University of Southampton Research Repository

Copyright © and Moral Rights for this thesis and, where applicable, any accompanying data are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This thesis and the accompanying data cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder/s. The content of the thesis and accompanying research data (where applicable) must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder/s.

When referring to this thesis and any accompanying data, full bibliographic details must be given, e.g.

Thesis: Author (Year of Submission) "Full thesis title", University of Southampton, name of the University Faculty or School or Department, PhD Thesis, pagination.

Data: Author (Year) Title. URI [dataset]

University of Southampton

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

English

‘What’s in a name’: The Performance Traditions of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Tang Xianzu’s *Mudan ting*

by

Huimin WANG

ORCID ID [0000-0002-0403-3489]

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2023

University of Southampton

Abstract

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

English

Doctor of Philosophy

‘What’s in a name’: The Performance Traditions of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Tang Xianzu’s *Mudan ting* by Huimin Wang

Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and a coeval Chinese play, Tang Xianzu’s *Mudan ting* (*Peony Pavilion*, 1598), share a similar storyline of forbidden love; both plays have been alive on the stage for more than 400 years, and have attracted a succession of adaptations and rewrites. Following a hint in the advertisement for *Romeo and Juliet*, the 18th century actor David Garrick heavily cut and simplified the play as a tragic tale of ‘star-cross’d lovers’, and almost all productions of *Mudan ting* have reduced the play to a series of excerpts telling a clichéd story of ‘talented scholar and beautiful maiden’ living happily after ‘a grand union’. This phenomenon of cutting and rewriting reflects a limited understanding of Shakespeare’s and Tang Xianzu’a dramaturgy. Besides, previous comparative studies of the two plays have been confined to the page, with little consideration of the stage, let alone audience response.

With the stage and the audience in mind, this thesis compares the dramaturgical structure of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, focusing on the juxtaposition of different generic elements and *mises en scène*. In the process, I integrate my

understanding of Shakespeare's and Tang Xianzu's own approaches, with discussions of neglected aspects of drama theories by both Aristotle and by the Qing-dynasty Chinese drama theorist, Li Yü. The latter has often been marginalised in world theatre discourse. My investigations will demonstrate that Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu share many similar dramaturgical solutions to the problem of staging a play, and that these solutions are likewise expounded by Aristotle and Li Yü.

Despite the thematic and dramaturgical similarities between *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, the two plays are received differently today. Whereas *Romeo and Juliet* is adapted around the world to address rampant social problems such as racial animosity and forced marriage, even the most avant-garde productions of *Mudan ting* (by Peter Sellars and Chen Shi-zheng) are still situated within, and judged against, the constraints of the *kunqu* (kun opera) performance tradition. Drawing on the successful experience of producing and adapting *Romeo and Juliet* from a cross-cultural perspective, this thesis explores the challenges and benefits of producing *Mudan ting* in today's theatre practices, starting by questioning the antithesis between 'traditional' and 'modern' theatre forms in China.

Overall, this thesis argues that if future productions of both plays are to speak to their audiences, the key is to understand Shakespeare's and Tang Xianzu's humour as reflected in their dramaturgical mix of genres and *mises en scène*, and to use the play to actively explore contemporary issues in the way that both dramatists did. For the future development of world theatre, it is also important to integrate marginal theorists and neglected theories. Although Aristotle, Shakespeare, Tang Xianzu, and Li Yü were writing in diverse contexts, the commensurabilities of the drama

theories and practices found in them raise interesting questions about human cognition and emotion processes.

Table of Contents

Abstract iii

Table of Contents i

Table of Figures iv

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship vi

Acknowledgements vii

Definitions ix

Dramatic structure/Dramaturgical structure, *xi / xiqu / nanxi / chuanqi / zaju / kunqu / kunqu zhezixi* ix

Editions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* used in this thesis xiii

Abbreviations xvi

Preface 1

Introduction 7

Tang Xianzu and *Mudan ting* 7

Problems in past comparative studies of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* 8

The physical stage and audience's watching experience 16

Playful theatricality in the theatre culture of *nanxi* and *chuanqi* 25

Marginalised Chinese theatre theories 32

Chapter 1 The dramaturgical mixed genre structure of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* 39

Contrasting emotions in ancient Chinese poetry and theory 44

Negligence of the mixed-genre structure in performances and in studies 47

The mixed-genre structure on the page and the stage 54

'Humour in death' 55

The comic military characters and death in *Mudan ting* 60

The mourning in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* 63

The mourning scene in *Mudan ting* 71

The comic characters in the mourning scene of *Mudan ting* 77

Performance implications of the mixed genre structure 81

Chapter 2 Impossible elements made probable in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* 83

The chaotic physical world 90

The turbulent physical world in *Mudan ting* 94

The garden of utopia and the impossible elements made probable in the garden 102

Improbable elements in the garden 106

Dystopia invading the garden 110

Performance implications of the garden utopia as a mirage 120

Chapter 3 Simplification of the text, beauty, spectacles, and historical authenticity in productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* 125

Beauty and spectacles 131

Historical authenticity 141

Historical authenticity for performers: the *kunqu* tradition of performing *Mudan ting* 147

Chapter 4 Suggestions for future productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* 156

Divergence between the performance history of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* 158

Importance of restoring the complete text of *Mudan ting* 162

Modernising *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* 169

Playfulness and playful theatricality 175

Conclusion 180

Appendices 184

Appendix 1 English translations of scene titles, Chinese characters and pinyin in *Mudan ting* (by Cyril Birch) 184

Appendix 2 *Chuanqi* role types and the corresponding characters in *Mudan ting*187

Appendix 3 Chinese dynasties and theatre forms in Chinese history 195

Filmography 197

Bibliography 203

Manuscripts 203

Primary Texts 203

Secondary Texts 208

Table of Figures

Figure 1 Qinshan Stage, Yongjia, Wenzhou, Zhejiang. The Stage was built during the reign of Ming-dynasty Emperor Jiajing (r. 1522-1566). Courtesy of Yongjia County Government. 17

Figure 2 Left-hand side and right-hand side of Qinshan Stage. Photo by the author. . 17

Figure 3 Picture of *gōu lán* drawn by Zhang Jia. 19

Figure 4 The elevation drawing of the two-storey stage in *gōu lán*. 20

Figure 5 The hundred-year old Rear Garden of Suzhou Kunqu Theatre, photo by the author. 21

Figure 6 Wu Si biting her thumb. Guanqifu Kunqu Studio production of *Two Belles in Love*, 25 April 2016, Zhengyici Theatre, Beijing. Photo by Feng Hai. Courtesy of Guanqifu Kunqu Studio. 57

Figure 7 'Biting one's thumb' in Peter Sellars's *Peony Pavilion*, 5 March 1999, Zellerbach Hall, University of California at Berkeley, courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles. 58

Figure 8 Illustration of thirteen flower spirits and one dream spirit in *Shenyin jiangulu*136

Figure 9 The portrait of the thirteen most famous *jingju* actors during the Qing-dynasty Emperor Tongguang's reign. 152

Figure 10 Shao Tianshuai performing Chen Miaochang, 20 August 2022, Guanqifu Kunqu Studio, Northern Kunqu Theatre, Beijing. Photo by Feng Hai. Courtesy of Guanqifu Kunqu Studio. 153

Figure 11 Wei Chunrong (left) performing Chen Miaochang, 17 December 2010, Daguanyuan Theatre, Beijing. Courtesy of Northern Kunqu Theatre. 153

Figure 12 (left) Shen Fengying performing Du Liniang on 12 October 2004, Suzhou Kunqu Theatre; (right) Shen Fengying performing Du Liniang on 17-9 August 2019, Tianjin Theatre. Photo by Hsu Pei-hung. Courtesy of Suzhou Kunqu Theatre. 154

Figure 13 Illustration of Du Liniang in the garden in a Ming dynasty publication of *Mudan ting*. 171

Figure 14 Ming dynasty women's over-the-shoulder gown with python patterns, Shandong Museum. 171

Figure 15 Ming dynasty women's *ma-mian* skirt, Shandong Museum. 171

Figure 16 Song dynasty noble ladies in *bèi zi* 褙子 enjoying the moon on a terrace.172

Figure 17 Lauren Tom as the 'peony', 5 March 1999, Zellerbach Hall, University of California at Berkeley, courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles. 176

Figure 18 Joel de la Fuente as the 'apricot tree', 5 March 1999, Zellerbach Hall, University of California at Berkeley, courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles. 176

Figure 19 The wooden snow blower in Chen Shi-zheng's *The Peony Pavilion*, the Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, 1999 [DVD recording]. 178

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Huimin WANG,

Title of thesis: 'What's in a name': The Performance Traditions of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting*

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1.This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2.Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3.Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4.Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5.I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6.Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Parts of this work have been published as:

Wang, Huimin. 'From Page to Stage: A Transcultural Comparison of the "Garden Scene" in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Peony Pavilion* in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *eSharp Transitions, Transformations, 'Trans'Narratives*, 27(2019): 61-69.

Signed: HUIMIN WANG

Date: 18/6/2023

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my main supervisors, Ros King (who tells me not to blindly follow anyone's opinion, even if they have the title of 'professor') and Alice Hunt, and the thesis examiners, Ma Haili and Jakub Boguszak, for their scintillating comments and valuable advice. I would like to thank following people for their contributions to this thesis: Alireza Fakhrkonandeh, Thomas Irvine, Catherine Swatek, Susan Jain, Efterpi Mitsi, Eva C. Karpinski, Ewa Kębłowska-Ławniczak, Elliott Nikdel, Stephanie Norgate, Jonathan Buckley, Stephanie Jones, Stephen Morton, Ryan Bishop, Stephen Bygrave, Ma Haili, Yang Huiling, Yang Lingui, Zhang Chong, Li Wei, Su Yuxiao, Xiao Xingzheng, Li Ruru, Feng Wei, Wu Guanda, Hu Xingliang, Wang Ning, Jason Gleckman, Hua Wei, Frederick Lau, Roberta Zanoni, Guillaume Foulquie, Leanna Brinkley, Li Jun, and Zou Yuanjiang.

I would like to thank Tang Xianzu and William Shakespeare. Both dramatists are like court jesters who manage to vent their social dissent without losing their heads. Besides, Shakespeare makes me realise that the most valuable lessons in life are not learned in college; in fact, one may end up with a diploma and think that anyone without a degree is a 'country bumpkin' incapable of writing plays.

I would like to thank the following theatre companies: Jiangsu Kunqu Theatre, Suzhou Kunqu Theatre, Northern Kunqu Theatre, Guanqifu Kunqu Studio, Zhejiang Kunqu Theatre, Yongjia Kunqu Theatre, Shanghai Kunqu Theatre, Quanzhou Liyuan Theatre, Shanghai Theatre Above, Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, and stage@leeds.

I also thank the editors of the journals, and book collections that have published or accepted work related to this thesis, thereby contributing to its final form: *Asian Theatre Journal*, *Theatre Research International*, *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, *Theatre Arts*,

Emergence, *eSharp*, *Comparative Literature: East&West*, and *Beyond Adaptation: Hybrid Transtextualities* (Routledge).

I am grateful to the China Scholarship Council, Xiamen University-Southampton University scholarship, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong Global Research Excellence Fellowship. I would like to thank Fuqing Library and Ms. Hé Meiyun for providing me with quiet study spaces.

This is also a great opportunity for me to thank my friends Bridget Blankley, Nazrin Wilkinson, Waka Kuboyama-Haraikawa, Idris Ajia, Ayo Abioye, Jabrah Alharbi, Liu Yuejie, Yang Kefan and many others, for making me feel at home in an English-speaking country. Thanks to my cousin Alex Lin for proofreading part of the thesis. Thanks to the angelic IT support team and the librarians at Soton, and to all the staff in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family members: my grandma, my Romeo, my daughter (my little chubby angel), my parents, my mother-in-law and my sister-in-law for taking very good care of me throughout the past years. This thesis is dedicated to them.

Definitions

Dramatic structure/Dramaturgical structure, *xi / xiqu / nanxi / chuanqi / zaju / kunqu / kunqu zhezixi*

This thesis distinguishes 'dramaturgical structure' from 'dramatic structure'. It follows conventionally accepted definition of 'dramatic structure' and understands the term as the textual structure of a play - the plot. Based on the OED definition of 'dramaturgy' and 'dramaturgical', this thesis understands the 'dramaturgical structure' as the art of translating the written play into the three-dimensional language of theatre.[1] This art implies the way in which the dramatist uses different elements of (e.g.) *mises en scène*, character juxtaposition, language etc. to influence audience response to the bare plot of the drama. To understand the 'dramaturgical structure' requires a comprehensive consideration of the written play, the physical stage conditions, the performance conventions and the audience's response.

xì **戏**: n. a game, a theatre play; v. play with something.

Xì qū **戏曲** is the umbrella term for all forms of traditional Chinese theatre which generally combines singing, speaking, dancing, and acrobatic arts. It is featured with highly stylised gestures and movement. *Háng dàng* 行当 'role categorization' is central to the 'complex and hierarchically codified' system of conventionalisation,

---

[1] OED definition of 'dramaturgy', see https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/57490?redirectedFrom=dramaturgy#eid (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

which aims to polish *xiqu*'s style.[2] There are four major role types - *shēng* 生 'male', *dàn* 旦 'female', *jìng* 净 'painted face', and *chôu* 丑 'clown'. For minor role types and corresponding characters in *Mudan ting*, please kindly see Appendix 2. Each role type has their own set of formulations for hand, eye, body, and strides. Any aspect of the performance – singing, speaking, music, costume and make-up – has to adhere to strict rules. Actors follow the principle of expressivity and develop a system of stylised gestures and movements as refinement of unconscious daily gestures.

The generalised concept of 'traditional Chinese theatre' is not helpful in distinguishing the nuanced difference of theatre forms in different regions and across different time periods in the Chinese history. This thesis will refer to specific form of Chinese theatre: Song-dynasty *nán xì* 南戏 (Southern theatre), Yuan-dynasty *zá jù* 杂剧 (variety plays, or 'Northern theatre'), and Ming and Qing dynasties *chuánqí* 传奇 (dramatic romance), to which *Mudan ting* belongs.

***Chuanqi* 传奇**: *chuán* 传 means 'passing on', and *qí* 奇 means 'the strange, the unusual or the extraordinary'. Isabella Falaschi literally translated *chuanqi* as 'to transmit the marvel' or 'passing on something amazing'.[3] *Chuanqi* drama is the general term applied to all kinds of plays that comprises dialogues, arias, and role types. *Chuanqi* evolved from the Song dynasty's theatre form known as, ***nán xì* 南戏** 'Southern theatre', which gained its name because it was popular in the South China. *Nanxi* is different from the Yuan dynasty ***zá jù* 杂剧** 'variety plays', also known as

---

[2] Li Ruru, *Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China* (Hong Kong: HKU Press, 2003), p. 113.
3 Isabella Falaschi, 'Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting*, and Qing' in Tian Yuan Tan, and Paolo Santangelo, ed. *Passion, Romance, and Qing: The World of Emotions and States of Mind in Mudan ting*. 4 vols. (Boston: Brill, 2015), vol.1, pp. 1-43 (2).

'the Northern theatre'. *Nanxi* is made up of thirty to sixty *chū* 出 'scenes' without act divisions. According to Sun Mei, in 1920, Volume 13,991 of *Great Colletanea of Yongle*, including three original *nanxi* play scripts, was discovered in London and were brought back to China. The earliest three extant *nanxi* play scripts are: *Zhang Xie zhuangyuan* 张协状元 *First Place Scholar Zhang Xie*, *Huanmen zidi cuo lisheng* 宦门子弟错立身 *Grandee's Son Takes the Wrong Career*, and *Xiao Suntu* 小孙屠 *Little Butcher Sun*.[4]

Chuanqi prevailed during the Ming and early Qing dynasties, roughly from the late fifteenth to early eighteenth centuries. Primarily created and circulated by the literati, this genre is also nicked 'literati *chuanqi*'. As a dramatic form, the Ming and early Qing dynasties *chuanqi* is different from Tang dynasty's *chuanqi* fiction – a form of short romantic tales. Cyril Birch translated *chuanqi* drama as 'dramatic romance' in his introduction to *Mudan ting*, which indicates the relationship between Tang dynasty's romantic tales and the *chuanqi* drama. Some dramatists adapted previous romantic tales. For example, Tang Xianzu's *'The Purple Hairpin'* is based on the Tang dynasty tale, '*Legend of Huo Xiaoyu'* written by Jiang Fang. Huo Xiaoyu is the female protagonist in both the *chuanqi* fiction and the *chuanqi* drama.

Tang Xianzu's *chuanqi* play, *Mudan ting*, is most often performed in the genre of ***kunqu*** 昆曲 featuring *Kūnshān qīang* 昆山腔, or *Kūn qīang* 昆腔 (*Kunshan* musical style). *Kun qiang* originally referred to a musical style that emerged in the late Yuan dynasty (early 14th century). It was created by Gu Jian, a musician from Kunshan (near Suzhou), who combined the music of the region with an improvement on the music of *nanxi*. During the mid-1500s, the musician and actor Wei Liangfu developed a musical form that combined *Kunshan qiang* with other regional styles,

[4] Sun Mei, 'Performances of Nanxi', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 13.2(1996): 141-166 (142).

which became the major musical style of *kunqu* theatre. Kunshan dramatist Liang Chenyu wrote *Huanshaji* 浣纱记 'Washing the Silken Gauze' in the *Kunshan* musical style. The play gained wide popularity, and is regarded as the earliest *kunqu* play, or *kunju* 昆剧. The refined lyrical quality of *kunqu* is deeply loved by the literati, and *kunqu*'s highly stylised gestures and movement win over the audiences with cultivated tastes. Like other *xiqu* genres, *kunqu* is a symbolic art with three distinctive aesthetic principles - *zōng hé xìng* 综合性 'synthesis', *chéng shì xìng* 程式性 'conventionalisation', and *xū nî xìng* 虚拟性 'virtuality'.[5]

kunqu zhezixi 昆曲折子戏: The full *kunqu* play is often too long to be performed within several hours for a night's gathering.[6] In contrast, the flexibility of performance time and arrangement of selected scenes from different plays can be tailored to multiple situations, like ritual ceremonies, festivals, weddings, birthdays, funerals, and commercial gatherings. The selected scenes, or the 'highlights', from each play are commonly known as *zhezixi* 折子戏. *Kunqu* adapters perform scenes extracted from the whole play to highlight a certain skill, which became the trend of performing *zhezixi*. *Zhezixi* is 'of tremendous importance for making the theatre so popular' because it allows audiences to enjoy the highlights of different plays within

[5] See Elizabeth Wichmann, 'Traditional theatre in contemporary China', in *Chinese Theatre: From Its Origins to the Present Day*, ed. Colin Mackerras (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), p. 185, and Li Ruru, *Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China* (Hong Kong: HKU Press, 2003), p. 113.

[6] See Wang Ning, *Kunju Zhezixi Yanjiu* 昆剧折子戏研究 *A Study on Kunju Zhezixi* (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2012), pp. 11-20, and Li Xiao, 'Qianjia tradition' of the performance art of *kunju* and its inheritance 昆剧表演艺术的 '乾嘉传统' 及其传承', *Hundreds Schools in Arts*, 4(1997): 86-115 (p. 86).

one night.[7] This is also true of 19th century theatre in England, when the show lasted all evening and contained the highlights from different plays.

Editions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* used in this thesis

As the current thesis focuses on the performance tradition, its major textual basis is the first quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) which was likely to be the recollection of actors, and is thus of more value than the second quarto and the first folio versions. For the convenience of citation, unless otherwise noted, all quotations of *Romeo and Juliet* come from Burton Raffel's edition of the play (2004) which takes into consideration extant versions of *Romeo and Juliet*.[8] Unless otherwise noted, all citations of Shakespeare's plays other than *Romeo and Juliet* come from *The Norton Shakespeare* edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (2008).[9]

The edition of Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting* in this thesis is Xu Shuofang and Yang Xiaomei's modern reprinting (with commentary) of the *Huaide tang* edition, which dates to the Wanli period (1573-1620); Xu uses this edition because it seems to have undergone the fewest emendations.[10] I follow Cyril Birch's English translation of

---

7 Colin Mackerras, 'Review of Catherine C. Swatek's *Peony Pavilion Onstage: Four Centuries in the Career of a Chinese Drama*', Journal of Oriental Studies, 40.1/2(2005): 184-185 (p. 185).

[8] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*. ed., Burton Raffel (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

[9] William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, With an Essay on the Shakespearean stage by Andrew Gurr, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2nd edn. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

[10] Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting*, ed. by Xu Shuofang, Yang Xiaomei (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 2005).

Mudan ting unless I translate passages myself to highlight a particular point.[11] With the exception of Madam Du, Sister Stone, Scabby Turtle, Camel Guo, and Tutor Chen, I use the *pinyin* romanization of characters' names in the main text and the notes, so that Birch's 'Bridal Du' reverts to 'Du Liniang' ('Liniang' means 'beautiful girls', and does not necessarily mean 'bridal'), and 'Spring Fragrance' becomes 'Chunxiang'. Liniang's father official position changes from a local prefect to the Military Pacification Commissioner, and to the Prime Minister; to avoid confusion, I refer him according to his name 'Du Bao' rather than his official title as Cyril Birch suggests. The thesis refers to the English scene titles alone unless the original Chinese scene titles are needed to make clarifications. For the in-text citation, I have provided the page number both in *Mudan ting* (*MDT*) and in *The Peony Pavilion* (*PP*), and for my own translation I have provided the page number in *Mudan ting* alone.

Though *mû dān* 牡丹 is often translated as 'peony' in English, it is important to note the difference between the two words in their respective cultural background. In the Western culture, the 'peony', or 'paeony' is a flowering plant in the genus Paeonia, the only genus in the family Paeoniaceae. The name of this flower comes from Ancient Greek mythology. According to that myth, the peony is named after Paeon, a healing deity and a student of Asclepius. The legend says that Paeon was a very talented and bright apprentice. Eventually, he showed a greater knowledge about medicine than Asclepius himself. Shortly after that, Asclepius became jealous and tried to kill Paeon. But Zeus stopped him and saved Paeon by turning him into the peony flower.[12]

---

[11] Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting* [*The Peony Pavilion*], trans. Cyril Birch (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002).

[12] For the meaning of 'peony' in Greek mythology, see https://flower-meanings.com/peony-flower-meaning/.

In Chinese culture, the flower *mû dān* is nicknamed the 'king of flowers' for its unparalleled beautiful petals. *Mû dān* has often been used as a symbol for the female sexual organ: 'a peony blooms with dew drops' vividly represents the process that a girl comes to womanhood with the injection of 'dew drops' – the sperm. As a plant, *mû dān* can be equalled with 'peony', but for Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting*, a work of imaginative art, the English translation of '*The Peony Pavilion*' is not adequate since the translation misses both the literal and the cultural meanings contained in the three characters. *Mû* 牡 means 'male', and *dān* 丹 means the colour 'red', and 'can perhaps be taken as a reference to blood and the loss of virginity.'[13] The very name of the pavilion, *Mû dān tíng*, indicates that it is the place where the protagonists have sexual intercourse. Further, the cultural associations and significances of different coloured peonies in Chinese art and culture are generally missing from the Western understanding of the term and plant 'peony'.

Given the above consideration, while referring to Tang Xianzu's original play, I use the *pinyin*, *Mudan ting*; and while referring to productions of the play, I retain the production title used for publicity, for example, American director Peter Sellars's *Peony Pavilion*, Chinese American director Chen Shi-zheng's *The Peony Pavilion*, Pai Hsien-yung's 'young lovers' edition of *Peony Pavilion* and etc. Pai Hsien-yung is a Chinese writer from Taiwan and the son of the Kuomintang general Bai Chongxi (Pai Chung-hsi). Inspired by Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting*, Pai Hsien-yung wrote the novel, 'Wandering in the garden, waking from a dream' and later adapted it on the stage. He is most noted for producing his 'young lovers' edition of *kunqu Peony Pavilion* in 2004.

---

[13] Isabella Falaschi, 'Tang Xianzu, *The Peony Pavilion*, and Qing', in Tian Yuan Tan, and Paolo Santangelo, eds. *Passion, Romance, and Qing: The World of Emotions and States of Mind in Peony Pavilion*, 4 vols. (Boston: Brill, 2015), vol. 1: 1-43 (p. 27).

I have used romanised *pinyin* of Chinese titles, names, and terms in the main text and notes. Where there is confusion or misconception with the meaning and/or translation of a Chinese word, I have provided the Chinese characters, the *pinyin*, the literal translation, and the conventional English translation to explain the literal significance. The Chinese and Japanese surnames are placed before the given names.

Abbreviations

TXZJQB: Tang Xianzu, *Tang Xianzu ji quanbian* 汤显祖集全编 *Tang Xianzu's Complete Works*, ed. Xu Shuofang (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2015), 6 vols.
OED: The Oxford English Dictionary.

Preface

What is the point of doing a Ph.D. on *Romeo and Juliet*, a play that is older than my 14th great-grandparents? And what is the point of comparing the play with a Chinese play written by a god-knows-who, here, in a British university? In other words, why should we care about what happened in a distant time and space? The Chinese dramatist, Tang Xianzu, happened to die in the same year as Shakespeare, and his play, *Mudan ting* (1598), nicknamed 'the Chinese *Romeo and Juliet*' is best known in the West as 'The Peony Pavilion'. While the fourteen-year-old Juliet drinks the suspicious potion under the pressure of a forced marriage, the female protagonist of *Mudan ting*, Du Liniang, dies early at the age of sixteen because her parents deny her sexual desires and delay her marriage arrangement: her father thinks she is too young to know what love is, and her mother thinks her husband is always right.

Before answering the questions above, I would like to share with you how both plays speak to me as a woman of the millennial generation in China. What is it like to be a woman in China? First of all, because of the 'one-child' policy launched in 1979, there is a high probability that I would not have been born at all: I would have been aborted because parents wanted 'one-male-child'. Had I survived female infanticide, I might have been abandoned, sent to an orphanage or to a relative, or sold to a stranger if my family is less-privileged and has a bunch of children. One of my relative is adopted as her poor biological parents secretly gives birth to six girls before finally having a son. If I am lucky enough to get an education, still I will probably drop out of school after the free nine-year compulsory education and start working to support my family. If I was born into a working-class or a middle-class family, my parents

may be willing to invest further in my education, because academic qualifications are directly proportional to the bride price.

What kind of education do I have? Just like Du Liniang, who was taught to learn by rote, I received a similar education from the primary school to university. ‘Critical thinking’ was just a line in the textbook, and when I tried to think differently from the textbook, the primary school teacher told me, ‘Huimin, thinking too much will not get you a good grade. Just remember that.’ My schooling was purpose-oriented - I have been taught to concentrate on what is ‘useful’ and ‘meaningful’. Reading the textbook was useful because it could help me get a good grade; whereas, all activities other than studying were a ‘waste of time’, like reading extracurricular books, watching TV dramas, and going to the local theatre. Even during the 10-minute break between classes, teachers encouraged us to review what had been taught and to prepare for the next lesson in the classroom. If we wanted to do some exercise outside, they encouraged us to practice jumping rope as this was part of the P.E. exam. When we wanted to creatively design different rope patterns, they told us our designs were meaningless because the only judging criteria was how fast we could jump the rope.

As the social measure of success is materialistic, teachers explained the importance of studying not because acquiring knowledge was fun and rewarding in itself, but because knowledge could be converted into material rewards. High school teachers told us to study hard so that we could be enrolled into a ‘good’ major at a prestigious university, and at universities we were expected to study hard to have a ‘good’ job. In China, a ‘good’ major means a major that can help you locate a well-paid job. However, it matters less whether the job makes you happy and accomplished.

Generally speaking, science majors are preferred over liberal arts majors because the former can yield more material benefits. Even in liberal arts majors, such as

English Language and Literature, most students will hone their linguistic competence and choose to become a handsomely-paid simultaneous interpreter, while only a minority will go on to study English literature. For girls, a 'good' major also includes education: teaching is seen as the most ideal profession for future wives and daughters-in-laws. A degree in education is therefore likely to help one marry into a better-off family.

As for sex education, neither Juliet's nor Liniang's parents are open about it. On the eve of Juliet's wedding, Lady Capulet says opaquely, 'Get thee to bed, and rest, for thou hast need.' (4.3.13) Why does Juliet need to sleep well tonight? The important reason is given by the Nurse: The County Paris has set up his rest that Juliet shall rest but little at the wedding night tomorrow (4.5.6-7); but before the Nurse finishes her line, she quickly adds: 'God forgive me [for referring to sex]!' Juliet is indirectly taught about sex on the eve of her wedding, while Liniang's parents tell her nothing about sex throughout the play. The situation remains more or less the same in China, even four hundred years later. When I asked my parents where I came from, they told me I was picked up off the street, avoiding the fact that they had intercourse to have me. But I knew they were lying because I looked just like my father. My family told me almost nothing about sex before I went to college, except that my grandmother told me in private, blushing, not to 'take my clothes off' before marriage. But once I got married, my parents took it for granted that I knew all about sex, and they wanted the grandchildren now!

Speaking of marriage, Juliet's marriage is more like a deal between Lord Capulet and County Paris. For Liniang as well, her father, Du Bao, delays her marriage not only because he thinks Liniang is too young, but also because he is still waiting for a qualified suitor who can facilitate Du's own official career. Marriage was, and still is,

a business, at least in my mother's mind. After graduating from college, my boyfriend immediately started working in the local town while I pursued a further study in the UK. I decided to marry him before finishing my Ph.D., but my mother pragmatically advised me: 'Wait. I am sure you will find someone better.'

By 'someone better', my mother did not mean someone who loved me more, but someone who had a higher academic qualification and earned more than my boyfriend.

'But he is my true love.' I replied.

'Silly girl! You will know I am right when you reach my age.' Period. My mother ended the conversation.

I do not need to reach her age to know that love and marriage are not about calculating losses and gains like a business. And I know that I have married the right man, who is smart enough to see all the possibilities of our future, including the possibility that I might have dumped him after going to the UK, and yet he is 'stupid' enough to support me emotionally and financially to take another expensive IELTS test, the gateway to studying abroad.

In addition to education and marriage, there is a deeper-trenched problem for both Juliet and Liniang—they are the second gender. Juliet was born to be a man's wife rather than an independent woman, and for Liniang, her father laments the lack of male offspring in every brief conversation with her. Like Juliet and Liniang, I am a female, the only child, and the second gender. When my aunt's son got married about twenty years ago, my kind aunt was busy decorating the new couple's bedroom, and I wanted to give her a hand. But she stopped me from entering the room with the most serious expression I had ever seen on her face. She told me that she wanted grandsons, not granddaughters, and that any unmarried girl entering the room would spoil the 'masculine' and 'lucky' atmosphere in the room. Her words made me feel as if part of

my body was ominous and filthy. To avoid 'contaminating' the atmosphere, I stood far away, alone by myself, watching my naughty male cousins roll over the bed to 'bring good luck'. I was shut out because I was female. This is probably what my aunt and all my female relatives were told when they were young, and then they internalised the word and told it to me.

Twenty years later, I married and had a daughter. Though all my relatives adore her, they still find two things wanting in my first-born: she does not have 'that thing' (penis), and she does not carry on my family name. 'What's in a name?' asks Juliet in Act II. For my mother, a name, especially the family name, is everything. She threatens to renounce her relationship with me, if I do not have a second (male) child to carry on the family name—the family name of me, my father, and my grandfather. In other words, she is not even fighting for her own family name, but for the family name of my late grandfather, someone she did not like very much.

The aforementioned problems of gender inequality, education, marriage, family name, and conservative attitudes towards sex, along with other social problems such as street violence, religious strife, and war, reflected the social reality in both dramatists' time and space. These problems are still contingent today - I am a living witness to these problems - and both plays speak to me powerfully. But very few productions of either play are able to re-create the emotional authenticity experienced by our early modern ancestors. In particular, almost every production of *Mudan ting* emphasises the beauty of the 'love story', the scenery, and the physical appearance of the leading actors, while leaving out the sensitive issues of social significance. In order to reinvigorate future productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, I aim to decipher the successful experience of producing them in the past by examining the

dramaturgical structure of both plays. Let's look backward to the future, and ask what had once moved early modern theatre-goers.

What worked in a distant time and space is likely to inspire here and now.

Introduction

Tang Xianzu and *Mudan ting*

In 2016, the quatercentenary celebration of Shakespeare's and Tang Xianzu's (汤显祖, 1550-1616) death brought a renewed academic interest in comparing the two dramatists. But without sustained high-level attention from both the UK and the Chinese governments, the enthusiasm towards comparing the two dramatists swiftly declined. Seven years after that anniversary, Shakespeare remains a household name, but Tang Xianzu and his plays once again need a brief introduction outside of the Sinophone world.

