flower Spirit, the spirit who keeps watch of the garden, states in the scene that “there exists a marriage affinity that must someday be fulfilled.”<sup>30</sup> The spirit also states that Bridal Du was so deeply affected by her walk in the garden that she brought Liu Mengmei to join her while she experienced the dream.<sup>31</sup> It brings one to wonder how this dream is constructed if another being can prophesize a destiny for the lovers as well as illustrate the power and control Bridal Du had in manipulating the dream to fit her desires. The dream scene has a number of intriguing aspects.

Bridal Du’s life is forever altered by the dream she experiences in the garden. Furthermore, Bridal Du is so convinced that she has found her soulmate and is deeply perplexed when she cannot find him after the dream. She wanders the garden praying proclaiming, “Can it be in my next life he is fated to appear, / in this life only a dream?”<sup>32</sup> Thus, a blur between reality and the supernatural has been established in her mind. Liu Mengmei related a similar experience of having met a beautiful girl in a dream at an

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<sup>29</sup> Shu-Chu Wei. “‘The *Peony Pavilion*’ with Todorov’s ‘Fantastic.’” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews. (CLEAR)* Vol. 33 (December 2011), 79.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>31</sup> Shu-Chu Wei. “‘The *Peony Pavilion*’ with Todorov’s ‘Fantastic.’” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews. (CLEAR)* Vol. 33 (December 2011), 79.

<sup>32</sup> Shu-Chu Wei. “‘The *Peony Pavilion*’ with Todorov’s ‘Fantastic.’” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews. (CLEAR)* Vol. 33 (December 2011), 80.

apricot tree. Bridal Du's maid Fragrance is skeptical of the dream's reality induced proportions, and tried to assure Bridal Du of this during this difficult time, "Young mistress, / the dream is done / and he was never real; / sickness endures / and robs you of your true self."<sup>33</sup> Much confusion remains amongst the various characters as to how to approach the reality or "unreality" of her dream.

A variety of sources provide a variety of angles from which to analyze the texts of the plays *Peony Pavilion* and *The Lute*. They also analyze aspects of the text that give rise to the development of the happy endings and grand reunions of each play's conclusion. Tina Lu's publication explores the multifaceted persona of Bridal Du that evolves throughout the play *Peony Pavilion*. Shu-chu Wei's article provides discourse on the dream scene in *Peony Pavilion* and how such a scene depicts elements of the human and supernatural worlds. The article by Regina Llamas provides a critical analysis of the pretext to *The Lute* and certain factors that shaped the play's formation and development. Lastly, Wilt Idema's publication among other matters describes the vernacular text that influenced the writing of *Peony Pavilion*. These publications alongside a number of other texts provided a valuable foundation for the analysis of the harmonious endings of each play.

The format of the thesis goes by chapter. Chapter 1 explores the happy ending found in *Peony Pavilion* as well as the various complexities that surround the achievement of the happy ending. Chapter 2 focuses on *The Lute* and how harmony is

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<sup>33</sup> Shu-Chu Wei. "'The *Peony Pavilion*' with Todorov's 'Fantastic.'" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*. (CLEAR) Vol. 33 (December 2011), 81.

found in the conclusion of the play despite the obstacles that seem to initially prevent such a happy ending to occur. Chapter 3 meanwhile analyzes a specific factor in the happy ending of the plays: the supernatural. The supernatural intervened in both plays for the benefit of the characters to bring good to a bad situation. Chapter 4 explores the background of the authors, the pretext to the plays, and the authors' standpoints in respect to the plays. The Introduction provides a prelude to the main body of the text while the conclusion provides a summary of what has been presented in the thesis thus far. Such a format in my view provides for a greater cohesion to the reader of the thesis.

## CHAPTER 1

### HARMONY IN *PEONY PAVILION*

#### 1.1 *Peony Pavilion*: Bridal Du's Journey

The play *Peony Pavilion* explores the dueling desires of Bridal Du. These desires coincide with the harmonious ending of the play. Initially, Bridal Du initially pursues a life of lust and personal fulfillment. She ignores the norms of filial piety and chastity that a woman was supposed to abide by. In addition to her exploration of the garden against her parents' wishes, Bridal Du also engages in premarital sexual relations with a man in a dream. Because her fleshly and forbidden desires are unfulfilled, Bridal Du falls into a sorrow filled state of sickness and eventual death. However, following her resurrection Bridal Du is a different person with different desires in life. She wishes to follow a traditional path for a woman including a proper marriage. In addition, a reunion with her parents is imperative to her as well. These conflicting desires illustrate a pattern of behavior that is either frowned upon or praised. Through the harmonious ending culminating in a grand reunion of the characters, the virtuous behavior of Bridal Du that coincides with Confucian ethics is ultimately triumphant.

The authors of the article "A New Interpretation of the Happy Ending about Mudan-ting" 《《牡丹亭》》大团圆结局新解 Ma Yu and Chu Ai-hua argue that there is much more behind the plot and conclusion of the play than an initial superficial reading of the play would imply. The interplay of Bridal Du's conflicting desires provides a formula for deep analysis and philosophical exploration. Bridal Du drifts from desires for

self-fulfillment and desires to fulfill her duties to her family and society as a whole. Through the play Tang Xianzu explores the conflict between the individual and the collective society. The conclusion of the play demonstrates a reunion of not only the main characters but also the conflicting desires between the individual and society.<sup>34</sup> It is more than a love story.

Both plays *Peony Pavilion* and *The Lute* had major obstacles in the way of harmony from occurring. However, peace prevailed over strife in both plays. Bridal Du faced numerous challenges in her pursuit of harmony as did Wuniang. There were a number of themes that presented themselves in the emergence of harmony at the conclusions of both plays such as filial piety and the supernatural. In addition, one may wonder why such a harmonious ending did occur while the majority of the plays had such tremendous turmoil. I believe that the authors' background and motivations had a critical impact on the positive outcomes. A harmonious ending fit in neatly for the conclusion of each play in accordance with the message the authors wanted to send regarding each play. In order to begin the argument regarding the harmonious ending of the plays, I think it is necessary to begin with a dialogue regarding the two plays and how they are alike yet differ at the same time.

Although there are a number of differences between the two plays that could be analyzed at great lengths, there is a common thread of a joyful reunion at the

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<sup>34</sup> Ma, Yu; Chu, Ai-hua. 马瑜; 楚爱华, A New Interpretation of the Happy Ending about Mudan-ting. 《《牡丹亭》》大团圆结局新解 *Journal of Kunming University*: Kunming, CN Vol. 32 No. 4 (2010), 38.

conclusion of each play. When conducting research regarding the differences and similarities found in each play, there are an array of examples to support the contrasts found between them. For example, the rebellious nature of Bridal Du is a core theme of *Peony Pavilion* that is not found with Wuniang in *The Lute*. However, a similarity occurs in the conclusion of each play. Despite all the sorrow and tragedy, there is a happy ending that seems to contrast with the turmoil found throughout each play. Such a change illustrates the dynamic process that leads to harmonization in Confucian ethics.

In *Peony Pavilion*, despite all the barriers keeping the characters apart eventually there is a reunion amongst various characters at the end of the play. Bridal Du is happily reunited with her parents in the concluding scene of the play: "Predestined match to astonish belief, predestined match to astonish belief, dreamer from the shades, from the Yellow Springs below, so greatly blessed, so greatly blessed, her nuptial hall the Imperial Court! In audience all, in audience all, joyously rejoined, joyously rejoined, as edict from world of light dispels the darkness of the court of Hades."<sup>35</sup> Much heartbreak can be found throughout the play including death and destruction. However, the conclusion demonstrates the harmony that the author sought to achieve. There were many obstacles to overcome including Bridal Du's father, Du Bao's obstinate spirit, and the doubts about her resurrection. The reunion of Bridal Du and her mother illustrates how a happy ending can be achieved despite such major obstacles that stand in the way.

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<sup>35</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 339.



At the start of the play, Bridal Du is a woman who is intent on pushing the boundaries literally and metaphorically. She is a young woman who is curious to explore the garden and what lies beyond the confines of her home residence. Despite the stern instructions of her parents, Bridal Du in her youth amidst the spring beauty indeed makes the transgression of entering the garden. In Scene 9, Tutor Chen and Fragrance converse regarding her behavior. They even use the Book of Songs to debate her lifestyle choices. Fragrance uses a passage to argue her opinion on the matter, “*Guan* means ‘shut in’, doesn’t it? My young mistress said, ‘Even though the ospreys were shut in, they still had the freedom of the island: why should a human being be treated worse than a bird?’” In books the head must be buried, but it lifts itself to gaze on a scene of beauty.”<sup>36</sup> Such a quote illustrates the repressed state that Bridal Du finds herself in. While Tutor Chen is adamant about keeping the girl focused on her studies and away from the temptations of the outside world, Fragrance stands by her view that it is necessary as the blossoming of the spring season and the spring blossoms will stir certain emotions in the young virgin. Their banter exemplifies how conflicting forces in the text prove to be conflicting yet useful driving forces. In the first part of the play, Bridal Du proves to be a formidable force both physically and metaphorically as she challenges the lives of those around her and the perspective on how women are supposed to behave.

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<sup>36</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 40.

A major climax in *Peony Pavilion* occurs in Scene Thirty-five when she is resurrected. Bridal Du is not the only controversial, rebellious character in the play. Sister Stone and Liu Mengmei, for instance, play an active and illegal role in bringing Bridal Du back to life. They deliberately hatch a plan to revive the girl. When she is actually a living creature again, she exclaims, "Can this be real, or is my soul falsely roused from evil dream?"<sup>37</sup> Thus, even at certain times Bridal Du is unaware of her true self. There are indeed multiple dimensions to Bridal Du's persona, and the change in her temperament is quite noticeable. When she meets Liu Mengmei as a living girl, she does not realize or recall that he is the man of her dreams who she longed for so deeply with fervency unparalleled in numerous plays. She remembers little, but does realize the potency of the love she experienced, "Aunt Stone, I lay dead for three years, but love's devotion brought a secret pact to new fulfillment. I owe my rescue to Master Liu and yourself for your faithfulness."<sup>38</sup> The characters involved in her resurrection (Sister Stone, Scabby Turtle, Liu Mengmei) are all sympathetic to her ordeal of being dead for such an extended period of time. Thus, such events as Bridal Du's death and resurrection serve as crucial barriers in the way of the harmonious ending at the conclusion of the play.

## **1.2 Bridal Du's Turmoil in *Peony Pavilion***

Bridal Du's transformation from a rebellious girl to a woman who desires to follow traditional norms impacts the emergence of the harmonious ending. The grand

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<sup>37</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 202.

<sup>38</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 205.

reunion occurs after Bridal Du's conviction toward following a moral lifestyle. The change in Bridal Du's nature and temperament coincides with the harmonious ending. Such a change in the main character Bridal Du sends a message that if one leads a morally righteous life then peace will occur. If one rebels against traditions, then conflict will occur. The happy ending of the play is correlated to the change in Bridal Du's behavior.

Once she is resurrected, Bridal Du is an entirely different person compared to the girl who died from her unrelenting thirst for the passionate dream. She is much more mindful of the personal and in particular societal implications of her actions. Furthermore, she is concerned about the well-being of her parents more so than ever before. For instance, when the discussion arises about marriage to Liu Mengmei, she is extremely apprehensive. In order for her parents to approve, a matchmaker is needed. In Scene 36, Bridal Du recalls the time when she was consumed by such passion and the toll it took on her. Now, as Liu Mengmei sees her and declares her as his wife, Bridal Du is hesitant, "Sir Scholar, our condition has changed. The other night I was a wandering spirit; now I am a living woman. A ghost may be deluded by passion; a woman must pay full attention to the rites."<sup>39</sup> She further reminds him of the traditional duties to one's parents in marital affairs alongside abiding by the conventional norms for the marital arrangement and ceremony. Although she has gratitude, the need to be observant of traditions is evident. Bridal Du must now confront a world of sheer bewilderment and

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<sup>39</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 207.

resistance to the notion of her very existence. Thankfully, her lover stays by her side. Unlike her parents who are both initially quite resistant to their daughter's claims, Liu Mengmei is steadfast in his belief that the girl is truly the woman from his dream that he has fallen in love with.

Bridal Du had to overcome many changes and hardships in order to pursue tranquility in life. While reunited with her maidservant Fragrance, the story of her journey was recalled. The pivotal dream in the garden of her parents truly became the focal turning point in the play's trajectory that sent Bridal Du toward death. Her recollection of love is poignant, "First a dream in springtime garden, then in the shades love grew for in dreams our shadows so briefly joined were parted but in the shades love twined us close together."<sup>40</sup> From there, Bridal Du encountered many hardships, most notably death from sorrow over the love lost. Fragrance expresses her sentiments on the struggle Bridal Du underwent, "Beauty so bewitching, so cruel the pangs of passion!"<sup>41</sup> At the same time, Fragrance expresses how despite the hardships endured a reunion is in order between the characters that will ultimately lead to joy, "But now let swallow tomb, be desolate as it may, the lovebirds can build a new nest!"<sup>42</sup> There is hope indeed interwoven in the plot at the latter stages of the play.

Harmony in *Peony Pavilion* is illustrated by how Bridal Du is able to reunite with her parents. Despite impossible odds, Madam Du eventually comes to the belief that the

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<sup>40</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 318.

<sup>41</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 319.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 319.

likeness of her daughter is in fact her daughter. Bridal Du struggles to let her mother know about her true identity. She declares to her in Scene Forty-Eight that she is in fact a real human being and not a ghost. Madam Du's doubt is evident in her requesting that Bridal Du recite a certain word three times to prove who she really was, "If you are no ghost, I will call your name thrice and you must answer thrice, each time louder than before."<sup>43</sup> When Bridal Du's replies are softer each time, Madam Du believes she to be a ghost. She even senses the presence of a ghost while speaking to Bridal Du. When informed that Bridal Du is in fact not a ghost, Madam Du is shocked. Madam Du also expresses great remorse to her daughter: "Is this you, my child? Forgive me, I have neglected you, and now you are here as a revenant to accuse me. Fragrance, take spirit money from our baggage and scatter it at once."<sup>44</sup> Despite great adversity the reunion of mother and daughter occurs in a powerful way. Because of Bridal Du's new attitude the grand reunion with her parents and the happy ending are able to occur.

### **1.3 The Path to Harmony in *Peony Pavilion***

A joyful ending prevails despite the conflict and tension amongst the characters at the Emperor's court. An instance of such conflict that arises occurs between Liu Mengmei and the father of Bridal Du. When Liu Mengmei and Du cross paths, Du is outraged at Liu Mengmei when he believes that he disturbed the burial site of his daughter, "Heaven is all-seeing! It's you who plundered my daughter's tomb! Take him

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<sup>43</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 277.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 277.

away and beat him!”<sup>45</sup> Du discovers that Liu Mengmei has the portrait painted by his daughter. He is infuriated at Liu Mengmei, for he believes that Liu wrongfully accessed the grave of his daughter Bridal Du. At the same time, Du blames Sister Stone for being involved in the treacherous act of disturbing his daughter’s grave. Du goes so far as to seek a punishment for the crime. The punishment that he sought for Liu Mengmei was death.<sup>46</sup> The father of Bridal Du was extremely critical of Liu Mengmei for what he perceived to be dubious acts on the part of the young man, “What a scoundrel, born for the executioner’s sword! Thief born and bred, every inch a villain up to every wicked scheme.”<sup>47</sup> Liu Mengmei retorts that all of his deeds “were for your esteemed daughter’s sake.”<sup>48</sup> Du refuses to believe Liu’s story. Such deep loathing and distrust shows how insurmountable the hurdles that appear to make a happy ending seemingly impossible.

The dueling convictions of Liu Mengmei and Du Bao set a striking contrast to the prospects of a peaceful end to all of the drama that continues to unfold in *Peony Pavilion*. Liu Mengmei continues to profess his love for Bridal Du even though her father refuses to believe in the tale being told, and advocates for a severe punishment to be administered. He also states his role in the revival of Bridal Du, yet again Du Bao is skeptical and defiant in his views. However, the order arrives for Liu Mengmei to be

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<sup>45</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 309.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>47</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 310.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

honored for being the Prize Candidate of recent examinations administered by the Emperor for young scholars. Du Bao, on the other hand, refuses to believe that this man could possibly be his son-in-law. Du Bao remains convinced that treachery was committed, and such actions deserve punishment. The efforts of Liu Mengmei to prove his true identity and intentions appear to be futile. As time goes by, conflicts ensue that place the essence of their relations in a continuously evolving spectrum across space and time. The conflict between Liu Mengmei and Du Bao shows the corresponding ideological conflict between *li* and *qing* throughout the text.

Liu Mengmei almost turns a blind eye to her death and revival as a living being once again and fully embraces the woman he loves. All of the traditional rationale and social norms are put to rest, for passion and the human emotions prevail. On the other hand, Du Bao abides by the Confucian traditions and norms. Sister Stone is concerned about the repercussions for their actions, “‘What now what now? Tomorrow Tutor Chen intends to visit the young lady’s grave. If all comes to light, number one Miss Du will be labeled a demon, number two Commissioner Du will be accused of failing in her upbringing, number three you, sir, will be ridiculed for allowing yourself to be bewitched, and number four I shall have to take the blame for opening the grave. What’s to be done?’”<sup>49</sup> Such a statement presents a formula for great social distress and a negative reaction due to the resurrection taking place. The reaction of her parents to the news of their dead daughter’s resurrection is of an entirely different matter.

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<sup>49</sup> Shu-Chu Wei. “‘The *Peony Pavilion*’ with Todorov’s ‘Fantastic.’” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*. (CLEAR) Vol. 33 (December 2011), 86.

#### 1.4 Du Bao's Doubt

Du Bao once he is notified of his daughter's presence in the world again is quite antagonistic. He labels her many names "demon" and "malevolent sprite" among other categorizations.<sup>50</sup> In Scene 55 Bridal Du is again chastised by her father, "Years now, since my daughter perished: by laws of ying and yang, of light and dark How could she live again? Once stroke from Your Imperial Majesty Here on the golden steps to the throne And this demon will stand revealed."<sup>51</sup> Du Bao has been depicted as a "Confucian 'rationalist'" who relies on reason and facts as a guide through life.<sup>52</sup> He is also extremely devoted to traditions and the current system of law and societal order as an official in the government. Tension is evident as Bridal Du is desperate for her father's acceptance. Du Bao is certainly not willing to accept this post mortem being as his daughter, and he is also not fond of Liu Mengmei for his involvement with his daughter. He is certainly devoted to the order and traditions of the day, and their union does not align with the conventional norms for a husband and wife to be betrothed to one another. Although Liu Mengmei is a successful civil servant and comes from a reputable family background, Du Bao is stubborn in his stance. Even the emperor's conclusion that the girl truly is Bridal Du does little to sway him from his mindset.<sup>53</sup> In

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<sup>50</sup> Shu-Chu Wei. "The *Peony Pavilion*' with Todorov's 'Fantastic.'" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews. (CLEAR)* Vol. 33 (December 2011), 88.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>52</sup> Shu-Chu Wei. "The *Peony Pavilion*' with Todorov's 'Fantastic.'" *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews. (CLEAR)* Vol. 33 (December 2011), 88.

<sup>53</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 95.



the final scene, Du Bao finally realizes that she is in fact his daughter. It is a truly memorable conclusion to a remarkable work of art.

The final scene of *Peony Pavilion* involves the reunion of all the characters, and demonstrates how a sense of harmony was achieved at the conclusion of the play. Liu Mengmei and Du Bao continue to feud even going so far as to accuse one another of being criminals.<sup>54</sup> Liu Mengmei even goes so far as to criticize Du Bao for allowing his daughter to go for a walk in the garden, and for rejecting him as his son-in-law.<sup>55</sup> There is great tension between the two men that threatens to boil over in the final scene of the play. As Bridal Du approaches her father and husband, it causes great distress amongst the various characters most notably Bridal Du, Liu Mengmei, and Du Bao. The drama that shaped much of the play continues to hold its sway, and threatens to place a sorrowful finish to the conclusion of *Peony Pavilion*. However, that was not to be the case despite a number of forces working against such a positive, uplifting outcome.

A very powerful and dramatic reunion occurs between Bridal Du and her father Du Bao. Her father is initially extremely resistant to the notion that the girl appearing before him is in fact his daughter, “Years, now, since my daughter perished: by laws of yin and yang, of light and dark how could she live again? One stroke from Your Imperial Majesty here on the golden steps to the throne and this demon will stand revealed.”<sup>56</sup> Likewise, an example that the imperial court uses to determine the validity of Bridal

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<sup>54</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 326.

<sup>55</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 327.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 329.

Du's claim is over whether she has a shadow.<sup>57</sup> They discover that Bridal Du in fact does possess a shadow when she walks, and thus is deemed to be human and not a ghost.<sup>58</sup> Bridal Du thereafter is permitted to disclose the full story a tale that she has lived to tell. She describes how she met Liu Mengmei in the garden, fell in love, and was buried by the apricot tree. These sequence of events ultimately led to the girl's death. The portrait she painted was discovered by Liu Mengmei, and he clung to the portrait in the hope of finding the woman of his dream.<sup>59</sup> Liu Mengmei confirms that what his wife professed was in fact true, and he traveled far and wide trying to find her. His love was a powerful force behind her resurrection as he worked fervently to bring her back to life with the assistance of others such as Sister Stone. Despite the evidence, however, her father Du Bao refuses to believe the story being told to him about his daughter's resurrection. Du Bao declares that Liu Mengmei is a liar and his daughter an impostor. Liu Mengmei is only desecrating his daughter's memory and honor. Bridal Du questions her father's judgment when Liu Mengmei has been so faithful to her all these years. The arguments among the various characters indeed provides a complexity to the final scenes of the play.

### **1.5 Harmony at Last in *Peony Pavilion***

At the end of the play it seems as though a harmonious ending will not occur.

The appearance of Madam Du adds an additional complexity to the play. She advocates

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<sup>57</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 329.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

for her daughter's authentic claims regarding her own identity. It is rumored that Madam Du died during the war, so it is especially shocking for her husband Du Bao. Madam Du recalled how she was reunited with her daughter, "To Hangzhou we came by night there to encounter Bridal in the darkness startling our very souls to flight. Then mother and daughter, hearts as one from death released found a new life together."<sup>60</sup> Despite this compelling evidence, Du Bao will not relent in his convictions continuing to label his daughter a demon.<sup>61</sup> After careful consideration the imperial court does declare that Bridal Du and Liu Mengmei are telling the truth, "Hear our decree: Having given careful attention to the deposition of Bridal Du, we are no longer inclined to question her rebirth. Now let our eunuchs escort her past the Southern Gate, and let father and child, husband and wife acknowledge each other and all return home to resume their proper relationships."<sup>62</sup> Although some characters refuse to acknowledge one another, others receive each other with openness and good will. Although harmony is achieved, the complexity of such harmony is shown by the unresolved issues that remain.

An instance of harmony at the conclusion of *Peony Pavilion* is Madam Du's acceptance of Liu Mengmei as part of the family in addition to accepting her daughter Bridal Du's humanity. Madam Du is pleased not only that her daughter is alive and well, but also that she is married to the Prize Candidate. She welcomes Liu Mengmei as part

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<sup>60</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 332.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

of the family, yet Du remains stubborn. In response to her father's continued resistance, Bridal Du declares, "Ah my parents, there are people who build high towers decked out with colored silks, yet even in broad daylight can't succeed in attracting a son-in-law of official rank. And here I, your daughter, from ghostly caverns of my dreams have made the conquest of no less than the Prize Candidate- what is this talk now of 'family rank and status'?"<sup>63</sup> Bridal Du continues to seek her father's blessing and approval. Her desire for her father's approval shows not only the importance of filial piety in Confucian norms, but the gender dynamics that place favor on male authority in society.