Tang Xianzu, also known as the 'Chinese Shakespeare', was a scholar-official and dramatist of the late Ming dynasty who was noted for his integrity. He was banished to a remote place because of his article, 'Memorial to Impeach the Ministers and Supervisors' (1591), which criticised high officials in the court, including one of the most senior and powerful politicians during those time, the Grand Secretary Shen Shi-xing (1535-1614). The Wanli emperor, alias Shen-zong (r. 1573-1620) viewed Tang's memorial as an attempt not only to slander and to attack chief officials in the court, but also as a reflection on the emperor's own judgement. Consequently, Tang was punished for his integrity, and was demoted to serve as a jail warden in the remote region, Xuwen in Guangdong province.[14] He later resigned his post and returned to his quiet study to compose plays.[15] The difference between Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare is that Tang did not seek for commercial benefits for his plays.

---

[14] Cyril Birch, 'Preface to the second edition [of *The Peony Pavilion*]', pp. i-ix. Yung Sai-shing, 'A critical study of *Han-tan chi*' (Princeton University : PhD diss., 1992), p. 8.

[15] For more details, see Xu Shuofang, *Tang Xianzu nian pu* 汤显祖年谱 *Chronicles of Tang Xianzu* (Shanghai: Guji Press, 1980).

Tang's *magnum opus*, *Mudan ting*, was published in 1598 according to its preface. The play is nicknamed the 'Chinese *Romeo and Juliet*' because its story line takes a similar theme of forbidden love. The play revolves around the love story of the maiden Du Liniang 杜丽娘 and scholar Liu Mengmei 柳梦梅, which transcends life and death in 55 scenes. Liniang is the only child of Prefect Du Bao and Madam Du, and she is home-schooled by Tutor Chen. In Scene 10 'The Interrupted Dream', Liniang takes a stroll to the rear garden with her maid Chunxiang 春香 and sadly realises that her beauty, like the spring's splendour, will fade with time. Returning to her boudoir, she dreams of having sexual intercourse with a handsome scholar. Later, she returns to the garden to relive her romantic dream, but fails. She falls sick and paints a self-portrait before she dies. Liu Mengmei, on his way to the imperial examination, happens to find Liniang's self-portrait. That night, Liniang's ghost visits Liu's chamber, and they share the same pillow. She is urged to reveal her true identity and begs Liu to help her return to life. After many hardships, Liniang marries Scholar Liu with the Emperor's blessing.

Problems in past comparative studies of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*

A large amount of previous comparative studies of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* have adopted a pure textual approach with relatively little consideration of the actual stage conditions. Based on textual evidence alone, their conclusions would not be valid when the early modern stage conditions, performance conventions, and the audience's response are taken into consideration. For example, it is well-known that the female characters were performed by male actors during Shakespeare's time, like the ill-fated Desdemona murdered by her husband Othello, thus the feminist reading of Shakespeare, especially the accusation of discrimination against women, may lose

its ground. Besides, given the popularity of the cross-dressing practice on both sides during Tang Xianzu's time and in today, it is common to see a young man performing the female protagonist of *Mudan ting* against Scholar Liu Mengmei enacted by a female actor. Cross-dressing is a set tradition at the final performance in a calendar year of a theatre troupe in order to show that each of its actors and actresses are capable of performing various role types. On this basis, the feminist reading of *Mudan ting* about the oppression of women in the feudal time is less convincing.

In past comparative studies on Shakespeare's and Tang Xianzu's plays, factual aspects like the two dramatists' life experience and their coincidental death year have been well documented, and a textual comparison of their plays on themes like love and death have attracted most of the attention. Aoki Masaru, a Japanese sinologist, fleetingly mentioned Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare in the same breath in his monograph *History of Chinese Drama 1368-1840* (1930).[16] Chinese scholars like Zhao Jingshen (1946) and Xu Shuofang (1964) broadly compared Tang Xianzu's and Shakespeare's life experience and drama writing.[17] Zhao's and Xu's opinions are accepted by later scholars like Zhou Xishan.[18]

Generally speaking, the actual stage conditions have not been well studied. Though the major contribution in the Western world, *1616: Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu's China* (2016), touched upon actual stage conditions covering topics like

[16] Aoki Masaru, *History of Chinese Theatre in Recent Times*, trans. Wang Gulu (Hong Kong: Zhonghua, 1975).

17 Zhao Jingshen, 'Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare', *Wenyi Chunqiu*, (1)1946. Xu Shuofang, 'Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare'. *Social Sciences Front*, (2)1978: 208-216 (first written in 1964).

[18] Zhou Xishan, 'Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare', in *Bijiao wenxue sanbaiti* 比较文学三百题 *Three Hundred Topics on Comparative Literature*, ed. Zhi Liang (Shanghai: Wenyi chubanshe, 1990).

‘Playwrights and Localities’, ‘The State and the Theatre’, ‘The Transmission of Dramatic Texts and Printing’ ‘Audiences, Critics, and Reception’, ‘Music and Performance’, and ‘Theatre in Theory and Practice’, this collection of essays provided parallel analyses of Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu respectively with little crossings. Its final chapter by Kate McLuskie quotes Shakespeare in its title: ‘There be salmons in both’.[19] In *Henry V*, Fluellen compares the river in Macedon with that in Monmouth and says ‘there is salmons in both.’ (*Henry V*, 4.7.25). Any audience will know there are countless rivers in different cities that have salmon, and will also think that Fluellen is guilty of special pleading because he wants to link Henry as a successful warrior with Alexander the Great. It goes without saying that there are good virtues in both dramatists’ plays, or in Li Jianjun’s comparative study of the two dramatists - ‘the orchid is beautiful while the chrysanthemum is fragrant’, meaning that each dramatist has his own merits.[20] A more recent addition is the special issue of *Asian Theatre Journal* 2019 which again fails to take note of both dramatists’ dramaturgy and their humour in a theatrical context.[21]

It is not difficult to understand the reason behind taking the pure textual approach when comparing Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu as in the Chinese theatre studies, the actual stage conditions as well as the dramaturgical structure of the play have long been neglected. While Shakespearean scholars like Andrew Gurr, Stanley

---

[19] Kate McLuskie, ‘There be salmons in both’: Models of connection for 17th century English and Chinese drama’, in Tan Tian Yuan, Paul Edmondson and Shih-pe Wang, eds, *1616: Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu’s China* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 277-93.

[20] Li Jianjun, *Bingshi shuang xing: Tang Xianzu he shashibiya* 并世双星：汤显祖和莎士比亚 *Two of the Fairest Stars: Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare* (Beijing: 21st Century Publishing House, 2016).

[21] Alexa Alice Joubin, ed., ‘Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare Quatercentenary Celebration’, *Asian Theatre Journal*, 36.2(2019): 275-348.

Wells, Stephen Greenblatt, Tiffany Stern and many others have been well aware of how the theatrical buildings (like the 'Wooden O') have shaped Shakespeare's dramatic writing; very few scholars of Tang Xianzu's plays, both home and abroad, have comprehensively studied the relationship between the physical theatres in which the play has been performed and the performance traditions that have grown up, particularly around the *chuanqi* versions of *Mudan ting*.

In the history of traditional Chinese theatre studies, the focus on the literariness and the musical structure of a play has been the mainstream. The founding fathers of modern Chinese theatre studies, Wang Guowei and Wu Mei, established the tradition of *qü xué* 曲学: the study of arias. The study of the aria was one step forward from the study of the 'literariness' of a written play, but it is far from enough as these plays are not only to be sung, but also to be acted. It is not until in the contributions of scholars such as Lu Jiye, Zhou Yibai, Xu Muyun, and Dong Meikan that the actual performance conditions, in addition to music and song, were taken into consideration in Chinese theatre studies.[22] Still, the scope of Lu, Zhou, Xu, and Dong is the macroscopic historical development of Chinese theatre, and they have not zoomed in the microscopic aspects, like the dramaturgical structure of any classic play. Only in

---

[22] Lu Jiye (alias Lu Qian) *Zhongguo xiju gailun* 中国戏剧概论 *A Generation Observation of Chinese Theatre* (Shanghai: Shijie Shuju, 1934), Zhou Yibai, *Zhongguo juchang shi* 中国剧场史 *A History of Chinese Theatre* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936), Xu Muyun, *Zhongguo xiju shi* 中国戏剧史 *A History of Chinese Theatre* (Shanghai: Shijie Shuju, 1938), Dong Meikan, *zhōngguó xìjù jîan shî* 中国戏剧简史 *A Brief History of Chinese Theatre* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1949).

the field of modern drama has there been an academic study of the dramaturgical structures of plays by the modern Chinese dramatist Cao Yu.[23]

As Ye Changhai has summarised, most writings about the history of Chinese theatre are about playwriting, fewer are about staging, and even fewer about audiences and spectatorship.[24] This is also true of studies of English drama until very recently. Influenced by the imbalanced tradition of Chinese theatre studies, scholarship on *Mudan ting*'s literariness and its lyrical beauty is almost as long-lived as the play itself, as are controversies over the play's musical structure. No work has analysed the performance tradition of the play in the *chuanqi* theatre, let alone the audience's response. This phenomenon reflects the lack of understanding and even misunderstanding in the *chuanqi* field. Previous scholars like Grant Shen Guangren and Shen Jing have regarded *chuanqi* as 'a literary form of Ming drama', or as 'an essential form of refined literature', and study the literary games on the page.[25] As a consequence, no one has studied the dramaturgy of any *chuanqi* play, including *Mudan ting*. A full examination of *Mudan ting* requires a thorough understanding of the performance convention of *chuanqi* and its relation with *kunqu.*

A *chuanqi* play can be performed to different tunes, and sometimes a *chuanqi* is especially written for a certain musical style. Tang Xianzu wrote *Mudan ting* to the

---

[23] Liu Jiasi, *Cao Yu xiju de Juchang Xing Yanjiu* 曹禺戏剧的剧场性研究 *A Study on the Theatricality of Cao Yu's Plays* (Beijing: China Social Science Publishing House, 2010).

[24] Ye Changhai, *Zhongguo xijuxue shigao* 中国戏剧学史稿 *A History of Theatre Studies in China* (Shanghai: Shanghai Arts and Literature Press, 1986), p. 4.

[25] Shen Grant Guangren, 'Chinese *chuanqi* Opera in English: Directing *The West Wing* with Modern Music', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 29.1(2012): 183-205 (199). Shen Jìng, *Playwrights and Literary Games in Seventeenth-Century China: Plays by Tang Xianzu, Mei Dingzuo, Wu Bing, Li Yü, and Kong Shangren* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 4.

Haiyan tune with Yihuang features.[26] According to Tang Xianzu's 'Epigraph for the Theatre God Master Qingyuan in the Yihuang County Temple' (hereafter, 'Epigraph'), when the general Tan Lun returned from Zhejiang Province to his hometown, Yihuang, Jiangxi Province, for his father's funeral in 1561, Tan brought with him a Zhejiang theatre troupe who sang Haiyan tune, and when the local Yihuang actors' sang Haiyan tune, they introduced their local dialect.[27] In addition to the Haiyan tune, other popular tune styles during Tang Xianzu's time include Kunshan tune, Yiyang tune, and Yuyao tune, all are named after their birthplace.

The popularity of the *Mudan ting* soon attracted the attention of *kunqu* experts. Shen Jîng (1553-1610), Zang Maoxun (1550-1620) and Feng Menglong (1574-1646) adapted *Mudan ting* to the tune of *kunqu*.[28] But Tang Xianzu himself strongly opposed the *kunqu* adaptation of his *Mudan ting*. He wrote to Luo Zhang'er, a local Yihuang actor who had performed *Mudan ting* under Tang's own supervision: 'As for *Mudan ting*, you must perform it according to my original version; on no account can you follow the one revised by Lü. Although he has changed [only] a word or two to facilitate popular [*kunqu*] singing, still, his adaptation greatly differs from my original

---

[26] Ye Changhai, 'Tang Xianzu and Haiyan Tune (in discussion with Gao Yu and Zhan Mutao)', *Theatre Arts*, 2(1981): 136-141.

[27] Tang Xianzu, 'Epigraph for the Theatre God Master Qingyuan in the Yihuang County Temple', *TXZJQB*, pp. 1596-99, trans. Fei Chunfang, in Fei Chunfang, ed. & trans. *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Conficius to the Present* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 55-6.

[28] For a detailed example on how Zang Maoxun and Feng Menglong rewrote *Mudan ting*, see Catherine Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage* (Ann Arbor: Centre for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002), chapter 2 'the musically grounded adaptations of Zang Maoxun and Feng Menglong'.

idea!'[29] In Tang's letter correspondence with Sun Siju, he argued emphatically about the play's integrity of thought and structure, stated that he would not change a single word of *Mudan ting* to make it easier to sing in the tune of *kunqu*.[30]

Despite Tang's strong protest, *kunqu* excels in slowly unfolding the nuanced emotions embedded in lyrics and has a great strength in expressing the lyricism, and becomes a perfect medium for expressing the aspect of romantic love in *Mudan ting*. Due to the nationwide influence of *kunqu* and the popularity of *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting*, previous studies examining the play's performance traditions on the stage are actually studying *kunqu* productions of the play, especially *kunqu* performances put on by private troupes for an elite audience in private homes.[31] No one has examined how *Mudan ting* had been performed according to its *chuanqi* performance traditions. This gap in academic research is understandable as there are very few historical records on this aspect. With the extinction of Haiyan tune, the performance tradition of *Mudan ting* is lost.

On today's theatre stage, all productions of *Mudan ting* are in the artistic form of *kunqu* except two: Peter Sellars's 1998/99 production and Chen Shi-zheng's 1999 production. Catherine Swatek has studied both productions in great detail in chapters 6 and 7 of her *Peony Pavilion Onstage* (2002). What follows is a brief introduction of both productions. For details on other productions of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, please kindly jump to the 'filmography' section.

---

[29] '*Yu Yi ling Luo Zhang'er*,' in *Tang Xianzu Shiwenji*, trans. Swatek, with my variation, see *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, p. 1. Here, 'the one revised by Lü' was actually the one adapted by Shen Jing and the adaptation was sent to Tang Xianzu by Lü Yusheng, see *TXZJQB*, p. 2012.
[30] *TXZJQB*, pp. 1848-9.
[31] See for example, Cyril Birch, *Scenes for Mandarins: The Elite Theatre of the Ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), and Shen Grant Guangren, *Elite Theatre in Ming China, 1368-1644* (London: Routledge, 2005).

When Peter Sellars was directing *Theodora* (1996), he was also about to stage *Peony Pavilion* which was performed in Vienna, London, Rome, Paris, and Berkeley from 1998 to 1999. Judith Zeitlin observed that in Sellars's production:

> The first half combined *kunqu* excerpts from the play with Sellars's own signature avant-garde vocabulary: simultaneous double casts for the lovers Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei, for example, and video installations on multiple monitors embedded in Plexiglass screens that could be freely rearranged on stage. The *mise-en-scène*'s witty play on 'the double screen,' a motif Sellars took from traditional Chinese painting, also resonated with his use of doubling for the leads: one couple (Lauren Tom and Joel de la Fuente) played as an American teenaged *Romeo and Juliet* according to the conventions of Western naturalist theatre; the other a stylized, nonnaturalist pairing with Hua Wenyi as Du Liniang and Michael Schumacher, a male Western dancer, as Liu Mengmei. In Part Two the soprano Huang Ying and the tenor Xu Lin Qiang joined the cast as a third Du/Liu pairing, essentially taking over the nonaturalist roles.[32]

Chen Shizheng's *The Peony Pavilion* is the only known full 55-scene production of *Mudan ting* ever since the play was written in 1598. It starred *kunqu* actors Qian Yi and Wen Yuhang in the lead roles, and went on a world tour after its debut in the Lincoln Center Festival in 1999. Originally, Chen Shi-zheng cooperated with Shanghai Kunqu theatre, and his *The Peony Pavilion* was scheduled to perform in

[32] Judith T. Zeitlin, 'My Year of Peonies', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 19.1(2002): 124-133 (pp. 126-7).

1998. But the Shanghai authority was unsatisfied with the 'bawdiness' in Chen's production, and banned *kunqu* actors to perform in New York. As a compromise, Chen went back to the States and re-rehearsed the play with Chinese American actors; the female lead, Qian Yi, left Shanghai Kunqu Theatre to join them. Though both Sellars and Chen distinguished their productions from *kunqu* presentation of *Mudan ting*, still, in Chen's production, the two lead actors are *kunqu* actors, and Sellars also invited *kunqu* maestro, Hua Wenyi, to star Du Liniang.

The physical stage and audience's watching experience

In order to understand how Shakespeare's and Tang Xianzu's plays worked in their own space and time, it is important to be aware of their theatre traditions, stage conditions, performance conventions, and audiences. There are several similarities between Elizabethan stage and the traditional Chinese theatre stage. As the extant sketches of the Elizabethan playhouses inform us, Shakespeare was writing for an unadorned stage protruding into the auditorium. Similarly, the traditional Chinese stage extends into the auditorium, so that the audience can view the stage from three sides. The Chinese stage likewise, was not decorated with sophisticated stage settings; a simple set of one table and two chairs were positioned flexibly to indicate different *mises en scène*, like the maiden's boudoir, the courtroom, or mountains.

Figure 1 Qinshan Stage, Yongjia, Wenzhou, Zhejiang. The Stage was built during the reign of Ming-dynasty Emperor Jiajing (r. 1522-1566). Courtesy of Yongjia County Government.

Figure 2 Left-hand side and right-hand side of Qinshan Stage. Photo by the author.

In China, there are no detailed records of permanent theatres during the Ming dynasty. But prior to the Ming, during the Song and Yuan dynasties, *wâ shè* 瓦舍 was a purpose-built leisure venue offering customers a wide variety of performances like singing, drama, and story-telling in prosperous cities like the then-capital, Kaifeng.[33] *Wâ shè* is actually very similar to today's Broadway, the cultural and entertainment centre of New York. It used to be highly competitive for a performing troupe to win a space within the leisure venue, and if the quality of performance dwindled, so would the number of the audience. The performing troupe might be kicked out of the leisure venue, and returned to a vagabond life. Inside the leisure venue, the place where theatre performances took place was called *gōu lán* 勾栏, which literally means 'curved balustrade', referring to the balustrade that enclosed the theatrical space. Texts such as Meng Yuanlao's *Dongjing Menghua lu* 东京梦华录(1127) have provided historical records of the Song dynasty performances.

---

[33] See Guobin Xu, Yanhui Chen, Lianhua Xu, *Introduction to Chinese Culture* (Singapore: Springer, 2018), p. 101. Also see Kang Baocheng 康保成, 'A new interpretation of washe and goulan ' "瓦舍"、"勾栏"新解, *Wenxue Yichan*, 5(1999): 38-45.

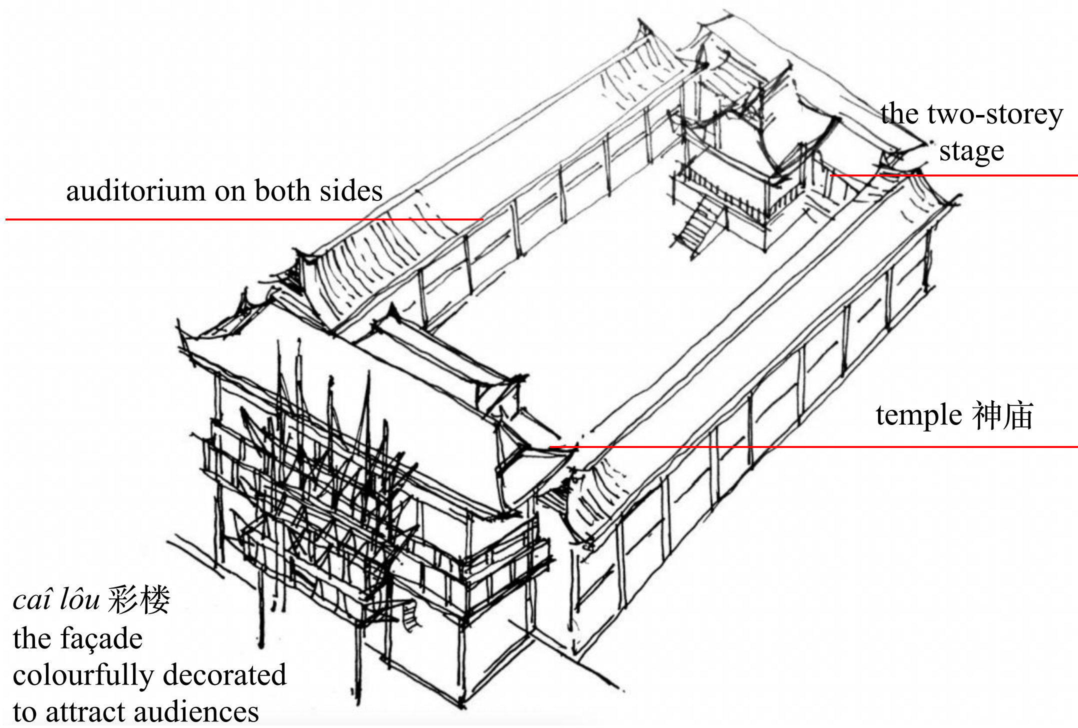
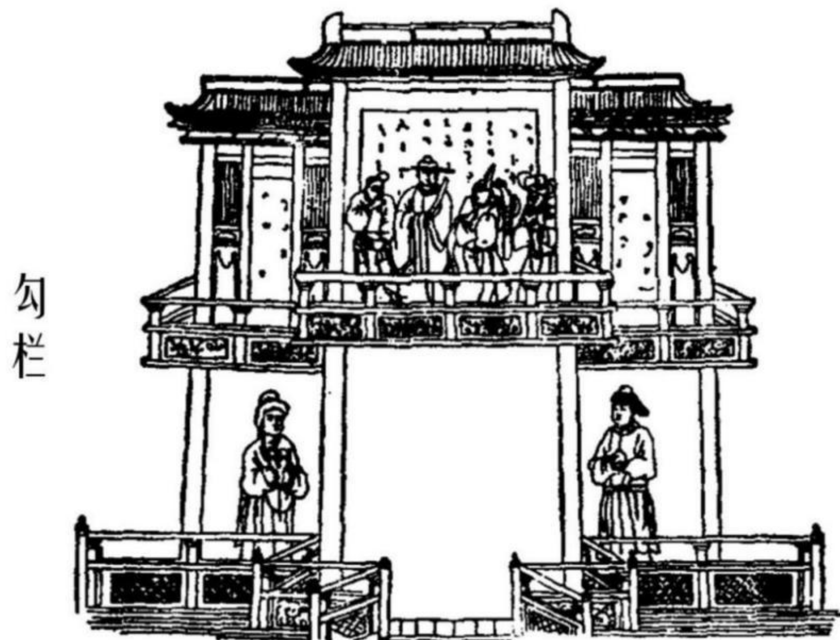


Figure 3 Picture of *gōu lán* drawn by Zhang Jia.[34]



[34] Zhang Jia, 'Research on the shapes of Washe Goulan in Song dynasties 两宋时期瓦舍勾栏形制探究' (Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology: Master diss., 2013), p. 71.

Figure 4 The elevation drawing of the two-storey stage in *gōu lán*.[35]

Later, during the early Ming dynasty, the emperors were negative towards theatre, and the commercial *gōu lán* disappeared about 600 years ago.[36] As most of the *wâ shè gōu lán* is made of wood and is hard to preserve, there is no extant *wâ shè gōu lán*. But the meaning of the term has been extended to mean theatre buildings in later dynasties, like the theatre in provincially based guildhalls in the capital city, *huì guân* 会馆, and the private space in high-level officials' and rich merchants' mansions. Sometimes the professional theatre troupes were invited to perform in private spaces, like the royal court and guildhalls. In these circumstances, the professional actors performed the scenes selected by the emperors and the hosts for a particular purpose, such as to celebrate birthdays and weddings. In other words, the theatre troupes did not have much initiative in play choices. During public performances, professional theatre troupes could choose to perform in temple theatres, purpose-built theatres in the town centre, or make-shift stages made of bamboo sticks and woods in the city or the countryside.

---

[35] https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/30944855 (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[36] See also Colin Mackerras, 'Architecture and Stage of Traditional Theatre (China)', in *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*, ed. Liu Siyuan (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 226-231 (227).

Figure 5 The hundred-year old Rear Garden of Suzhou Kunqu Theatre, photo by the author.

For private theatre troupes, Yang Huiling's *Jiangnan Familial Culture and the Art of Kunqu during the Ming and the Qing Dynasties* (2016) has detailed the private *kunqu* performances of the Zhang, Shen, Cha, Sun, Lü and Tu families in their respective rear gardens.[37] In contemporary China, actual gardens are also a favoured venue for performances of *Mudan ting*, providing audiences with Ming-Qing social elites' play-watching experience. The stage and the auditorium are usually separated by a man-made lake which helps enhance the acoustic experience, and the audience scatter around the picturesque garden.[38] For example, Suzhou *Kunqu* Theatre in Jiangsu

---

[37] Yang Huiling, *Ming-Qing Jiangnan wangzu he kunqu yishu* 明清江南望族和昆曲艺术 *Jiangnan Familial Culture and the Art of Kunqu during the Ming and the Qing Dynasties* (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2016), pp. 332-369.

[38] Li Yü shared his experience of garden design in the chapter *Jushi Bu* 居室部 'Architecture' of *Xianqing Ouji*, pp. 303-328.

province, China, has been producing outdoor performances of *Mudan ting* in its rear garden with a pavilion surrounded by man-made lake since 2004. The Zhujiajiao Kezhi Garden, Shanghai, has also been the performance space for Shanghai Zhang Jun Kunqu Art Centre. This production premiered in 2010 during the Shanghai World Expo and kicked off a world tour with six shows in the garden setting of Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, in 2012. A more recent adaptation of *Mudan ting*, Stan Lai's *Nightwalk in the Chinese Garden* (2018), was also situated in the Flowing Fragrance Garden of the Huntington Library, the U.S.A. The ticket price of the above-mentioned productions in garden settings is usually five to ten times higher than a *kunqu* performance in a small indoor theatre.[39] In addition, many productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and other Shakespeare plays have been staged in various forms in outdoor spaces. Examples include the Shakespeare by the Sea company, which since 1998 has built makeshift stages off the coast during its free touring season, and The Willow Globe Theatre in Wales, whose theatre is surrounded by carefully woven branches of living willow.

Neither the Elizabethan stage nor the traditional Chinese stage were darkened, thus the audience could not only see the actors on the stage, but also other audience members and the physical structure of the theatre. The open-space physical theatre structure determines that neither Shakespeare nor Tang Xianzu were aiming at creating theatre illusions. On the contrary, both dramatists were rather playful about the space-time in the fictional play and the audience's physical space-time. Shakespeare writes, 'If this were played upon a stage, now, I could condemn it as an

[39] The average ticket price for the Royal Granary production is 1000 rmb, while a good seat in normal indoor theatre at any *kunqu* theatre costs around 100 rmb.

improbable fiction' (*Twelfth Night*, 3.4.114-5). This theatrical in-joke reflects Shakespeare's playfulness.

The physical stage influences the audience's watching experience. John Davies (1565-1618), Shakespeare's contemporary and a prolific poet who maintained a successful career as a writing-master, shared his first-hand play-watching experience in his poem written in 1603:

> […] like a looker on a tragedie
> Within the middle roome, among the meane,
> I see the fall of state and majesty
> While mongst the presse t'a piller sure I leane:
> So see I others sorrowes with delight
> Though others sorrowes do but make me sad:
> But plagues to see, which on our selues might light,
> Free from their fall, makes nature, grieving, lad.[40]

John Davies was sitting in the middle gallery, with others of his 'middling' class and leaned against a pillar while watching the fall of state and majesty. Because of the physical presence of the gallery and its pillar, he was aware that he was in a theatre and he was also aware of his station in life. He knew theatre was a world of make-believe, and miseries on the stage were fake. Davies' early modern experience is echoed in today's play-watching experience in open-air theatres. Susan Bennett

---

40 John Davies, *Wittes Pilgrimage (by poeticall essaies) through a vvorld of amorous sonnets, soule-passions, and other passages, diuine, philosophicall, morall, poeticall, and politicall* (London: John Brown, 1605), Tvr.

theorised her perception of audience reception and states the co-existence of the 'outer frame', or the social context, which contained all those cultural elements that create and inform the theatrical event', and the 'inner frame' which contains the dramatic production in a particular playing space.[41] For Davies, the 'outer frame' is the physical theatre situated in the Elizabethan London, and the 'inner frame' is the fictional story which tells 'the fall of state and majesty'.

Davies recognised the theatrical illusions as illusions. He felt glad to watch tragedy because the tragic story was fictional; he felt sad when he saw sorrows of people in his reality, though. Davies was acutely aware of the fictionality of a play, yet he still empathised with stage characters. We believe in the story; we share empathy with the characters; yet at the same time we are conscious that they are fictional. This suggests that the dramatic illusion and audience's consciousness are compatible. They co-exist simultaneously in harmony, which can be described as the state of 'and' rather than 'either … or'. Conflicting feelings can be explained by the gap between what we see on the stage and what we normally do in our life. Early in the seventeenth century, René Descartes points out that pleasure may come from staged sadness and hatred 'when these passions are only caused by the stage adventures which we see represented in a theatre, or by other similar means which, not being able to harm us in any way, seem pleasurably to excite our soul in affecting it.'[42] On this basis, anti-theatricalists' fear that stage behaviours will be copied by the audience, is groundless.

---

41 Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 228-9.

42 René Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, 2 vols. (Cambridge: CUP, 1911) vol. 1, p. 373.

Davies' description of theatre experience does not differ much from that of Tang Xianzu's audience, watching *Mudan ting* on the other side of the globe. On the bare stage, the opening of Li Yü's play *Yizhong yuan* 意中缘 reads, 'This is a fictional play, and you may take it or leave it.'[43] For studies on the Chinese theatre audience, Li Wai-yee's *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (1993) summarised the audience's reception as a process of 'enchantment' and 'disenchantment' of stage illusions.[44] Influenced by Li, Sophie Volpp demonstrated that the implied spectator of the late Ming is asked 'to hold illusion and disillusion in tension' in her *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (2011).[45] Both Li and Volpp propose a balance between the stage illusion and audience's physical reality, which is similar to Bennett's concept of the convergence of the inner frame and the outer frame.

Due to the open stage structure, the early modern theatre-goers enjoyed a more heightened theatricality than the modern audience who are used to a blackened auditorium.

Playful theatricality in the theatre culture of *nanxi* and *chuanqi*

Based on the bare stage and performance convention of double and even multiple casting, it is possible that the theatrical traditions of *nanxi* and *chuanqi* are full of playfulness. While examining the dramaturgical structure of *Mudan ting*, this thesis

---

43 Li Yü, *Li Yü's Ten Plays*, Chinese Classics Website, https://www.zhonghuadiancang.com/shicixiqu/yizhongyuan/49685.html (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

44 Li Wai-yee, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: Love and Illusion in Chinese Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

45 Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Asian Centre, 2011), p. 22.

bears in mind the *nanxi* and *chuanqi* traditions. Meanwhile, the medieval drama might have also influenced the dramaturgical structure of *Romeo and Juliet* as the young Shakespeare might have watched in nearby Coventry, only seventeen miles from Stratford-upon-Avon. Emerging from the church, the medieval drama gradually passed into the hands of the laity, with the result, as Lawrence Clopper observed, that comic intrusions and base scenes increased in vernacular religious drama.[46] The humour in medieval drama can be surprising and even shocking:

> Noah is portrayed as a bit of a drunken fool, and his wife as a shrewish nag. The York play of the Crucifixion, which concerns Jesus being nailed to the Cross, sees the soldiers arguing and making the audience laugh with their incompetence.'[47]

The above description may even seem sacrilegious to modern eyes. The soldiers' argument about nailing Jesus to the Cross produces bad jokes, the effect of which is also achieved by the argument between Peter and the musicians at the end of Act 4 Scene 5 of *Romeo and Juliet*, as the section of the thesis entitled 'The mourning in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*' will show.

Recent scholarship has caught up with the influence of medieval drama and earlier performance tradition on Shakespeare: 'The rise of the Elizabethan theatre was unthinkable without this conjunction of largely oral, physical, spectacular, body-

---

[46] Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago University Press, 2001), p. 1.