The true culmination of harmony in the play occurs when Du Bao finally sees his daughter for who she truly is. Bridal Du is swept up in emotions and tears as she stands before her parents, and eventually faints. In this stirring moment, Du Bao recognizes his daughter. Furthermore, a number of the characters reconnect in a joyful time including Fragrance and Sister Stone. The family received promotions bestowed upon them by the Imperial Family. Du Bao, for instance, was "to be advanced to the first rank of the nobility" in addition to his title as Chief Minister.<sup>64</sup> Liu Mengmei alongside his title of Prize Candidate received a promotion as well as did his wife Bridal Du. In essence, despite all of the adversity that stood in the way of a happy ending for the characters and the play overall, such a harmonious conclusion was indeed achieved.

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<sup>63</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 335.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

## CHAPTER 2

### HARMONY IN *THE LUTE*

#### 2.1 Tale of *The Lute*

Wang Jiadong's article "On the Profound Social Tragedy behind the Chinese Happy Ending" describes the type of happy ending that is so prominent in Chinese drama. There is an underlying tragic element to these grand reunions at the happy endings of each play.<sup>65</sup> The tragedy can be found in the day to day hardships that the characters face. Also, the characters face great loss in reaching the harmonious conclusion. In addition, there is an aesthetic appeal to the beauty of such a tragic element of the plays.<sup>66</sup> Unlike in Western plays, there is the tragic reality that the efforts of humans cannot produce a happy outcome.<sup>67</sup> Rather, external forces such as from the supernatural realm is the primary factor in ensuring that a harmonious ending does occur.<sup>68</sup> Plays such as *Peony Pavilion* and *The Lute* are great examples of this structure that is so dominant in Chinese plays. *The Lute* has an especially tragic storyline.

At the beginning of the play *The Lute*, Cai plays the role of a devoted son and scholar. He is also newly married to a young woman named Wuniang. At the same time, he faces a huge dilemma that he cannot avoid. By imperial order, he is chosen to leave his hometown to serve as a civil-servant for the emperor. However, this decision tears at

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<sup>65</sup> Wang Jiadong "On the Profound Social Tragedy behind the Chinese Happy Ending. 论中国式大团圆背后所隐藏的深刻社会悲剧性" *Journal of Liuzhou Teachers College*: Vol. 25 No. 1 (Feb. 2010), 76.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>67</sup> Wang Jiadong "On the Profound Social Tragedy behind the Chinese Happy Ending. 论中国式大团圆背后所隐藏的深刻社会悲剧性" *Journal of Liuzhou Teachers College*: Vol. 25 No. 1 (Feb. 2010), 77.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

him to the very core for he cannot imagine being apart from his parents. He deems it not filial of him to leave them and his wife for the city and the life of a scholar official in the distant capital. The Confucian ethical norms of serving the ruling class and abiding by duties to society also compel him to question his decision regarding this matter. He is truly at a crossroad as the play unfolds in Scene 2:

I'm drunk on the Six Classics and I have mastered one by one the Hundred Philosophers. I've penetrated the mysteries of everything from ritual and science to each form of poetry and prose. I've fathomed the essence of all studies from divination and astrology to music, philology, and mathematics. My talent for government is extraordinary, and I live in an enlightened and prosperous age. 'Study in youth and put it into practice in maturity,' it is said, and I long to rise to a position as high as the clouds a thousand miles up in the sky. But they also say, 'At home, be filial; in society, respectful as a younger brother,' and how could I leave the side of my white-haired parents? It's better off after all to devote myself to my parents' service, even if I can only offer pulse and water, and to accept my lot of only eating pickled food and salt.<sup>69</sup>

It appears as though Cai realizes his potential and his expertise in the studies of the academic field, but at the same time he has a sense of obligation and even indebtedness to serving his parents because of the power of filial piety. He is caught between both worlds. While he deems it necessary to stay home, he also seems to lament the position that will place him in. He would certainly be of a higher class with greater societal prestige. In attempting to justify his need to cater to his parents' need while casting his own aside, he recites the phrase "Carry out filial piety in your own life

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<sup>69</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 34.

and leave the reward to Heaven.”<sup>70</sup> At the start of the play, Cai is intent on being a devoted husband and son. He believes in destiny to reward his behavior.

Wuniang grieves throughout the transgression of the play. In likeness with the character Bridal Du from *Peony Pavilion*, she endures great hardship, heartache, and sorrow. Bridal Du is left in a terrible state after the dream that she experienced with Liu Mengmei in the garden. In *The Lute*, Wuniang experiences great sadness when Cai leaves her. Bridal Du is tormented by the fact that she cannot recover her dream or the man in it. Although these experiences have similarities and will be discussed further at a later time in this publication, Wuniang’s hardship does not abate rather it intensifies. And in reference to the anger and grief she feels in regards to her husband’s departure and the subsequent situation at hand, Wuniang unlike Bridal Du continues to endure the heartache. It does not cease. The tragic elements of the play continue to unfold particularly for the primary female character Wuniang. Her life is a tragedy, and so is her journey.

As the plot of the play unfolds, it becomes apparent that external pressures will certainly have their impact on the outcome of this love and story and family. Many thematic elements revolving around the pursuit of a li oriented lifestyle are present throughout the text. A recurring theme in the play is Cai’s feelings of despair over serving the country versus his family, “When rivers are warm and blossoms fragrant, fish turn into dragons. The spring examination draws near; the spring examination has been

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<sup>70</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 34.

proclaimed. In vain is the summons to scholars of the district; My heart's tied to my parents' home. Too hard to part from my parents' home!"<sup>71</sup> In his search for justification, Cai asks himself "How can the fame of world success compare to the fame of a filial son?"<sup>72</sup> He further laments how delicate and temporary the good things in life are such as springtime sweetness that transcends itself into summertime sadness. A life of ordinary means surrounded by his parents and serving them in their old age would be perfectly suitable for Cai. Yet at the same time, he has been suggested by local officials in his region to serve as a scholar in the capital. An opportunity that is terribly difficult to decline. Despite using his parents as the reason for not accepting the request, Cai knows that the pressure will remain to appease the wishes of the higher authorities. He is truly tormented by this dilemma that threatens to unleash great distress, "Though I've read ten thousand books, Success and fame were not my goal. I worry about my parents in their old age, and not even in dreams will my soul enter the examination hall. Even to become a high official and stand among the nine jujube and three locust trees, how could I ever desert the day lily and ch'un tree? Within me, deep in my heart, filial love- Who can understand it?"<sup>73</sup> Cai is out of faith in the merits of service to society, and deeply torn. While Cai has himself embroiled in this predicament, his neighbor Chang chuckled for he knows that the mindsets of his parents are entirely different.

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<sup>71</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 50.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>73</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 50.



The parents of Cai have wishes of their own for him that do not neatly coincide with the desires that he feels. His father knows that his fate lies in the modest existence that he currently inhabits physically and intellectually, but he wishes that his only son could achieve more in life. In addition, he is aware of his son's potential, "But I have a clever son, And when he becomes an official, I'll be satisfied at last."<sup>74</sup> He orders his son to prepare to leave, for the emperor wishes that he along with some selectively selected scholars depart to the capital for service. Likewise, Cai's mother finds her greatest hope lies in her son and what he can do with his life. Their family may have no prominence at this time, but will gain significance when their son's smart, clever disposition is put to good use.<sup>75</sup> She further remarks that when he achieves a position of prominence, that they will no longer be impoverished people. An emotional tug of war ensues between the young scholar to be and his parents over whether or not he ought to depart for the capital in service to the emperor. While his mother does state that her son's elevated status would certainly elevate their own modest lifestyle, at the same time she has fears of her own if he leaves. In a statement that almost foreshadows the future, Mother Cai is in a perplexed, vexed state of being as she reminds her husband of their predicament. Father Cai is not a healthy young man who is physically capable of aiding them should a major crisis emerge. She asks, "What if our son goes off and there's trouble at home?"

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<sup>74</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 51.

<sup>75</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 52.

Who would get us out of it? With no food, we'd die of hunger. With no clothes, we'd die from cold."<sup>76</sup> In essence, the mother of Cai foresees trouble in paradise.

## 2.2 Wuniang's Character

Wuniang is the epitome of a virtuous woman. She is also a chaste woman who is incredibly faithful to her husband and his family. Her character is ultimately rewarded for her righteous behavior by the Spirit World in the supernatural realm. Her reward not only shows the type of moral behavior that creates the foundation for a harmonious conclusion, but also shows the force of the supernatural in bringing about harmony in the finale of the play. The happy ending comes about from such factors as the behavior of Wuniang. Her acts fall in line with the norms of Confucianism which is an integral part of the play, and provides the basis for the grand reunion and harmonious ending. Her acts such as going on a journey to find her husband brings back stability amidst sorrowful circumstances. Although not every desire is fulfilled such as the survival of Cai's parents, nevertheless through elements of the play such as Wuniang's character harmony does eventually take place.

Wuniang was in a state of bliss following the marriage to Cai, yet turmoil erupted when the call of scholarly duties arrived. She likens this to the ecstasy she experienced in springtime that was suddenly brutally disrupted. Cai is chastised in Scene Five for abandoning his duties of filial piety and the love he committed to in marriage. In her eyes, worldly glory and prestige motivates her husband, and the pursuit of scholarly

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<sup>76</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 52.

studies in the capital is nothing but a facade for his true desires. Cai replies that he would not go had it not been for the prodding of his parents. They both are in great distress about Cai's impending departure. Wuniang is reduced to tears. Cai instructs her to stop shedding tears of sorrow as his parents' approach. Together with his parents, a painful goodbye indeed occurs. His concern is evident as he instructs the neighbor Chang on how to manage his family affairs in his absence, "I'm leaving today. We have no other relatives at home, and my parents are old and weak. Their daughter-in-law is after all, just a woman. What can she know about anything? I depend on you to take care of everything, to look after them early and late, and if there's anything they need, I hope you'll take care of it."<sup>77</sup> Cai clearly underestimates the capability and resiliency of his wife.

Wuniang, the wife of Cai, is willing to place all of her strength and fervor into preserving the well-being and safe keeping of her family namely his parents. Her own life comes secondary and she does not pursue an individualist lifestyle. She is heartbroken, for example, yet she does not pursue any other men or have an inclination toward doing so. In addition, Wuniang does not seek a reclusive lifestyle in a religious establishment free of the societal and filial binds that tie her. Despite certain feelings in regards to her husband's departure, she will not cease to be a faithful wife, "I'll carry on here as best I can, So his reputation won't be harmed, I'll cover up for him somehow."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 61-62.

<sup>78</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 82.

Cai has abandoned her in pursuit of the life of a scholar in the capital, yet she does not desist from her duties. While she does lament the drastic changes this has brought to her life namely by referencing the “spring breeze” in relation to her decline in beauty and youthful appearance, she carries on.<sup>79</sup> The desire to preserve her beauty as a young woman does indeed affect her, but Wuniang will not cease in her mission to serve wholeheartedly and faithfully the family she has married into. Simultaneously, she cannot avoid certain negative emotions as her strength and resolve will be greatly tested as certain hardships unfold that puts her very life and her parent-in-laws’ lives at stake.

Despite her feelings in regards to her husband’s decision to leave for the capital to serve the Emperor, Wuniang adheres to her spousal obligations and remains faithful to Cai in his absence. She had dreams clenched deep inside her heart of a future that was stable and traditional. Amidst the grief that she experiences from the changes in life that have shattered her dreams, Wuniang laments the unfortunate change in fate, “Po-chieh ((Cai)) had been married only two months. I hoped then that the two of us would grow together in service to his parents. But instead his father commanded him to attend the civil examinations. Since he left, there hasn’t been a single letter from him; I must both uphold his good name as a filial son and carry out my own responsibilities as a good daughter-in-law.”<sup>80</sup> In essence, Wuniang is in great distress over the change in

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<sup>79</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 83.

<sup>80</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 80.

fortune, and is dissatisfied at the situation that she finds herself in. At the same time, it also provides a poignant glimpse into the persona and goals of Wuniang. She had a simple formula for how her life would unfold with happiness and ease, and it crashed down upon her.

The virtue of the young woman Wuniang is shown in how she negotiates the conflicts that erupt during the hard time following Cai's departure. Despite her anger and resentment of her husband that she labels as superficial, she shows honorable qualities in how she deals with the stress between her father-in-law and mother-in-law. Arguments erupt between the husband and wife, and Wuniang mediates between the two. While the two blame each other for the misfortune that has arisen, their daughter-in-law seeks to quell their quarreling. For example, during their conflict in Scene 10 Wuniang shows her negotiation skills by reminding each other of important matters to consider:

Father, Mother, please don't be angry any more. Just listen to me a minute. Mother, when Father sent your son away, no one could have known that today there'd be such a famine. You mustn't hold it against him. And Father, when Mother suffers through this terrible famine when no son by her side, it's only natural that she's distraught. You shouldn't blame her for holding it against you. Please calm yourselves. I'll pawn some of my hair ornaments and jewelry for rice so that you can have a few mouthfuls of food. Better that I die of starvation myself than ever fall behind in my duties to you!<sup>81</sup>

Wuniang is willing to sacrifice everything for her mother-in-law and father-in-law. She continuously places her own needs aside in order to serve them with her

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<sup>81</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 98.

greatest effort. In the play, all of these emotions are experienced by Wuniang in her quest to live a life of decency. Despite the departure of her husband, she does not let this dash her resolve to serve his parents and honor her status in society as his wife. A particularly poignant scene that highlights Wuniang's devout qualities is the scene in which she eats corn husks for sustenance.

The resiliency of Wuniang through great hardship is demonstrated clearly in the scene in which she eats the corn husks to save food for her in-laws. Such selfless acts yet again show who the real Wuniang is in the midst of tremendous devastation. She encounters a chasm of great depression and turmoil, and life is truly bleak. Yet through it all Wuniang maintains a certain perspective: that she must sacrifice all for the sake of her husband's parents' survival. When Wuniang encounters these husks, she sacrifices her own hunger in order to save her mother-in-law and father-in-law's lives, for she would rather die alone before them (her in-laws).<sup>82</sup> Initially, her mother-in-law believes that Wuniang is being duplicitous and concealing food from them. There is great remorse shown upon discovering that Wuniang is in fact eating husks in order to save any remaining sustaining food for her in-laws. Wuniang remains steadfast in her commitment to their survival. She further metaphorically relates the terrible state she is in to the husks she has before her, "You were ground by the pestle; They sifted you, fanned you, Every harm that they could do. As I, wretched beyond hope, Have been through endless hardship and suffering. A person of bitter fate, your bitterness I taste.

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<sup>82</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 156.

Both bitter, we meet. I want to swallow, and I can't."<sup>83</sup> In addition, the comparison of husks and rice is used by Wuniang to correlate her current plight to the one her husband finds himself in.<sup>84</sup> One of grandeur and splendor. She is the husk, he is the rice. The belief that her fate is one of pain and destruction is held steadfastly to by the young woman.

Wuniang demonstrates her selfless qualities at many times throughout the play. In addition, through her selfless nature she heaps a great deal of pressure on herself to meet the expectation of a dutiful, filial wife. At this point in the play Wuniang faces a crossroad. While she wishes death would arrive and she even goes as far as to attempt to jump in a well, thinking of the family she married into keeps that action at bay. Death has become a viable option for Wuniang under the circumstances which she has been forced to endure. But her resolve is again demonstrated in her will to live. A touching, poignant tale continues to emerge of the ways in which following a moral code are able to move mountains in a metaphorical sense. Wuniang's character plays a pivotal role in the emergence and resiliency of peaceful relations and harmony in the latter stages of the play.

### **2.3 The Blissful Reunion**

The true climax of *The Lute* occurs when Cai meets Wuniang while traveling with his second wife Mistress Niu on their respective journeys. Cai is presented with a poem

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<sup>83</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 157.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

by Mistress Niu in Scene Thirty-Six. It was written by his wife Wuniang, and it bothers him greatly, “The author ridicules me; I can’t forgive that! Tell me now, I must know; I can’t let the matter drop.”<sup>85</sup> Cai is thereafter reunited with his wife Wuniang. He became aware of his first wife’s frustrations, and also realized that his parents were no longer alive. The grief felt by Cai was great and he criticized himself for being a bad son to his parents. Wuniang further relates her grief at the loss of her in-laws, and also the terrible hardships she had in the wake of her husband’s departure, “You speak of my torment, Speak of my bitter toil. If you don’t believe how I suffered, look at your father, look at your mother- How emaciated they became after you left! All alone, how hard it was to endure!”<sup>86</sup> In addition, Mistress Niu recalled how the Emperor pressured Cai into marriage. She therefore doubts that her husband could be devoted to his parents under such circumstances as their (Mistress Niu and Cai’s) marriage. In essence, there are a number of dynamics that threaten to cause great discord.

The kindness of Wuniang is clearly shown in how she responds to the reunion with her husband. Their reunion could have been dramatic and very hostile. Wuniang does not exhibit much animosity toward her husband. Despite her previous angry comments directed toward her husband in the play’s text, at this time Wuniang has found a different approach, “At the beginning he had no choice- Forced to take part in the examinations, All attempts to refuse ignored by his father.”<sup>87</sup> In addition, there is no

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<sup>85</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 261.

<sup>86</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 261.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.



anger shown toward Mistress Niu. Even when she and her husband are reunited, there is more concern over the fact that Cai's parents are now deceased. He is in great distress labeling himself as an unfaithful, dishonorable son to his parents for leaving them for civil service. Wuniang requests that her dead in-laws' spirits forgive Cai for not being present.<sup>88</sup> Her in-laws continue to maintain priority over any animosity she might hold against her husband. In essence, Wuniang's virtuous character continues to be shown throughout the play in the most trying of circumstances including when she sees her husband again and it is indeed not a fairytale ending. It is truly remarkable to see in this instance how Wuniang's virtuosity is shown in her dealing with Cai and his new wife the Prime Minister's daughter.

The harmony between the characters toward the conclusion of *The Lute* can be tied to such aspects as the integrity of each character. Cai for instance blames himself for the pain that Wuniang faces, "Wuniang, I was the cause of your torment, I was the cause of your bitter toil! I thank you for providing burial for my father, For my mother How hard to repay such love! And they say, 'Sons are raised to provide for one's old age'!"<sup>89</sup> Cai takes responsibility for his choices. At the same time, Wuniang again shows her virtuous spirit by also stating that she could have done more to provide for her husband and in-laws. Even though she did so many virtuous deeds to assist her in-laws during the famine, nevertheless Wuniang is not malicious to her husband. In essence,

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<sup>88</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 281.

<sup>89</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 263.

the nobility of the characters was a major influence on a lack of conflict during the meeting of Mistress Niu, Cai, and Wuniang. Such behavior contributed to the harmony that occurred at the conclusion of the play. There was ample material for a contentious reunion, but in the end such a fiery reunion did not take place.

Wuniang's integrity as a character impacts how peace prevails in *The Lute* among other matters. Wuniang's faithfulness is shown in her persistent pursuit of the journey that will lead her to the capital. She has hope that a reunion with Cai is indeed possible. Despite having little in possession and sustenance, Wuniang is determined to set off on her quest. The balance between despair and determination is evident as she leaves the graves and departs. Similarly, Wuniang fervently believes that the love between her and her husband has not been lost in spite of his departure, "He could never forget our love; All groundless are these fears of mine! He must remember that 'single night as husband and wife that held a hundred nights of love.' How could we ever become strangers?"<sup>90</sup> While she thinks their love will survive, at the same time she has great doubts as well. Divisions of class are evident as well, for because of Cai's great stature Wuniang fears that she will not be able to access him.<sup>91</sup> Alongside her faith and determination, Wuniang is afraid. Afraid of what might happen. Such a scene again shows her vulnerability amidst such strength of character. It is evident that Wuniang shows human

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<sup>90</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 228.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

characteristics amidst her behavior that is seemingly beyond human normal behavior most notably through her service to her in-laws that never wavers.

They even all discuss traveling together to the burial site, and Wuniang alongside Mistress Niu provide a comforting presence for Cai in his grief stricken state. Cai himself suggests that they all go together to the burial site to pay their respects. However, the notion that the Emperor would approve such a venture was mentioned by Wuniang. Mistress Niu replied that he would accept such a plan once the devotion that Cai feels to his beloved parents is made clear.<sup>92</sup> Wuniang continues to place responsibility on herself for the proper care of her in-laws' burial site as well as the events that led to their passing. Mistress Niu is fervent in her desire to be a filial wife, "I won't shirk trouble, Won't shirk toil. We'll go together to bow before your father, Bow before your mother. With my own hands I'll sweep their grave, And our homage will bring glory to their souls beneath the earth."<sup>93</sup> First, the Prime Minister's approval was a must for any such procession to take place. His initial stubbornness to such an idea and his refusal to abide by such a request placed an obstacle in their path to commemorating the lives of those lost.

#### **2.4 Barriers to Harmony in *The Lute***

Prime Minister Niu's objection to his daughter's involvement in the commemoration of Cai's parents following their death proves to be a formidable

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<sup>92</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 265.

<sup>93</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 265.

obstacle against harmony in the play. He refuses to allow her to honor the lost loved ones of his son-in-law. The prime minister is concerned for his daughter's well-being as well, "Now I think of my delicate daughter, always sheltered- How can she travel ten thousand miles? And I with no other kin- How can I bear separation?"<sup>94</sup> He is concerned for matters such as his daughter's reputation as well as his own piece of mind. Prime Minister Niu is also advised, however, that it truly is his daughter's duty as a wife to honor her in-laws at their grave. Initially, the prime minister refuses to allow his daughter to travel to her husband's hometown. At the same time, characters such as Cai are apprehensive that Prime Minister Niu will permit his daughter to participate in the activity. Mistress Niu states that according to Confucian ethics it is her duty as a wife to honor her in-laws at their burial site.<sup>95</sup> During the interaction between the Prime Minister and his daughter, the harmony between Wuniang and Mistress Niu is admirable as they both have great respect for one another.

Mistress Niu is adamant in her assertion that as Cai's wife she must pay her respects to his deceased parents. While referring to Wuniang as her older sister, Mistress Niu recalls how much effort and devotion Wuniang showed in trying to preserve the lives of her in-laws.<sup>96</sup> In addition, Mistress Niu describes how Wuniang carried out all of the proper rituals for deceased loved ones. Mistress Niu expresses her guilt over not being present for their death as well as praise for Wuniang, "When they

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<sup>94</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 273.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>96</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 274.

died, I was not able to be there to mourn for them, nor was I able to serve them in their long night. How can I be counted as human? I've sinned against my parents-in-law; the conduct of my elder sister shames me! Now, Father, I ask in your presence- let my elder sister take precedence over me!"<sup>97</sup> Mistress Niu, consequently, deems it her duty not only as a wife but also as a human being to pay tribute to her dead father-in-law and mother-in-law. In addition, she refers to her husband's former wife as her "elder sister."<sup>98</sup> Such a term of affection demonstrates the peace seeking disposition of both women that lies in contrast to the notion that the a man's wives are at odds with one another. It truly contributes to the cohesive ending of the play. Wuniang's veneration of Mistress Niu is noteworthy here as well.

Wuniang, as well as Mistress Niu, show their virtuous character in their respectful praise of one another. Wuniang, for her part, is humble as the Emperor's daughter praises her qualities as an honorable wife. While Mistress Niu shows her admiration of Wuniang, Wuniang once again exhibits the noble qualities that she has shown throughout the play's duration. Wuniang declares that one must be evaluated based on one's position in society.<sup>99</sup> Thus, Mistress Niu, in the eyes of Wuniang, should not compare herself to the wife of a lesser social status, "She is a renowned beauty raised in elegant surroundings, while I am but a humble woman wearing a bramble hairpin and a cotton skirt. What's more, her marriage was by order of imperial decree!