[47] https://www.bl.uk/medieval-literature/articles/medieval-drama-and-the-mystery-plays (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

centred practices of performance and display' popular in the late Middle Ages.[48] But there is still a lack of systematic study of the influence of *nanxi* on Tang Xianzu's *chuanqi* play, *Mudan ting*. Therefore, this thesis will shed more ink on the long shadow that *nanxi* has cast over later Chinese theatre traditions. What follows is a comparison of three *nanxi* and *chuanqi* plays written in different time periods: *First Place Scholar Zhang Xie, The Lute,* and *Mudan ting*. The comparison does not seek to be exhaustive but intends to contextualise *Mudan ting* in the *nanxi* theatre tradition in order to better understand the original performance conditions of *Mudan ting.*

The earliest *nanxi* play, *First Place Scholar Zhang Xie* was written in the Southern Song dynasty (ca. 1208-1224).[49] The play recounts the story of a hard-working scholar from a modest background who sets off for the capital to take the imperial examination. On the road, he is robbed and beaten by a bandit. In a nearby village temple, he meets an orphan girl who nurses him back to health and later becomes his wife. However, after coming first in the exams he regrets the marriage,

---

[48] Robert Weimann, *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 55. For a further study of the influence of medieval drama on Shakespeare, see Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. by Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), *Kurt Schreyer, Shakespeare's Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 'Shakespearean narrative and characterization are fundamentally informed by thematic patterns borrowed from the still-vital mystery play tradition' (p. 23); Helen Cooper's *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010) demonstrates the pervasiveness of the deep structures of medieval culture in Shakespeare's work and his times; Ruth Morse, Peter Holland, and Helen Cooper, eds. *Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[49] Sun Chongtao, 'Zhang Xie zhuangyuan yu "Yongjia zaju"' (First Place Scholar Zhang Xie and Yongjia zaju), *Wenyi yanjiu* (Literature and art studies), 6(1992): 105-114 (107).

he unsuccessfully arranges for his wife to be trampled to death by horses, and then stabs her in the arm when he finds her picking tea in a field.[50]

Gao Ming's (1306-59) *Pipa ji* 琵琶记 *The Lute* is also a well-received *nanxi* play. At his father's request, Cai Bojie leaves his elderly parents and his newly-wed wife to take the imperial examination in the capital. He ranks top in the imperial exam, but he is unable to contact or return to his parents, and is forced to marry the prime minister's daughter. When Cai's parents die of starvation in his absence, it is his first wife, Zhao Wuniang, who buries them. As she does so, two ghosts appear and urge her to go to the capital city to find her husband. She travels many miles to find him, playing her lute and begging for alms along the way, and is eventually reunited with Cai. When he learns that his parents are dead, he travels back to their grave with his two wives for the obligatory three-year mourning period. The play ends with Cai and his two wives being honoured by the emperor for their filial behaviour.[51]

First Place Scholar Zhang Xie and *The Lute* exploit the double casting tradition for humour. The *jing* actor is double cast as the Grandma Li and the mountain God in scene 33 of *First Place Scholar Zhang Xie*:

> Poorlass [the female lead]: Good-bye, Grandpa, take care of yourself. I will go to bid farewell to Grandma and then leave.
>
> Mountain God: No need, I'm your Grandma.

---

[50] For an English translation of the play, see Jiushan shuhui cairen, trans. by Regina S. Llamas, *Top Graduate Zhang Xie: The Earliest Extant Chinese Southern Play* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), introduction.

[51] For more on the play, see Ashley Thorpe, *The Role of the Chou ('Clown') in Traditional Chinese Drama: Comedy, Criticism, and Cosmology on the Chinese Stage* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), pp.63-4.

Grandpa Li: Don't disclose our trade secrets![52]

Similarly in *The Lute* Scene 27, one minor character is double cast as a spirit and a grave-digger diachronically. Under the command of Jade Emperor, the spirit helps Wuniang to build the grave while Wuniang is sleeping. The spirit then goes off the stage, taking off the spirit's costume and reappears on the stage as a grave-digger, whom Wuniang's neighbour has invited to give Wuniang a hand, only to find that the grave has already been built. Wuniang wakes up, and is equally surprised. She vaguely recalls that there seem to be a spirit helping her build a grave among the pines and cypress. Then the grave-digger sings to Wuniang, with my interpretation added in square brackets:

> You are so nonsensical! [The stage is empty] Where is the lonely grave in the pines and cypress [that you are referring to]? By the way, the little spirit was performed by me a few moments earlier.[53]

The grave-digger is joking about the bare stage conventions where the actor needs to convince the audience of the 'pines and cypress' on the empty stage. Besides, he is also joking about the double-casting convention: he blankly points out that a real spirit does not exist, it is he, a human being, who acts as the spirit.

In addition to double casting, the actors also act as stage properties in *First Place Scholar Zhang Xie*:

---

[52] Jiushan shuhui cairen, *Top Graduate Zhang Xie: The Earliest Extant Chinese Southern Play*, trans. Regina S. Llamas (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), p. 217.

[53] Gao Ming, *Pipaji*, in Qian Nanyang, ed. *Yuanben Pipaji Jiaozhu* (Shanghai: Guji Press, 1985), p. 157.

> Jing: ... I, the God, think that the outside door was damaged and doesn't look good. Ask a little ghost to come here. You both temporarily act as the two leaves of the door.
> Mo: I am the judge of hell. How can I act as the door?
> Jing: Ask a little ghost to come here and discuss it....
> Chou: (Playing a little ghost, enters and sings.) ... I can only act as one leaf of a door. Who will do the other?
> Jing: The judge of hell is on the left and you are on the right....
> (Mo and Chou act as the door.)'[54]

The minor characters not only act as doors, but also as a table in Scene 16 and a chair for the Prime Minister in Scene 21.

The above examples show the playful theatricality on the *nanxi* stage where the fictional space-time in the play and the physical space-time shared by the actor and the audience are constantly mixed, mostly for comic effects. In the same fashion in Scene 33 of *Mudan ting*, Sister Stone laughs at Scholar Liu, saying:

> The Ming Dynasty Code prescribes execution for any person, instigator or accomplice, who opens a coffin. You the scholar from the ancient Song dynasty of course know nothing about our Great Ming Code (*MDT*, 196; *PP*, 195).

[54] Qian Nanyang, comp. and ed. *Yongle dadian xiwen san zhongjiaozhu (Collated and annotated of three xiwen plays in Great Collectanea of Yongle*) (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1979), p. 55, tran. Sun Mei. Qtd. in Sun Mei, 'Performances of Nanxi', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 13.2(1996): 141-166 (158-9).

Sister Stone is also a character from the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279). It is therefore impossible for her to know the Ming dynasty's law, the Great Ming Codes, that do not appear until more than one hundred years later. In Tang Xianzu's time, the actor enacting Sister Stone was aware of the Ming Codes and so were the audience; here Sister Stone is clearly making fun of the historical discrepancy between the Southern Song dynasty and the Ming dynasty, between the space-time of the story and the space-time of the audience. In today's production, it would be very interesting for Sister Stone to address the audience and adjusts the line as 'You the scholar from the ancient Song dynasty of course know nothing about the law of People's Republic of China – anyone who opens a coffin will be sentenced to at least three years in prison plus a huge fine!'

In addition to the discrepancy of fictional and physical space-time, Tang Xianzu inserts playful elements throughout Liniang's resurrection. In Scene 34 'Consultation', to facilitate Liniang's resurrection, Sister Stone turns to Tutor Chen, a part-time medical practitioner, for medicine that can help Liniang to regain her strength after rebirth. Sister Stone pays compliment to Tutor Chen, calls him 'Prince of Healing' who is as powerful as to 'withstand those of the living Yama, Lord of Hades.' Tutor Chen is actually hidden in the dark, he does not know that the medicine is prescribed for Liniang. Sister Stone lies to him, and says that the medicine is for another nun whose whereabouts are not known to the reader. In Sister Stone's narrative, the nun is 'dead some days past' after falling beneath the spell of foul fiend' (*MDT*, 199; *PP*, 198). Tutor Chen himself expresses his doubt questioning whether a dead person still has a mouth that can take medicine. But still, he instructs Sister Stone to 'burn this trouser patch [of a potent male] and administer it with heated wine.' (*MDT*, 199; *PP*, 198). In a brief summary, both the *nanxi* and *chuanqi* theatre admits its theatricality

via the practice of double casting and using humans as properties; its stage was bare and the auditorium was not darkened, much like the Elizabethan stage.

Marginalised Chinese theatre theories

In addition to the neglect of the *nanxi* and *chuanqi* performance traditions, traditional Chinese theatre theories have been marginalised in current studies of *Mudan ting* and the Chinese plays in general. The Western theatre theories have been regarded as the rule of thumb even by Chinese critics in examining every aspect of a Chinese play ranging from its genre, structure, and social effect despite the fallacies and controversies concerning the 'standard Western approach to drama'.[55] Chinese theatre theories have occupied a very limited space in today's world theatre, Asian theatre, and Chinese theatre studies. The influential *History of the Theatre* by Oscar Gross and Franklin J. Hildy leaves a very limited space for theatrical traditions other than Western.[56] Mainstream Western drama theories like Marvin Carlson's *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (1984) does not mention Chinese theories, and Manfred Pfister's *Theory and Analysis of Drama* seldom refers to Chinese theatre.

From the scope of world theatre to Asian theatre, *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* edited by James R. Brandon and Martin Banham (1993) is intended to be a

---

[55] For the controversies and fallacies, see Steve Tillis, *The Challenge of World Theatre History* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), esp. chapter 3 on the fallacy of the East-West dichotomy.

[56] Oscar Gross, Franklin J. Hildy, eds. *History of the Theatre* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2014, 10th edition, 1st in 2008).

general guide to the history of Asian theatres from the ancient time to the present.[57] Fei Chunfang's edition of *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance: From Confucius to the Present* (1999) is basically an English translation of *Annotations on Selected Historical Chinese Theatre Theories* edited by Chen Duo and Ye Shanghai - of her 43 entries from this period, 41 overlap with the 138 entries in Chen's and Ye's edition.[58] *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* (2016) edited by Liu Siyuan is trying to enter the mainstream of world theatre studies, yet greater effort is needed in introducing not only the Chinese theatre, but also Chinese theatre theories.[59] Overall, Chinese theatre theories have not earned their deserved attention in world theatre discourse, and have not been consciously used to analyse the working of a play, either in China or abroad.

This thesis is interested in analysing plays according to theories developed by Tang Xianzu himself and by Li Yü 李渔 (1611-1680), a talented dramatist and theorist in the Qing dynasty. Tang Xianzu did not publish his drama theories collectively. His drama theories mainly consist of his 'Epigraph', his prologues for his own plays and others' plays, and his letter correspondences with friends. Li Yü formed his own theatre company of female performers, for which he acted as producer, manager, playwright, and director. Originally, one of Li's concubines, Ms. Qiao, advised Li to organise a domestic theatre troupe, with herself as the female lead

---

[57] James R. Brandon and Martin Banham, eds. *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (Cambridge UP, 1993).

[58] Chen Duo, Ye Changhai, eds, *Zhongguo Lidai Julian Xuanzhu* 中国历代剧论选注 *Annotations on Selected Historical Chinese Drama Theories* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1987).

[59] Liu Siyuan, ed. *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2016).

and another concubine, Ms. Wang, as the male lead.[60] The theatre troupe was made up of Li's concubines and maids and performed Li's own plays and his adaptations of earlier plays.

Li Yü collected his theatre theories in *Xianqíng ôujì* 闲情偶寄 *Casual Notes of Idle Feelings*.[61] First published in 1671, *Xianqing Ouji* was an instant best-seller, well noted for Li Yü's art of living and his experience in theatre. *Xianqing Ouji* consists of eight chapters and two hundred and thirty-four subtopics 'ranging from playwriting, acting, architecture, gardening, landscaping, interior design, and culinary delights to clothing, personal grooming, and sexual needs'.[62] For example, Li Yü taught the reader how a woman should dress properly with jewellery to enhance her feminine charm, how men should build gardens and how to grow flowers in order to show the master's taste. He also introduced the readers to some of his everyday findings: if a man wanted to pee but did not wish to leave the comfy house in winter, neither did he want to pee inside the house to avoid undesirable smell, Li Yü suggested that he could use a bamboo stick to direct the fluid outside. Li Yü was aware of his declining reputation for writing erotic novels (like *Ròu pú tuán* 肉蒲团 *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, or *Sex and Zen*), and to save his reputation, he aligned himself with the moral person as a way of self-protection in the preface to *Xianqing Ouji*. His claim that he is a righteous writer rather than a dubious pleasure-seeker – is a clever way of avoiding any trouble with the authorities.

---

[60] For a detailed introduction to Li Yü's theatre troupe, see George A. Hayden, 'Li Li-weng: A Playwright on Performance', *CHINOPERL Papers* 9 (1979-1980): 80-91.

[61] Li Yü, *Xianqing Ouji* [*Casual Notes of Idle Feelings*], ed. Du Shuying (Beijing: Xueyuan, 1998).

[62] Fei Chunfang. ed. & trans. *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 77.

As Confucian classics were the orthodoxy books, all other books were regarded as *xían shū* 闲书 'books to be read during idle times'. In the preface to his *Xianqing Ouji*, he wrote that he disguised his book as 'casual notes' simply to attract more readers and his ideas were strictly in accordance with the orthodox. Li Yü commented that the public preferred leisure and pleasure to moral coaching, thus he suggested that, 'For those wishing to persuade people into taking the right path, direct warning is not as effective as fables and metaphors.'[63] Direct warning puts people away, while a lively fable conveys a moral lesson through stories, and is thus easier to be perceived by people and is more effective in educating them into doing good deeds.

There is also a hidden reason why Li Yü disguised *Xianqing Ouji* as 'casual notes'. Li Yü lived through the collapse of the Ming dynasty and the consolidation of the Manchu dynasty known as the Qing.[64] As a member of the conquered Han ethnicity, Li Yü was an outsider in the eyes of the ruling Manchu ethnicity. The Manchu rulers strengthened their domination and maintained their control over other ethnicities through various means, including *wénzì yù*文字狱, 'imprisonment for writing', also known as speech crime.[65] In such a totalitarian regime, Li Yü carefully referred to *Xianqing Ouji* as 'casual notes' of 'idle feelings' in order to evade the censorship of the authorities, and insisted that his book was too insignificant to be read for any serious purpose. Under the guise of idleness and insignificance, Li Yü's *Xianqing Ouji* could comment on serious social problems without risking Li's own

---

[63] Li Yü, *Xianqing Ouji*, p. 406, my translation.

[64] For a detailed account of Li Yü's life, see Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yu* (Harvard University Press, 1988), p. vii.

[65] For more on the speech crime, see Pang Wing-yin, 'A Historical Review of the Comparative Study of Mohism and Christianity during the Late Qing and Republican China Periods', *Religions*, 15.2(2024): 162-189 (p. 165).

life. Idleness as a way of commenting on politics lies behind theatre and the satirical tradition not only in China, but also in England and elsewhere. Li Yü's wisdom of 'hiding serious messages in jokes' is central to the thesis which argues for the value of drama in totalitarian cultures.[66]

Notable for its scope, originality and practicality, *Xianqing Ouji* is groundbreaking in the history of Chinese theatre criticism because Li Yü pioneered the idea that 'a play is written to be performed on the stage' rather than to be read on the desk.[67] Among the wide-ranging topics covered in *Xianqing Ouji*, Li Yü's theory of theatre is found in the first three chapters: *Ciqu* 词曲 Playwriting, *Yanxi* 演习 Performance and training, and *Shengrong* 声容 Performers' voice and appearance. For playwriting, Li Yü has been compared to Aristotle because of their similar emphasis on plot.[68] Li's theory on plot construction has been described by Shen Guangren Grant as 'the Asian version of [Aristotelian] "unity of action" '.[69] In addition to his primary concern with plot, Li Yü gives advice on characterisation, language register, choice of theme and subject matter, rhyme and rhythm, dialogue and monologue, comic routines and jokes, and the overall structure of a play.[70]

Li Yü's rich experience in directing and producing plays lends insight to his second and third chapters on performance, selection and training of performers. His

---

[66] Li Yü, *Xianqing Ouji*, pp. 56-7.

[67] Li Yü, *Xianqing Ouji*, p. 154, my translation.

[68] See for example, Sun Huizhu William, 'The Paradox of Acting in the Traditional Chinese Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 15.1 (1999): 17–25.

[69] Shen Guangren Grant, *Elite Theatre in Ming China, 1368-1644* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 146.

[70] For an English translation of each subsection of Li Yü's two chapters on playwriting and performance, see George A. Hayden, 'Li Li-weng: A Playwright on Performance', *CHINOPERL Papers* 9 (1979-1980): 80-91(p. 81).

practical advice on the selection of plays and the length of each performance is based on a careful consideration of the needs of the audience, which echoes the central concern of the Japanese Nō artist Zeami Motokiyo (c. 1363– c. 1443) in his performance treatises, *On the Art of the Nō Drama*.[71] Li Yü's advice on adapting and updating plays is of particular interest for the modernisation of *Mudan ting* in the final chapter of the thesis; Li Yü's advice on actor training is still relevant today and is also applied in the final chapter of the thesis.

Although Li Yü's stage-based theatre theories are original and comprehensive, the study of his theories is mainly limited to the Sinophone world due to the lack of translation. Some of Li Yü's plays and novels have been rendered into English, Japanese, German, and French, and notable examples include Patrick Hanan's English translation of Li Yü's novel *The Carnal Prayer Mat*.[72] But so far, there has been no complete translation of Li Yü's drama theories, let alone of *Xianqing Ouji*, in any language. Fei Chunfang, Patrick Hanan, David Pollard, Eric Henry, Ashley Thorpe, Nathan K. Mao, Liu Ts'un-yun, George A. Hayden, Man Sai-cheong, Helmut Martin, S. E. Kile and a few others have selectively translated Li Yü's drama theories according to their own areas of interest.[73] For example, Ashley Thorpe translated Li

---

[71] Zeami Motokiyo, *On the Art of the Nō Drama. The Major Treatises of Zeami*, trans. J. Thomas Rimer and Yamazaki Masakazu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[72] Li Yü, *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, trans. Patrick Hanan (University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

[73] Fei Chunfang (Faye), ed. & trans., *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 77-88; Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yü* (Harvard University Press, 1988); David Pollard, trans. & ed. *The Chinese Essay* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 93-99; Eric Henry, *Chinese Amusement: the Lively Plays of Li Yü* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980); Ashley Thorpe, *The Role of the Chou ('Clown') in Traditional Chinese Drama: Comedy, Criticism, and Cosmology on the Chinese Stage* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), pp. 76-84; Nathan K. Mao and Liu Ts'un-yun, *Li Yü* (Boston: Twayne, 1977), p. 113-

Yü's theory of comic routines and jokes out of his interest in the role of the clown on the Chinese stage.[74] Compared to the complete translation of Zeami Motokiyo's *On the Art of the Nō Drama* by J. Thomas Rimer and Yamazaki Masakazu early in 1984, the translation and transmission of Li Yü's scintillating drama theories are belated and partly neglected, awaiting future efforts.

34; George A. Hayden, 'Li Li-weng: A Playwright on Performance', *CHINOPERL Papers* 9 (1979-1980): 80-91; Man Sai-cheong, 'Li Yü on the performing arts', *Renditions*, 3(1974): 62-5; Helmut Martin, *Li Li-weng uber das Theater: Eine Chinesische Dramaturgie des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Taipei: Mei Ya, 1968). S. E. Kile translated the complete table of contents of *Xianqing Ouji*, see https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/liweng/full-xianqing-ouji-table-of-contents/ (last accessed on 15 March 2024).

[74] Ashley Thorpe, *The Role of the Chou ('Clown') in Traditional Chinese Drama: Comedy, Criticism, and Cosmology on the Chinese Stage* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), pp. 76-84.

Chapter 1 The dramaturgical mixed genre structure of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*

The practice of mixing different genres has long existed. Shakespeare himself was probably making fun of genre categorisation in the often-quoted line of Polonious: 'tragical-comical-historical-pastoral' (*Hamlet* 2.2.420-4). To facilitate the understanding of 'mixed-genre', it is important to trace back in the Western and Chinese history. Early in ancient Greece, the theatre festival competitions in honour of Dionysus comprised of three parts: tragedies, comedies, and satyr plays that mixed tragic and comic elements. Classical plays survived because they were deemed suitable texts for study in school. Maybe because ancient Greek satyr plays were too rambunctious, only one example of a satyr play survives: Euripedes's *Cyclops*. Roman poet and critic – Horace (65-8 BC), talked guardedly about the satyr play. He tantalisingly mentioned a mixed tragedy and comedy form in his *Ars Poetica* (10-8 BC), and implied that the satyr plays might have informed classical tragicomedy.[75] 'Tragicomedy' resembles 'mixed-genre' and is more well known and studied. The extant evidence shows that the Roman playwright, Plautus (254 - 184 BC), is the only classical writer to use the term tragicomedy (albeit in the formulation tragicocomedia) in Prologue to *Amphitruo*. By 'Tragicocomedia', he is acutely aware that he is mixing characters from the different genres - tragedy and comedy; and he is probably being satirical. Plautus probably meant a comedy with the characters of tragedy - the Gods. Plautus's *Amphitruo* mixes different characters from tragedies and comedies - Gods and mortals, masters and slaves. To borrow Aristotle's words, *Amphitruo* mixes tragic

[75] For a detailed discussion of the history of mixing genres and tragicomedy, see Ros King, *Cymbeline: Constructions of Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 10-15.

characters who are usually 'nobler,' or 'better' than ordinary people in real life and comic characters that are, in average, 'inferior' to us.[76]

Moving to the early modern time, Richard Edwards (1525–1566), poet, dramatist, actor, composer, teacher and Master of the Chapel Royal, wrote *Damon and Pythias* (1564). It is a self-proclaimed 'tragical comedy' and pays homage to Horace in the play's prologue. Edwards's contemporary, Italian poet and diplomat Giovanni Battista Guarini (1538-1612) wrote a treatise on tragicomedy, *Compendio della poesia tragicomica* (1601), and demonstrated his theory in his pastoral play *Il Pastor Fido* (1602).[77] As Ros King noted, Edwards predated Guarini, and situated his tragical comedy in a city instead of a pastoral landscape, and deserved more academic attention as an example of the English tradition of satirical writing.[78] The relations between tragicomedy and pastorals as well as satyr plays is indicated on the architectural title page to Ben Jonson's (1572-1637) *The Works of Benjamin Jonson* (1616) which shows Tragicoemedia flanked by a satyr and a shawm-playing countryman on the top. Why is a pastoral setting closely linked with tragicomedy? George Puttenham's (1529–1590), *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) provided a brief answer:

---

[76] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher, Provided by The Internet Classics Archive, 7. http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[77] Giovanni Battista Guarini's ideas come to Britain in John Fletcher's (1579–1625) *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608-09).

[78] Ros King, *The Works of Richard Edwards: Politics, Poetry and Performance in Sixteenth-century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

> under the vaile of homely persons, and in rude speeches to insinuate and glance at greater matters, and such as perchance had not been safe to have been disclosed in any other sort.[79]

Puttenham regarded pastoral as a useful political vehicle, since it allowed one to speak opaquely and tangentially about 'greater matters' in a safe way. And these 'greater matters' probably included politics, as it was not always safe to talk about that in public and sometimes, even in private spaces. But these 'greater matters' concerned everyone, including theatre practitioners of all genres. Thus tragicomedies were often under the veil of a pastoral setting, or a setting of remote space-time away from the audience's immediate present.

In recent times, the term 'tragicomedy' has been reinvigorated to explain the thin line between 'tragedy' and 'comedy' in mixed-genre plays. A recent addition to the study of tragicomedy is Verna Foster's *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy* (2004), which argued that tragicomedy perceived and communicated human experience through dramaturgical and emotional fusion of tragic and comic elements. Tragicomedy offered a more comprehensive and complex understanding of human experience, and evoked more complicated, pleasurably tragic, painfully comic response in its audience.[80] Foster's argument repeated the polar keywords of 'tragic' and 'comic', and did not pay enough attention to emotions beyond the two polar terms. Thus, her study is confined by the very name of 'tragicomedy' and indicates the limitation of the term of 'tragicomedy' itself: 'tragicomedy' suggests the combination

---

[79] George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1936), p. 38. I have modernised the spelling.

[80] Verna Foster, *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy* (London: Routledge, 2004).

of tragedy and comedy alone, and any discussion of or under the term will be confined by the (unsettled) definition of 'tragedy' and 'comedy'. Thus this term is incapable of describing more complicated dramaturgical structures.

The limitation of the term 'tragicomedy' has been pointed by Ros King in the edited collection, *Early Modern Tragicomedy* (2007). King expressed her reluctance to use 'tragicomedy' because the term had come to signify a V-turn plot development – a play which started tragically and turned out well.[81] King developed her above thought in *The Works of Richard Edwards* (2001), and proposed to describe Shakespeare's structure as 'mixed genre' as she argued that Shakespeare comes to realise that the genre has greater possibilities if it is more consistently mixed up.[82] Unlike 'tragicomedy', 'mixed-genre' no longer requires one to 'plump for one side, one angle, or the other.'[83] In other words, a 'mixed-genre' does not demand one to take sides, either the 'tragic' or the 'comic' one. This thesis likewise prefers 'mixed-genre' to 'tragicomedy' because 'tragicomedy' has been understood primarily from a textual perspective rather than from the perspective of actual performance. According to OED definition of 'tragicomedy' – it contains both tragic and comic elements in the plot, and the term does not take into consideration the audience's reception, and cannot explain for situations when a tragic event on the stage triggers laughter among the audience.[84]

---

[81] Ros King, 'In lieu of democracy, or how not to lose your head: theatre and authority in Renaissance England', in *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 84-100 (p. 94).

[82] Ros King, 'In lieu of democracy', p. 94.

[83] Ros King, 'In lieu of democracy', p. 99.

[84] https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/204368?redirectedFrom=tragicomedy#eid (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

The genres are mixed not only in Western plays, but also for Chinese drama predating the introduction of Western drama in the late 19th century. The comic elements accompany a poor orphan girl's tragic story in the earliest extant Chinese play, *First Place Scholar Zhang Xie*, and appear in *The Orphan of Zhao* and *The Injustice to Dou'er*, the two most tragic Chinese plays acclaimed internationally. But just as in English literary criticism, this generic mix has not been valued in Chinese theatre studies. Current Chinese theatre studies are highly influenced by Western theories, and Chinese drama are judged according to outdated Western genre theories; some of which are also inaccurately represented during the process of translation and transmission. Established Chinese drama scholars like Wang Jisi divided the repertoire of Chinese drama into 'comedies' and 'tragedies' by editing the influential *Top Ten Classical Chinese Tragedies* (1991) and *Top Ten Classical Chinese Comedies* (1991).[85] Most recently, a Chinese National Social Science Funding project (2021) pinpointed the lack of 'tragedies' in traditional Chinese theatre.[86] In short, the generic mixture found everywhere in classical Chinese drama has been ignored or cut in order to fit the Western definition of 'tragedy' and 'comedy'.

At the root of confusions over genre distinctions is the debate about the definition of 'genre'. The general term, 'genre', has been inviting criticism since the Romantic era: the German romantic critic August Wilhelm Schlegel has proposed to

---

85 Wang Jisi, ed. *Zhongguo shida gudian xiju ji* 中国十大古典喜剧集 *Top Ten Classical Chinese Comedies* (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1991), Wang Jisi, ed. *Zhongguo shida gudian beiju ji* 中国十大古典悲剧集 *Top Ten Classical Chinese Tragedies*, two vols. (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1991).

86 Project no. 16BZX089, Sun Chang-hong, *Zhongguo chuantong shixing zhengyi yu beiju de quefa* 中国传统诗性正义与悲剧的缺乏 'Chinese Traditional Poetic Justice and the Lack of Tragedy', *Huazhong University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 35.5(2021): 43-51.

abolish the outdated generic names of 'comedy' and 'tragedy' and to simply call modern dramatic works as 'romantic' which 'delights in mixtures and contrarieties.'[87] Indeed it is next to impossible to define a play according to a strictly defined generic name. 'What's in a name?' (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.43) asks Juliet. A 'name' is just an airy word that had it been written, Romeo could tear it (2.2.53-7). Similarly in Taoism, 'The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name.'[88] In other words, a thing that can be named will be confined by its 'name': the 'name' sets a boundary which prevents it from changing and developing; besides, a 'name' also limits one's perception of the thing. In the same vein, a thing that can be defined will be confined by its definition. This thesis is suspicious of definitive generic names like 'tragedy' and 'comedy' because it is hard, if not impossible, to describe one thing as neatly tragic or comic. Besides, emphasising the difference between the two genres, prevents one to see the possible transferability between seemingly opposite ends.[89]

Contrasting emotions in ancient Chinese poetry and theory

Compared with rigid definition and distinction of genre, it is more preferable to mix different generic elements in a play. A traditional Chinese theory is 'depicting sadness against a jubilant setting', with the classic example of a line with more than 2000 years of history from *Book of Poetry*: 'willows were luxuriant when I left for the

---

[87] August Schlegel, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 12 vol. (Leipzig, 1846-47), 6:158, qtd. in Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 180-1.

[88] Lao Zi, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing/zh?en=on (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[89] See Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 180-1.

battleground. Now when I look back, it snows heavily.'[90] The spring willow is symbol of joyful natural scenery, which is at odds with the grief of the departing soldier. And the snowy winter represents a sad scenario which is a foil to the soldier's joy for coming back safe and sound. This aspect was also expounded by Li Yü, who suggested that the dramatist should embed moral tones in 'mad' speeches and embed tears in laughter.[91] In Shakespeare's plays, Posthumus will be 'happier much by his affliction made' (*Cymbeline*, 5.5.202), and Juliet suggests, 'Though news be sad, yet tell them merrily' (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.5.22).

In *Mudan ting*, the theory of contrast is evident when Madam Du cries, 'Ah Heaven, when others are surrounded by seven healthy sons, why must my only daughter sicken and pine?' (*MDT*, 86; *PP*, 75) Other households' promising population growth is the opposite of Madam Du's desperation, thus the tragic mood is accentuated. Later in Scene 20, Madam Du cries, 'A cruel empyrean that sends / the flower-despoiling storm / when the moon is at her brightest' (*MDT*, 111; *PP*, 102). Storm is the metaphor for the disease that puts Liniang's life at risk. The full moon is the symbol of family union, especially at the Mid-autumn Festival. On this joyful day when every other household is thanking heaven for the blessing, the family of Du is witnessing Liniang breathe her last breath.

The literary theory of contrast is also evidenced in other academic disciplines. William James's *Principles of Psychology* introduces the phenomenon of successive and simultaneous contrast through the example of sight – 'in general the colour and brightness of one object always apparently affect the colour and brightness of any

---

90 For a translation of the complete poem, see https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/cai-wei?searchu=昔我往矣&searchmode=showall#result (last accessed on 15 June 2023). Also see Shu Wu, *Shu Wu on Poem* (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 2016), pp. 92-3.

91 Li Yü, *Xianqing Ouji*, pp. 56-7.

other object seen simultaneously with it or immediately after.'[92] What we have seen will remain in our eye's memory and influence what we see successively or simultaneously. Because of the contrast of two objects, a bright object seems to be brighter if the other object is darker than itself, and vice versa. The law of contrast also applies to sound. In Wang Ji's poem 'In the Ruoye River', the mountain is more tranquil against the noisy chirping of birds.[93]

The theory of contrast further finds correspondence in neuroscience: an experiment by Mu Xia *et al*, demonstrates that tragic events introduce less intense feelings than tragicomic events.[94] In their experiment, they found that positive and negative events happening to the same people or things in a specific chronological order (i.e., a negative event following a positive event) induce more intense mixed feelings than the same events happening to different people or things. The amount of negative feeling does not vary much in the two sets of contrasting experiment, but the amount of positive feeling increases in the tragicomic event, so the emotion is more intense in the tragicomic group. Based on the theory of contrast, the more diverse the feeling is, the more intense the general effects will be. Compared with a 'tragedy' or a 'comedy' in the traditional sense, a mixed-genre play can trigger more intense and complicated emotional experience.

Unlike their source stories, Shakespeare's and Tang's plays are a mixture of different generic elements. The source for *Romeo and Juliet* is commonly agreed to be Arthur Brooke's narrative poem *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562),

---

92 William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2vols. (London: Dover Publications, 1950, 1st 1890), vol.2, pp. 13-4.

93 For a full English translation of the poem, see https://www.istudy-china.com/on-river-yoya/ (last accessed on 6 Jan 2024).

94 Mu Xia, Jie Chen & Hong Li, 'Tragedy or tragicomedy: Mixed feelings induced by positive and negative emotional events', *Cognition and Emotion*, 30.5(2016): 857-867.

which begins with a lengthy depiction of the Mountain Alps and other scenery in the city of Verona, Italy, and centres around the major characters' affairs with less elaboration on the lower-class characters. A natural pearl begins its life as grit inside an oyster's shell, and the shell of *Mudan ting* has been agreed to be a mediocre 3,000-word *huaben* 话本'Song and Yuan literary form based on vernacular folkstories', *Dù Lìníang mù sè huán hún* 杜丽娘慕色还魂 *Du Liniang's Resurrection* written by Chao Li.[95] It is significant that both dramatists forsook the didactic tone evident in their source stories. Arthur Brooke intends to provide some moral lessons in 'To the reader', and the preface of Tang's source story states that the intention of the novella is to 'provide a lesson for the future generation'. Instead, both dramatists hide their serious message in jokes and juxtapose humour throughout for the sake of moral safety.