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<sup>97</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 274.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>99</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 274.

Impossible that she should yield precedence to me!”<sup>100</sup> The collective declarations of kindness and respect by the two women not only demonstrates the harmony found in the conclusion of *The Lute*, but also serves as a major influence on the Emperor’s position on his daughter going with Cai and Wuniang to honor the deceased in-laws.

Despite his initial objections at his daughter having returned to Cai’s hometown, eventually the Emperor does yield to his daughter’s wishes. An initial obstacle to the honoring of Cai’s parents by his wife Mistress Niu was eliminated when the Emperor agreed to his daughter’s request to honor her deceased in-laws. The Emperor even goes so far as to label Wuniang as though she were a second daughter to him, for she has lost so many family members.<sup>101</sup> He sees the virtuous behavior of Cai’s first wife Wuniang. Cai and Wuniang in turn are both grateful for the Emperor’s change of heart. Wuniang is delighted, for in her mind her in-laws will find tranquility in the afterlife due to the care of their burial site.<sup>102</sup> She further pledges to the Emperor that she will watch over his child Mistress Niu during their journey. At the same time, Mistress Niu feels as though she is caught in between two competing desires, “As I gaze at my father’s aged face and white hair, Pain brings tear after tear from my eyes. Father, Either way it will be hard for me; If I wrong my parents-in-law, People will censure me. If I abandon my father, There’ll be no one to care for him.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, a number of complexities remain in the

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<sup>100</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 274.

<sup>101</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 274.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>103</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 276.

play despite events that occur to establish a sense of tranquility. An example of such an occurrence is the Emperor abiding by his daughter's wishes to travel to Cai's hometown and honor her in-laws. The uncertainty of the future unsettles the characters. However, a plan has been made toward a common goal of peace and unity alongside a sense of justice.

In relation to the Emperor permitting his daughter to depart, there is a sense of hardship that can be found in *The Lute* amidst the pursuit of peace. There is the feeling of loss felt by a number of characters. In Scene Thirty-Nine, for example, Mistress Niu and her father the Emperor express a collective sense of sadness because they will be separated from one another. Throughout the duration of the play, Wuniang was in a state of despair over the absence of her husband and her in-laws after their death. She frequently expresses the great sorrow she feels. Such a sense of loss and longing is also profound in *Peony Pavilion*. Bridal Du, for example, is at a great loss after the dream she experienced in the garden. Liu Mengmei is similarly in a place of great sadness when he is unable to relocate Bridal Du after also experiencing the dream. In *The Lute* loss and heartache seem to permeate through every element of the text as now Mistress Niu, for instance, expresses sorrow at having to leave her father even though she feels it is for her ultimate benefit to be with her husband. In addition, Wuniang's dream of a blissful reunion with her husband does not go according to plan for he is married to a second wife. Cai's family collectively experiences tremendous grief over lost life and hardship. Although such negative chaos is profound, the conclusion of the play has a much different tone.

## 2.5 Harmony Amongst The Characters in *The Lute*

The return to the grave of Cai's parents is a somber occasion, but also reflects the unity among the characters at the conclusion of the play. For instance, the characters are joined in their collective sorrow over the hardships of life that they have endured. Cai and Wuniang, for example, both cast blame on themselves for the events that led to the deaths of their loved ones. For her part, Wuniang not only blames herself but also asks for forgiveness on behalf of her spouse Cai for not being present during his parents' time of need. Likewise, the characters are united in their sense of gratitude toward the character Chang for looking after the graves during their absence. Wuniang states to Chang about he assisted her in her time of need, "In those days I was dressed in rags, I thank you, sir, for all the support you gave. And alas, before I can repay your past kindness, Again you come to care for us! It's not only I who is moved by your virtue; Mother and Father, in dark world below, will remember your kindness forever."<sup>104</sup> They collectively state their gratefulness for his effort. In essence, an area of harmony among the characters is not only found in their collective sorrow and grief, but also in how they respond to other characters such as Chang during their time together. They are a unified force intent on honoring their deceased relatives as a cohesive family unit. In the pursuit of honoring their deceased relatives Cai, Wuniang, and Mistress Niu receive praise and are rewarded for their noble efforts.

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<sup>104</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 283.



The play takes on a more positive tone when Cai and his wives arrive back at his hometown. There is a reward for the virtuous behavior of the three characters by the Emperor through an imperial declaration. Cai is humbly taken aback as he is notified of the praise that is bestowed upon him. He notes other men who have been much more devoted to their families in his eyes.<sup>105</sup> In addition, he mourns the loss of his parents, and does not believe that he should receive such an award. The Emperor is much more forgiving of Cai, and even declares that “Your period of mourning is over.”<sup>106</sup> There is no longer a need to be overcome with guilt in the Emperor’s eyes. Matters were truly taking a turn for the good after all the heartache. The Emperor issued the following mandate to Cai, Wuniang, and Mistress Niu:

Kneel as I read the decree: ‘It is our belief that good customs are the foundation of moral development, and that filial piety and righteousness are the foundation of good customs. With every day that brings us further from the time of the ancient sages, so do their pure customs grow more and more corrupted. Social morality is in a state of decay, and this fills our heart with distress. Therefore, when a man is able to fulfill the ways of both filial piety and righteousness and encourage others to reform their own behavior, how can we fail to commend him so that the whole world will be inspired by his example?... To carry out both filial piety and righteousness is a double perfection. Upon these three we hereby confer our sincerest commendations. Let the multitudes of the world follow their example, take them as a model. For if customs are improved and conduct reformed, our era can compare with the great dynasties of antiquity. And so we graciously reward them, that the whole world may know of their filial piety and righteousness.’<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 289.

<sup>106</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 291.

<sup>107</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 292-293.

Along with the praise of Cai, Wuniang and Mistress Niu were praised for their selfless behavior such as Wuniang serving her in-laws until the bitter end, and the lack of animosity from Mistress Niu toward Wuniang after discovering the truth about her husband's first marriage. The Emperor's decree further illustrates the desire to set these individuals' character as an example to be emulated in order to achieve harmony in society.

It seems as though a divine intervention has occurred that has changed the characters' circumstances for the better. The man named Chang states that certain changes in the world indicate that hope emerges from despair, "It was said in antiquity, 'Acts of filial piety and respect toward elders make themselves known even to the spirits above. They shine everywhere within the four seas; everything is touched by their power.' Look at those ancient trees with branches intertwined, and the white rabbits scampering about as if tame. With these auspicious signs, it's certain that good fortune is on the way."<sup>108</sup> In the eyes of Chang it's as though the entire world is rejoicing due to the kind, virtuous behavior of Cai and his wives Wuniang and Mistress Niu. It seems to be that the theme of the supernatural realm infiltrating the natural world is evoked here. Since these individuals are performing such noble acts, they are being rewarded from above, "Thus does heaven express its sympathy, Thus does heaven express its sympathy."<sup>109</sup> The characters recite that line in accordance with the view that the

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<sup>108</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 289.

<sup>109</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 289.

supernatural is involved for the benefit of all. Wuniang comments that “Even unknowing animals and plants become omens of good fortune; When the depths of ill fortune are reached, good fortune must begin.”<sup>110</sup> In essence, nature is aligning itself with the heavenly realms for their benefit.

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<sup>110</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 288.

## CHAPTER 3

### FATE & THE SUPERNATURAL

#### 3.1 The Importance of the Supernatural In Relation to Harmony

In China's Confucian tradition Heaven plays an active role in restoring order in society. The heavenly realm was an active participant in bringing harmony back to a society that had drifted away from proper ideals and behavior, "Heaven was no longer simply the cosmos, or the fundamental law of the universe, but became active and morphic... Belief in the supreme authority of Heaven came before belief in the supreme authority of the emperor."<sup>111</sup> Within the realm of Confucianism was the establishment of the "mark of the mandate of Heaven." The Emperor was considered to be the "Son of Heaven" who carried out the Heavenly mandates, "But it was not for the emperor to interpret this mandate as he saw fit, for the mandate was to be exercised for Heaven's purposes, nothing less than the establishment of cosmic harmony, harmony in a continuum of the social and natural worlds."<sup>112</sup> Disaster would occur if the Heavenly way was not being upheld by the Emperor. Such disaster would include natural disasters and general instability.

Order could only be restored by the Emperor conforming to the Heavenly order. Furthermore, it was seen as the Emperor's duty to instill moral values into his subjects. Such an act would ensure that humans would reach their fullest potential as moral,

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<sup>111</sup> Levenson, Joseph R., Schurmann, Franz. *China: An Interpretive History from the Beginnings to the Fall of the Han*. (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, USA; London, UK 1969), 87.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

upright beings.<sup>113</sup> The Emperor was indeed the earthly administrator of Heaven's wishes, "But since it was the will of Heaven that gave the ruler this task, it was also the will of Heaven that could withdraw its mandate."<sup>114</sup> Likewise, individuals were rewarded based on their personal merits as shown in Scene 42 of *The Lute*. Wuniang and Cai, for instance, received tremendous gratification from the Emperor. Or they could also be punished for certain indiscretions.

The theme of revenge in Chinese theater is closely associated with the Chinese concept *bao* 报。 The Chinese concept *bao* meaning the "reciprocity of action" is a concept that has proved to be pivotal element of social relations in Chinese culture.<sup>115</sup> The reciprocal action prominent in the "ungrateful scholar plays" tradition in Chinese plays is the act of repaying kindness with gratitude. The concept of *bao* contained the underlying notion that any type of social act such as kindness would be met with gratitude, and malice would be met with retaliation. In the ungrateful scholar plays, the main character is met with the question about how he would repay his family for their kindness in allowing him to leave them and serve the imperial court. It is known that his family notably his wife will have great responsibility in maintaining the household during his absence. There is skepticism surrounding how the scholar will not only perform as a civil servant, but also how he will repay the debt he owes his wife for her moral act.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Levenson, Joseph R., Schurmann, Franz. *China: An Interpretive History from the Beginnings to the Fall of the Han*. (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, USA; London, UK) 1969, 90.

<sup>114</sup> Levenson, Joseph R., Schurmann, Franz. *China: An Interpretive History from the Beginnings to the Fall of the Han*. (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, USA; London, UK) 1969, 90.

<sup>115</sup> Regina Llamas. "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 90.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

While the scholar declares that his family will be rewarded for their kindness, doubt remains as to how this will occur. Such tension is evident in *The Lute*, for example, when Wuniang doubts the scholar's moral capacity when he does not realize the portrait she created is in fact his parents.<sup>117</sup> The lack of allegiance to the rules of behavior for *bao* indeed lead to consequences in the "ungrateful scholar" plays.

The supernatural realm plays a critical role in regulating the outcome of the plays. The acts of kindness and reciprocity in the plays are monitored from the Heavenly domain. The concept of justice from Heaven, however, was not a concept unique to the "ungrateful scholar" plays. It has been a theme present in Chinese literature since the beginning of civilization in China. The spirit world presides over human behavior and rewards good behavior and punishes evil behavior in a number of texts including the "ungrateful scholar" plays. In her publication "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama," Regina Llamas states that revenge from heaven is appealing to an audience seeking justice for wrongful acts.<sup>118</sup> The drama of such a heavenly involvement also may be appealing to an audience. There is a sense of a resolution based on karma. Good is rewarded with good, bad is met with bad. Heaven plays a critical role in administering the laws and rules governing human nature.<sup>119</sup> When the rules of debt owed for kind acts is not properly resolved by humans, heaven responds accordingly throughout the "ungrateful scholar plays."