Negligence of the mixed-genre structure in performances and in studies

Despite the mixed-genre structure of both plays, the majority of past productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* especially before the 1950s rewrites and cuts the text to avoid mixing different generic elements. Theatre scholars and practitioners have been agitated about the genre of both plays, but agitating about whether a play fits in with a certain genre is upside down, or in an inappropriate metaphor, like cutting the feet to fit the shoes. More often than not, 'over-rigid assumptions about genre and style have reduced and distorted the dramatic and intellectual experience the plays can offer'.[96]

---

95 Most scholars agree that Chao Li (1507-1560) is the author of the source story, see Zou Zizhen, *Tang Xianzu and His Dramatic Works* (Nanchang: Jiangxi Gaoxiao Publishing House, 2016), pp. 275-6.

96 Brian Gibbons, *Shakespeare and Multiplicity* (CUP, 1993), p. 4.

Romeo and Juliet have been modeled as a 'romantic tragedy', and in order to meet the genre's expectation of tragedy, adapters often rewrite the play to accentuate the emotionalism of the tragic forbidden love. *The History and Fall of Caius Marius*, Thomas Otway's 1679 adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, adds the detail that Juliet (Lavinia) wakes before Romeo (Marius) dies. Later in 1744, Theophilus Cibber played Romeo, and retained Otway's addition. The third quarter of the eighteenth century notably marks the watershed towards 'a more expressive emotionalism' in England.[97] Cibber's contemporary, David Garrick, develops Otway's addition into 60 lines of dialogue and allows Juliet to revive before Romeo dies of poison, giving the lovers a limited amount of time alive together.[98] According to theatre reviews, this added scene is remembered as 'a moving closing to the story'.[99] This addition can also be seen in contemporary productions. In Baz Luhrmann's 1996 movie version, Juliet awakes just as Romeo drinks the poison; she watches him die before shooting herself.

In Jiangsu Kunqu Theatre's 2016 *kunqu* adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Zuì xīn huā* 醉心花 *Belladonna*, the adapter Luo Zhou also arranges Ying Ling (Juliet) to watch Ji Can (Romeo) die in her arm before she commits suicide with a hairpin. A close examination of the text of *Belladonna* reveals a heavy cut of Shakespearean characters such as Mercutio, Benvolio, Prince Escalus, and Paris. Luo Zhou streamlines Shakespeare's plot, and drastically cuts subplots and minor characters to

---

[97] George Winchester Stone, '*Romeo and Juliet*: The Source of Its Modern Stage Career', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15.2(1964): 191–206 (p. 191).

[98] For a more detailed discussion on Garrick's rewriting of the tomb scene, see Katherine L. Wright, *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in Performance: Traditions and Departures* (Lewiston: Mellen University Press, 1997), p. 58.

[99] Katherine L. Wright, *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in Performance: Traditions and Departures*, p. 133.

make room for the elaboration of the romantic narrative. Luo's practice is similar to the Restoration and the eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare, where subplots and minor characters were cut away to focus on the love story. In Luo's adaptation, apart from the titular lovers, other characters are simplified as either good or bad, without moral dilemmas, and become more or less flat characters who lack the space to develop their characteristics, again reinforcing the stereotype that traditional Chinese theatre lacks profundity in character construction. As a consequence, *Belladonna* has a very different tone from *Romeo and Juliet*, as the original literary allusion and elements of humour, sex, and social satire are lost in the adaptation.

Similarly for past productions of *Mudan ting*, the poignancy of Liniang's early death, especially the sorrow of seeing one's child die has been accentuated. A great number of stage directions are added to show Liniang's parents' bereavement in *kunqu* miscellanies published in the late Ming and Qing dynasties. Popular *kunqu* miscellanies include *Zhuibaiqiu* 缀白裘, *Yuelu yin* 月露音, *Cilin yixiang* 词林逸响, *Wanhe qingyin* 万壑清音, *Yichun jin* 怡春锦, *Chantou bailian erji* 缠头百练二集, *Xuexue pu* 玄雪谱, *Zui yiqing* 醉怡情 and *Shenyin jiangulu* 审音鉴古录.[100]

In addition to rewriting, adapters also cut comic elements in *Romeo and Juliet*. Garrick cuts 'jingles and quibbles' because he thinks jokes and wordplay are more suitable for the presentation of comedy rather than tragedy. In the mourning scene for Juliet, Garrick cuts musicians' banter with Peter, and ends the scene with Juliet's funeral procession to ensure that the atmosphere is coherently tragic throughout. The cutting of musicians is common practice among productions of *Romeo and Juliet* until today. In the performance history of *Mudan ting* as well, comic elements such as

[100] See Zhang Xueli, 'A Study on Commentaries, Revisions and Miscellanies of *Mudan ting*' 《牡丹亭》评点本、改本及选本研究 (Fudan University: PhD thesis, 2010).

Sister Stone and Tutor Chen's wordplay in the mourning scene for Liniang are removed; in contrast, elements that depict Liniang's tragedy are elaborated, most notably in Scene 20 'Keening', which is renamed as 'Soul's Departure' in *kunqu* miscellanies.

Not only in performance practices, but also in academic studies, mixed-genre structure is not studied comprehensively. Though *Romeo and Juliet* have long been understood as a work of mixed form, previous discussions are limited by the genre mindset. Susan Snyder (1970) proposed that it would not be sufficient, or useful to read *Romeo and Juliet* only in the light of a treatise on tragedy, and thus she introduced the elements of comedy to explain the play.[101] Snyder identified the opening comic patterns of the action and of the characters, and stated that comic patterns were later transformed or discarded in order to compose the pattern of tragedy. Comic elements however are not confined to the opening but distributed throughout the play. More than forty years after Snyder, Brian Gibbons' chapter titled 'Dramaturgy' in the *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare* argued that the juxtaposition of opposites, hornpipes and funerals was a central characteristic of *Romeo and Juliet* and was a powerful example of generic mingling.[102] But he did not further explore the effect of the 'generic mingling' from the dramaturgical perspective as his chapter title promised; probably influenced by Snyder, he described the play's dramatic structure as follows:

---

[101] Susan Snyder, '*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy', *Essays in Criticism*, 20.4(1970): 391-402.

[102] Brian Gibbons, 'Dramaturgy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 258-275 (260-1).

> [The play] begins as apparently a romantic comedy but in Act 3 a random encounter of young hotheads sparks a street brawl and suddenly two men lie dead. That Romeo is merely banished for a killing half-acknowledges that this is no right tragedy, and seems to promise tragicomic reconciliation. Yet Shakespeare, having hinted at tragicomedy, soon disrupts it with an extraordinary sequence of accidents at rapidly accelerating speed, ending in multiple deaths.[103]

Like Snyder, Gibbons' analysis of the play is full of generic names like 'romantic comedy', 'no right tragedy', 'tragicomic reconciliation', and 'tragicomedy' which presumed that the definition of those terms was not only well-settled, but also well-known to the reader. Unfortunately, neither was the case. Without drawing examples of actual staging, Gibbons' tone of argument - '...seems to promise...' - was rather ambiguous and thus rendered the argument less convincing.

In more recent studies on the mix in Shakespeare's plays, Aileen Young Liu's 2018 PhD dissertation, ' "From Strange to Stranger": the Problem of Romance on the Shakespearean Stage', comments on Brian Gibbons' *Shakespeare and Multiplicity*:

> He [Brian Gibbons] suggests that this mix reflects the play's [*Cymbeline*'s] 'insistent concern with multiple possibilities of interpretation.' But ultimately, Gibbons argues, the playwright manages to order all of this material 'into a compact and patterned form,' 'transforming prolix and disproportioned chronicle into a symbolic drama.' But the play's mix of different genres and

[103] Brian Gibbons, 'Dramaturgy', pp. 258-275 (260-1).

modes does not take the form of the melting pot or the stable, ordered mosaic that Gibbons portrays here.[104]

Gibbons proposed the notion of 'multiplicity' to understand the form and style of Shakespeare's plays: 'multiple codes woven together in complex designs, often involving eclectic mixing of generic elements'.[105] But there is also a problem in Gibbons' methodology as Liu mentioned: Gibbons proposed that each play had evolved to be 'a compact and patterned form', in other words, Gibbons tried to give a neat conclusion while the 'messy' play itself refused to be reigned. Based on *Shakespeare and Multiplicity*, Aileen Liu analysed the mixture via what she termed as 'plural perspective' - 'keeping multiple genres constantly in play through multiple characters and the stories they tell; by avoiding the domination of one genre, action, or character'.[106] Liu's 'plural perspective' is actually describing the phenomenon of mixing, without further studying the function of the mixture.

Although *Mudan ting* is understood as a mixture of tragic and comic elements, previous scholars have mainly adopted a textual approach. They listed the 'comic' and 'tragic' aspects in both plays without further questioning the reason for this mixture. Ye Changhai summarised *Mudan ting* as a profound tragicomedy after

---

[104] Aileen Young Liu, '"From Strange to Stranger": the Problem of Romance on the Shakespearean Stage' (University of California, Berkeley: PhD diss, 2018), pp. 58-9. Brian Gibbons, *Shakespeare and Multiplicity*, pp. 47, 24, 30.

[105] Brian Gibbons, *Shakespeare and Multiplicity*, pp. 1-2.

[106] Aileen Young Liu, '"From Strange to Stranger": the Problem of Romance on the Shakespearean Stage', pp. 58-9.

pointing out the 'tragic' and 'comic' aspects in the plot and in the character.[107] Ye's opinion was echoed and cited in Cyril Birch's comparative study of the tragicomic pattern in *Mudan ting* and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.[108] Cyril Birch's textual study of *Mudan ting* concluded that there was a 'sudden shift of mood from tragic first half of play to gathering comic resolution' as the sombre motif of cloistered maiden's longing for love grew in intensity.[109] But the ending of *Mudan ting* is anything but a 'comic resolution', and the clear-cut 'tragic first half' ignores the comic elements in scenes like Scene 7 'The Schoolroom', which is agreed by Birch himself to be a traditional comic skit poking fun at the pedant.

Generally speaking, influenced by the 'genre mindset', studies on *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* have avoided interpretive complexities, as they tend to narrow the play down in order to confine it within a certain genre. In order to fairly examine the dramaturgical structure of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, it is important to first of all leave the genre mindset, and then analyse in rigorous detail the rationale of mixing different generic elements throughout and the effects such mixture may have on an audience.

---

[107] Ye Changhai, '*Mudan ting* de beixiju yinsu' 牡丹亭的悲喜剧因素 'The Tragicomic Structure of *Mudan ting*', in *Mudan ting: Antou yu changshang* 牡丹亭：案头与场上 *Mudan ting: Page and Stage*), ed. Ye Changhai (Shanghai: Sanlian, 2001), pp. 38-45.

[108] Cyril Birch, 'A comparative view of dramatic romance: *The Winter's Tale* and *Mudan ting*', in *Interpreting Culture through Translation. A Festschrift for D.C. Lau*, eds. Roger T. Ames, Chan Sin-wai and Mau-sang Ng (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1991), pp. 59-77.

[109] Cyril Birch, 'A comparative view of dramatic romance: *The Winter's Tale* and *Mudan ting*', p. 63.

The mixed-genre structure on the page and the stage

To comprehensively examine the effects of dramaturgical mix, it is important not only to leave behind the genre mindset, but also to take the stage conditions, the performance conventions and audience's response into consideration. I employ Bertrand Evans's notion of discrepant awareness to analyse the complicated plotting and emotional structure for both characters and audiences.[110] By discrepant awareness, Evans elaborates differences in knowledge between characters and between characters and the audience. 'Three possibilities are available to a dramatist: he can keep the audience less informed than the participants, equally aware with them, or more aware than they.'[111] Audience's advantage in awareness opens up exploitable gaps both between audience and characters and among the characters. Based on Evans' notion of 'discrepant awareness', R. S. White and Ciara Rawnsley further develop 'discrepant emotional awareness' to recognise and value of 'mixed emotions' felt by different characters and by the audience.[112]

Via discrepant awareness and discrepant emotional awareness, both Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu create a complicated cognitive and emotional picture among the characters and between the character and the audience. 'The tension between the will of the audience and that of the actors is made for exciting spectator sport'.[113] As the audience has superior awareness, they cannot help but giggle when the characters act out intense feelings that are at odds with the true situation on the basis of partial or

110 Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), pp. 1-30.
111 Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies*, pp. vii-viii.
112 R. S. White and Ciara Rawnsley, 'Discrepant emotional awareness in Shakespeare', in *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding affect in Shakespeare and his contemporaries*, eds. Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan (Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 241-263 (244).
113 Ros King, 'In lieu of democracy', p. 88.

even false information. In the following examples, I will show how the same scene is felt differently when read on the page and when performed on the stage. This thesis is also interested in situations where the characters and the audience feel differently towards the same scene, for example, when the audience laughs through the characters' tears, or, when the audience cries through the characters' laughter. The same line feels totally different for the character and the audience, which is the magic of theatre.

In the following sections, this thesis incorporates Elizabethan as well as the late-Ming dynasty theatrical conditions, performance conventions and the audience's reception to examine the feud in *Romeo and Juliet*, the war in *Mudan ting* and their deadly consequences. The feud, war, and death may be brutal on the page, but when presented on the stage, it may turn out to be a different story.

'Humour in death'

In the opening fight of *Romeo and Juliet*, Capulet's servant, Sampson says to Gregory, 'I will bite my thumb at them, which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it.' (1.1.52-3) Sampson bites his thumb, and he manages to irritate the Montague's servants via this gesture.[114] It was explained that biting one's thumb used to be a gesture of insult during Shakespeare's time. But there is a lack of other historical or literary records that report the same insulting gesture. In fact, the modern English definition of this gesture - placing a thumb behind the front top teeth and then flicking it out - traces its origin to *Romeo and Juliet*, and this gesture becomes the synonym of 'flipping

---

[114] For a chapter-length discussion of the history of the thumb-biting gesture, see Miranda Fay Thomas, *Shakespeare's Body Language: Shaming Gestures and Gender Politics on the Renaissance Stage* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), chapter 1 'Thumb-biting: Performing Toxic Masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*', especially pp. 23-36.

someone off' because Sampson explains that it is 'a disgrace' to the Montagues. If the usage of this gesture was common among the audience, there is no need for Sampson to explain it.[115] In today's global context, it is also needless to add that sticking up one's middle finger expresses contempt, dissent, displeasure, rage, and even rebellion. If something needs to be explained, it is not a common knowledge. Thus it is fair to guess that Shakespeare actually assigned an insulting meaning to the gesture of biting one's thumb in *Romeo and Juliet*.

But it is worth questioning why Shakespeare took the labour of creating a new gestural meaning when there is a ready option: sticking up one's middle finger to express contempt and disgrace which originally meant to threaten violent sexual penetration. In Latin, the middle finger was the *digitus impudicus*, meaning the 'shameless, indecent or offensive finger'. Presumably sticking up the middle finger was commonly used in Shakespeare's time as well, and Sampson could easily show his negative attitudes toward the Montagues by sticking up his middle finger without explaining its meaning to the audience. More importantly, the gesture of biting one's thumb can look more funny and sexually appealing than offensive. As fingers share similar shape with the phallus, and the mouth resembles labia, the two fleshy folds of the vulva, nicknamed 'vaginal lips', biting one's thumb imitated the process of oral sex, and this gesture could be interpreted as sexually inviting. The gesture's intended meaning of 'disgrace' is incongruous with its actual meaning, and the incongruity is a potent source for humour according to the incongruity theory of humour. Thus it

---

[115] For example, in India, Pakistan, and cities such as Naples, Italy, thumb-biting is a well-known offensive gesture - known as the 'cutis' gesture where one makes a fist and flicks the thumb off the front teeth. See Romana Lefevre, *Rude Hand Gestures of the World: A Guide to Offending without Words* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2011), p. 110.

would be rather funny when the actor performing Sampson bit his thumb at the Elizabethan playgoers.

Not only in the West, in the Chinese culture as well, biting one's finger can be regarded as a sexual symbol. The picture below portrays a maid in Li Yü's play, *Lían xīang bàn* 怜香伴 *Two Belles in Love*. The maid is performed by *kunqu* actor Wu Si from the Northern *Kunqu* Theatre, and this production is part of the theatre's Guanqifu series. Against the rich colour of red and green costume, her index finger symbolises the phallus pointing against her glossy red lips.

Figure 6 Wu Si biting her thumb. Guanqifu Kunqu Studio production of *Two Belles in Love*, 25 April 2016, Zhengyici Theatre, Beijing. Photo by Feng Hai. Courtesy of Guanqifu Kunqu Studio.

In Peter Sellars's opera adaptation of *Peony Pavilion*, when Liniang and Mengmei are presenting sexual intercourse, the *kunqu* actress Hua Wenyi bit her thumb to indicate that she was bearing the pain of intercourse. The above examples show how 'biting

one's thumb' deviates from the meaning that Sampson suggests and creates an incongruity that may cause the audience to laugh.

Figure 7 'Biting one's thumb' in Peter Sellars's *Peony Pavilion*, 5 March 1999, Zellerbach Hall, University of California at Berkeley, courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

In addition to the controversial hand gesture, the phrase 'keep the peace' appears only twice in *Romeo and Juliet*, and its first appearance is in the first brawl.

> Benvolio: I do but keep the peace. Put up thy sword,
>
> Or manage it to part these men with me.
>
> Tybalt: What, drawn, and talk of peace?
>
> (1.1.77-79)

Benvolio draws his rapier to keep the peace, which is a joke in Tybalt's eye as 'rapier' and 'peace' hardly sits comfortable with each other. Benvolio's drawing of his weapon further irritates Tybalt, and the following fight is against Benvolio's original

wish of keeping the peace. Meanwhile, Mercutio's death is a direct result of Romeo trying to keep the peace – Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo's raised arms. Due to the discrepant awareness between characters, Tybalt is not aware that Romeo has married Tybalt's cousin Juliet, and thus he does not understand why Romeo explains why they should drop weapons. Tybalt is further enraged by Romeo's elliptical explanation. Romeo's peace-keeping effort unfortunately leads to tragedy in embattled societies.

In the second fight, the dying Mercutio is still making very bad jokes 'Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man' (3.1.93-4), and his double entendre has a sense of grotesqueness about it. After Romeo slays Tybalt, the citizen enters looking for 'he that killed Mercutio, Tybalt that murderer' he then commands the dead Tybalt: 'Up, sir, go with me.' (3.1.135). The citizen is unaware of Tybalt's death. Perhaps being irritated by no response from Tybalt, the citizen adds 'I charge thee in the prince's name, obey.' (3.1.136). We might well laugh (if the production allows it) but cannot help but being shocked when the absolute disaster of death is strangely so akin to humour.

Not only the description of death, but also the performance of death is full of improbabilities. 'Theatrical poisoning scenes are also usually untrue to nature. It is popularly believed that when a fatal dose of laudanum or morphine is swallowed the victim immediately sinks into a deathlike sleep, as is commonly seen on the stage, whereas the first effect of this poison taken in like quantity is invariably to excite and enliven.'[116] As we can see, after Romeo drinks the poison, he acclaims 'true

116 Maine Farmer, 'Absurd Stage Deaths: Nature Outrageously Violated Instead of Being Shown a Mirror', *Augusta* 63.17(1895): 2.

apothecary'. In fact, a true apothecary will not give Romeo the leave to reflect upon the poison's effect.

The comic military characters and death in *Mudan ting*

Like the comic depiction of fight and death in *Romeo and Juliet*, the war in *Mudan ting* is full of comic potential. Most previous studies on the war background are based on the text alone without taking consideration of the stage conditions. They point out the brutality of the war and invasion, yet they take little heed of the humorous depiction of martial characters.[117] The war is like a children's play: in Scene 15 'A Spy for the Tartars', the 'barbarian' prince's attendants recommend, since the West Lake in the South is so beautiful, 'let's borrow it and have a bit of fun', and the Prince replies that he has already 'stolen' the beautiful scenery by sending 'an artist on a secret mission to make a painting of the entire scene' (*MDT*, 82; *PP*, 74). The nomads **borrow** and **steal** the West Lake for **fun**.

What adds to the comic aspect to the depiction of war is the cross-gender performance where Dame Li is performed by a male actor, and in Scene 47 'Raising the Siege', the Tartar general belongs to the role type of *lao dan* 'old female', and the male interpreter is also cross-dressed and belongs to the role type of *tie* 'supporting female'. The cross-dressing is for comic effects, but this practice is not observed in modern *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting*. In Pai Hsien-yung's 'young lovers' edition of the play (2004), Dame Li is played by Lv Jia, a beautiful young female actor in the role type of *wǔ dàn* 武旦'martial female role', and Sister Stone is performed by a female actor, different from Tang Xianzu's cross-gender character design.

---

[117] See for example, Zhang Jinke, '*Mudan ting*'s Satire and Criticism of the Late-Ming Society'《牡丹亭》对晚明社会的讽刺与批判, *Ming Zuo Xin Shang* 27(2022): 96-8.

Besides, the officials in the frontier do not have much common sense and they are the source of comic effects as suggested by their role type of *chou*. For example, when Li Quan besieges the city Huaian, Du Bao comes to rescue the city, and he informs the local officials that Li is employing the strategy of 'locking [the city]'. The local military officer inquire about the strategy, confused with whether it is Li Quan or the city Huaian that is locked. Obviously, it is the city that is besieged by Li Quan, and the military officer's ignorance towards war strategies poses one question whether his competence equates with his post. In addition to the comic officials' roles, the rebels are stylised as base martial characters contributing to 'gross humour and vivid spectacle'.[118] In their conversation, wordplay is abundant. When the bandit Li Quan was about to summon his wife to discuss military strategy, there is a punning on *jian fang* 箭坊 'fletcher', the arrow-maker, and *jian fang* 贱房 'a humble title for one's wife', namely, Dame Li.

The war between the Southern Song dynasty and the rebels causes death. In Scene 45, the rebel heads caught Tutor Chen, an old friend of Du Bao. In order to emotionally crack down Du Bao, the rebels show Chen two heads, and pretend that they are the heads of Du Bao's wife and the maid Chunxiang. The two dead heads in *Mudan ting* bring constantly to mind the topless body in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. Tutor Chen is too scared to identify the real identity of the two human heads, thus he falls into the trap that Li Quan's wife sets for him. The rebel asks Chen to tell Du Bao of the tragic death of Madam Du and Chunxiang. 'I grieve to report the death of your lady wife, at the hands of rebel', says Tutor Chen (*MDT*, 248; *PP*, 259-60). But the audience know the truth that the two 'dead heads' are just stage props, and they feel

[118] Patrick Hanan, *The Invention of Li Yü* (Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 139-40. Though Hanan's major focus is on Li Yü's plays, his observation can be applied to other Chinese plays.

glad that the main characters are still alive and will unite with their family members later. Given the audience's superior awareness, they will probably find Tutor Chen's and Du Bao's tears out of place, which may even lead to laughter. But at the same time, the audience is reminded that though the heads are not those of Madam Du and Chunxiang, there are two innocent women being slaughtered by the rebel, and the danger of the war is real.

Later in Scene 35, 'Resurrection', the Scabby Turtle, Sister Stone's nephew, begins the scene making very bad jokes and boasting about his big 'balls'. He learns that Sister Stone has agreed to Scholar Liu's request to open up Miss Du's grave, and he directly comments that it is not sensible at all: 'Live bride not good enough, he's after a ghost: no sense.' (*MDT*, 201; *PP*, 199) To Scabby Turtle, it is more far-fetched that Scholar Liu and Miss Du are going to be man and wife again, 'What a laugh', as he exclaims. Just like all common people, the audience included, Scabby Turtle's first response to the resurrection is disbelief. But still he chooses to believe it, 'devil talk or not, I've brought some spirit money along.' (*MDT*, 201; *PP*, 199) His reaction is very interesting as it mirrors the audience's first response and their following reaction: neither does the audience believe in the resurrection, in fact they know they are watching a fictional play; but still they choose to believe the validity of the resurrection on the stage.

To facilitate Liniang's resurrection, when Scabby Turtle begins to dig, Liu reminds him to be very careful: 'You've reached the coffin.' Scabby drops his spade in alarm, and cries: 'The officer? Help, we're dead men!'(*MDT*, 202; *PP*, 200) Due to the same sound of *guān* 棺'coffin' and *guān* 官 'officer' in Chinese, the Scabby Turtle misinterprets Liu's word, and brings out the comic effect in the pun. At the moment of resurrection, Sister Stone is still making sexual jokes: 'The nails have

rusted through and the joins have split open. I'd say the young mistress has been off somewhere playing at "clouds and rain" '(*MDT*, 201; *PP*, 199). According to the *Gaotang fu* by the pre-Han-dynasty poet Song Yu, Prince Hui of Chu made love in a dream to a beautiful woman who told him, 'At dawn I am the morning clouds, at dusk the driving rain.' Later the term 'clouds and rain' became a metaphor for sexual intercourse.[119] Via the metaphor of 'clouds and rain', Sister Stone is commenting that Liniang's spirit has fled somewhere else for the enjoyment of sex.

The mourning in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*

Our society teaches us not to laugh at serious situations, like deaths, funerals and mourning scenes. Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu surprise the audience by violating the accepted social conventions; they play with the institutionalised patterns of emotions - no laughter during death, mourning and funeral - and add comic jokes throughout. The two mourning scenes – Act IV Scene V of *Romeo and Juliet* and Scene 20 'Keening' of *Mudan ting* - are the most typical examples of Shakespeare's and Tang's juxtaposition of different emotional modes.[120] Both Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu juxtapose a variety of attitudes and narratives concerning the same events - Liniang's and Juliet's (apparent) death. Unlike Brooke's single presentation of the response towards Juliet's apparent death and funeral preparation, Shakespeare provides an almost kaleidoscopic view of the same event. Similarly, Tang Xianzu elaborates the

[119] See Birch's translation notes of *The Peony Pavilion*, p. 341.

[120] On the possible connection between the female mourning in medieval drama and Shakespeare's plays, see Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 1-28.

simple and uninteresting description of Liniang's early death in the source story, and composes a quadruple perspective showing each of the concerned characters' attitudes toward Liniang. The mourning of the female protagonists' family and the quarrel among the minor characters are juxtaposed with each other.

The complicated emotional picture in the mourning scene of *Romeo and Juliet* can be interpreted via Friar Lawrence's observation '[n]ature's tears are reason's merriment' (4.5.86). His statement gains multiple meanings because of the characters' different levels of awareness in the play. By saying 'nature's tears are reason's merriment', Friar Lawrence is offering banal Christian explanation of death as consolation for the Capulets. He means that now Juliet is advanced to heaven, a better place compared with the living world, her family should feel happy for her. Here, 'nature's tears' means that it is natural for one to shed tears for the loss of a loved one; but if one uses the reasoning of religion, and thinks that the dead person is now in heaven, those left behind should be satisfied and be merry. Friar Lawrence's words is similar to Ben Jonson's mourning for the death of his son.[121] The rhetoric of Friar Lawrence tries to temper, soften, and attenuate the sting of death, and persuade the Capulets to get over Juliet's death. The Friar's platitude of Christianity speaks to the Capulets as they listen to his word, and start to prepare for Juliet's funeral.

The Friar is often been accused of 'playing God' in previous criticism, and this argument can be further enhanced with the discrepant awareness between the stage and the auditorium. The Friar appears to be the all-knowing character in the play, although of course his confidence in what he knows is misplaced: he does not know what has happened to Romeo. Though the Friar consoles the family with platitude, he

---

[121] https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44455/on-my-first-son (last accessed on 12 January 2024).

clearly knows that Juliet is not dead – she loses life symptoms due the effect of sleeping potion he has given her. Therefore there is no need to mourn for her. Except he might think that their mourning for her is a way for them to learn what they really feel about her. Meanwhile, his puns are full of meaning for an alert audience. When the audience take into consideration the Capulets' earlier mistreatment of Juliet, they can hear Friar Lawrence's multiple meanings through his wordplay and join the Friar in teasing the Capulets. The punning of 'ill' in 'in this love, you love your child so ill' (4.5.75) and '[t]he heavens do lour upon you for some ill' (4.5.94) adds complexity to Friar Laurence's rhetoric. On one hand, the Friar seems to complain about the Capulets' overt mourning, which is ill and sinful according to Christianity. On the other hand, the Friar criticizes the Capulets' 'ill' way of arranging a 'hasty' marriage against Juliet's will.

When we consider Friar Lawrence's previous line, 'all the better is it for the maid: / Your part in her you could not keep from death' (4.5.71-2), the satirical meaning is further accentuated. All the better is it for Juliet to take the sleeping potion and to pretend to be dead so that she can escape the forced marriage. 'Your part in her' - The Capulets' control over Juliet is exactly what drives her desperate and makes her choose to take the suspicious vial. To the alert audience, it is not difficult to hear the hidden meaning in Friar Lawrence's word.

Scholars have long noted the exaggerated mourning for Juliet,[122] and the argument could be enhanced by comparing Arthur Brooke's and Shakespeare's depiction of the mourning, contrasting the mourning for Juliet with the previous mourning for Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*, and the mourning for both Romeo and

---

[122] See Simon Palfrey, Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 214-8.

Juliet in the final scene. Via the contrast, the exaggeration of the Capulet family's reaction to Juliet's apparent death will be evident.

Capulet behaves rather modestly in Brooke's narrative, 'he ne had the power his daughter to be-weep, / Ne yet to speak, but long is forced his tears and plaint to keep' (l.2453-4). But in Shakespeare's narrative, he is rather wordy. Even after pronouncing that Juliet's (apparent) death '[t]ies up my tongue, and will not let me speak' (4.5.31-2), he continues speaking twenty lines.[123] If Juliet's (apparent) death really ties up Capulet's tongue, he would have been silent - Capulet is a silent presence in the earlier mourning for Tybalt in Act 3 scene 1.

Throughout the play, Capulet's chief concern has been to have Juliet matched either '[d]ay, night, late, early, / At home, abroad, alone, in company, / Waking or sleeping' (3.5.176-8). Capulet is discussing the marriage issue of Juliet with Paris starting from Act 1 scene 2 and he spends most of his time in the play with his chosen future son-in-law. Capulet esteems Paris as the ideal match for Juliet as Paris is '[a] gentleman of princely parentage, / Of fair demesnes' (3.5.180-1). Plainly put, Capulet favours Paris as the son-in-law because Paris is born noble and rich, and can help Capulet climb up the social ladder; Capulet cares less about whether Paris really loves Juliet. Capulet tenderly asks Paris whether it is too hasty to arrange the marriage on the forthcoming Thursday (3.4.21-3). In contrast, Capulet simply informs his daughter, the bride-to-be, of the marriage via imperative tone: 'tell her', 'she shall be'. Capulet even threatens to disown Juliet if she does not follow his order to marry Paris.

Even in the mourning scene facing Juliet's body, Capulet's primary interlocutor is Paris. Before Paris comes, Capulet says 7 lines in total excluding his first line, 'For

---

123 For a detailed analysis of the hypocrisy of the Capulet family, see Robert Stagg, 'Against "the Music of Poetry"' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Literature and Music*, ed. Delia da Sousa Correa (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 183-8.

shame, bring Juliet forth; her lord is come.' (4.5.22) After Paris arrives, Capulet eloquently speaks 20 lines which form antithesis with Paris's mourning, as seen in the following example. The antithesis will be self-obvious when each of Paris and Capulet's lines is rearranged and re-placed line by line:

> **Paris**: Beguiled, divorcèd, wrongèd, spited, slain.
>
> **Capulet**: Despised, distressèd, hated, martyred, killed.
>
> **Paris**: Most detestable Death, by thee beguiled,
>
> **Capulet**: Uncomfortable time, why cam'st thou now
>
> **Paris**: By cruel, cruel thee quite overthrown.
>
> **Capulet**: To murder, murder our solemnity?
>
> **Paris**: O love! O life not life, but love in death!
>
> **Capulet**: O child, O child! My soul, and not my child,
>
> Dead art thou.
>
> (4.5.55-64)

In fact Capulet himself will probably find the juxtaposition of 'O life' and 'not life' in Paris's line, 'O life not life', as chop logic, as in Act 3 scene 5, Capulet scolds Juliet:

> Capulet: How, how, how, how, chop logic? What is this?
>
> 'Proud,' and 'I thank you,' and 'I thank you not,'
>
> And yet 'not proud'?
>
> (3.5.149-151)

Despite finding ‘O life not life’ as chop logic, Capulet follows Paris’s pattern, and mourns, ‘O child, O child!’ ‘and not my child’.[124] When this chop-logic line, ‘O child, O child! My soul, and not my child’ is linked with the following line, ‘Dead art thou’ it becomes opaque whether ‘thou’ refers to Capulet’s ‘soul’ or his ‘child’. If ‘thou’ is replaced with ‘my soul’, Capulet’s line is transformed into, ‘Dead art my soul, not my child’, which unknowingly tells the truth that his child is not dead in this scene; while on the other hand, Capulet’s soul is ‘dead’ due to the failed marriage which could have boosted his social status.

Like Capulet, Lady Capulet has very limited conversation with Juliet. When Juliet prays for her mother’s pity and questions about the hasty marriage, Lady Capulet coldly replies, ‘Talk not to me, for I’ll not speak a word: / Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee’ (3.5.204-5). During the mourning scene, she cries to Juliet’s body, ‘Revive, look up, or I will die with thee!’ (4.5.20). The nearly silent character, Lady Montague, dies when she learns the news of her son’s banishment (5.3.209-10). In contrast, Lady Capulet outlives her daughter, and in the last scene, when she clearly sees Juliet dead after being stabbed by a dagger, the death reminds her of herself rather than of her daughter: ‘O me! this sight of death is as a bell / That warns my old age to a sepulcher’ (5.3.205-6). This discrepancy of words and deeds calls us to question whether words are trustworthy.

None of the characters really know Juliet, and they misinterpret frequently her intention. Paris does not know Juliet’s mind: when he meets Juliet in the front of Friar Lawrence’s cell, he presumes that Juliet loves him and demands a kiss. After Friar

---

[124] For an analysis of the ‘bad verse’ in the mourning scene, see Simon Palfrey, Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 217-8.

Lawrence asks Juliet to 'Go home, be merry, give consent / To marry Paris' (4.1.89-90), Juliet, despite having a heavy heart, looks merry, as reported by Nurse, 'See where she comes from shrift with merry look.' (4.2.16) The Nurse used to be Juliet's confidante in arranging the secret marriage, but when Juliet turns to Nurse for comfort; Nurse shrewdly advises Juliet to forget her banished husband and marry rich Paris (3.5.215-34). Nurse's betrayal is the last straw for Juliet's mental collapse.

'[M]uch of grief shows still some want of wit' (3.5.74). In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet's parents are overwhelmed in their mourning and lack wit to discern the reason for their child's (apparent) death. The parents' self-conceitedness leads to Juliet's taking of the suspicious vial, and Juliet's final suicide. The parents' limited ability of perception makes them believe that they are distraught for love of their child. They do not blame themselves for their child's death; instead, they regard themselves as the victim of fickle fate, and condemn the cursed fate and cruel time.

In addition to enable the audience to laugh through the characters' tears, Shakespeare also ends the scene with comic characters. After Juliet's body is carried offstage, a mourning mode is transferred to a contrasting mode of bad jokes. During Shakespeare's time, Peter was performed by the comedian, Will Kemp. Peter comically names musicians as 'Simon Catling', 'Hugh Rebeck', and 'James Soundpost' (4.5.125-131)– Rebeck is an Elizabethan three-stringed plucked instrument, and Catling and soundpost are components of instruments, and the instrument is supposed to be beyond the knowledge of the character of Peter, who lives in Verona as the background of the play suggests.

In the Elizabethan London when 'music meant money' and 'musicians are expensive', the employment of three real musicians on the stage for a short

appearance towards the end of the play is not an economically wise decision.[125] Besides, the musicians hired for Juliet's wedding are silent since they appear on the stage after Paris, and they do not need to sing as the wedding is canceled. Considering the budget, it is almost certain that the three silent musicians are double cast by other minor characters. The most convenient choice is to let the actors previously enacting Capulet's serving men in the same scene put on the musicians' costume and carry the instrument. Thus the three characters named by Peter as 'Simon Catling', 'Hugh Rebeck', and 'James Soundpost' are not real musicians. Peter asks, 'why silver sound' and when the last 'musician', James Soundpost, fails to answer, Peter exclaims, 'O I cry you mercy. You are the singer.' (4.5.125-133) But actually, the poor James is not the singer, thus the line will sound funny and the joke is turned back on Peter. The musicians call Peter 'a serving creature', and indeed the actors in Shakespeare's time were the serving men.

The seemingly irrelevant characters speak 'more truth than their more knowledgeable or 'sane' companions, but they are oblivious in that.[126] In the scene there is an intricate correspondence between Peter's word and Juliet's situation. Peter says to the musicians, 'I will dry-beat you with / an iron wit and put up my iron dagger' (my emphasis, 4.5.125-6). The choice between 'wit' and 'dagger' appears earlier when Juliet turns to Friar Lawrence, she has the strength of will to slay herself with a 'bloody knife' (4.1.62). Sensing her determination, Friar Lawrence says to Juliet, 'If, rather than to marry Count Paris, / Thou hast the strength of will to slay thyself, / Then is it likely thou wilt undertake / A thing like death to chide away this

---

[125] Daniel Albright, *Musicking Shakespeare: A Conflict of Theatres* (University of Rochester Press: New York, 2007), p. 2.

126 Thomas J. Scheff, 'Audience Awareness and Catharsis in Drama,' *Psychoanalytic Review*, 63.4(1976-77): 529-554 (p. 534).

shame, […] And if thou dar'st, I'll give thee remedy.' (4.1.71-6) The Friar persuades her to put down the knife, and to use wit – to drink the vial for an apparent death. The all-knowing audience share with the Friar the secret of Juliet, they wish to see, with merriment, how Juliet will wake and outwit her parents.

The mourning scene in *Mudan ting*

I analyse Liniang's parents' attitudes towards her early death in great textual detail because not many theatre scholars in mainland China read the complete play of *Mudan ting*. Among numerous examples, the highly acclaimed scholar Zhou Xishan with numerous titles including 'professor', 'high-level researcher', wrote: 'When the ghost of Du Liniang was tried in the underworld, the flower **Gods** appeared for testification.'[127] But in fact, there is only one flower spirit in *Mudan ting*, and Zhou's impression of 'flower Gods' is under the influence of *kunqu* productions which usually employ a large number of flower Gods as stage spectacles.

Liniang's parents have not been studied in detail, and the usual interpretation is inadequate. In fact, characters except from Liniang and Mengmei have attracted very little attention from scholars. The usual interpretation of Liniang's father is that he is an upright official, and one of the 'authority figures in traditional Chinese patriarchal society'[128] To maintain Du Bao's upright image, Chen Shi-zheng's 'full' version of *Mudan ting* cut the detail in scene 20 where Liniang's father told Tutor Chen to help prepare with the 'bribery'. Studies on *Mudan ting* usually mention fleetingly that

[127] Zhou Xishan, 'How to compare Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare today? Starting from widespread wrong ideas on the internet' in *2016 China Fuzhou Tang Xianzu Drama Exhibition and Selected Papers of International Academic Summit*, ed. Fuzhou Social Science Association (Fuzhou: Fuzhou Social Science Association Publishing, 2016), pp. 413-29 (426).

[128] Hua Wei, 'Character Design in *The Peony Pavilion*,' *CHINOPERL Journal of Chinese Oral and Performing Literature*, 20.1(1997): 9-44.

Liniang's mother is a prototypical mother, who is kind to her husband and her daughter, and thus lack depth.[129] What follows will be a detailed textual study of both characters in the mourning scene.

In *Mudan ting*, Madam Du is acutely aware of the reason of Liniang's suspicious illness, but she does not show traces of her knowledge in front of Du Bao. As Liniang is entering her womanhood, Madam Du understands the physiological causes for Liniang's amatory passions. In Scene 10 'The Interrupted Dream', Madam Du has subtly discerned Liniang's longing for a loving companion: when Liniang broiders patterns on a dress, 'the flowers and birds are all in pairs' (*MDT*, 56). Later in Scene 16 'An Inquiry of Liniang's Illness', Madam Du confirms her guess of Liniang's longing for love, and she complains to Du Bao that, had Liniang been engaged with a suitor, Liniang would not have fallen ill. And in Scene 20, she regrettably cries that there is a high chance that Liniang would not have died had she been married.

As Madam Du has superior awareness towards Liniang's desire for love, if she really wishes for Liniang's recovery as she claims herself to be the only one that loves her daughter; she should have actively proposed the issue of marriage on the face of Du Bao. But Madam Du prioritizes her role as an obedient wife, and avoids conflict with her husband. 'The inferior status and subordinate position of Chinese women was firmly established and tightly woven into the hierarchical fabric of (Confucian-rationalised)' feudal Chinese society.[130] In the patriarchal society, Madam Du has been taught to follow her father, her husband, and her male child - the female

[129] Li Shanshan, 'An Analysis of Madam Du in *Mudan ting*', *Literature Life*, 7(2011): 4, 7.
130 Paul S, Ropp, *Dissent in Early Modern China. Ju-lin wai-shi and Ch'ing Social Criticism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981), p. 121.

behavioral code of 'thrice-obedience'.[131] She dares not rebut her husband, and her weakness in characteristics indirectly assists her husband in suffocating Liniang's emotional world.

Upon Liniang's death, Madam Du hangs on to the memory that Liniang is so good at *Sì jie* 四诫 *Four Disciplines* written by a female historian, Ban Zhao (ca. 49 - 120) (*MDT*, 112; *PP*, 105). '*Four Precepts*', also known as *Nü jie* 女诫 *Exhortations to Womanly Virtue*, is a typical feudal textbook confining women's mind and physical movement. This book lists 'the thrice-obedience and four virtues' which Madam Du herself is brought up with. The book consistently emphasises men's superiority to women and requires women to be submissive, with which Liniang may not agree. According to Liniang's monologue in Scene 10, her favoured readings are romantic love stories, like *The Romance of the West Chamber*, *Poem on A Red Leaf*, and *The Biography of [the Courtesan] Cui Hui*, books banned from the inner chamber.[132]

Madam Du's tears are not only for Liniang alone: she may also weep for herself. In the original source story, Liniang has a younger brother, thus the concern of progeny does not cross the mind of Du Bao and Madam Du. By contrast, Tang Xianzu makes Liniang the only offspring of the Du family; once Liniang is gone, Madam Du's family position is in danger. As she later tells Chunxiang in Scene 25, Du Bao has always lamented the lack of a male offspring, and he contemplates taking a concubine. Mencius, one of Confucian sages says, 'There are three things which are

---

[131] For the numerous records of 'thrice-obedience', see https://ctext.org/pre-qin-and-han/ens?searchu=三从 (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[132] Among the three books, especially *The Romance of the West Chamber* has been famously banned due to its depiction of sex before marriage without parental consent.

unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them.'[133] Mencius (372 - 289 BC) is, the author of *Mengzi* (also known as *The Works of Mencius*, 340 BC-250 BC), and his main proposal is that human beings are born kind and have compassion towards each other. Du Bao's plan to take a concubine has not been carried out when Liniang was alive. Now Liniang is gone, Madam Du fears that her husband, a Confucian scholar-official will probably put his plan into action (*MDT*, 153; *PP*, 142).

Compared with Madam Du's superior awareness towards the real cause of Liniang's illness, Liniang's father, Du Bao, mistakes Liniang's lovesickness syndrome as simply having a cold. He invites Tutor Chen, a part-time and incompetent medical practitioner, to have a look at Liniang. Du Bao is the patriarchal presence and a devotee of the rigid Cheng-Zhu School of Confucianism which ranks moral doctrines high above human desires and feelings. Du Bao assumes that twenty is the proper age for a woman to get married, as according to the ancient *The Rites of Zhou* ([Warring States] 300 BC-100 BC), one of the Confucian orthodoxy, 'man takes wife at thirty, at twenty woman goes as bride.'(*MDT*, 87; *PP*, 78).[134]

But obviously, Du Bao fails to take notice of Confucius's own interpretation of this line. In *Kôngzi jīayú* 孔子家语 *Records of Confucius's Thoughts and Life* (206 BC - 220), the Duke Ai of of the Lu Dukedom asks Confucius: as men reach sexual maturity at the age of 16, and women reach sexual maturity at 14 and are thus capable of reproduction, isn't it too late for men to get married at 30 and women at 20 according to *The Rites of Zhou*? Confucius explains that 30 is not the minimum

[133] Mencius, *Mencius·Lí lôu shàng* I.26, trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-i (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[134] For English introduction to *The Rites of Zhou*, see https://ctext.org/text.pl?node=36816&if=en&show=parallel&remap=gb (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

marriage age for men, but the maximum age, and for women, 20 is the maximum marriage age instead of the minimum age.[135] In other words, *The Rites of Zhou* encourages men and women to marry early for the sake of reproduction as the mortality rate was high during the Zhou dynasty and the later Warring States period of China. But Du Bao only understands the literal meaning of the quote; since Liniang is just sixteen years old, Du Bao rejects Madam Du's suggestion of finding Liniang a suitor by asserting that how is it possible for their young daughter to experience seven passions (*MDT*, 87; *PP*, 78). He is insensitive towards Liniang's spring passions, ignores and even denies Liniang's natural longing for love. Even after Liniang's death, Du Bao still laments that his only child dies for lack of a miracle-working doctor (*MDT*, 112; *PP*, 106). Similar to the Capulets, Liniang's parents condemn the chilly autumn wind, and the unfair heaven instead of themselves (*MDT*, 110-3; *PP*, 106-8).

Similar to Capulet's consideration of moving up the social ladder via Juliet's marriage, Liniang's father is thinking about his own fortune. Du Bao prioritizes his political ambition, and only pays attention to Liniang's education when he is less occupied by official affairs as he himself confesses in Scene 3 'Admonishing the Daughter'. Du Bao's limited time spent with his daughter is always interrupted by his official business. In Scene 16 'The Invalid', after reminding Madam Du to take good care of Liniang's health, Du Bao left to see a coming messenger, explaining that '[o]fficial duties must claim my attention.'(*MDT*, 88; *PP*, 78-9) As Madam Du complains, 'I fear my husband is too preoccupied with his official visitors to concern himself with his daughter's sickness.'(*MDT*, 88; *PP*, 78) Later in Scene 20, Du Bao's attention to Liniang is also distracted by his official business. He is promoted from 'Prefect of Nan'an' to 'Pacification Commissioner charged with the defence of

[135] See https://ctext.org/kongzi-jiayu/ben-ming-jie/ens (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

Huaiyang'(*MDT*, 113; *PP*, 107). He hastily departs for his new post and entrusts others to prepare his daughter's funeral. His explanation for Liniang's early death is also related with his political career as he says, 'I who sit as judge must pay myself the penalty for past sins.'(*MDT*, 112; *PP*, 106) But in fact, Liniang dies because Du Bao's preoccupation with politics leaves him little time and attention to care for her mental and physical health.

In addition to his political business, what also concerns Du Bao's mind is the lack of a male offspring. Throughout his presence in the play, when he is less concerned with politics, he repeatedly laments for his misfortune in having no son at his knee in Scene 3, 5, 42, and 50.[136] In Scene 5 'Engaging the Tutor', Du Bao comments that Liniang has 'the misfortune to be a girl', and he cries, 'Like Cai Yong lacking sons, to whom shall I pass this rich inheritance of learning?'(*MDT*, 21; *PP*, 17) Du Bao desperately needs a son, rather than a daughter, and he deems it ill-fated that Liniang is not born as a male. A denial of Liniang's gender almost equals to the denial of one's existence. Thus it calls into question the tears Du Bao shed for Liniang.

The tears of Du Bao and Madam Du contrast greatly with Tang Xianzu's attitude toward his own death. One of Tang's seven dying wishes is 'do not cry for me'.[137] As Tang himself is negative towards tears, the mourning by Liniang's parents is rather overblown. Their mourning may even be a stage business as Chunxiang later in the scene directly addresses the audience as 'lookers' who are watching a play: 'Oh, you who watch, what is there we can do [but crying over my young mistress's death]?'(*MDT*, 111-2; *PP*, 104) Here Chunxiang invites the audience to be virtual

---

[136] See Scene 3, 5, 25,42, 50.

[137] *TXZJQB*, pp. 1004-5.

participants in the mourning scene in the fictional play in which Du Bao and Madam Du are performing their part.

Liniang's father is concerned with his political career, and learns nothing from Liniang's death as indicated by the final scene. Du Bao refuses to believe that Liniang has resurrected, and asks the emperor to strike dead 'the apparition of Liniang'. When it is proved that it is living Liniang rather than an apparition, Du Bao forces Liniang to divorce Liu Mengmei.

The comic characters in the mourning scene of *Mudan ting*

The comic characters in this scene are traditionally believed to be a 'comic relief' by scholars on *Mudan ting*. Cyril Birch summarised the function of humour within tragic scenes as 'comic relief', and his opinion was followed by Hua Wei:

> Between Fragrance's and Madam Du's sorrowful laments, however, there is Sister Stone's complementary realistic view on this tragic event....Functioning mainly as comic relief in the theatre, her appearance...and 'mock-keening' aria lighten up the otherwise monotonous sequence of laments required by such an important dramatic situation...Furthermore, by making lighting of its seriousness, Sister Stone helps diminish the 'tragicness' of the heroine's death in the minds of the audience...Paradoxically, her light-hearted attitude is…rather appropriate since Liniang's death is merely temporary.[138]

[138] Hua Wei. 'The Search for Great Harmony: A Study of Tang Xianzu's Dramatic Art', pp. 246-8.

Catherine Swatek agreed with Hua Wei and commented that 'Tang uses humour to undercut sustained grieving at the moment of Liniang's death.'[139] But the explanation of a 'comic relief' is weak, as Samuel Schoenbaum has earlier labeled 'comic relief' as 'a wonderful convenience for evading interpretive complexities'.[140]

After Chunxiang, Sister Stone enters the stage, and says to Chunxiang, 'You're making a good job of your wailing and I've come to help you.'(*MDT*, 112; *PP*, 104) Only persons who are paid to wail at a funeral will regard 'wailing' as a 'job'.[141] They are employed in the performance of wailing, which does not require them to authentically feel the sadness. The cacophonous wailing found in Chinese mourning rituals may also explain for *nào* 闹 'noisiness' in the scene title.[142] Is Sister Stone hinting that Chunxiang's sadness is performed rather than felt? We do not know. But we know that according to the performance conventions in the traditional Chinese theatre, the actors do not shed real tears; they indicate their sadness by wiping fictional tears via their sleeves. Thus the discrepancy between one's inner emotion and the staged expression of feelings is emphasised.

Sister Stone also lists the benefit that Chunxiang gains after Liniang is dead: 'You won't have to pull a wry mouth when you pick her corns or stop your nose when you empty the chamber pot' (*MDT*, 112; *PP*, 105-6). Hua Wei's study cited above pays attention to the function of Sister Stone in the scene, and she proposes that Sister Stone's 'mock-keening' aria 'helps diminish the "tragicness" of the heroine's death in

---

[139] Catherine Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, pp. 238-9.

[140] Samuel Schoenbaum, 'Enter a Porter (Macbeth, 2.3)', in *Shakespeare: Text, Language, Criticism: Essays in Honour of Marvin Spevack*. ed. Bernhard Fabioan and Jurt tetzeli von Rosado (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1987), pp. 246-53 (p. 247).

[141] It is rather common to see this practice in the rural part of China.

[142] See Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, p. 239.

the minds of the audience'.[143] The audience is, however, well aware of Liniang's later resurrection, and that her death is temporary. Therefore there is no need to diminish the 'tragicness' in the audience's mind. 'The same hall witnesses mourning and joyful felicitation', says Tutor Chen when he enters the mourning hall after Sister Stone (*MDT*, 113; *PP*, 107). Tutor Chen has no idea of Liniang's later resurrection, but his word unknowingly indicates that the same place witnesses the sorrow caused by Liniang's early death and joyful felicitations brought by her rebirth.

After the death of Liniang, Tutor Chen and Sister Stone seek to profit from Liniang's funeral preparation, and they openly quarrel about who shall get the lion's share of money and land by making fun of their names. Funeral in a wealthy family can be a lucrative business. Apart from the payment to take care of the tomb, there are hidden benefits, 'the grave held gold and jewels' as Tutor Chen later recalls in Scene 37 'The Alarm' (*MDT*, 248; *PP*, 217). Sister Stone argues that since she is called *dào gū* 道姑 'nun', she is entitled to harvest the *dào gǔ* 稻谷 'rice' from the land adjoining Liniang's tomb. Tutor Chen argues back, saying that his nickname, *gū lǎo* 孤老 'a lonely old man' also sounds similar to *dào gǔ*, and thus he has every right to claim for benefit (*MDT*, 190).

Not only Tutor Chen and Sister Stone but also Du Bao is occupied with practical concerns. According to the 'time-honoured practices', the unwritten bureaucratic rules, after his term as the Prefect of Nan'an ends, Du Bao needs some proof for his good governance, and some 'gifts' for his superiors and colleagues (*MDT*, 113; *PP*, 108-9). Du Bao needs to depend on Tutor Chen for the preparing the proof and the gifts. This is why he gives the benefits from Liniang's funeral to Tutor Chen rather than Sister

[143] Hua Wei, 'The Search for Great Harmony', p. 247. Swatek also suggests that 'Tang uses humour to undercut sustained grieving at the moment of Liniang's death', *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, pp. 238-9.

Stone. Du Bao indirectly cues the tutor that during his tenancy, he has ‘highly favoured the schools’ which means he has promoted the local education. Tutor Chen quickly picks up the cue, and replies that people in Nan’an are well aware of Du Bao’s contributions, and Chen takes the initiative to propose to Du Bao that:

> And now that Your Honour has received promotion I shall have your scholars, in accordance with time-honoured practice, compose a Record of your Fatherly Benevolence, together with a commemorative inscription. Then upon reaching the capital you will find these most useful to include with the gifts you will be making to your superiors and colleagues (*MDT*, 113; *PP*, 108-9).

Sister Stone does not know the bureaucratic rules, and asks Tutor Chen to explain the ‘Record of Fatherly Benevolence’ and ‘commemorative inscription’: ‘is this Record of Fatherly Benevolence some kind of a keepsake of his daughter’s to show what a good father he was?’ Chen explains, ‘It’s a eulogy of His Honour’s administration - what’s it got to do with his daughter?’ Sister Stone continues, ‘Well, and what might a “commemorative inscription” be?’ Chen says, ‘We build a hall of worship and crave a statue in His Honour to receive our homage there, and then over the entrance we write “Hall of the Lord Du”.’ Sister Stone proposes, ‘But wouldn’t it be better to put the young lady there too at the side, so that we could pay our respects to her?’ (*MDT*, 113; *PP*, 108-9) Sister Stone’s question clearly leads Du Bao to deny his intention to seize the ‘proof and gifts’ to facilitate his official career.

Performance implications of the mixed genre structure

In the mixed-genre structure, what is written on the page may turn out to be a completely different story when the stage perspective is taken into consideration. The mixed-genre structure has caught attention from recent directors of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*. In *Romeo and Juliet* (2009) directed by Dominic Dromgoole, the audience laughs through the opening street fight. Due to the pun and association of 'weapon' and 'penis', Sampson holds his weapon up to imitate the erection of his penis, and Abram rubs Tybalt's sword to imitate masturbation. The edge of the sword is supposed to be sharp, but Abram does not get hurt as he quickly rubs the sword. This detail lays bare that the sword is fake and the audience is watching a fictional fight. Dominic Dromgoole also presents Peter's banter with musicians after Juliet's body is carried off.

West Side Story (2021 film) presents a discrepant aspect of the gang fight. Riff and Bernardo make a very formal deal about very absurd matters of rumble and weapons used. They even politely shake hands after the fight has been agreed. The rational negotiation plus a handshake is in stark contrast to the cruel and irrational fighting that follows.

In Chen Shi-zheng's full-scene production of *Mudan ting*, the most successful aspect is his respect towards the mixed-genre structure in *Mudan ting*.[144] He shows the comic aspect of the war by faithfully following Tang Xianzu's design of cross-dressing. He employs female impersonator to perform the role of the female bandit head. The fights between armies of the Southern Song dynasty and the Jin dynasty

[144] For detailed discussion, see Catherine Swatek, chapter 7 'To perform "*chuanqi*" we will recreate a "*chuanqi*"' of *Peony Pavilion Onstage*. David Rolston, 'Tradition and innovation in Chen Shi-zheng's Peony Pavilion', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 19.1(2002): 134-146, Judith T. Zeitlin, 'My Year of Peonies', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 19.1(2002): 124-133.

becomes a display of martial arts. In Scenes 18 'Diagnosis', Tutor Chen and Sister Stone are invited to cure Liniang's sickness. Tutor Chen touches the wrong side of Liniang's wrist while feeling her pulse. He diagnoses that Liniang has a fever, and randomly prescribes medicine according to the irrelevant *Book of Poetry*. His medicine is at best useless, and at worst life-threatening for Liniang. Sister Stone is ignorant of Liniang's cause of sickness, yet she comically prescribes a talisman to be hanged on Liniang's hairpin in order to prevent Liniang from dreaming of the handsome scholar again. In contrast, Liniang will pay any price to re-encounter the scholar in her dream. Sister Stone's comic ignorance should have been set as a contrast to Liniang's pathetic loneliness. But Chen Shi-zheng introduces the exorcism ceremony performed by Sister Stone on the stage, which missed the point of the contrast.

What is most noted in Chen Shi-zheng's exploitation of the comic potentials in *Mudan ting* is his presentation of the mourning scenes for Liniang and for Madam Du (scenes 20 and 46). A group of actors stand in the background, and after Du Bao cries an elegy for Liniang, Sister Stone conducts the background actors to cry out loud. This is very similar to the 'wailing' tradition in the countryside, and it vividly showcases the artificiality of the funeral scenes in the play and in the audience's physical reality.

Chapter 2 Impossible elements made probable in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*

Except few exceptions, past productions of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* end with reconciliation. Especially before the 1950s, producers of *Romeo and Juliet* simplify the text and present the story of another pair of 'star-crossed lovers' whose death bury their parental strife. They end the play with reconciliation as promised by the prologue: 'From forth the fatal loins of these two foes / A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life, / Whose misadventured piteous overthrows / Doth with their death bury their parents' strife'. But it is highly possible that the play's prologue was written later by others who were not aware of the potential disaster embedded in the detail of the 'golden statue' in the play's denouement.[145] It is unlikely that Shakespeare wrote this prologue since elsewhere he refutes simple exertion of astral power. As any Elizabethan astrologer would understand, 'inclinant, non necessitant' – i.e. the stars can exert forces but they cannot compel. Accordingly in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* 'The fault, dear Brutus is not in our stars / But in ourselves that we are underlings' (1.3.140-1). Similar ideas are also expressed in *Othello* and in the limited power of witches in *Macbeth*. Therefore the peaceful ending promised by prologue cannot equate with Shakespeare's intention, thus, 'no prologue, I pray you'![146] Producers of *Mudan ting* also follow the beaten track and produce another clichéd pair of 'talented scholar and beautiful maiden' who live happily ever after a grand union at the court.

---

[145] Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 84-5.

[146] 'No epilogue, I pray you' (*MND*, 5.1.340)

Is there a final reconciliation at all in both the plays? This chapter tries to answer this question via a detailed analysis of the function of theatre in society and the structural juxtaposition of *mises en scène* - the garden and the physical reality - in both plays.

A play mixes different characters. 'A dramatic form that allows us to see Gods, masters and slaves rubbing shoulders on equal terms, even if we do not quite believe it, has the potential to be very subversive indeed.'[147] Indeed, a mixture of characters from different social classes on the stage has the tinge of democracy, especially against the background of strict social hierarchy in Shakespeare's and Tang Xianzu's time. Upsetting social hierarchy would be regarded as subversive and undesirable by too many people. However the middle and upper classes did not want to be ruled over by a tyrant. Charles I's attempts to raise taxes without recourse to parliament is what got his head chopped off.

The democratic trace in theatre may be the reason why the dominant ideology in the feudal society opposes theatre. Ever since the birth of performative elements in ancient China, Confucius, the founding father of Confucianism, the dominant ideology in China, was hostile towards actors most of whom were court jesters in the feudal society. According to *Chūn Qīu* 春秋 *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, a historical records of events between 722 B.C. to 481 B.C., during the meeting in Jiagu between the Qi emperor and Lu emperor in 500 B.C., an actor named Shi performed before the Lu emperor. Confucius said, 'Those who laugh at the monarch should die!'

---

[147] Ros King, 'In lieu of democracy, or how not to lose your head: theatre and authority in Renaissance England', in *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), pp. 84-100 (p. 91).

Thus Confucius ordered Sima to chop off the head of the actor.[148] Inheriting Confucius's negative attitudes towards court jesters, movements opposing theatrical activities are mostly advocated by Confucian scholars, like Chen Chun (1153-1217), the disciple of Zhu Xi, founder of the neo-Confucian school. Chen Chun submitted 'An indictment of Immoral Theatre' to the imperial minister Fu Sicheng in order to stop the theatrical activities that had previously prospered during the Song Dynasty (960-1279).[149] Theatre has undergone several major phases of prohibition and destruction throughout the history of the feudal society with the earliest record in 11th century B.C..[150]

Tang Xianzu himself ponders over the nature of theatre and he proposes the dialectic relation between *qíng* 情 'feelings' and *lí* 理 'propriety' to justify the existence of theatre. Previous studies on *qing* in *Mudan ting* has narrowly defined it as the love between the protagonists, but when the meaning of *qing* is related with Tang Xianzu's drama practice, it is more than human feelings. 'What cannot exist in the realm of *li* can possibly exist in the realm of *qing*', writes Tang Xianzu in the

---

148 Anonymous, 'The Spring and Autumn Annals, Gu Liang Biography·The Tenth Year of Emperor Lu Dinggong', in *Annotations on the Thirteen Classics · The Spring and Autumn Annals, Gu Liang Biography,* annotated and edited by Ruan Yuan (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980), p. 2445. This incident is also recorded in Sima Qian, *Shǐjì* 史记 *History Records*, in the entry of 'Confucius', https://ctext.org/shiji/kong-zi-shi-jia/ens?searchu=夹谷&searchmode=showall#result (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

149 For a full account of Chen Chun's indictment, see Fei Chunfang, ed. & trans. *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 31-2.

150 See Wang Liqi (courtesy name Xiaochuan), *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinghui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* 元明清三代禁毁小说戏曲史料 *The Historical Accounts of the Forbidden or Destroyed Fictions and Dramas during the Dynasties of the Yuan, Ming and Qing* (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1958), Zhou Ning, *Imagination and Power: The Ideological Analysis of Theatre* (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2003), chapter 1.

prologue for *Mudan ting* (*PP*, ix). In my understanding, *li* refers to *lí xué* 理学, the Cheng-Zhu school of Confucianism, which is the dominant ideology throughout the feudal society of China. *Li* represents the set social order which prefers certainty and fixed meaning. In contrast, *qing* is *rén qíng* 人情 'human feeling and human nature' which is full of ambiguity and is up to change. In Tang Xianzu's time, the acknowledgement of human nature especially sexual desires was faced with formidable resistance from the mainstream Cheng-Zhu school of Confucianism which promoted social morals over personal desires. The moral doctrines of *li* tried to repress people's natural biological emotions, like the longing for love and sex.

Tang Xianzu's thought is deeply influenced by the school of *xīn xué* 心学 'study/philosophy of the mind', a rising philosophy of idealism, which is reflected in Tang's treatment of sexuality, freedom, and humanitarian pursuit in his plays. According to its founding father, Wang Yangming, 'How can the signs of sage hood be recognized? If one clearly perceives one's own innate knowledge, then one recognizes that the signs of sage hood do not exist in the sage but in oneself.'[151] As explained by Theodora de Bary, Wang Yangming proposes that everyone can be a sage as long as 'they corresponded to a standard of perfection within one's own heart and mind', and become 'completely identified with the principle of Nature (or Heaven) within oneself'.[152] In contrast with idolatry of sages, the idea that everyone can be a sage shows the democratic trace of individualism and humanitarianism. As seen in *Mudan ting*, Tutor Chen acclaims, 'Confucius my master lamented he could not see

---

[151] Wang Yangming, *Chuan xi lu*, quoted in Theodora de Bary, 'Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought', in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 145-247 (p. 150).

[152] Theodora de Bary, 'Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought', p. 150.

the Duke of Zhou; but here's the Son of Heaven gets to see Tutor Chen now! And that's no small matter, I can tell you!' Here, Tutor Chen says that it is the emperor's honour to see him rather than the other way around (*MDT*, 278; *PP*, 296).

The dialectic between *qing* and *li* can also be understood from the light of Aristotelian probable impossibility. According to Aristotle, what is impossible in reality can be made probable on the stage, and besides, 'a probable impossibility is to be preferred to a thing improbable and yet possible. [. . .] the impossible is the higher thing; for the ideal type must surpass the reality.'[153] Further, Aristotle proposes that 'the impossible must be justified by reference to artistic requirements, or to the higher reality, or to received opinion'.[154] What is not possible in the world ruled by fixed order can become probable in the world where human feelings reign. As Tang writes,

> My *Mudan ting* has been severely distorted by Lü Yusheng to be sung in the language and tunes of Wu region [the *kunqu* region]. I could not help laughing mutely. Once upon a time, there was someone who disliked Wang Mojie's [Tang-dynasty poet and painter Wang Wei's courtesy name] painting of the plantain in snowy winter, hence he cut off the plantain and replaced it with the plum blossom. Yes, it showed the realistic winter landscape; however, it was not Wang Wei's winter landscape any more, which was filled with spiritual abundance beyond the principles of writing.[155]

[153] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1460a –1461b, trans. S. H. Butcher, Provided by The Internet Classics Archive, 7. http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html, (last accessed on 15 June 2023).
[154] Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1460a –1461b.
[155] *TXZJQB*, p. 962, trans. Wang, Shih-Pe. 'Revising *Mudan ting*: audience reception in presenting Tang's text', in *1616: Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu's China*, pp. 180-93 (181).