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<sup>117</sup> Regina Llamas. "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 91.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

Such an intervention from the supernatural realm via ghost acts is rooted in a tradition of ghosts seeking revenge in Chinese literary tradition. Ghosts carry out acts of revenge they could not perform as living humans.<sup>120</sup> This revenge transcends the human existence into the realm of the supernatural:

Revenge for deceit means a very cruel death, which draws for its description on a well-established tradition of ghostly representation and revenge. And it is indeed an odd characteristic of both early Chinese and Western theater that dramatic action does not permit the ghosts of wronged spirits to leave the world of the living until the evil perpetrated on them has been uprooted. Ghosts return from the netherworld with accrued sentiments of hatred, and are persistent in avenging themselves. And while what keeps a ghost on stage or brings it back to stage seems to be a general desire for justice in the abstract, one wonders if they are not there to represent and satisfy contained sentiments of odium for specific, real social injustices. They exorcise a restless public spirit by representing the injustice and meting out the punishment.<sup>121</sup>

The ghostly tradition of revenge in Chinese theater likewise appeals to the audience seeking drama amidst profound social conflict. While revenge does occur in a number of Chinese plays, it is absent from *The Lute*. The supernatural world plays a critical role in the play through rewards rather than revenge.

### **3.2 The Spirit World in *The Lute***

Wuniang has the impression that her life is meant to be bad and there is nothing she can do to avoid the inevitable fate that has been cast her way. She frequently laments the fact that her husband is no longer in the picture, but simultaneously she

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<sup>120</sup> Regina Llamas. "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 96.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

also thinks that life has shaped a certain destiny and her life has been crafted for disaster and despair. For instance, in discussing the prospect of eating husks as a metaphor for her digestion of a bitter pill called her life, Wuniang links the two together in expressing her emotions. The husks have no flavor or nutritional value, and neither does her life carry any richness or delight to be found. In addition, earlier when she traveled to fetch the grain for the family, Wuniang uttered the following statement “The smallest event in life is determined by destiny.”<sup>122</sup> When she made this declaration, she was in the midst of fighting for the grain with the treacherous Village Head. In the end, she left for home empty handed, and thus was able to directly correlate such unfortunate events with circumstances that are out of her control. It drives her toward an attempt to take her own life in that scene. There is great fury expressed at the life she must live.

Wuniang remarks that it is an existence that the higher powers in society have disdain for and do not care about. Wuniang’s life is full of poverty, destitution, and desperation. Despite her many hardships living is of the utmost prerogative for the daughter-in-law of Mother Cai and Father Cai. Not just for herself, but for them too. By crying “How mean is our fate to suffer all this pain!”<sup>123</sup> Wuniang is in effect declaring that life is cruel due to the fate that it has bestowed upon her and her in-laws. Suffering has become the norm, and there is no escape. A truly tragic narrative that centers on the famine and people’s suffering during that period. Despite the heartache and

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<sup>122</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*(Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1980), 138.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.



hardship that surrounds her and envelops every corner and wall of her existence on literal and existential levels, the steadfastness of Wuniang's character and her devotion to the cause remain intact. However, her adherence to moral behavior is in accordance with Heaven's principles for humanity's proper behavior.

Wuniang's virtuous behavior proves to be beneficial for her as the spirit world intervenes on her behalf. Due to financial troubles, Wuniang is in dire need of providing a proper burial for her now deceased mother-in-law and father-in-law but is unable to do so. She is truly at her wits end as this state of destitution not only leads to a life or death scenario, but also makes an honorable death for her in-laws seemingly impossible. Luckily for this faithful young woman, her unwavering devotion is rewarded. When she arrives at the secluded location for where the burial must occur, a spirit of the mountain states, "Wuniang, listen to me: I received a special command from the Jade Emperor. Moved by your filial heart, he sent me to help you."<sup>124</sup> The characters Monkey and Tiger further declare "The grave is completed. When you've buried your parents, go seek your husband. Change your style of dress and go to the capital."<sup>125</sup> The above statements are significant for multiple reasons. Not only is Wuniang rewarded for her generosity and kind spirit, but she is also given a commandment by the spirit creatures. A way forward filled with potential challenges, yes, but also possibility and blessings of heaven. In other words, Wuniang's journey to the capital is predestined to

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<sup>124</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi* (Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1980), 196.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

succeed because of heavenly *bao*. This episode involving the supernatural world in *The Lute* also foreshadows the grand reunion in the end.

The destitution that Wuniang has felt was all consuming, yet now she is given a second chance at life. The rewards are truly infinite. Although her filial nature did not save her in-laws from death, it has preserved her life and honor. For instance, a proper burial is allowed to take place. The spiritual universe intervenes on her behalf courtesy of her kind, pure disposition. Such a scene demonstrates the emphasis on Confucian norms and values in a favorable fashion, for by abiding by these principles Wuniang ultimately receives assistance in her quest to serve her parents and society in an extremely noble manner. Such involvement from the supernatural world demonstrates the role of Heaven in restoring order in society under the Confucian code of ethics.

The supernatural realm has a significant place in *The Lute*. Wuniang's reaction to the news that a grave has been crafted for her parent-in-laws' burial is one of delight. There is surprise as well, for she discovers the grave has been made. A state of confusion follows as she remains unsure about what just occurred. Was it a dream or not? In the eyes of Wuniang she is initially ambivalent and altogether skeptical as she wonders how the graves appeared without her involvement or seemingly any other human involvement.<sup>126</sup> However, she states that the divine powers from above had shown compassion on her.<sup>127</sup> She further believes that only divine spirits could have

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<sup>126</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a chi* (Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1980), 197.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

actually constructed the grave without her involvement, “Spirits appeared in my dream-wonderful indeed! Mysterious troops moved the earth and carried the mud. When the grave was completed I received personal instructions to travel to the capital in search of my husband.”<sup>128</sup> The instruction delivered by the spirit is significant because it leads her to a grand reunion in the end that serves as part of the reward bestowed by heaven for her filial piety and faithfulness. Curiosity continues over how the spirit world got involved, yet her neighbor Chang ultimately remarks that because of her filial piety the supernatural sphere made its presence felt. Regardless of Wuniang’s joy at the gift from above, her sorrow remains in place throughout the ordeal. However, her resolve does not wane as she seeks to honor her in-laws and family name.

### **3.3 The Spirit World in *Peony Pavilion*: The Dream in the Garden**

The theme of the supernatural and its influence on the play *Peony Pavilion* is another noteworthy feature. Particularly the revival of Bridal Du from death is a pivotal scene in the play, and is also a prime locale for the supernatural to have especially great significance. It is also important to note the different reactions of the characters to Bridal Du’s resurrection. For example, Liu Mengmei embraces the resurrected girl as truly a human form of his lost love, but her father Du Bao is skeptical. The supernatural realm acts to navigate the characters and plot of the play toward a harmonious conclusion and grand reunion.

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<sup>128</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi* (Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1980), 198.

Bridal Du's experience in the dream was a pivotal moment in the plot of *Peony Pavilion*. Bridal Du's dream brings about fantasy, ecstasy, and ultimately sorrow. Scene Ten is a monumental, pivotal turning point in the play that sets the course for how the remainder of the plot unfolds. It demonstrates how the supernatural proves to be a pivotal force throughout the play. The splendor of the garden amazes Bridal Du and leaves her in a state of wonderment. She remarks how beautiful the garden is and how her parents have avoided describing its loveliness to her. During the dream, she experiences a lust filled freedom that she had never before experienced, "... then taking me in his arms he carried me to a spot beside the *Peony Pavilion*, beyond the railings lined with tree peonies, and there together we found the 'joys of cloud and rain.' Passion was matched by passion, and indeed a thousand fond caresses, a million tenderesses passes between us. After our bliss was accomplished he led me back to the place where I had been sleeping..."<sup>129</sup> After the dream, however, the elated feeling she had felt during the experience was replaced by a deep sorrow. She longed for the man and the sex. The essential core of her being that kept her alive and well seemed to dissipate in reality and contain itself in the supernatural realm.

### **3.4 The Spirit World in *Peony Pavilion*: The Underworld Scene**

The supernatural also makes its presence apparent in Bridal Du's experience in the underworld. She is presented to a court of spirits with official judicial titles similar to an earthly court to determine her fate. The judge in the Underworld also is skeptical of

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<sup>129</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 51-52.

Bridal Du's story of what occurred. Despite her claims that a dream of passion ultimately led to her demise, the judge finds this incredulous, "This is all lies. When in the world did anyone die of a dream? How could such slip of girl cling so strongly to her dream? Who was it claimed to interpret your dream or told your fortune in character riddles? Hey now, tell me where is this young scholar? And who else did your dreaming spirit encounter?"<sup>130</sup> Through a back and forth debate between the Judge and the character Flower Spirit, the Judge is eventually swayed toward believing in the story of Bridal Du's dream and death. He chastises Flower Spirit as well for not being dutiful in preventing the girl's exposure to the garden and the peonies that brought about such temptation. Ultimately, however, the high status of her family as well as the prestige of her father Du Bao prove to be decisive factors in her release.<sup>131</sup> Despite the passion that brought Bridal Du to the Underworld, filial piety is embedded in her wish to escape. She longs to be reunited with her parents, and feels such sorrow over not being alive with them at that time. This recurrent theme proves to be such a powerful element in the play.

Later when Bridal Du is brought back to life, the collaboration between the natural and the supernatural in creating the rich substance behind the play is in full scope during the resurrection process. Upon seeing the coffin containing Bridal Du, Sister Stone proclaims, "So the heads of the nails have rusted through, and the joints of the wood opened. I suppose the young mistress must have been going elsewhere to

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<sup>130</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 129.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

send off the clouds and the rain.”<sup>132</sup> The boundary between this world and the spirit world continues to be a fault line for a number of emotions and events that occur or are processed. Sister Stone notes the presence of the young girl’s ghost in a metaphorical sense. The dead girl had also left plum blossoms around the shrine where she was buried. It is as though Bridal Du is caught between both worlds. Despite Bridal Du’s desire for a reunion in the supernatural realm, she indeed faces challenges due to her death and movement into the supernatural world of the dead.

The supernatural realm in either *The Lute* or *The Peony Pavilion* is important because it mirrors the hierarchical structure of the human world and foreshadows its dramatic ending due to the involvement of the emperor who represents the highest authority in the human world. In both plays, the highest authority in the supernatural world is represented by the Jade Emperor that echoes the emperor in the human world who plays a significant role in the ending of each play. Both Bridal Du and Wuniang receive guidance from the authorities of the supernatural world at the most helpless moment of their lives. It seems that they are predestined to deal with the traumas, but with the direct or indirect help from the Jade Emperor, their pursuits of family reunion and happy marriage are destined to succeed. In other words, the supernatural figures in both plays subtly reveal the female protagonists’ destiny and foreshadow their happy endings.

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<sup>132</sup> Tina Lu. *Persons, Roles, And Minds: Identity in Peony Pavilion and Peach Blossom Fan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 86.

Both plays have the involvement of the supernatural in ultimately determining the destinies of the female protagonists in each play. In *The Lute*, the main female character Wuniang receives help from the Jade Emperor in the construction of her deceased in-laws' graves. The Jade Emperor on behalf of the supernatural spirit world seeks to assist Wuniang because of her devotion to such Confucian ethical norms as filial piety. On the other hand, in *Peony Pavilion* the presence of the supernatural world is made known as well. The Judge in the Underworld eventually decides that Bridal Du is able to return to this world. Likewise, The Emperor along with the supernatural world seeks to create a happy ending and grand reunion for the characters involved. Conflict is overcome through the guiding voice of the Emperor. Du Bao's doubt as to his daughter's true identity is resolved when the declaration is made that all of the family members must overcome their differences and embrace one another. Bridal Du and Wuniang are both able to overcome great conflict to reach harmony. Indeed, the supernatural is a powerful force throughout the plays *The Lute* and *Peony Pavilion*.

The supernatural throughout the tradition of Chinese drama has been a pivotal force in guiding plays toward a happy ending. The presence of the supernatural is prominent in both plays *The Lute* and *Peony Pavilion*. It further demonstrates the importance of abiding by Confucian ethics for the individual and society as a whole. Wuniang's virtuous behavior, for example, is rewarded in *The Lute* by the intervention of the supernatural. She is also formally recognized by the Emperor's decree for her noble behavior. Bridal Du's transformation from the rebellious girl to the chaste resurrected being further illustrates the impact of the supernatural world. Without her

resurrection orchestrated from the supernatural realm, for instance, the play would ultimately have been a tragedy. Bridal Du's transformation illustrates how the supernatural is a pivotal force in restoring order. The restored order coincides with Bridal Du's adherence to Confucian ethics and norms as a result of her transformation. The supernatural realm indeed plays a critical role in the formation of the happy ending and grand reunions found in each play.