In Tang's opinion, Lü's *kunqu* adaptation of *Mudan ting* changed the spirit as well as the rich imagination of his original text, just as Wang Wei's famous painting should not be viewed as a realistic scene but instead as a lyrical expression of colours—a contrast of opposites and a display of unrestrained talents.

The impossible elements cannot exist in the world of *li* where fixed 'meaning is the marrow of institutions'.[156] The institutions prefer unambiguous and fixed meaning in order to maintain social control. In the Chinese feudal society dominated by Confucianism, the most important thing is one's 'name': 'If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things.'[157] On the basis of names, Confucius develops his ideal social order: 'A ruler acts as a ruler should, and a subject acts as a subject should; a father acts as a father should, and a son acts as a son should.'[158] Based on class distinctions, Confucius prescribed the code of conduct for each social class, and people should act according to their status. In the late Ming dynasty, and throughout the Chinese feudal society, there were strict codes governing every aspect of life in order to distinguish different classes. Among numerous examples, the colour of yellow was restricted to the royal family, and improper usage of colour would cost one's life. Under unequivocal codes, there is no room for transgressing the boundaries between different social classes. In the Elizabethan society as well, social hierarchy was marked by sumptuary laws determining what

---

[156] Anton C. Zijderveld, 'The Sociology of Humour and Laughter', *Current Sociology*, 31.3(1983): 1-100 (p. 17).

[157] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius* (BCD 480-350), trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/analects/zi-lu/zh?searchu=name&searchmode=showall&en=on#result (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[158] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius* (BCD 480-350), trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/analects/yan-yuan/zh?searchu=%E5%90%9B%E5%90%9B&en=on (last accessed on 15 June 2023), with my variation in translation.

people in each class could and could not (although these rules were often broken) and a set of behaviour codes: 'The key symbols of Tudor and Early Stuart society were the hat [which the lower classes had to doff to their betters] and the whip [which the upper classes were entitled to use on their inferiors]'[159] There was also Tudor class legislation about sport, for example, archery was prescribed for the lower orders, and bowls and tennis were restricted to gentlemen with an income of over 100 [pounds] a year.[160]

In contrast to the clinging to fixed meaning and order in society, theatre is about ambiguity, about presenting alternative possibilities; it encourages its audience to think beyond. As Zhou Ning summarises, the dominant ideologies maintain the existing order, while theatre as a utopia can deny the existing order.[161] The ruling class secures their domination via ideological controls, while theatre presents alternative possibilities and challenges the set social order via humour which plays with the institutionalised structure of meaning. Zhou's opinion is echoed in Peter Sellars's message for the 2022 World Theatre Day:

> We are so certain of what we are looking at and the way we are looking at it that we are unable to see and feel alternative realities, new possibilities, different approaches, invisible relationships, and timeless connections. This is a time for deep refreshment of our minds, of our senses, of our imaginations,

---

[159] Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641*, abridged ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1967), p. 20, p. 18.

[160] Ibid., p. 20, p. 18.

[161] Zhou Ning, *Xiang xiang yu quanli: xiju yishi xingtai yanjiu* 想象与权利：戏剧意识形态研究 *Imagination and Power: The Ideological Analysis of Theatre* (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2003), p. 15.

> of our histories, and of our futures. This work cannot be done by isolated people working alone. This is work that we need to do together. Theatre is the invitation to do this work together.[162]

The alternative possibilities presented by theatre productions challenge our ordinary perceptions, and enable us to question 'what if?' Or in Li Yü's words, theatre presents the 'extra-ordinary' in order to challenge what has been accepted as 'ordinary'.[163] In both *Mudan ting* and *Romeo and Juliet*, what is not possible to exist in the characters' physical world, like love between people from families at feud or love between people from different social classes, can be accepted as desirable in the garden scene of both plays. A play is the place where the alternative states are considered, and the impossible elements are made probable. The contrast between the physical reality and the fictional play lays bare the social problem in the audience's time.

The chaotic physical world

In both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, the physical society is featured with set social order which is indicated via the family names. Juliet, leaning toward the garden, questions 'what's in a name' (2.2.43). Although she complains that a 'name', like an airy word, is not any part belonging to a man, she herself clearly knows the answer to her question. A name, especially a family name, is the symbol of the family and signifies the family's position in the wider society. Romeo succinctly describes the higher class of the Verona society by simply reading out the list of names of the guests invited by Capulet (1.2.64-72). In the social world of Verona, the two names,

[162] https://aict-iatc.org/en/world-theatre-day-message-2022-by-peter-sellars/ (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[163] Li Yü, *Xianqing Ouji*, pp. 36.

'Capulet' and 'Montague', represent two feuding families; love between the two is forbidden.

In *Mudan ting*, each of the male characters also shows their sensitivity to names and their family origin. Du Bao asserts himself to be the descendant of Du Fu, one of the greatest of the High Tang poets, Liu Mengmei to Tang literati Liu Zongyuan, and even Liu Mengmei's gardener, Camel Guo, claims himself to be the descendant of the most famous gardener, Guo Tuotuo. Sophie Volpp has noted the discrepancy between the male characters' exaggerated self-claimed family origin and historical facts and she attributes such discrepancy to the male characters' 'lack of literary sensitivity'.[164] But Volpp does not explain why all the male characters including the well-educated Du Bao and Liu Mengmei lack literary sensitivity. The characters willingly leave behind their 'literary sensitivity' and their sense of 'historical faithfulness' in order to associate themselves with historical celebrities. For example, Han Zicai makes up the story of his family origin and even cites the anecdotes of a deity, Han Xiangzi, in order to claim himself as the descendant of the famous poet, Han Yu. A family name of 'Han' is the symbol of power and identity, so is the family name of 'Liu', 'Du', and 'Guo'. All the characters are clinging to their family names in order to justify their social status.

In a world of fixed order, decorum is of the utmost importance. To paraphrase Confucius on the code of conduct in Verona society, a lady should behave as a lady should, or else, she is no longer a lady. Being 'Juliet Capulet', the offspring of the dignified Capulet family, Juliet is born a noble lady and she is bound by the decorum and etiquette required by her social status. In her own words, she should 'dwell on

---

[164] Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), pp. 102-3.

form' (2.2.88), which means she needs to insist on and abide with the social etiquette and propriety.[165] She needs to live up to the role of an obedient daughter: when Lady Capulet asks Juliet whether she will love Paris, she replies, 'no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly' (1.3.98-9). She will not show her affection to any suitor without parental consent. Her reply is exactly what would be expected from a noble and proper young lady. And later in Act 4, Juliet informs her father that 'I met the youthful lord at Laurence cell / And gave him what becoming love I might, / Not stepping o'er the bounds of modesty' (4.2.26-28). 'Becoming love' means 'suitable/proper' love in accordance with Juliet's social status. Similarly, in *Mudan ting*, Du Liniang is born into a distinguished family, and is 'concerned with jealous guarding of the family reputation', which requires her to behave in a 'serious and reverent' manner (*MDT*, 48; *PP*, 38). Her mother, Madam Du, recalls that she herself has never seen 'irreverent levity' in Liniang's eyes (*MDT*, 112; *PP*, 105).

The physical world, dominated by rigid social class system, is supposed to function properly and in order, but in fact, the Verona society is portrayed in disorder, as the illiterate servant complains: 'the shoemaker should meddle with his yard and the tailor with his last' (1.2.38-9). This reflects the foolishness of Lord Capulet who sends an illiterate for the errand. Disorder is also suggested by the fact that musicians who are supposed to play music are silent throughout the fourth act, while the servant Peter sings all the songs.

The problem of displaced social order is extremely severe when the talent is not in the governing position. The city of Verona is in the hand of Prince Escalus, and the heads of the Capulet and the Montague families, and neither of them has shown much

[165] *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Burton Raffel, p. 82.

ruling skills. Capulet says, ' 'tis not hard, I think, / For men so old as we to keep the peace.' (1.2.2-3) But in fact, it is **hard** for men so old as Capulet and Montague to keep the peace as Paris comments, ' 'tis [pity] you lived at odds so long' (1.2.5). Capulet is simply paying lip service presuming that it is not difficult to keep the peace. In the middle of Capulet's statement, two commas accompany and emphasise 'I think'. He thinks it is not hard, and yet he has not turned it into practice. It is not enough to keep the peace by simply talking of peace, or thinking of peace. Simply put, their words do not accord with their actions.

Not only the head of the Capulet and the Montague families, but also the Prince himself is only talking about peace rather than taking actual actions. The Prince is supposed to be the peace-keeper in the city, but in fact, throughout the play, there is hardly any trace of his good governing. For his three appearances, he only describes the consequences of the fights between the Montagues and the Capulets after the blood is shed and the corpses are strewn on the ground. In the end, he concludes, 'Go hence to have more talk of these sad things.' (5.3.307) The sad story is to be talked rather than reflected or acted upon, and the word choice of 'glooming' meaning 'dark' in 'a glooming peace' indicates that the peace is only momentary.

Prince Escalus is clear about the disastrous consequences, but he takes very limited and rather futile actions. For example, after the first street fight, he asks Capulet to go with him first and Montague to see him in the afternoon. But there is no description of the respective conversation between the Prince and the head of each household in the play. It is curious why the Prince does not ask Lord Capulet and Lord Montague to come together to have a tripartite conversation. It would be much more direct to solve the problem with both parties involved to sit down and talk. The problem between the two families could be better handled if Lord Capulet and Lord

Montague communicated with each other, exchanged opinions, and then drew up a truce agreement. The effect of a bipartite conversation instead of a tripartite one is doubtful, and the Prince's strategy turns out to be useless as a second street fight breaks out and a pile of bodies lie in the Capulet tomb.

The turbulent physical world in *Mudan ting*

Despite the set social order, the physical world in *Mudan ting* is full of turbulence as suggested by the opposition of *mû* and *pìn. Mû* means 'male', and is the antonym of *pìn* 牝 'female'. The title of Scene 19 is *pìn zeí* 牝贼 'The Brigandess', and the word *pìn* reminds one of the frequently seen phrase, *pìn jī sī chén* 牝鸡司晨 which means 'the hen crows'. Naturally speaking, the cock crows, and the hen lays the egg. When the hen crows, it is against the laws of nature, and is regarded as a bad omen of social disaster in the Chinese culture. In the physical world of *Mudan ting*, Tang Xianzu uses this peculiar word to suggest that the world is in chaos.

In *Mudan ting*, the disorder in the physical world is suggested by the misplaced official positions. The half-blind official Miao Shunbin is under the imperial command to examine the essays. As he himself tells us,

> On the strength of the skill I displayed in assessing the tribute jewels brought by Muslim traders to the Vale of Incense Mountains, His Imperial Majesty charged me with the supervision of the metropolitan examinations...grading gems is easy compared with grading papers. Why so? Because I have cat's eyes, no different in quality from jasper, beryl, or crystal; therefore, they flash sparks when they light upon a true gem. Now, examination essays are

> something my eyes have had nothing to do with. However, it is the Imperial command and there's no help for it. (*MDT*, 225; *PP*, 229).

In another example, martial generals are supposed to take the role of a military commander, but the emperor in the play employs a civil official, Du Bao, Liniang's father, to the post. Even Madam Du notes the displacement of sending her husband, an 'old pedant', to the frontier in Scene 43 'Troop Transfer' (*MDT*, 232; *PP*, 240). This reflects the lack of martial talents in the Southern Song dynasty, and indicates the weakness of defence work, a problem that exists during Tang Xianzu's time as well. The displaced social position is also suggested by Tutor Chen. He knows little about classic poetry as can be seen in his frequent misinterpretations of standard texts, yet he is invited to be Liniang's tutor. Scholar Han Zicai similarly mistakes well-known historical events, and is anything but knowledgeable. The discrepancy between the 'scholar' title and Han's actual learning is further suggested by the role type of the character. In most plays, the scholar enacted by a *chou* role has shallow understanding, examples can be seen in *First Place Scholar Zhang Xie* and *The Lute*. Here in *Mudan ting*, Liu Mengmei calling Han a 'talent' is actually ironic.

Besides, in Scene 47 'Raising the Siege', Du Bao writes in the letter to Dame Li, 'Du Bao, family friend of generations past, bows with folded sleeves before the tent of Madam Yang' (*MDT*, 254; *PP*, 269). In fact even the bandit Li Quan knows, 'bows with folded sleeves' is a women's bowing gesture and is inappropriate for Du Bao to make the gesture. But in the circumastance, Du Bao regards himself as a woman who begs the bandit to retreat.

In addition to describing displaced orders, Tang Xianzu directly challenges the Confucian classics which prescribe the set social order. Since the Confucian

orthodoxy is the cornerstone of the feudal society, Tang Xianzu's satire of the Confucian classics is actually a challenge to the unjust social system. Through Chunxiang's mouth, Tang Xianzu says, '*Words of Worth from the Ancients* - What a deadly thought / but when I'm through, I'll be able to teach the parrot to order tea.' (*MDT*, 33; *PP*, 24) '*Words of Worth from the Ancients*' means the Confucian orthodoxy which was the centre of the royal examination system in the Ming dynasty. Scholars were required to memorise every word from the classics, and to master the meaning in order to succeed in exams. Passing the exams was the gateway to serving in the imperial bureaucracy: Tang Xianzu himself earned his official post in the prestigious Ministry of Rites in Nanjing after passing the *jinshi* 进士 'Advanced Scholar' examination at the age of thirty-three.[166] By confining the examination scope to the classics, the authority was taming the scholars to be parrots who only repeated the classics.

Without critical thinking and by providing their own limited understanding, Tang Xiansu's scholars only understood the literal meaning of the classics, and thus became laughingstocks in his plays. The quotations of Confucian orthodoxy is pervasive in Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting*, but Tang twists the conventionally accepted meanings. In *Mudan ting*, there are abundant instances indicating that the Confucian-scholar characters lack literary sensitivity to the extent that they even do not know the exact meaning of the classic quotations that they frequently use in their speech. Tutor Chen is the living embodiment of all the Confucian orthodoxy, who cannot speak properly without citing words of worth from the ancients. The pedant has shallow understanding of the classic texts but he is addicted to quoting them in order to show his learning. In Scene 7 'The Schoolroom', when Liniang asks him about the pattern

[166] Cyril Birch, 'Preface to the second edition of *The Peony Pavilion*', p. ix.

of sandals, he does not reply directly, instead he quotes a line about sandals from *Mencius*, 'one makes sandals without knowledge of the foot', and he asks Liniang to design the pair of sandals according to this quote.[167] His misuse of the classics is apt for creating comic effects, but there is also a pathetic aspect to Tutor Chen's follies: his life has been wasted in memorising the classics in order to prepare himself for the royal exam throughout his life. For scholars like Tutor Chen, sitting the exam is the only way to climb up the social ladder, and most of them have spent their lives in vain.

Liu Mengmei who later becomes the top graduate after his year-long study also misquotes and misunderstands the classics. In Scene 33 'Confidential Plans', Liu Mengmei claims himself to be the husband of the dead Liniang, Sister Stone is not convinced, and asks Liu, since he and Liniang are man and wife, does he know the day of Liniang's birth and death. Liu does not directly answer Sister Stone's question. Instead he ambiguously quotes Confucius's *Analects*, "未知他生，焉知死 (While you do not know the [date of] birth, how are you to know the [date of] death?)" (*MDT*, 196; *PP*, 194, with my interpretation in the square brackets). This line is drawn from a conversation between Confucius and Ji Lu. Ji Lu asks Confucius about death, and Confucius answers, 'While you do not know life, how can you know about death?'[168] Confucius is unsatisfied with Ji Lu's indulgence in airy thoughts about the spirits in the underworld, and he urges Ji Lu to prioritise the present incarnation and to concern himself about everyday life instead. By quoting the classics, Liu Mengmei is clearly shying away from Sister Stone's question, and his reply does not provide the information that Sister Stone seeks.

---

[167] Mencius, *Mencius·Gào zi shàng* I.7, trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-i (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[168] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, XI.12, trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/analects/xian-jin (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

Sister Stone then asks Liu Mengmei when he received the news of Liniang's death, Liu replies again by quoting from *Analects*: ' "In the morning I hear" of her, "in the evening died"' (*MDT*, 196). Liu's interpretation is not only illogical - how is it possible for one to know for certain what will happen later in the evening - but also distorts Confucius' original meaning of *Zhāo wén dào, xī sî kê yî* 朝闻道，夕死可矣 'If a man in the morning hears the right way, he may die in the evening without regret.'[169]

Sometimes Tang Xianzu's satire of the classics is achieved via the contrast between the illiterate servants' and the pedants' understanding of the classics. In most instances, it is the illiterate who tell the truth although they may not always realise it while the scholars are hindered from the truth as they are only aware of the orthodoxy and official interpretation. In Scene 4 'The Pedant's Lament', Tutor Chen enters the stage complaining about his lack of wealth and health. He hears about the news that Prefect Du Bao intends to hire a tutor for Du Liniang. Though he is in a desperate need of this job, he lists seven disadvantages of being the tutor of a young and rich girl. When Du Bao's illiterate janitor arrives carrying a letter of invitation for him, Tutor Chen puts on a pretentious air when replying to the janitor:

> Chen: 'The human vice is the urge to teach others,' as Mencius said.
>
> Janitor: Don't worry about the 'human vice.' What about 'human rice'? At least you'll be fed. (*MDT*, 17; *PP*, 12)

---

[169] Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius*, IV.8, trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/analects/li-ren#n1175 (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

In Chinese, 患 *huàn* mainly means 'mistakes, shortages', while Birch translated it as 'vice' to rhyme with 'rice'. I use his translation for the lack of a better one.

'The human shortcoming is the urge to teach others' is quoted from *Mencius*, meaning that arrogant people's mistake lies in their tendency to coach others without reflecting on their own shortcomings.[170] The illiterate janitor who has no idea about *Mencius*, makes a witty reply thanks to the similar pronunciation of 'vice' 患 *huàn* and 'rice' 饭 *fàn* in the dialect: the janitor tells Tutor Chen not to worry about the 'human vice' after he is fed with 'human rice'. The janitor does not intend to be humorous, yet the joke arrives through the punning between 'vice' and 'rice'. Confucian scholars who try to deny their true desires are usually the target of satire throughout *Mudan ting*. Tutor Chen's quotation from the classics is at odds with his true desire, thus sounds hypocritical. Despite the janitor being illiterate, he acknowledges their need to get enough to eat, and his speech, though unadorned by words of worth, is genuine.

Despite Tutor Chen's little learning, Liniang's father has engaged Tutor Chen to teach Liniang 'restraint and decorum'; presumably Du Bao has no intention of teaching her the actual philosophy and the schoolroom is like a cage that shuts Liniang inside (*MDT*, 87; *PP*, 77). In the schoolroom, the orthodox and unequivocal explanation of the classics is taught; imitation rather than innovation is encouraged: the homework Tutor Chen leaves is for Liniang to copy the characters from the poem. In the schoolroom, being obedient is the survival strategy while critical thinking is repressed: when Chunxiang asks Tutor Chen what is the young man seeking from the

---

[170] Mencius, *Mencius·Lí lôu shàng* I.23: 'The evil of men is that they like to be teachers of others.' trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-i (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

woman in the poem, Tutor Chen does not answer but scolds Chunxiang for being too wordy (*MDT*, 33-4; *PP*, 25-6).

The illiterate maid, Chunxiang, serves again as the contrast to the pedant Tutor Chen. In Scene 7 'The Schoolroom', Tutor Chen teaches Liniang the poem, *Guān jū* 关雎, from *The Book of Poetry*.

> Guan-guan go the ospreys,
> On the islet in the river.
> The modest, retiring, virtuous, young lady:
> For our prince a good mate she.[171]

Guān jū is a poem about young lovers' love, but Tutor Chen, who only knows the official orthodox explanation of the poem, explains to Liniang that the poem tells the empress not to envy the emperor's concubines.[172] On the contrary, Liniang and Chunxiang understand the poem according to their own instincts, since they have not been contaminated by the orthodox interpretation and they are moved by the passion for love in the poem.

Later in Scene 9 'Sweeping the Garden', Chunxiang mistakes the meaning of g*uān* 关 'the sound of the ospreys' in the poem as the literal meaning of *guān* 关, 'to shut in'. She interprets the poem as follows: '*Guān* means "shut in," My young mistress said, "Even though the ospreys were shut in, they still had the freedom of the

---

[171] *Shī Jīng* 诗经 *Book of Poetry* (also known as *Shī* 诗 *The Book of Odes*), Western Zhou (1046 BC - 771 BC)] trans., James Legge https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/guan-ju?searchu=关关&searchmode=showall#result (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[172] The official interpretation of *The Book of Poetry* is annotated by Mao Heng (毛亨, B.C. 3-2) and Mao Zhang (毛苌, the Western Han dynasty, B.C. 202-8).

island: why should a human being be treated worse than a bird?"' (*MDT*, 49; *PP*, 40) Interestingly, Chunxiang's self-construed unorthodox interpretation of the poem directly addresses Liniang's real situation, and though Chunxiang is illiterate, her explanation makes much more sense than that by Tutor Chen.

As part of the social institution, the schoolroom leaves no space for ambiguity. When Tutor Chen asks Chunxiang to fetch the 'four jewels of the scholar's study' for calligraphy - brushes, ink, paper, and inkstone - Chunxiang brings the mascara brushes, ink for painting the brows, notepaper woven by the Tang-dynasty courtesan Xue Tao, and a rare type of inkstone decorated with patterns of 'eyes'. Tutor Chen is irritated as he has not seen such things before: for him, there is only one type of paper woven by the noble inventor of paper, the ancient Cai Lun. Chen refuses to learn about the new type of paper woven by Xue Tao, and orders Chunxiang to change the whole lot. Tutor Chen is 'ignorant' and 'rustic', as Chunxiang comments (*MDT*, 34; *PP*, 26).

Tutor Chen's intolerance towards ambiguity is also shown in his attitudes towards puns and wordplay in the poem. Chunxiang makes pun of the line *zaì hé zhī zhōu* 在河之洲 'in the island of a river' in the poem. She jokes on *hé zhī zhōu* 河之洲 'the island of a river' with the official title, *hé zhī zhōu* 何知州 Master Hé because the two share the same pronunciation. What lies behind a simple pun is a plural mindset, which is lacking in Tutor Chen, the old pedant. He has been too confined by the coaching of the Confucianism that his mind is too narrow to perceive any other possibilities. He is the representation of the patriarchal society, and the schoolroom is a microcosm of the dominant ideology that tries to confine the citizens with 'restraint and decorum'. To enhance absolutism, authorities try to silence the public and to present a solely definite voice – the one in favour of their own interest.

The garden of utopia and the impossible elements made probable in the garden

In contrast to the authoritative world outside, the garden is a utopian presence in both plays. In the kingdom of nature, all species are equal, no plant is superior to other plants. Thus the gardens of nature often nourish utopian thinking, or, in Amy Tigner's words, the 'paradise imaginary'.[173] When the garden of nature is translated in dramatic art, it becomes a utopian presence, as it does in both plays.

The garden is central to both plays in question. Romeo and Juliet make their first love tryst in the garden, and after their first consummation of love, Romeo descends into the garden and departs for Mantua in banishment. In *Mudan ting*, almost one-fifth of the 55 scenes take place in the garden. In Chinese culture, a springtime garden where birds and bees flirt with flower buds is imbued with erotic suggestions, thus becoming the clichéd setting for the encounter between beautiful maidens and talented scholars in the repertoire of traditional Chinese theatre. *Mudan ting* is no exception. The garden is central to both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, and the keyword 'garden' is often used interchangeably with 'balcony'. Despite the mention of 'balcony' in Shakespeare's sources and the worldwide popularity of the so-called 'balcony scene', I choose to use the keyword 'garden' rather than 'balcony' because the horizontal garden in *Mudan ting* does not share a similar vertical dimension as a 'balcony' does, while the horizontal garden serves a similar function as one would expect of Juliet's garden.[174]

---

[173] Amy L. Tigner, *Literature and the Renaissance Garden from Elizabeth I to Charles II: England's Paradise* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p. 1.

[174] For the strict distinction between 'garden', 'balcony', and 'orchard' in the discussion of *Romeo and Juliet*, see the *SENS*: Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination archive, produced by the Verona Skenè Research Centre, which details the transmission of the balcony scene, the garden, and/or the orchard from the

So far, the liminality of the garden has attracted numerous studies. To this date, studies of both gardens have tended to focus on a feminist reading.[175] The garden in *Romeo and Juliet* is regarded as a liminal space between the maiden's private bed chamber and the public space: 'The woman is to be besieged and conquered, she will resist and then she will surrender.'[176] Similarly, in Chinese studies of *Mudan ting*, Zhou Ning summarised that the talented scholar (Liu Mengmei) from the outside world was an intruder into the beautiful maiden's (Du Liniang) inner chamber.[177] But a feminist reading might not be as effective once the Elizabethan performance conventions are taken into consideration. The tradition of boy actors enacting 'Juliet'

European sources to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. For a detailed discussion of the tropes of balcony and anti-balcony scenes, see Sujata Iyengar, 'Shakespeare's Anti-Balcony Scene', *Arrêt sur Scène/Scene Focus*, 6(2017): 135-45, and Lois Leveen, '*Romeo and Juliet* has no Balcony', *The Atlantic*, October 29, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/10/romeo-and-juliets-balcony-scene-doesnt-exist/381969/ (last accessed on 25 Aug 2023).

[175] See for example, Dana Percec, 'Sposami a Verona', in *What's in a Balcony Scene? A Study on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and its Adaptations*, ed. Luminita Frentiu (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 1-11 (1-2). Manfred Pfister, 'The Balcony Scenes from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* across Cultures and Media', in *Romeo and Juliet in European Culture*, ed. Juan F. Cerdá, Dirk Delabastita, and Keith Gregor (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017), pp. 37-59 (43-4). Wang Huimin, 'From Page to Stage: A Transcultural Comparison of the "Garden Scene" in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *eSharp Transitions, Transformations, 'Trans'Narratives*, 27(2019): 61-69.

[176] Dana Percec, 'Sposami a Verona', in *What's in a Balcony Scene? A Study on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and its Adaptations*, ed. by Luminita Frentiu (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 1-11 (10).

[177] Zhou Ning, 'Private Garden: the Heterotopia of Chinese Opera', *Drama Literature*, 3(2004): 22-26 (26).

blurs the clear-cut boundary of gender on which some feminist studies are based, and renders a feminist reading of the garden less sufficient.[178]

Building upon previous parallel studies, I set out to explore the significance of the garden by paying particular attention to the plant symbolism and allegories in the frequently studied 'garden scene' - Act 2 scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet* and Scene 10 of *Mudan ting*. I also move beyond the two scenes, and even the two plays, in order to gain a broader perspective on the liminality of the garden. Although the garden has been defined as a liminal space between the private and the public, this thesis posits the garden in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* as a liminal space between art and nature and between dream and reality in order to explore how the garden has been eroticised and politicised and to what end.

In contrast to the emphasis on propriety discussed in the previous section 'The chaotic physical world', with the fixed Confucian order and the English codes of behaviour in their respective social backgrounds, both Juliet and Liniang abandon propriety in the garden scenes. Juliet encounters Romeo, the only descendant of her family's foe, and darts her affectionate glance at him without parental permission; Du Liniang boldly has premarital sex with a complete stranger, a sin unthinkable for a high-born lady to commit. Both Juliet and Du Liniang violate the social codes for aristocratic women and betray their family names and reputations in the garden scenes. By violating the social decorum, as Juliet and Liniang do, they defy the established social order, and try to set their own rules in the enclosed gardens. Compared with Liniang, Juliet goes one step further and teaches Romeo how to speak properly in the garden. Her advice is to 'farewell compliment' (2.2.89) - 'compliment' means 'formal

[178] Cross-gender acting is also common in *Mudan ting* performances. Mei Lanfang is a renowned female impersonator and had played Liniang for numerous times.

expression of civility' and usually means 'less than it declares', as Samuel Johnson memorably put it.[179] A 'compliment' is especially needed when expressing one's true thoughts would cause offence or even risk death. But a compliment loses its place in the garden of paradise which worships authenticity and freedom. In addition to authenticity, the garden in *Romeo and Juliet* renounces hatred and embraces love. The encountering of the title lovers overcomes the hatred between the Montagues and the Capulets. Here, the family name loses its meaning: Juliet is no longer a 'Capulet', and Romeo is no longer confined by the name 'Montague'. In the garden, love between two young people, both in their prime time is encouraged, rather than forbidden.

In *Mudan ting*, the garden is not only about love, but also equality. For Liu Mengmei, a poor orphan and low-born scholar from the far Southern part of China, it is almost impossible to meet Liniang, a high-born maiden living near the middle part of China. In the past, Southern China was often stereotyped as uncivilised and barbaric. Tutor Chen judges that everyone from Ling nan, Scholar Liu's hometown, is an indecent tomb-digger (Scene 37, 'The Alarm').[180] To meet Liniang, Liu Mengmei has to overcome the barrier of social class inequality as well as the geographical distance between the two places. The only possible place for Liniang and Mengmei to meet is the peony garden where all social barriers dissolve.

The gardens in both plays banish fixed names and set social orders, and are instead spaces for love, authenticity, freedom, and equality. In other words, the garden presents the audience with a blueprint of the best human world imaginable. If it can be imagined, we can believe it to be probable even if in our own societies it would be

---

[179] 'compliment, n.' *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2022, www.oed.com/view/Entry/37717 (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[180] The Ling nan 岭南 region is in South China and includes provinces like today's Guangdong.

impossible. This power of the imagination to conceive probable alternative world is why authoritarian regimes might find theatre dangerous.

Improbable elements in the garden

The garden has been such a clichéd setting for love affairs that few scholars have picked fault in the improbable elements of the garden in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*. For example, how is it possible for Romeo to easily climb into Capulet's garden when the 'walls are high and hard to climb' (2.2.63) and should have been heavily guarded? How it is possible for Romeo, the enemy of the Capulets, to remain there without being noticed considering that 'the place [is] death' (2.2.64) for a Montague? Romeo explains that he 'o'erperch[ed]' these walls 'with love's light wings' (2.2.66) and that he has the 'night's cloak' (2.2.75) to hide him from the eyes of the enemy. But he is speaking metaphorically rather than literally, and the airy metaphor will not protect him from iron swords as his words promise. *Mudan ting* is also abundant with improbable elements. How is it possible that Du Liniang has no knowledge of the family garden for three years during her father's residency in Nan'an Prefecture? Although it is explained that, as a high-born maiden, Liniang is subject to strict discipline and is not allowed to leave her boudoir, how can her maid's ignorance of the garden be explained? As a maid, Chunxiang should have known the exact location of every place to better serve the household. It is even more unlikely that Chunxiang, having no prior knowledge of the garden, should have discovered it by chance on her way to the lavatory, without making a conscious effort to look for it.

The garden in both plays seems like a capricious presence: its walls are not very high and not hard to climb when Romeo wishes to come in, and in *Mudan ting*, the

spring garden suddenly reveals itself when Liniang is in the mood for a lover. Under the disguise of a common garden setting, both Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu juxtapose improbable elements. The challenge to verisimilitude defines the garden as a liminal space between dream and reality.[181] Figuring as an imaginative space, the garden and other horticultural spaces in both plays are both real and fictional, similar to Percec's discussion of the balcony in *Romeo and Juliet*. Camel Guo, the servant to Liu Mengmei, laments in Scene 40 of *Mudan ting* that, when Master Liu was home, he could pick a hundred ripe fruits from every tree in Liu's family orchard, but once Liu has left, all he gets is a hundred maggots. As the Chinese saying goes, the 'tree will fruit no more, when the master's gone'. The deterioration of the orchard after Liu's departure indicates that the orchard is associated with Liu's psychological space and depends on Liu for its prosperity.

The improbable elements in Juliet's and Liniang's gardens can evoke the understanding of the garden as the psychological world of the female protagonists. In fact, these gardens that belong to the female protagonists are enclosed. In Latin, *hortus conclusus* (the enclosed garden) is derived from the *Song of Solomon* 4:12.[182] In Medieval and Renaissance poetry and art, *hortus conclusus* had been intimately associated with the Virgin Mary, and paintings often situated her in an enclosed

[181] Dana Percec, 'Sposami a Verona', pp. 1-2. I am inspired by Henri Lefebvre to study the garden as a mental space, i.e. to regard the garden as a psychological / dream space. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 11-2.

[182] Brian E. Daley, 'The "Closed Garden" and the "Sealed Fountain": *Song of Songs* 4:12 in the Late Medieval Iconography of Mary', in *Medieval Gardens: History of Landscape Architecture Colloquium*, vol. 9, ed. Elizabeth B. Macdougall (Harvard University Press, 1986).

garden.[183] During this period, the enclosed garden was a metaphor for the virgin's enclosed womb, and symbolised guarded virginity as well as female 'virtues'.[184] Thus, the garden, which used to be hard to climb, suddenly opens its way for Romeo, because Juliet has fallen for him and desires to renounce her virginity.