## CHAPTER 4

### FACTORS BEHIND THE HAPPY ENDING

There are various factors that influence the happy endings of plays such as *The Lute* and *Peony Pavilion*. There is a tradition of “ungrateful scholar plays” that existed prior to the writing of *The Lute*. This genre of Chinese plays had an impact on the writing of *The Lute*, for example, and its happy ending. However, there were notable changes in *The Lute* that differed greatly from previous versions of the story. Such changes in the plot of the play also contrasted greatly from “ungrateful scholar plays” that served as a pretext to *The Lute*. Furthermore, the aesthetical preferences of the audiences who viewed plays impacted the structure of plays like *Peony Pavilion* and the general need for a harmonious conclusion to occur. Social trends regarding the performing arts further impacted the outcomes of these plays. Finally, the motivations of the authors and their personal preferences impacted the happy endings of both *The Lute* and *Peony Pavilion*.

#### 4.1 The Story of “Zhao The Chaste Maid,” *The Lute* & Ungrateful Scholar Plays

The plays that focus on the ungrateful scholar and revenge evolve over time. According to Regina Llamas, the “ungrateful scholar plays” often enact a scenario in which revenge occurs leading to the scholar’s demise, but some plays also allow for redemption to occur for the scholar.<sup>133</sup> The plays that focus on revenge were common

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<sup>133</sup> Regina Llamas. “Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama” *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 79.

at early stages of the development of these plays. Over time, due to such factors as the change in the views on social customs and norms during the Ming Dynasty, the play *The Lute* by Gao Ming allows for redemption to occur for the scholar. To understand *The Lute*, one has to know its intertext *Zhao the Chaste Maid*. The Ming scholar Xu Wei wrote about *Zhao the Chaste Maid*: “This is the old story of Bojie who abandons his parents, betrays his wife and was killed by a bolt of lightning. It is a coarse work and complete fantasy.”<sup>134</sup> In essence, although it is seen as the basis for *The Lute* the tale of *Zhao the Chaste Maid* has a plot that also contrasts greatly with *The Lute*. Indeed, there is a drastic shift that occurs from a tale of revenge to one of redemption. In *Zhao the Chaste Maid* for instance, the lead male character Bojie is killed by a bolt of lightning in divine retribution for his actions. Such a heavenly punishment does not occur in *The Lute*.

The plot of the “ungrateful scholar” genre of plays changed during the Ming Dynasty. For example, despite irresponsible husbands/fathers, virtuous wives carried out virtuous deeds and filial sons carried out filial deeds as well. The role of male characters in “ungrateful scholar plays” evolved during the Ming era. The male characters were no longer seen as villains. Rather, they are men who are depicted as victims of the state’s emphasis on service to the imperial leadership at all costs including the strength of the family unit. Various theories have emerged over why such a change took place:

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<sup>134</sup> Regina Llamas. “Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama” *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 79.

The modern scholar Yu Weimin... following the sixteenth-century Xu Wei, believes the changes came from a general attempt by the literati to show themselves as filial and upright men. Xu Wei, in his discussion on the origins of southern theater, notes that during the Yuan era northern-style theater spread to the south to the point of almost completely taking over the autochthonous southern theater. He complains that once this occurred there were too many playwrights writing northern plays in a base and crude language, and he expresses his "nostalgia" for the old school of northern playwrights.<sup>135</sup>

Many "ungrateful scholar" stories had been changed or rewritten during the early Ming Dynasty. One reason for such a change may have stemmed from the omission of such officials as emperors from on stage performances.<sup>136</sup> Ming writers were encouraged to write tales of individuals behaving properly and performing acts of good. The literati of the Ming Dynasty wrote plays with great virtue to offset the emergence of other literary works notably the rise in the writing of pornographic literature.<sup>137</sup>

Gao Ming had great motivation for writing *The Lute* in the way he did. Gao Ming writes: "I regretted that Bojie was vilified, so I wrote *The Story of the Lute* to clean away this defamation. I used lovely and clear diction to completely wash away the author's baseness so that singers from villages and alleys can be advanced to practice [with the members of the] Imperial Academy, and render it so sublime as to be unsurpassable."<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Regina Llamas. "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 99.

<sup>136</sup> Regina Llamas. "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 98.

<sup>137</sup> Idema, Wilt L. "'What Eyes May Light upon My Sleeping Form?': Tang Xianzu's Transformation of His Sources, with a Translation of 'Du Liniang Craves Sex and Returns to Life.'" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 16 No. 1 (2003), 128.

<sup>138</sup> Regina Llamas. "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 99.

Thus, Gao Ming wrote *The Lute* to provide a blank slate for the historically maligned character Cai Bojie. In the introduction of *The Lute*, Gao Ming notes the decline in morality that has occurred in Chinese society. Gao Ming seeks to send a certain message to those watching the play. His writing of *The Lute* reflected a broader change in the literary genre regarding social values, customs, and behavior during the Ming Dynasty that influenced literature during the time.

During the Ming Dynasty, the purity of a widowed woman was highly praised. In particular “widow chastity” was venerated through such acts as a woman’s refusal to remarry after her husband leaves.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, in a broad case, Zhao Wuniang in *The Lute* lives as a widow for years when she completely loses contact with her husband Cai Bojie. The ability of a woman to withstand great hardship was also looked highly upon by the literary establishment in the Ming times. The high moral standing of the widow in these plays is shown through her refusal to remarry and her refusal to take her own life in the face of great turmoil and disaster. There is an evolution of these plays’ structure over time as the harmonious, peaceful ending “*da tuanyuan*” (大团圆) emerges as a core element of the plays.<sup>140</sup> In earlier plays, the behavior of the male scholar leads to revenge either through his wife or from divine forces. However, in latter plays such as *The Lute* the scholar is portrayed in a more positive light. There was further a sense of justice for the widowed wife as the plays reached their conclusion.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Regina Llamas. “Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama” *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007)., 86.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

The various plays that revolve around the ungrateful scholar and retribution theme contain elements of Confucian philosophy. While the plays do promote the view that success was met through the imperial examination system, at the same time the message is sent that success was ultimately achieved through following a certain moral system. A system that focused on one's knowledge of social morals. Learning thus referred both to the "moral" principle inherent in all things and to empirical cumulative knowledge of particulars. Neo-Confucians viewed learning primarily as a means to improve one's mind for the sake of individual growth, not for social advancement.

Ungrateful scholar plays such as *Zhao the Chaste Maid*, however, clearly stress the opposite. While it is true that the young scholars express a desire to apply their knowledge and serve the emperor, this is immediately qualified by the material aspect of their desires, "to sell" one's abilities in order to acquire rank and profit. Many ungrateful scholar plays describe scholars striving for material prosperity rather than to realize themselves as idealistic moral exemplars of officialdom."<sup>142</sup> In essence, the state educational system was in fact promoting a flawed approach for society in pursuit of knowledge and success. The knowledge that the educational system promoted was not of a morally right nature according to the authors of these plays. Moral customs such as virtue and filial piety were negatively affected. Gao Ming himself was a man disillusioned with the state educational system.

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<sup>142</sup> Regina Llamas. "Retribution, Revenge, and the Ungrateful Scholar in Early Chinese Southern Drama" *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2007), 82-83.

## 4.2 Popular Aesthetics in Traditional Chinese Drama

The happy ending additionally demonstrates the aesthetic preferences of Chinese culture in relation to the performing arts. There is a need for a happy ending to be achieved in order to satisfy the taste of the viewers of the plays. In addition, the harmonious ending reflects the ideal aspects of society that will be achieved if individuals adhere to certain social values. If an individual is able to navigate the hardships of life with a sound moral compass then a happy, peaceful ending will occur for the individual as well as society as a whole. The ideal ethical nature of humanity if proper morals are followed is demonstrated through the happy ending narrative in Chinese plays.<sup>143</sup>

The modern Chinese scholar Wang Guowei believed that Chinese drama typically lacks a tragic ending because of the needs of the Chinese people to have a happy ending. There is a need for a positive conclusion to occur: “The spirit of our people is this-worldly and optimistic. Plays and novels of ancient times that exemplify this spirit are, without exception, all infused with this optimism; they begin sadly but end happily, begin with separation but end with reunion, begin with hardship but end with good fortune. Unless he writes according to this (formula, a Chinese writer) finds it difficult to satisfy his readers’ cravings.”<sup>144</sup> Wang cites *Peony Pavilion* as an example of a play written according to the formula of a “happily-ever-after” ending.<sup>145</sup> In the play love

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<sup>143</sup> Guowei, Wang. “Honglou meng zhi meixue shang zhi jiazhi 紅樓夢之美學上之價值” [www.guoxue.com](http://www.guoxue.com)

<sup>144</sup> Bonner, Joey. *Wang Kuo-wei: An Intellectual Biography*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA & London, England), 1986, 139.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

prevails over tremendous obstacles including death itself. Wang himself found it difficult to find notable Chinese plays that end tragically.

Throughout the duration of his analysis of Chinese drama, Wang could only find seven instances of Chinese plays that end in tragedy.<sup>146</sup> Even in the plays that depict tragedy such as the *Orphan of Zhao* the main protagonist displays a remarkable willpower and strength of character in the fight for justice amidst great suffering. Although plays written in the Yuan Dynasty contain deeply tragic elements the conclusions are often harmonious. Plays written during the Ming Dynasty typically have grand reunions and happy endings.<sup>147</sup> Although Wang Guowei believed that the strength of a literary drama was found in deep tragedy, ultimately in Chinese plays the appeal to an audience was measured in the harmonious endings they contain. The strength of a play was demonstrated by the happy ending that appealed to the popular aesthetics of the time period during which these plays were written.

Wang Kuowei praised the Yuan Dramas for what he saw as their literary superiority. The language and words were deep and stylistic that appealed to the hearts and desires of its audience. He especially venerated *The Lute* for the strength of its poetic language that depicts scenes in great detail and emotion.<sup>148</sup> There was a novel approach to the writing of *The Lute* that Wang Kuowei in particular appreciated. He

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<sup>146</sup> Bonner, Joey. *Wang Kuo-wei: An Intellectual Biography*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA & London, England), 1986, 141.

<sup>147</sup> Birch, Cyril. *Scenes for Mandarins: The Elite Theater of the Ming*. Columbia University Press: New York, NY 1995, 53.

<sup>148</sup> Bonner, Joey. *Wang Kuo-wei: An Intellectual Biography* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA & London, England), 1986, 137.

found the play to be a superior play of the Yuan era. Wang Kuowei cites the scene in which Wuniang eats husks to survive as a scene of literary excellence.<sup>149</sup> The scene, according to Wang Kuowei, possessed especially superior attention to details and emotion in describing a sequence of events through beautiful language. The Yuan Dynasty plays follow the tradition of happy endings in Chinese plays. In *The Lute Scene* 42 in particular exemplifies the emergence of a harmonious ending amidst all of the preceding tragedy. It serves to demonstrate the aesthetical preferences of the culture during the time when the plays were first introduced to society.