Similarly, the enclosed garden belonging to Liniang's family can be imagined as Liniang's maidenhead, a garden that invites Liu Mengmei's visit. In the imaginary garden that Liniang conjures up in her dream, she wonders how improbable it is that a strange scholar should come to the enclosed garden. The improbable element can be explained through Freudian dream analysis, in which dreams are fulfilments of 'repressed wishes'.[185] Liniang's dream reveals her repressed wishes - the need of a lover - as Liniang's sexual desire awakens while entering her womanhood. Seeing that even orioles and swallows in the garden are all in pairs, she says to herself, 'My young passions stir to the young spring season, but where shall I find a proper suitor?'(*MDT*, 54; *PP*, 45-6) Her desire is left unfulfilled in the real world: she has reached the age of sixteen and she should have been betrothed by the local custom, but her parents, especially her patriarchal father, deems that it is still too early to arrange a marriage for her. Thus in her dream, a handsome scholar comes to her garden and satisfies her sexual desire.

---

[183] For more information on the theme of the enclosed garden in European literatures and the visual arts around Shakespeare's time, see Stanley Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

[184] Twigs Way, *Virgins, Weeders and Queens. A History of Women in the Garden* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006), p. 3.

[185] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010, 1st published in 1900), p. 255.

But the imaginary garden full of improbable elements is not compatible with the readers' and audience's reality. The following anecdotes have recorded faithful readers of the play, mostly young women, who died early because of excessive grief. A *kunqu* actress of the late Ming dynasty, Shang Xiaoling, shared deep compassion with the fictional heroine Liniang because she was also unfortunate in her pursuit of love. She finally died heart-broken on the stage while she sang Liniang's aria 'Let me commit my fragrant spirit, though rains be dank and drear, to keep company with this apricot's roots' (*MDT*, 67; *PP*, 61).[186] Yu Er'niang from Loujiang ate her heart out because she was helpless in defying social constraints. When Tang Xianzu heard of Yu's death, he wrote two condolence poems for her.[187] Feng Xiaoqing, a talented poet, was sold to be a concubine for a rich merchant, Feng Tong. Feng Tong's wife was so jealous that she ordered Xiaoqing to live alone in a remote mountain and even tried to poison her. Xiaoqing lamented about her tragic fate, and wrote 'I read *Mudan ting* by an oil lamp while the chilly rain is hitting against a lonely window'.[188] Her tragic marriage lead to her early death at the age of eighteen. In the early Qing dynasty, Wu Wushan's fiancé Chen Tong along with his first wife Tan Ze and his second wife Qian Yi were enchanted by *Mudan ting*. Reading the play consumed so much of Chen Tong's energy that she died before getting married. It is the stark contrast between the dream and reality that many Liniang-like figures mentioned above in the late Ming

---

186 For more on Shang Xiaoling, see Lu Tina, *Persons, Roles, and Minds: Identity in Peony Pavilion and Peach Blossom Fan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 118-122.
187 *TXZJQB*, p. 998.
188 For writings on contemporary receptions of *Mudan ting*, see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture In Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 68-112, and Chen Jingmei, 'The dream world of love-sick maidens: A study of women's responses to the "*Mudan ting*", 1598-1795' (University of California, Los Angeles : PhD diss., 1996).

and early dynasties chose to commit suicide after reading Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting*. Though Du Liniang could resurrect after lying dead for three years, there was no escape for the ordinary women who could only live once. The female readers empathised deeply with Liniang: reading about Liniang's amorous experience and her courageous pursuit of love was a great emotional comfort for them. But they also clearly knew there was no way out in their physical reality; only death could end all.

Similarly, for readers and audience who identify with Juliet, though Friar Lawrence's vial works for Juliet in the play, there was no such magic for Elizabethan young females from all walks of life to escape the fate of arranged and even forced marriage, except the Virgin Queen Elizabeth. Yet it was another story for the Queen, if not a more tragic one.

Dystopia invading the garden

The gardens of utopia belong to the psychological space of the female protagonists in both plays and are incompatible with the social reality of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*. The sudden joy of finding his true love in the garden makes Romeo fear that, 'Being in night, all this is but a dream / Too flattering sweet to be substantial' (2.2.140-1). He has every reason to fear that the encounter in the garden is as unsubstantial as a dream. Shakespeare reduplicates the same setting in the two garden scenes, Act 2 Scene 2 and Act 3 Scene 5. The parallel setting emphasises the difference: as James Black argues, 'things look the same but are painfully altered'.[189] In the first garden scene, Romeo ascends to Juliet's window as the only heir of the distinguished Montague family; in the second, he is banished, and he must leave Juliet,

[189] James Black, 'The Visual Artistry of *Romeo and Juliet*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 15.2(1975): 245-256 (247).

his newlywed wife. Like Adam and Eve, the pair of young lovers lose their Garden of Eden forever.

Although the conflict between the Capulets and the Montagues does not exist within Juliet's Garden, the moment Romeo bids farewell and leaves the garden, the garden of utopia disappears. The young lovers are the 'poor sacrifices' of the enmity between the two families (5.3.304). Their deaths pathetically confirm the futility of Friar Lawrence's efforts to transform the two households' 'rancor to pure love' through the clandestine marriage between the heirs of each family (2.3.92).

The ending is full of uncertainty and connotes the potential of a future disaster with the suggestion of the sudden appearance of the word 'brother' when Capulet addresses Montague as 'brother Montague' in the final scene. Throughout *Romeo and Juliet*, 'brother' means brother of the same family, or refers to the brotherhood in the church, as Friar Lawrence calls Friar John 'brother'. Capulet uses it in the sense of the church when people can call each other brother and sister regardless of a blood relationship. Capulet later describes the pair of young lovers of *Romeo and Juliet* as 'Poor sacrifices' of the enmity between the Capulet and the Montague. For the religious audience in Shakespeare's time, the two key words of 'brother' and 'sacrifices' may call their attention to the story between Cain and his brother Abel in the Bible. The first born child of Adam and Eve, Cain, was a farmer, and his younger brother, Abel was a shepherd. The brothers made sacrifices to God, but God favoured Abel's sacrifice instead of Cain's; Cain then murdered Abel. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the two statues are like the sacrifices that Montague and Capulet offer respectively to God. The two golden statues can also become the object of competition among Capulet and Montague. New fight may be triggered when the citizens of Verona start to argue

which golden statue is bigger, grander, and more expensive; in other words, which statue is a better sacrifice.

If the audience lends a careful ear to the Friar's opening monologue in his cell, a more pathetic fact relevant to the reality of Elizabethan theatregoers will soon emerge: 'Two such opposèd kings encamp them still / In man as well as herbs – grace and rude will – ' (2.3.27-8). Literally, 'Two such opposèd kings' means 'grace and rude', but it would not be far-fetched to suggest that the Friar is also referring to the 'Two households' at feud within the play. Hearing the Friar's words against Prince Escalus's line that three civil brawls '[h]ave thrice disturbed the quiet of our streets' (1.1.100), the audience might be reminded of the three religious shifts in sixteenth-century England shortly before Shakespeare started his career as a dramatist.[190] The utopia gradually disappears with the invasion of the physical world, not only for the characters, but also for the audience.

Not only in *Romeo and Juliet*, but also in other Shakespeare's plays, most notably *Richard II*, the garden takes on a more profound political undertone. Act 3 Scene 4 of *Richard II* explores the ideologies of governance and sovereignty by comparing the Gardener's duties with the sovereign's duties, which Richard has neglected.[191] England is likened to a 'sea-walled garden' and the whole country is full of 'weeds'

[190] For a further discussion of the religious strife in *Romeo and Juliet*, see Joseph Sterrett, '"On my word": Trust and the Word in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Études Anglaises* 71.4(2018): 409-423.

[191] See Sarah Crover, 'Gardening, stewardship and worn-out metaphors: Richard II and Justin Trudeau', *Early Modern Culture*, 13 (2018): 152-63 (152), and Guillaume Foulquie, '"All must be even in our government": Gardening and Sovereignty in the Performance of *Richard II*' [Paper presentation]. ESRA Shakespeare Conference 2021: 'The art itself is nature': Shakespeare's Nature, Art, Politics (Athens: 3-6 June, 2021).

that suck '[t]he soil's fertility from wholesome flowers' (3.4.39-40, 44).[192] As Thomas and Faircloth suggest, weeds are the result of carelessness, and represent corruption and the Fall.[193] In Richard's kingdom, the harmful weeds and 'superfluous branches' resemble a swarm of misleading flatterers who squeeze the living space of 'great and growing men'. The Gardener politicises the garden as a socio-political space, and use the metaphor of 'noisome weeds', 'wholesome herbs' and 'fairest flowers' to secretly comment on Richard's poor governance and to vent their social dissents (3.4.39-67).

The garden scene also recurs in *Mudan ting*, transitioning from an utopia to a dystopic space, and serves as a stark contrast of Liniang's situation. In the first garden scene, Scene 10 'The Interrupted Dream', Liniang is saturated with spiritual and sensual love in the company of her handsome scholar. But later in the second garden scene, Scene 12 'Pursuing the Dream', she is hopelessly alone, trying in vain to recapture her ethereal dream.[194] The stark contrast between the first and the second garden scenes indicates that the garden of utopia can only exist in Liniang's dream and cannot be realised in her social reality. The moment when Liniang steps outside the garden, she has to cling to the Confucian moral codes. In the scene after her resurrection, she replies Liu Mengmei's request to marry her as follows, 'Sir, I must remind you of the words of Mencius, that a young couple must "await the orders of the parent and the arrangements of the go-betweens"...A ghost may display fake

---

[192] All quotations of Shakespeare's plays other than *Romeo and Juliet* come from *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

[193] Vivian Thomas and Nicki Faircloth, *Shakespeare's Plants and Gardens: A Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 146.

[194] See Wang Huimin, 'From Page to Stage: A Transcultural Comparison of the "Garden Scene" in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', p. 63.

affection; a living person must pay full attention to the rites' (*MDT*, 206), says Liniang who displays her knowledge of decorum outside her dream garden.

While depicting the garden scene, Tang Xianzu constantly alludes to the 'Peach Blossom Land', an allegory by Tao Qian (365-427). The Peach Blossom Land is a secluded Shangri-la, and its inhabitants live a self-sufficient life, untroubled by the turbulent war outside. A fisherman once stumbled upon this land, but after he returned home, he failed to find his way back. The 'Peach Blossom Land' thus becomes an analogy for a lost paradise. The garden is like the Peach Blossom Land, and Liniang is like the fisherman who cannot relocate the paradise. In Scene 12, she compares herself to the fisherman, 'Where to seek him who at Wuling found faery love?' (*MDT*, 68; *PP*, 62) Lovers can only love freely in their dream garden. It is against the dreadful social situation that Liniang's dream garden is a mere mirage, and she dies because she knows the painful truth that freedom of love is impossible in her physical world.

There is also a political aspect to the garden in *Mudan ting* which has received little attention. The garden is not maintained in good condition, as Madam Du comments that 'kiosks and terraces [are] crumbling in neglect'. (*MDT*, 62; *PP*, 54) Here Tang Xianzu uses the unattended garden as a metaphor for the neglect of Liniang's welfare. Her father, Du Bao, pays little attention to Liniang's development since he is engrossed in his political career; but unfortunately, he is not only an incompetent father, but also an incompetent military official. Du Bao has not completely defeated Li Quan, rather, he has only achieved a temporary peace. As Liu Mengmei accuses Du Bao in the final scene, 'you never pacified "Li the **Whole**," only his better **half**!..All you did was offer Dame Li a pacifier to trick her into withdrawing her men'(*MDT*, 301; *PP*, 325-6). Liu is making fun of Li Quan's given name, *quán* 全

'the whole' and plays with the meaning of *bàn* 半 'half'. Du Bao's military success is not won honorably: Du Bao offers gold and titles to the rebels for this fragile peace. Du's bribery to Dame Li resembles the political shrewdness in Tang Xianzu's time during the Ming dynasty. 'Not long before Tang Xianzu was writing, peace agreements between the Ming empire and raiding Mongols under their leader Altan Khan had included the offer of a fief of land to one of Altan's wives.'[195] Truckling to the border tribes is crippling not only the Southern Song dynasty but also the late-Ming court.

Du Bao submits to the Southern-Song dynasty court a proposal that Dame Li be ennobled as Princess of *Tâo Jīn* 讨金. This noble title is tricky because it can mean completely different things. *Tâo* has diverse meanings, and the two most commonly used are 'to conquer' and 'to demand'; *jīn* usually refers to 'gold', but in the context of the play, *jīn* also means the Jin-dynasty which is the force behind the bandit Li Quan. Du Bao is taking advantage of the ambiguous meaning of *Tâo Jīn*: he explains to Dame Li that this title means she can demand as much gold as she desires from the Southern Song dynasty court; while reporting to the Southern-Song dynasty court, ennobling Dame Li the title is to demand her to conquer the Jin dynasty. In this way, Du Bao pleases both the rebels and the royal court.

Even though Li Quan retreats to the sea, the real horror of the Jin nomads' invasion hangs like a sword of Damocles over the head of the Southern Song rulers. The sword is literally suspended by a thin and flimsy thread and will drop very soon. The havoc created by the bandit Li Quan in the Huiayang region is simply the pretext

---

[195] Cyril Birch, 'Preface to the second edition of *Mudan ting*', p. xii.

of the Tartar prince's expedition of conquest.[196] The barbarian prince, Dignai, Prince of Hailing and later the Emperor of the Great Jin Dynasty, sets out to 'dash across the Great River and wipe out the house of Zhao and their Song dynasty' and pick up what's left of the realm of Zhao, and he succeeds in conquering the Song dynasty (*MDT*, 83; *PP*, 96).

Characters in the play know that the main armies of the Tartars will soon arrive, but they are indifferent towards the forthcoming plight and paint for themselves a false picture of peace and prosperity. In Scene 51 'The Lists Proclaimed', Chen Zuiliang exaggerates Du Bao's deeds to the emperor, 'how swiftly did the bandit Li submit! His document of surrender sealed and delivered, news of it reached the ears of the master of Jin, yet no move Southwards dare he make. To Loyang, to enjoy the blossoms is as far as he dare advance and now as we hunt these Tartars we may retake Kaifeng with ease' (*MDT*, 278-9; *PP*, 297-8). His boasting is at odds with the truth. Not only Chen Zuiliang, but also higher ranking officials and rulers of the Southern Song dynasty have willingly choose to ignore the sword of Damocles hanging above their head. Even during the very short period between the retreat of rebel Li Quan and the advance of Jin army, the officials indulge themselves with entertainment with the accompaniment of military prostitutes in scene 50 'Uproar at the Banquet'. Tang clearly satirises military corruption and injustice by quoting Tang-dynasty Gao Shi's poem 'Soldiers are dying on the battleground, while generals enjoy themselves with wine and beauty' (*MDT*, 273). While in an ironic contrast, the bandits who are

[196] 'The Jurchen, a Tungusic people from Manchuria, overcame the Liao to establish their Jin dynasty in the north of China in 1115. Zhao was the surname of the Chinese ruling house of the Song dynasty, who retreated south across the Yangzi to Hangzhou in 1127.' See Cyril Birch's note to his translation of *Mudan ting*, p. 341.

deemed as showing ‘little sense’ by Du Bao, dare not take female prisoners into their possession under the order of Dame Li (*MDT*, 237, 216; *PP*, 246, 219).

In a broader sense, the neglect of the house and garden in the play can be seen as an analogy for the poor governance of the rulers outside the fictional play. The crumbling ‘kiosks and terraces’ in Liniang’s garden suggest the gradual disintegration of the country’s territory as a result of the constant incursions of the northern nomads. Not only the garden of utopia is destroyed in *Mudan ting*, but also the Southern Song dynasty in the fictional play and the late Ming dynasty in Tang Xianzu’s time. During the lifetime of Tang Xianzu, the late Ming dynasty rulers had the least concern for the country’s welfare. Since his childhood, Tang Xianzu experienced and later criticised the social upheavals caused by war. In the prologue of his poem *luàn hòu* 乱后 ‘After the Riot’, which he wrote when he was 12, Tang Xianzu condemned the incompetence of the local officials who failed to protect citizens from armed bandits:

> ‘Thieves from Shanguan invaded the County and nearby places. The Prefect was rendered helpless and attempted to enclose the city. Among one hundred thousand households in Linchuan, around eighty to ninety percent had fled. Upon returning two years later, I swept my previous room and looked around in great depression. […] Where was hope in times of turmoil?[197]

Tang Xianzu’s time is faced with the severe danger of the invasion of northern nomads, the later founders of the Qing dynasty.[198] The territory was torn apart by intruders from the four corners, and its citizens were displaced and abandoned. The

---

[197] *TXZJQB*, pp. 97-8, my translation.

[198] Due to this reason, the war elements were often cut during the Qing dynasty.

mixing of historical periods - Southern Song dynasty and late Ming dynasty - in *Mudan ting* is part of the process of writing as well as commenting on Tang Xianzu's present. The incompetent ruler in the play was a mirror image of the ruler in the late Ming dynasty, Emperor Shen-zong (reigned 1573-1620). The emperor believed in the Taoist doctrine that good government could be maintained while the ruler did nothing.[199] For about 30 consecutive years starting from 1589, the emperor did not hold the imperial morning audience at which the officials reported major social problems to the emperor. His neglect of government affairs led to the paralysis of the bureaucratic system. Low administrative efficiency made it difficult for officials to achieve their political ambition.[200] Failing to advance in their careers, officials chose to be hermits in their own mansions and private gardens. Theatre was in vogue in the late Ming dynasty, and high-ranking officials had their own private troupe, usually made up of domestic servants.[201]

As the most popular Chinese play during and after Tang Xianzu's lifetime, *Mudan ting* was often performed in the private gardens of high-ranking officials. Tang Xianzu's poetry collections record numerous play-watching experiences, including *Mudan ting* once performed by the private troupe of the Prime Minister

---

[199] Anonymous, *Shen-zong Shi-lu* (*Record of Emperor Shen-zong*), reprint (Taipei: Chung-yang Yen-chiu-yüan, 1966), pp. 3144-46.

[200] For more on Chinese history, see Ray Huang, 'The Ming fiscal administration', in Denis C. Twitchett, Frederick W. Mote (eds), *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8 The Ming Dynasty, Part 2: 1368-1644 (Cambridge University Press, 2008, 1st edn. 1998), pp. 106-71 (165-6) and Ray Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance* (Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 1-41.

[201] For more on the venues and organisation of theatrical performances during the late Ming dynasty, see Shen Grant Guangren. *Elite Theatre in Ming China, 1368-1644* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Wang Xijue.[202] The officials of the late Ming dynasty retreated to their beautifully landscaped gardens, and indulged in theatre performances and other entertainment. Following the example of Emperor Shen-zong, the officials turned a blind eye to the literally burning social issues outside their garden - the threat from northern nomads, bandits, and pirates. They willingly chose to live in the fictional utopia, only to be awakened by the dystopia at a time when it was already too late to change.

History repeats itself not only in the play, but also in the audience's physical reality. Outside the garden in *Mudan ting*, the nomads are invading the Southern-Song dynasty; outside the fictional play of *Mudan ting*, the late-Ming court is in its last years of sociopolitical instability before being toppled by the Manchus, a non-Han Chinese tribe from northeastern China, less than fifty years after *Mudan ting* was written. History repeats again – hundreds of years later, the Manchus were invaded by the Eight Nation Alliance. The dystopia in *Mudan ting* reverberates with China's historical and political misfortunes during and after Tang Xianzu's living era.

The contrast between the two *mises en scène* – the corrupted society and the garden of utopia – reveals the nature of the social problem. More than four centuries have elapsed since the debut of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*; yet, what troubled Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu and their audiences like religious strife and social turbulence, are still relevant. 'The human species does not necessarily move in stages from progress to progress', says the French-Chinese dramatist, Gao Xingjian, in his 2000 Nobel Lecture; 'Scientific and technological progress certainly does not imply that humankind as a result becomes more civilised.'[203] War and strife continue to make the news' headlines, and what differentiates today's conflict from those in

[202] Tang Xianzu, *Tang Xianzu's Complete Works*, ed. Xu Shuofang, p. 998.

[203] Gao Xingjian, 'The Case for Literature', trans. Mabel Lee, NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2022. Fri. 8 Apr 2022.

history is that the methods of killing have advanced. It is still a time of 'glooming peace' (5.3.305), as Prince Escalus unknowingly predicts in the denouement of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Performance implications of the garden utopia as a mirage

Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu make probable on the stage what is impossible in the audience's daily life, and objectively, as well as mercilessly, inform the audience that the garden of utopia is nothing but a mirage that is subject to the authoritative force in the physical world and is doomed to disappear. There is no such reconciliation where the two feuding families live happily ever after in *Romeo and Juliet*, neither is there a 'grand union' between Liniang and Liu Mengmei along with their family members in *Mudan ting*.

Only in the garden of utopia are people treated as equals regardless of their birth, social status, ethnicity, gender, age, or religion; what is external does not decide a person: one is still himself after he changes his 'name' or 'title'. But outside the garden, characters are fighting for external and ephemeral things like 'titles' and 'honour', fame and fortune. Throughout both plays, people's material desires overflow. Capulet is not satisfied with being a lord, and he desires to move up the social ladder and to become the father-in-law of Paris who is from a princely parentage; Du Bao climbs up his career ladder from a local prefect, to the military pacification commissioner, and finally to the Prime Minister, which is at odds with his initial wish to resign in scene 3. Similarly in Mercutio's Queen Mab speech (1.4.53-94), courtiers dreams of 'smelling out a suit', parsons dreams of 'another benefice',

---

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2000/gao/25532-gao-xingjian-nobel-lecture-2000-2/> (last accessed on 15 June 2023). It is worth mentioning that the name of the exile writer, 'Gao Xingjian', is unspeakable in mainland Chinese academia.

soldiers who dreams 'of cutting foreign throats, / Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades, of health's five fathom deep'. But 'All the world's a stage', as Jaques says in *As You Like It* (2.7.138), and in China as in the West, 'the notion of the world as stage originally spoke to the vanity of human achievement, the ephemerality of rank and honour.'[204] As the Buddhism saying goes, all fame and fortune are transient. Yet not many people have already been aware of the ephemerality. They lack a transcendental view of life and fail to realise that these names, titles, and wealth are transient in the earthy world within the limited span of one's life.

Among all productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, very few manage to present a transcendental view of life except *West Side Story* (2021 film). The film opens with a sign reading the whole region is going to be demolished to make space for new buildings. In other words, the Sharks and the Jets are shedding blood for a place that will soon be torn down. The fight is thus meaningless because the victory of wining the control over the place ceases with the forthcoming disappearance of the place.

So far, there has not been a production of *Mudan ting* that has pointed out the transience of the success won by Liu Mengmei and crises hidden behind the superficial 'grand union'. Viewing from a historical perspective, Du Bao's distinguished social status as the Prime Minister and Liu Mengmei's honour of being the top graduate would soon end quickly with the demise of the Southern Song dynasty. But still, they pursue advancement in politics and try to make their name known across the four corners of the world.

Tang Xianzu's contrast of the dream garden featured with freedom, love, and equality with the turbulent and rigid physical world in *Mudan ting* is not always

---

[204] Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China*, p. 18.

actualised on the stage. Few *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting* ever attempt to show the social reality. In the two non-*kunqu* productions by Chen and Sellars, the dramaturgical contrast is not evident in the one produced by Chen Shi-zheng. In the physical world, the emperor was performed by a woman, which seems to suggest the rising social status of women in his production. It is still unthinkable in today's China that the top ruler should be a woman, but there should be a woman emperor in Lininag's world. Besides, the Liniang performed by Qian Yi dares to show her dissatisfaction when her father scolds her. In addition, Du Liniang wears a golden gown embroidered with dragon patterns exclusive to emperors. This detail indicates that the rigid social restrictions on the dress code ceases to exist. According to historical facts throughout the Chinese feudal society, only the emperor could use the golden colour and the pattern of dragon; it cost one's life if he did not dress according to his social status. The unhistorical facts in Chen's production weakens the central contrast between the corrupted physical world and the garden of utopia, and does not succeed in clarifying the severe suppression that Liniang experiences in the dreadful social situation.

Neither is Tang Xianzu's juxtaposition of a chaotic physical world with an imaginary garden of utopia evidenced in Sellars's production. In Part one there was little indication of the oppressive world outside the garden. As Sellars's production begins with Scene 10 of *Mudan ting* 'The Interrupted Dream', the audience has little chance to learn about *kunqu* Liniang's life experience prior to the scene. Neither is it clear why the naturalistic Liniang performed by the American actor Lauren Tom is confined within her room. Sellars presents the dream of freedom alone without much depiction of the world outside, and without that contrast, the power of the dream decreases significantly.

There are several levels of meaning in Liniang's dream in *Mudan ting*. Tang Xianzu constructs an ideal where Liniang is understood and loved, but there is a twist—the ideal only exists in her dream. Once she tries to retrace it, it disappears due to the invasion of the physical reality. The rear garden of Liniang's family crumbles after Liniang's early death. The decay vividly shows the impossibility for the garden to exist in Liniang's physical world. The disappearance and deconstruction of the dream garden unequivocally show that the tragic fate of Liniang is unavoidable in her social reality.

But Sellars has only understood the literal meaning of the 'dream': he equals the multi-level dream as 'an American dream', and identifies Liu Mengmei rather than Liniang as the 'dreamer'. Sellars explained in an interview that the play was about the aspirations of a younger generation: 'There is this tremendous sense of a student movement, asking real questions of their country: What can we do in our lifetime to create the world that we envision in our dreams? What it means to pursue the dream is very potent.'[205] To begin with, it is far-fetched for Sellars to identify the male protagonist, Liu Mengmei, as one of the modern-day student protesters at the Tian'anmen Square in 1989. Liu Mengmei's primary goal is to achieve worldly rewards he claims in Scene 2 of *Mudan ting*: he attends the royal examinations to gain fame, fortune, and beautiful partner(s) rather than to pursue the political agenda of saving the country.

Then, Sellars incorporates the dream garden into his favourite dialectics, the 'confusion of reality and illusion', with the enhancement of mirrors and reflection on

[205] https://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/The-Tent-Where-Harmony-Lives-For-director-Peter-2944537.php (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

the stage.[206] His politicised interpretation of the 'dream garden' simplifies the 'garden' image and prevents him from seeing deeper meanings. Judging by Sellars's standard, Liu Mengmei has achieved his dream, but Tang Xianzu was more complicated than that: Tang's dream garden is probable in the realm of humanity's aspiration and imagination but incompatible and therefore impossible in a turbulent society threatened by war. The irony of the play is that the dynasty that fulfills Liu's dream as its original audience would have known, will soon come to an end. Rephrasing Robert Crosman's word, the true contest in Tang Xianzu was not between illusion and reality, but between various views of reality, each competing with the others for dominance.[207] Tang Xianzu juxtaposes different realities, the chaotic world and the dream garden, and lets the audience contrast them. The audience will be shocked when dystopia invades into this garden of utopia, and they may even attempt to fight against the unfair social system evident in their own chaotic social reality. All these cannot be achieved with Sellars's 'confusion of reality and illusion' alone.[208]

---

[206] For the stage contrast of dream and reality, see Catherine Swatek, 'Boundary Crossings: Peter Sellars's Production of Peony Pavilion,' *Asian Theatre Journal* (2002): 147-158 (150).

[207] Robert Crosman, *World's a Stage: Shakespeare and the Dramatic View of Life* (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2004), p. 5.

[208] Besides, given Sellars's profound interest in illusion and reality, it is curious why he has left out Liniang's self-portrait, the prime example of the ambiguity between illusion and reality.

Chapter 3 Simplification of the text, beauty, spectacles, and historical authenticity in productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*

As the previous two chapters show, more often than not, producers of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* do not trust the text. They cut the comic elements and avoid an unsettled ending. As a result, they simplify the play and present another clichéd pair of 'star-cross'd lovers' of *Romeo and Juliet* and another uninteresting pair of 'talented scholar and beautiful maiden' of *Mudan ting*. A comparative study of Garrick's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* and *kunqu* production of *Mudan ting* can clearly show the simplification process.

David Garrick's production of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Zhuibaiqiu* 缀白裘 edition of *Mudan ting* in the mid-eighteenth century share contemporaneity and great popularity. *Zhuibaiqiu* means 'a patched cloak of white fur', and it is a collection of 400 excerpts from more than 80 popular plays, and it compares the play excerpts to precious fur.[209] *Zhuibaiqiu* is a literary miscellany of the playscript of *zhezixi*. Historically, Garrick adapted *Romeo and Juliet* at least three times, and the third edition was performed in 1753.[210] There are five versions of *Zhuibaiqiu*, and for the sake of direct parallels, this thesis is based on the well-received Qian Decang's edition of *Zhuibaiqiu* published in 1764.

Garrick was an actor, and *Zhuibaiqiu* is a collection of actors' performance texts. The two texts' shared popularity testifies to a similar historical trend in England and China where actors entered the realm of publication. The booming economy in the

[209] Anonymous, *Zhuibaiqiu* 缀白裘 *A Patched Cloak of White Fur*, compiled by Qian Decang, ed. by Wang Xieru (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2005).

[210] David Garrick, *The Plays of David Garrick*, edited with commentary and notes by Harry William Pedicord and Fredrick Louis Bergmann (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), vol. 3, p. 78.

Georgian time and mid-Qing dynasty, also referred to as the high Qing era, created a high demand for entertainment.[211] It contributed to the prosperity of commercial playing troupes and the establishment of acting as a profession, which lead to actors' rising social positions.

Garrick (1717-1779) is the most representative 18th century English actor, and his production of *Romeo and Juliet* sets the paradigm of performance for nearly one century.[212] Garrick endeavoured to 'supply the failure of so great a master [as Shakespeare]' in order to 'clear the original as much as possible', as Garrick explained in his advertisement for adapted *Romeo and Juliet* in the 1750s.[213] Garrick's adapting practice does not stand alone, rather, there are many adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* as well as new plays inspired by Shakespeare during Garrick's lifetime, like that by Theophilus Cibber, and that by John Rich at Covent Garden. But most of the texts of productions prior to Garrick have not survived.[214] Garrick has altered much of Shakespeare's text, still he claims to 'put a stop to much of the degradation into which Shakespeare's plays had fallen' and his version actually paved the way for the complete restoration of Shakespeare's texts.[215] From this aspect we can see how unfaithful previous Restoration productions have been.

---

[211] See John Styan, *The English Stage: A History of Drama and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 274-8, and Willard J. Peterson, 'Introduction: The Ch'ing Dynasty, the Ch'ing Empire, and the Great Ch'ing Integrated Domain', in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 9, ed. By Willard J. Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp.1-15.

[212] See George C. Branam, 'The Genesis of David Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35.2(1984): 170-179 (pp. 178-9).

[213] David Garrick, *The Plays of David Garrick*, vol. 3, p. 77, 78.

[214] Thomas Otway's production of *Romeo and Juliet* is readily attainable, but this production is so removed from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* that I do not include it in the discussion.

[215] Harry William Pedicord and Fredrick Louis Bergmann, 'Introduction' in David Garrick, *The Plays of David Garrick*, 1981, vol. 3, pp. xiii-xiv.

In contrast to Garrick's adaptation that has been seldom performed today, *Zhuibaiqiu* is still well received, mostly among *kunqu* connoisseurs and performers ever since its publication in the mid-Qing dynasty and is in a continuous demand of reprint. Different in form from Garrick's productions, *Zhuibaiqiu* includes twelve *zhezixi* from *Mudan ting*, namely *Míng pàn* 冥判 'Infernal judgment', *Shí huà* 拾画 'The portrait recovered', *Jìao huà* 叫画 'Calling the lady in the portrait', *Xué táng* 学堂 'The schoolroom', *Yóu yuán* 游园 'Wandering in the garden', *Jīng mèng* 惊梦 'The interrupted dream', *Xún mèng* 寻梦 'Pursuing the dream', *Yuán jìa* 圆驾 'Reunion at court', *Quàn nóng* 劝农 'Speed the Plough', *Lí hún* 离魂 'The soul's departure', *Wèn lù* 问路 'Asking the way', and *Dìao dâ* 吊打 'Interrogation under the rod'. This *Zhuibaiqiu* edition changes some of the original scene titles, for example, from the scene title of *Wán zhēn* 玩真 'The portrait examined' to the *zhezixi* title of 'Calling the lady in the portrait', and from *Pú zhēn* 仆侦 'The servant asking the way in search of the master' to 'Asking the way'. The *zhezixi* titles are simplified, and sound more colloquial than *Mudan ting* scene titles, which reflects the taste of the changing audience – the elite audience of the late Ming dynasty is outnumbered by middle-class audiences in the mid-Qing dynasty. During the late 16th and 17th centuries, in China and in Europe, the 'rising middle class elite' begins to claim their cultural capital.[216]

In the Qing dynasty China, limited freedom of speech in the Qing dynasty discouraged the artistic creation of literary writers. As the declining number of new plays could not meet the high demand of performance, *kunqu* performers played a leading role in adapting previous plays. Publications of performers' variation of

[216] Sophie Volpp, *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China*, p. 19.

literati playwrights' plays, like *Zhuibaiqiu* and earlier miscellanies such as *Zuìyí qíng* 醉怡情 (Drunken pleasure) marked a new era in the performance history of *kunqu*, revealing 'a gradual shift from a theatrical literature controlled by playwrights to one that registered the creative efforts of performers.'[217] The literati no longer dominated the interpretation of a play, thus performers gained the freedom to adapt based on the audience's taste. In the hand of *kunqu* performers, the original plays are like malleable raw material apt for re-creation and adaptation. Performers take the initiative to translate the scripts in selected scenes into audio-visual appealing stage symbols in order to fully tap the stage potential of a particular scene.