The language of the play *The Lute* was not only beautiful in its expression, but also provided a profound example of the harmonious ending achieved in Chinese dramatic tradition. Scene 42 is a pivotal moment in the play that also brought about a happy ending. In Scene 42, an imperial decree from the Emperor praises the main characters for their noble behavior. The message states that such acts are to be honored in a time period in which social morality is in great decline. The male character Cai is recognized for never forgetting his parents and his desire to take care of them. He even risks his political career to be reunited with them. Wuniang is praised for her filial nature in providing the means for her in-laws' survival. Mistress Niu is recognized for being faithful to her husband and seeking a reunion for her husband with his family. The Emperor's words state the importance of adhering to moral customs: "To carry out both filial piety and righteousness is a double perfection. Upon these three we hereby

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<sup>149</sup> Bonner, Joey. *Wang Kuo-wei: An Intellectual Biography* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA & London, England), 1986, 137.



confer our sincerest commendations. Let the multitudes of the world follow their example, take them as a model. For if customs are improved and conduct reformed, our era can compare with the great dynasties of antiquity. And so we graciously reward them, that the whole world may know of their filial piety and righteousness.”<sup>150</sup> The above scene displays the movement toward a profoundly harmonious conclusion in *The Lute*. It also shows the popular aesthetic desire for a happy ending to occur in plays. Significantly, this passage reveals the play’s didactic function. Not surprisingly, it has been defined as a “didactic play” or *jiaohua ju* (教化劇).<sup>151</sup>

#### 4.3 The Authors’ Background & Motivations

Kao Ming was influenced by his own upbringing in how *The Lute* was written. Disillusionment with civil service was evident as Kao Ming’s *The Lute* decried how the call to serve the Emperor truly undermined the harmony of the play. Kao Ming reportedly dutifully served his mother through a significant time of his life.<sup>152</sup> Civic duties, however, pulled Kao Ming away from his filial ways. There are suggestions that Gao was dissatisfied with his time of civil service and his career was not a positive experience: “... at odds with his commanding officers, he left the post disillusioned with civil service and is quoted as telling friends that he finally understood the warning of his

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<sup>150</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi*. (Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1980), 292-293.

<sup>151</sup> Situ Xiuying 司徒秀英, *Mingdai jiaohua ju qunguan 明代教化劇群觀* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2009), 2-5, 13-14.

<sup>152</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi* (Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1980), 8.

elders that official success marks the beginning of anxiety and trouble.”<sup>153</sup> Apparently, Kao Ming felt that his official career had a bad influence upon his life. Such an experience echoes the plot of *The Lute* in which Cai laments his position in civil service. Cai is away from his family, and he is unhappy about it. Much like Kao Ming who reportedly was deeply devoted to filial piety.<sup>154</sup>

In addition, Kao Ming lived under foreign rule by the Mongols during the period of the Yuan Dynasty. Such an experience seemed to shape publications by Kao Ming such as *The Lute*. During this time there was great turmoil and economic deprivation in the area that he grew up in.<sup>155</sup> Even a famine occurred in Kao Ming’s lifetime which also was present in *The Lute* as well. In addition, the literati class was restricted from participation in government ruling during the Yuan era, and this too had an adverse effect on Gao’s view of the ruling class during this time period.<sup>156</sup> Such a dichotomy between the common people and the ruling class was evident in the plot of the play, for the Emperor lived in royalty while people such as Wuniang and her in-laws lived in poverty. The chaotic times of the Yuan dynastic era had an impact on the plot of *The Lute*. A severe famine, for instance, did emerge in the Yuan dynasty as it did in *The Lute*. Such a hierarchical structure is typical of the “ungrateful scholar” genre of plays in Chinese drama prior to the writing of *The Lute*.

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<sup>153</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi* (Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1980), 8.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>155</sup> Kao Ming, Trans. by Jean Mulligan. *The Lute: Kao Ming’s P’i-p’a chi* (Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1980), 9.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Another play that was changed drastically from earlier versions was *Peony Pavilion* by Tang Xianzu. The early version of the story that Tang Xianzu used for his play *Peony Pavilion* is titled “Bridal Du Craves Sex and Returns to Life.” It is noteworthy to examine the great transformation that Tang Xianzu conducted in the writing of *Peony Pavilion* from the earlier story. Tang built upon the earlier version of the play by elaborating on such symbolic elements as the forbidden garden. Tang also retained many elements of the earlier tale “Bridal Du Craves Sex and Returns To Life” such as the content regarding the sexual desire and budding sexuality of the young Bridal Du.<sup>157</sup> As Wilt Idema has pointed out, there are distinctive textual elements of the short story “Bridal Du Craves Sex and Returns to Life” and the play *Peony Pavilion* that support the view that “Bridal Du Craves Sex and Returns To Life” is a major source for the writing of *Peony Pavilion*.<sup>158</sup> Tang utilized other tales as well notably the “Taiping guangji” collection of stories from the early Song Dynasty. Thus, while the tone of each play differs greatly, both *Peony Pavilion* and *The Lute* are derived from early vernacular stories. Likewise, aspects of *Peony Pavilion* proved conducive to the author’s motivations and the message that was sent through a harmonious ending.

Tang Xianzu became best known for his plays such as *Peony Pavilion*, but did serve in the imperial government for some time. Tang received a promotion because of

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<sup>157</sup> Wilt L. Idema. “‘What Eyes May Light upon My Sleeping Form?’: Tang Xianzu’s Transformation of His Sources, with a Translation of “Du Liniang Craves Sex and Returns to Life.” *Asia Major*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 16 No. 1 (2003), 116.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

his successful passing of the civil service exam.<sup>159</sup> The time he served there, however, was limited by certain circumstances that occurred, “Before long, however, he conceived it his duty as a loyal subject to protest against attempts by the Grand Secretary of the day to block the ‘path of speech,’ the means by which honest advisers might gain the ear of the emperor. His majesty viewed Tang’s memorial as a reflection of his own judgment, and responded... by reducing the memorialist to serve as a jail warden in a remote corner of Guangdong.”<sup>160</sup> Thus, although Tang was demoted from his service position his career as a writer flourished. Upon publication, *Peony Pavilion* was immensely popular. Tang Xianzu indeed had various motivations in the publication of the play. An important feature of its harmonious ending is that the emperor represents the highest authority in the human world who is able to both solve all the conflict and restore family order as well as social harmony. If the harmonious ending of the play shows how following one’s individual desires could prove beneficial, peace and justice revolve around the emperor. . Simultaneously, adhering to traditional norms such as filial piety also provided a way for harmony to take place. This point can also be found in *The Lute*, especially in the portrayal of Wuniang.

In short, the harmonious endings of *The Lute* and *The Peony Pavilion* showcase the didactic function of traditional Chinese theater. Having been influenced by popular aesthetics of the Yuan-Ming era, the play endings might also have had a therapeutic

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<sup>159</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), IX.

<sup>160</sup> Tang Xianzu. *The Peony Pavilion: Mudan Ting, Second Edition*. Trans. by Cyril Birch. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), IX.

function for both the audience and the playwright. Because the world was imperfect, the authors Gao and Tang created a type of ideal ruler in their plays that would bring happiness and harmony to the world. Ironically, the harmonious endings brought by the emperor reinforce social and political hierarchy.

Aspects of the plays *The Lute* and *Peony Pavilion* reflect changes in social dynamics within Chinese culture. The cultural shifts from the Yuan to Ming Eras in China was profound. During the Yuan Era the Mongol rulers effectively restricted the influence of Confucianism and Chinese culture as a whole. When the Ming Dynasty ruled, however, Confucian norms and ethics were dominant parts of the leadership and society. The Ming Dynasty was also a time of great stability in China. Confucianism returned to its prominent place in Chinese society. Harmony was restored, and therefore happiness and peace occurred as well.

The plays *The Lute* and *Peony Pavilion* both have harmonious conclusions that reflect the popular desire for a happy ending amidst great turmoil. The chronology of each plays' texts provides a basis for the happy endings to occur. A shift from conflict to a harmonious conclusion in the plays demonstrates the authors' message that abiding by Confucian ethics and norms is ultimately of great benefit. At the same time, the happy endings echo the sociological contexts of the time periods such as instability during the Yuan Era and political stability during the Ming Era. In both plays social order was restored at the conclusion of each play. The social order found in *Peony Pavilion* and *The Lute* embody unique aspects of Chinese culture. Social inequality is set in place for a harmonious balance to remain in society.

## CONCLUSION

The plays unearth a number of intriguing concepts for further analysis. Although both plays are full of instances that are ripe for additional inquiry, for the sake of this thesis the harmonious ending is the focal point of analysis. *Peony Pavilion* is a particularly rich and complex work of art. However, the plays do both provide a compelling argument regarding the harmonious ending that occurs in each play. Both plays have endings that bring together the characters, and also overcome a number of barriers in the way of such peacefulness. Each chapter of the play explores a different aspect of the theoretical framework at hand that analyzes the way in which a happy ending occurs and what factors contribute to such a happy ending. Although a number of barriers occur that seem to inevitably obstruct a harmonious conclusion from taking place, indeed harmony does occur. The preceding introduction and chapters provide an analytical framework for discourse as to why such a sequence of events was able to happen in such a powerful way.

Chapter 1 analyzes *Peony Pavilion* and the happy ending that occurs in the play. Bridal Du goes through various transformations in the play that ultimately leads to a climax between her and her parents. Her parents had lost all hope of ever having a beautiful reunion with their long lost daughter. However, what seems to defy all the odds is the manner in which a peaceful reunion does indeed take place. Even her stubborn, obstinate father is eventually convinced that the apparition of his daughter is indeed an accurate one. Madam Du also comes to believe that her daughter returned to life from the dead. Bridal Du is summoned before the Imperial Court, and it is declared

that her identity is indeed authentic. Ultimately happiness prevails alongside harmony in *Peony Pavilion*. However, there is an immense struggle in order for harmony to be found.

The harmony found in the ending of *Peony Pavilion* is shown through the various ways in which Bridal Du is able to convince others of her true identity. Although Liu Mengmei is incredibly easy to convince, other characters were not so easily swayed. Her parents were extremely doubtful as to her true identity. It was extremely perplexing to them in the rational minds as to how their daughter who died could possibly be standing before them. However, through various means Bridal Du was able to convince them that she was truly their daughter in living form. In addition to the reunion of the husband and wife with their daughter, the entire Imperial Court also had a happy reunion occur. Bridal Du was able to place her case before the court, and they too recognized the authenticity of her claim.

In *The Lute*, it is clear that many factors contribute to the happy ending of the play. Wuniang's character for instance is not only rewarded by the Emperor but also the universe when the supernatural intervenes on her behalf. The supernatural becomes involved in the life of Wuniang following the deaths of her mother-in-law and father-in-law. Wuniang's noble character is further displayed when she displays a very graceful persona upon the reunion with Cai and his wife Mistress Niu. A situation that could have gone quickly awry is rectified in a peaceful manner. Even though Wuniang personally expresses much grief over her husband's departure, in the end she shows great integrity

in not expressing displeasure at the sight of her husband with another wife. Wuniang's character certainly plays a role in the harmonious ending that does indeed occur.

The harmonious ending in *The Lute* similar to *Peony Pavilion* does seem to defy the odds in a number of ways. There is much death and destruction throughout the play, yet at the final section of the play peace and happiness prevails. The main characters overcome great hardship, and are reunited in a beautiful way. They journey together to the burial site of Cai's parents for the proper commemoration to take place. They are all rewarded by the Imperial Court for their virtuous behavior. A logic defying sequence of events allows for harmony to prevail.

The involvement of the supernatural is a particular instance when a certain force in the plays has a pivotal role in the creation of a harmonious ending. In *Peony Pavilion*, for example, the ruler of the Underworld allowed Bridal Du to return to earth. This was a critical event in the path to a peaceful ending. Likewise, the supernatural played an important presence in *The Lute* by serving as a presence in Wuniang's chaotic period of suffering. Chapter 3 explored the specific ways in which the presence of the supernatural influenced the plot and outcomes of both plays. It is important to discuss the presence of the supernatural due to its powerful effect on the harmonious ending of each play.

The authors had particular backgrounds and motivations behind the creation of each play. The time periods during which each play was written had a major influence as well. The Yuan Era, for instance, was filled with turmoil and strife as foreign invaders



ruled. Much like this time period, *The Lute* was also inundated with great turmoil and instability. Both Kao Ming and Tang Xianzu had experience serving imperial commanders during their times in civil service. Likewise, both experienced hardships in life and disillusionment with certain aspects of society during the times they were alive. The plays reflect certain elements of the society that each man was a part of. Both men included harmony in the play's endings to demonstrate a particular motivation that each individual had. One such motivation was a return to traditional morals in a time of great social upheaval. Indeed, it is fascinating to analyze not only the factors behind the creation of each play, but also the particular patterns that are woven throughout each play as well.

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