Influenced by the dominant ideologies, Garrick's and *Zhuibaiqiu*'s adaptation practices inevitably have a didactic tone. John Styan notes that 'the moralistic shift in taste governed everything on the stage' as in 1704 Queen Anne ordered her Lord Chamberlain 'not to license anything that is not strictly agreeable to religion and good manners' which turns the stage into a pulpit.[218] Levenson reveals that Garrick's production of *Romeo and Juliet* allows other actors to add their views in his explication, which is part of eighteenth-century theatre conventions.[219] Garrick purifies the characters, like deleting all references to Rosaline, Romeo's first lover, in his third edition of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1753. He constructs Romeo as an unequivocally loyal lover of Juliet in order to cater to the moral standards in the Georgian era. He also carefully adjusts Juliet's age, from fourteen to eighteen as Lord

---

[217] Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, p. 101.

[218] John Styan, *The English Stage*, pp. 280-1.

[219] Jill L. Levenson, *Romeo and Juliet: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1987), p. 25.

Capulet tells Paris that Juliet 'hath not seen the change of eighteen years'.[220] Garrick changes this detail probably because he deems that marriage at the age of fourteen is rather indecent according to Georgian standard.

Zhuibaiqiu also purifies Liniang's characteristics because of the strict ideological control – Emperor Qianlong encourages the construction of moral examples for his citizens to follow. The morals become a guiding principle for *kunqu* adapters. Catering to audience's tastes and the state's political control, they re-wired the selected scenes to become the embodiment of traditional Confucian values imposed by the ruling class like loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness.[221] For example, adapters politicize 'the spectacle of Liniang's death, which in the staged version becomes the occasion for an elaborate display of filial piety.'[222] They demonstrate Liniang's filial piety by adding the detail that Liniang insists to kowtow – the foremost etiquette, to her mother, to show her regret for failing to fulfil her filial duty due to her early death. This kowtow detail adds a didactic tone in *Mudan ting* at the sacrifice of the integrity of this play's spiritual value. This detail does not accord with the intention of the play – blind obedience to the orders of parents is what Tang Xianzu is criticizing, and what Liniang's ghost is later fighting against.

Influenced by the censorship, *Zhuibaiqiu*, like other *kunqu* miscellanies, also 'purifies' the plot. *Kunqu* abridgment of the play accentuates the protagonists' love story by cutting the humorous minor characters and the subplot of war. A comparative study of the relationship between Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting* and later adaptations can

---

[220] *Romeo and Juliet. A Tragedy Altered from Shakespeare*, by David Garrick, ESQ. Taken from the Manager's Book (London: printed for R. Butters, at the Theatre Royal in Covent-Garden, 1795), p. 6.

[221] See Feng Wei, *Intercultural Aesthetics in Traditional Chinese Theatre From 1978 to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 52-3.

[222] Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, p. 113.

be the topic of a new thesis. I will only point out the most evident change, common in all later adaptations, that is the tacit cutting of the comic aspects in the two Confucian scholars: Du Liniang's father, Du Bao, and Liniang's tutor Chen Zuiliang. Also due to the theatre censorship, the potentially subversive comic characters are cut: 'the artists and actors playing in the farce and pantomime were usually persecuted and tortured, which resulted in the difficulty for the performers to become "legitimate and professional"'.[223] The humour is cut to allow space for the unfolding of the protagonists' emotion via singing and gestures. Due to the cutting of comic roles, their embodied tradition of humour and satire has also declined. Pai Hsien-yung's well-acclaimed adaptation (2004) simplifies the whole play into three parts: the love in dreams, the love between the human being (Liu Mengmei) and the ghost (Du Liniang's ghost), and the love between Liu Mengmei and Du Liniang after Liniangs' resurrection. *Mudan ting* by the Northern *Kunqu* Theatre rewrites the play: Liu Mengmei no longer seeks success in royal examination, but rather sets on the road to find his true love.

In both practices of Garrick and *Zhuibaiqiu*, actor-adapters simplify the plot, cut the comics, and add a didactic tone. The simplified plots similarly centre around the title roles; whereas, minor characters and sub-plots are sacrificed, which leads to the weakening of the social background and the social problems along with it. To compensate for the weakened plot, the actor-adapters add spectacles. More often than not, those spectacles are not only irrelevant to the plot, but also sacrifice a play's structural integrity.

---

[223] Ding Shumei, 'On the prohibition and destruction of Chinese ancient drama' (Shanghai: East China Normal University: PhD. Diss., 2006), abstract. The thesis was also published under the same title by China Social Science Press, 2008.

Beauty and spectacles

It is easier to understand why adaptations of both plays have not been as powerful as the original in the light of Chinese literary theory, *xíng shén lùn* 形神论(‘appearance-essence’, or ‘form-spirit’ theory). *Xíng shén lùn* was first applied to painting, and was introduced to the literary field by Liú Xíe (465-520) in his *The Literary Mind and The Carving of Dragons*.[224] *Xíng* is the external form, or the appearance, and *shén* 神 is the internal spirit, or the essence; *xíng sì* 形似 means the mimicking of the physical appearance, while *shén sì* 神似 refers to the internal spiritual resemblance. The highest artistic standard is *xíng shén jīan jù* 形神兼具 ‘resemblance of both form and spirit’. If it is not possible to maintain both the form and the essence, most theorists favour the pursuit of *shén* over *xíng*; because the pursuit of *xíng* is artisanal, while the pursuit of *shén* is artistic.[225]

The theory of *xíng shén lùn* has been widely applied in Chinese literary criticism. But so far, it has not been used to analyse adaptation practices. In the field of adaptation, this thesis understands *shén* as written plays by Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu. The text is the most reliable account and it contains rich explicit and implicit stage directions. This thesis understands *xíng* as the external form, the stage presentation of the written text, including but not limited to the stage set and properties, actors’ costumes and make-up, lighting, music, and many others.

---

224 Chapter ‘Ti-xing’, in *The Literary Mind and The Carving of Dragons*, see https://ctext.org/wei-jin-and-north-south/ens?searchu=文心雕龙 (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

225 See Xu Yanlin, ‘*Xíng Shén Lùn*’s Influence on Ming Dynasty Drama Theories.’ *Journal of College of Chinese Traditional Opera*, vol.27, No.2, 38-47 (44).

The majority of previous adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* (before 1950s) and *Mudan ting* do not face up to the challenge of interpreting the essential *shén* - the written play. And to compensate for their lack of comprehension, they turn to *xíng*, the physical appearance of performance. They employ good-looking actors in the title roles, and dress the actors with beautiful costume and exaggerated make-up; they turn the stage into a picture, decorate it with expensive properties, and enhance its charm with every means of stage techniques, like lighting and a large ensemble of musicians; they also add stunts, and try to maintain the audience's attention through actors' exaggerated performances as well as unnecessarily frequent interaction with the audience. Productions that prefer *shén* to *xíng* are few and far between, and they will be discussed in the final chapter.

It is a common practice to employ good-looking actors for the lead roles in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*. Orlando Bloom, best known for playing the Elf Legolas in *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, was chosen to perform Romeo in the 2013 Broadway production.[226] Similarly in Pai Hsien-yung's 2004 production of *Mudan ting*, Du Liniang was performed by the young and relatively inexperienced actor Shen Fengying, whose singing was imperfect due to her incorrect breathing techniques. A much more experienced and well-accomplished actor, Gu Weiying, was not chosen simply because Shen looked more beautiful than Gu. Frustrated by the director's casting choice, Gu left Suzhou Kunqu theatre.

Not only the actors, but every aspect of *kunqu* performance should be beautiful. Two often heard comments of *kunqu* performance is that 'the singing voice is very beautiful/melodious' and that 'the gestures and movement are picturesque'. And the first appearance of every *kunqu* actor on the stage has often been compared with the

---

[226] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, dir. by Peter Jackson (Warner Bros, 2001-3).

art of sculpture. Current scholarship praises *kunqu* for its beauty of every aspect. Chen Duo's theory of *méixíng qûshèng* 美形取胜, lit., 'beautiful form takes victory' is highly influential. In his view, other elements of *kunqu*, like drama writing and musical composition, are supposed to concertedly achieve the ultimate goal of beauty in performance.[227] Wang Ning similarly states that *kunqu zhezixi*'s final pursuit is *hâo kàn* 好看 'good look', or 'beauty'.[228] Pai Hsien-yung writes 'beauty is the essence of *kunqu*'.[229] Influenced by the beauty-oriented aesthetic, nowadays *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting* are judged by whether it is 'beautiful' or not.[230] In media coverage of *kunqu* performance, the word 'beautiful' has been frequently adopted by media coverage of *kunqu* productions, and it was the very word used in audience responses to new *kunqu* productions from 2001 to 2015 as Yang Ming (2019) observed.[231]

All *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting* including Chen Shi-zheng's emphasise their beautiful stage and costume. The well-acclaimed Pai Hsien-yung's 'young lovers' edition of *Mudan ting* was praised for its beauty, especially the fine embroidery in the

---

227 Chen Duo, *Xiqu Meixue* 戏曲美学 *Aesthetics of Xiqu* (Chengdu: Sishuan renmin publishing house, 2001), p. 372. Apart from *meixing qusheng*, Chen Duo also proposes another three treatises *wurong gesheng* 舞容歌声 (lit., dance and song), *dongren yiqing* 动人以情 (lit., move people through emotions), and *yizhu xingcong* 意主形从 (lit., meaning dominates the form).

228 Wang Ning,*A Study on Kunju Zhezixi*, p. 136.

229 Pai Hsien-yung, 'The New Aesthetics of *Kunqu* - From the 'Young Lovers' Edition of *Mudan ting* to the New Version of *The Jade Hairpin* 昆曲新美学——从青春版《牡丹亭》到新版《玉簪记》', *Arts Criticism*, 3(2010): 5-9 (p. 5).

230 The emphasis of 'beauty' in *kunqu* performance is actually an invented tradition, see Kim Hunter-Gordon, 'Contesting Traditional Luzi ('Choreographic Paths'): A Performance-Based Study of *Kunqu*' (Royal Holloway, University of London: PhD thesis, 2016), pp. 8-10, 19-21.

231 Yang Ming, 'Return of the Soul: Inheritance and Innovation in the Process of Artistic Creation in Major *Kunqu* Productions in the PRC, 2001-2015' (University of Hawai'I: PhD thesis, 2019), pp. 7-8.

twelve Flower Spirits' mantle all hand-embroidered by Suzhou artists for hundreds of hours. But this detail is not based on Tang Xianzu's text at all: Tang only employed an old male actor to be the Flower Spirit, instead of a dozen of beautifully dressed young girls in Pai's production. In Tang Xianzu's stage direction, there was only one flower spirit dressed plainly 'in red cloak strewn with petals and ornamental headdress on his piled-up hair' (*MDT*, 55; *PP*, 48). The aesthetic taste for colour and grandeur in the eighteenth-century cried for a more realistic performance of the garden scene. With the absence of backdrops, the brilliant scenography of the garden scene was presented through the gorgeous costumes of a dozen flower spirits. Since the early Qing dynasty, the performance tradition of flower spirits has evolved to be increasingly exquisite. The number of flower spirits increases from one to twelve to satisfy the audience's quest for visual spectacles. Even though *Zhuibaiqiu* only adds *shui mo shen* 睡魔神 (dream spirit) holding mirrors in his hand without employing any flower spirit, an earlier miscellany, *Zuiyiqing* depicts twelve flower spirits representing the seasonal flowers. This added scene also gains its own name, *Duihua* 堆花 (Heaped blossoms).[232] *Duihua* does not contribute to the plot, and is presented simply to enhance visual beauty on the stage – the flower spirits' colourful dresses and various floral props are trying to turn the stage into a virtual garden.

One evidence is the growing number of flower spirits in the added scene of *Duī hua* 堆花 'heaped blossom'. *Shenyin jiangulu* is a Qing-dynasty stage-based playscript, and its illustration reflects its contemporary staging.[233] The illustration

[232] Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, p. 106.

[233] *Shenyin jiangulu* 审音鉴古录 *A Record for Parsing Notes and Mirroring Great Performances*, complied by Qinyinweng 琴隐翁, reprinted in *Shanben xiqu congkan* 善本戏曲丛刊, compiled by Wang Qiugui 王秋桂, vols. 73-74 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1984-1987).

below shows thirteen flower spirits and one dream spirit overseeing the dream lovemaking between Liniang and Scholar Liu. The flower spirits are played by different role types as a way of showing a troupe's rich personal resources. In total there are fourteen deities in this scene, which outnumbers a combination of the twelve flower spirits in *Zuiyiqing* and one dream spirit in *Zhuibaiqiu*. Besides the growing number, the costume is probably more sophisticated. The costume of the fourteen deities is embroidered with elaborated patterns, and their diverse headdress indicates their different identities.

Beautiful clothing is usually expensive. As recorded by Li Dou's (1749-1817) in *The Painted Pleasure Boat of Yangzhou* 扬州画舫录, the play troupe of the Zhang family spent ten thousand gold coins for the costume of flower spirits in *Mudan ting*.[234] Later, *Kunju chuantai* 昆剧穿戴 (*The Costume of Kunju*)[235] records the embellished details of each deity's costume and prop. For example, the dream spirit should be dressed in green shirt, black pants, and should wear a fake black beard, while the head of flower spirits is a *lao sheng* 老生 'old male' role who should wear a crown, yellow shirt, red pants, high-platform shoes, and hold a peony flower in the left hand as well as a *yun zhou* 云帚 'fairy brush' in the right hand. He holds the peony flower because peony is nicknamed 'king of flowers', which is in accordance with his position as the head of flower spirits. *The Costume of Kunju* sets specific and

---

[234] Li Dou, *The Painted Pleasure Boat of Yangzhou* 扬州画舫录, ed. by Zhou Chundong (Jinan: Shandong Youyi Chubanshe, 2001, 1st in 1795), p. 159.

[235] Zeng Changsheng, *The Costume of Kunju* 昆剧穿戴, ed. by Xu Lingyun, Bei Jinmei (Suzhou: Suzhou *Xiqu* Research Office, 1963).

detailed directions of costume and props, and serves as a reference book for today's performances.[236]

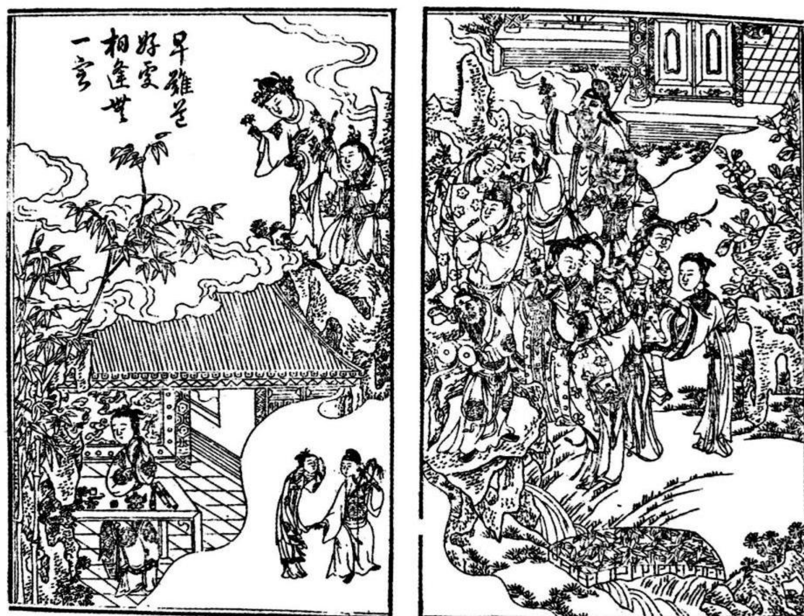


Figure 8 Illustration of thirteen flower spirits and one dream spirit in *Shenyin jiangulu*

In addition to the stage spectacle of a large number of flower spirits, other spectacles include a funeral progression of Liniang in Chen Shi-zheng's 1999 production of *Mudan ting* which consists of the burning of paper money and effigies; the funeral progression even marches to the street and is followed by audience members. Chen's stage is, without exaggeration, piled up with different spectacles, and most of which are irrelevant to the plot. In Chen's production, the infernal Judge Hu spits fire, and this stunt is borrowed from *kunqu* and Sichuan opera. David Rolston commented that 'three-ring circus' aspects of Chen's production - 'stilt walking, street games, rowing

[236] For more details on the flower spirits' costume and function, see Wang Huimin, 'Inclusion and Exclusion: Gender Politics in the Performance Traditions of the flower spirits in *Mudan ting*', *Emergence* 11(2020):1-12.

and punting of imaginary board, religious rituals (including an exorcism dance by Sister Stone), a funeral with the burning of effigies... ' – seemed to 'evince an anxiety that the audience would get bored with anything less.'[237] The wide use of acrobatics and Chinese folk arts at one hand shows the diversity of Chinese art as Chen said in 'Director's Note' that he wished to restore 'some lively elements of early Chinese opera that have fallen into disuse'.[238] But on the other hand, it shows Chen Shi-zheng's lack of confidence that Tang Xianzu's dramaturgical art alone could win the audience.

From the Restoration until today, producers of *Romeo and Juliet* emphasise on elaborated stage scenery. Theatre posters from the period of David Garrick advertise scenic effects; arguably theatre at this period and through the 19th century is more a fore runner to cinema than an inheritor of Shakespeare's stage. Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet* was the object of pictorial experiment. In order to satisfy the taste for scenic spectacle and surprising stage devices, David Garrick appointed Philip de Loutherbourg from Paris for the sceneography design. De Loutherbourg's work went beyond painted scenery - apart from shutters and flats, he built ramps and levels, achieving a vertical dimension within the acting area.[239]

Among all the spectacles, the grand funeral procession coupled with a choral dirge, is a prominent feature of Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet*. A German Count Frederick Kielmansegge saw one of Garrick's productions of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1761 when the Count travelled to London. He reported that an entire funeral was

---

[237] David Rolston, 'Tradition and innovation in Chen Shi-zheng's Peony Pavilion', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 19.1(2002): 134-146 (140).

[238] Qtd in David Rolston, 'Tradition and innovation in Chen Shi-zheng's Peony Pavilion', pp. 135-6.

[239] See John Styan, *The English Stage*, p. 278.

beautifully and naturally represented, with bells tolling, and a choir singing. Juliet lay on a state bed with a splendid canopy over her, guarded by girls who strew flowers, and by torch-bearers with flaming torches. Amazingly, around fifty actors, including dancers and singers, to be seen on one night, 'whilst there are probably as many absent', the sheer number of actors standing on the stage is a spectacle itself. Kielmansegge also noted that different decorations, machinery, and dresses were 'provided regardless of cost and with thorough completeness'.[240]

After Garrick, Henry Irving's stage design for play reached the culmination of stage spectacles as contemporary critics commented. A great amount of time was needed for the carpenters to change the scenery. And the spectacles were a distraction for the audience to appreciate actors' performance as William Poel complained that 'those outward decorations and subordinate details' not only 'divert a careful observance of the acting' but also 'obliterate the main object of dramatic work.'[241]

The high budget of stage and costume design is the signature of spectacle-oriented commercial productions. Though the funeral procession is irrelevant to the written play, George C. Branam argues that 'spectacle was its own justification' as 'Garrick rushed it [the funeral procession] into place in the struggle for box office supremacy'.[242] Commercial reasons lie behind Garrick's addition of irrelevant stage spectacles which, unfortunately, is at the cost of a play's continuity as changing the

---

[240] Count Frederick Kielmansegge, *Diary of A Journey to England in the years 1761-1762*, trans. Countess Kielmansegge (London, 1902), pp. 221-2. Quote in David Garrick, *The Plays of David Garrick*, vol 3, p. 411.

[241] William Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (London and Toronto: Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1913, reprint by AMS Press in 1974), pp. 7-8.

[242] See George C. Branam, 'The Genesis of David Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35.2(1984): 170-179 (pp. 178-9).

scenery takes much of performance time. This is the same for Henry Irving's productions of *Romeo and Juliet*.

On today's stage as well, the 2019 Shakespeare's Globe production of *Romeo and Juliet* alters Shakespeare's text and dresses Juliet in her beautiful wedding dress on the eve of her wedding. This detail is also against common sense: few brides will go to bed in wedding dress not only because it is uncomfortable but also because it will make the dress winkled. But this production ignores all the practical consideration in order to show how pretty Juliet is in the dream wedding dress.

Sometimes actors' special skills are also spectacles worthy of sight. It is recorded that Garrick elaborated his part as Romeo to fully exhibit his talent of performance: Garrick 'bent his knees so that he could shift his balance quickly' and a resultant lower centre of gravity enabled him to effect rapid transitions between points of focus and emotional responses.[243] Garrick emphasised the flexibility, litheness, and gracefulness of his body to feed the eye of the audience. Similarly, nearly all *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting* raise the priority of displaying technical skills and downplay the importance of the plot.[244]

Producers' distrust on the written play is also indicated by adding cheap jokes, or exaggerated gestures, like actor's unrelenting winking at the audience: in Shakespeare's Globe theatre, actors often turn to exaggerated gestures and frequent stage-auditorium interactions to attract the audience's attention. In *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting*, troupes 'sought to inject "bustling" (热闹) into their performances and to create a stage reality that more closely approximated the mentality of an audience no longer limited to scholar officials, wealthy merchants, and their household

[243] Darren Tunstall, *Shakespeare and Gesture in Practice* (London: Palgrave, 2016), p.89.

[244] Wang Ning, *A Study on Kunju Zhezixi*, p. 59.

members.'[245] To inject 'bustling', troupes preferred popular light comedies in the repertoire. For plays like *Mudan ting* that mixed different generic elements, instead of explicating the comic potentials embedded in the play, *kunqu* performers add extra comic elements via improvised jokes and exaggerated body gestures. In the hand of *kunqu* performers, Scene 7 'The Schoolroom' of *Mudan ting* has evolved to be an independent comic skit with the maid Chunxiang in the lead role: to make the audience laugh, both Tutor Chen and Chunxiang imitate the sound and gestures of bird. The performers also add the detail that Tutor Chen requires Chunxiang to recite the full poem. While Chunxiang cannot recite it, she steals glances at Liniang's textbook, and is comically punished by Tutor Chen.

Sometimes directors take cue from implicit reference of sex in both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, and try to draw out every ounce of lewd innuendo. It is common to see passionate kissing and sexual gestures in productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, especially after Franco Zeffirelli's 1960 production at the Old Vic theatre. In the 2013 Broadway production of *Romeo and Juliet*, Orlando Bloom is half-naked during the 'sex' scene with Juliet. Though traditional *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting* has shied away from sex, Peter Sellars's 1999 production embraces it. Sellars employs three pairs of Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei. In Part one, one couple (Lauren Tom and Joel de la Fuente) plays as an American teenaged Liniang and Mengmei according to the conventions of Western naturalist theatre. To depict Liniang's longing for love and sex, Lauren Tom lies on the Plexiglas bed with a sleeveless top, and poignantly writhes her body with the rhythm of the background music. Her gestures are an erotic indication of masturbation and her restless movement intends to

[245] Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, p. 158. Swatek translated 热闹 as 'liveliness', but actually 'bustling' is closer to the meaning.

be a naturalistic representation of Liniang's sexual impulse. Part Two of Sellars's production is sensually titled as 'Three Nights of Making Love to A Ghost', and it centres around three pairs of Liniang and Mengmei's premarital sex. American teenaged Liniang and Mengmei show sexual intercourse explicitly; the opera singers, Huang Ying and Xu Linqiang's sex scene was depicted indirectly, as their bodies were wrapped in a red cloth which enhanced the sensual amour on the visual stage.

As previously emphasised in the section 'The physical stage and audience's watching experience', every detail of the physical stage affects the audience's viewing experience. It is important to interpret the text, and allow the unfolding of the written play to engage the audience, rather than relying on other devices such as stunts, which are external to the essence of the play, to maintain the audience's attention.

Historical authenticity

In addition to employing beautiful actors in gorgeous costumes, decorating beautiful stages, adding excellent physical skills and sex, producers also aim at historical authenticity. But as Ros King has once warned,

> reading, performing and writing about art from the past needs to speak both emotionally and cognitively to a contemporary audience if it is to be more than a mere educational exercise or an indulgence in some heritage nostalgia.[246]

---

[246] Ros King, 'Making meanings: Shakespeare's poetry for the theatre' in *Shakespeare Handbook*, eds. Andrew Hiscock, Stephen Longstaffe (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 206-214 (206).

For ‘art from the past’, King has paid special attention to Shakespeare’s plays in the theatre, and her word is also a useful warning of today’s productions of *Mudan ting*.

Philosophically speaking, there are a variety of authenticities in the field of theatre productions, all in juxtaposition and playing off each other. Some current theatre productions are aiming at replicating the exact locale, like the ‘original practices’ movement at the Shakespeare’s Globe:

> The Globe reconstruction project was, in short, an attempt to recreate the physical surroundings for which the playwright’s works were written. It was an ‘experiment’ in the sense that it would allow scholars and practitioners to explore how the plays functioned (acoustically, spatially, temporally, interactively, etc.) in an approximation of their original performance space.[247]

The following slogan accentuates the original Elizabethan stage conditions and early modern play-watching experience: ‘Thrust stage; nontraditional theatrical spaces; a place to eat, drink, and nourish the soul; minimal sets; the Southern shore of the Thames river; plasterwork and thatching; the world’s only recreation of Shakespeare’s original indoor theatre’.[248]

The imitation of historical physical stage is also the publicity stunt for recent productions of *Mudan ting*. In addition to public stages, *kunqu Mudan ting* were often performed by private theatres owned by a rich family, mainly in the Jiangnan region

---

[247] Ella Hawkins, *Shakespeare in Elizabethan Costume: ‘Period Dress’ in Twenty-First-Century Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), pp. 28-9.

[248] Jeremy Lopez, ‘A Partial Theory of Original Practice’, *Shakespeare Survey* 61 (2008): 302-17 (p. 309). The so-called ‘original’ Globe Theatre is actually a reconstruction after the original Globe was burned down in a fire.

(around today's Suzhou and Shanghai), and were performed in private family spaces, like the living hall, and the rear garden in the Ming and Qing dynasties.[249] The 2007 Royal Granary Production was under the slogan: 'Six-hundred-year-old *kunqu* performed in six-hundred-year-old Royal Granary'.[250] A 600-year-old Royal Granary in Beijing is re-decorated to imitate the private and luxury play-watching experience inside the living hall of privileged households. In addition to the Royal Granary Production, productions of *Mudan ting* in real gardens are trying to recreate the experience of private performance for a small group of elite audience during the late Ming and Qing dynasties. Though Chen Shi-zheng's 1999 production distinguished itself from *kunqu* productions, Chen imitated the garden setting common for *kunqu*, and built a three-wing stage with a protruding pavilion surrounded by man-made stream with living fish, ducks and lotus.

In addition to the authenticity of historical stages, producers are also interested in the authenticity of historical period. Among 19th century English directors, Henry Irving was most noted for his lavish stage which aimed to restore the Verona Street in his theatre.[251] Moving on to the 20th century, the Italian director, Franco Zeffirelli,

---

[249] For a more detailed account of the historical play-watching experience, see Cyril Birch, *Scenes for Mandarins: The Elite Theatre of the Ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 1-3.

[250] https://www.ihchina.cn/Article/Index/detail?id=17394#:~:text=2001 年 5 月 18 日，中国昆曲艺术被联合国教科文组织宣布列入首批“人类口头和非物质遗产代表作”%E3%80%82,同样有 600 年历史，贮藏社稷安康的皇家粮仓位于东四十条 22 号，旧称东门仓，明代永乐七年%20%281409%29 在元代北太仓基础上建造，是和故宫同龄的建筑群落%E3%80%82 (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[251] https://www.rsc.org.uk/romeo-and-juliet/about-the-play/stage-history#:~:text=Much%20greater%20success%20was%20won%20by%20Thomas%20Otway%27s,ancient%20Rome%2C%20renaming%20the%20lovers%20Marius%20and%20Lavinia. (Last accessed on 15 June 2023).

managed to re-create a real atmosphere of Italian street life in his productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, both in theatres and on screens. 'The curtain rose to reveal the housewives of Verona shaking their newly-washed sheets out from their balconies over young people chatting, flirting and fighting.'[252] Many creative teams of *Romeo and Juliet* have done a research on how to dress the title roles as a Renaissance Verona citizens. Among highly-acclaimed productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, such as Peter Brook's 1947 RSC production of the play, and in Dominic Dromgoole's 2009 production at Shakespeare's Globe, all characters are dressed in Italian period costumes. But they neglect that though Shakespeare set the play in Verona, his actors were dressed in the contemporary style of Elizabethan London rather than Renaissance Verona costume. Neither did Shakespeare's actors speak Italian.

For productions of *Mudan ting*, Chen Shi-zheng aims at the authenticity of historical period and attempts to present a panoramic view of the Ming dynasty everyday life. 'Chen sought to... recapture the expansiveness of social and cultural life captured in the complete text of Tang's play.'[253] Chen compares his full-scene production to the 5-meter-long painting, 'Along the River During the Qingming Festival', a Northern Song dynasty scroll that portrayed the capital city of Kaifeng with nuanced details of commercial and cultural activities. Inspired by the scroll, Chen Shi-zheng makes the effort to depict 'people from all conditions and walks of life [in *Mudan ting*]: court officials, scholars, women of good family, Daoist nuns, bandits, an underworld judge and his minions, and wandering ghosts.'[254] In addition to the numerous amount of characters in Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting*, Chen Shi-zheng also adds a new character, a little nun as the servant to Sister Stone.

---

[252] ibid.

[253] Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, p. 234.

[254] Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, p. 234.

The scroll presents itself as a faithful imitation of the everyday life, and it becomes an important historical source for today's scholars to learn about Song dynasty's lifestyle. But it is not the priority of Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting* to be an encyclopedia of the background of the Southern Song dynasty. In fact, historical faithfulness was probably out of the mind of Tang Xianzu; this thesis has cited many of the historical discrepancies in the play, and actors in Tang Xianzu's time would have worn contemporary Ming dynasty rather than Song era clothing. As Tang Xianzu does not intend to be 'authentic' to the lifestyle in the remote Southern Song dynasty, there is not much point in producing an 'authentic' performance that demanded archaeological effort to know how the characters have lived during the Southern Song dynasty.

Having said that, the 'original practices' movement in England and the nuanced recreation of historical detail in *Mudan ting* productions can contribute to the local cultural and creative industries. Audiences attending Shakespeare's Globe productions with actors in Elizabethan costume are likely to pay for an extra backstage tour to obtain a closer look at the fine embroidery. Productions of *Mudan ting* in historical settings, such as actual gardens and the Royal Granary, are well-received by domestic audiences of the middle class and above as well as overseas tourists. Productions in actual gardens offer audiences a taste of the theatre and life aesthetics of Ming and Qing dynasties literati. As Ma Haili commented on Zhang Jun's Kezhi Garden production of *Mudan ting*:

> The revived garden *kunqu* has proven effective in restoring the long absent memory of traditional Chinese aesthetics centred on the cultivation of human and nature cohabiting within the mountains and rivers.[255]

The memory and experience of traditional Chinese aesthetic taste is especially needed in today's fast-paced society, where harmony between man and nature is an ideal yet to be realised. The Chinese garden is carefully designed to balance art and nature in the surrounding landscape. Tan Dun, the music supervisor for Zhang Jun's Kezhi Garden production of *Mudan ting*, explained his inspiration from garden:

> I was in a garden there one afternoon having tea. Suddenly, everything became so magical. In that moment, the insects and the bird sounds were so beautiful. A gust of chill wind very quickly came up. My friends wanted me to move in but it stopped in just a few minutes. The sounds of the birds came back and I thought it was so dramatic and organic. ... I felt the garden start to awaken as a sleeping beauty.[256]

Tan believed that the natural sound of the birds, the insects and the wind was the very soul of music. With the unique advantage of its acoustic conditions and picturesque location, garden *kunqu* productions have great potential in attracting cultural consumption for a site-specific aesthetic experience.

---

[255] Ma Haili, *Understanding Cultural and Creative Industries through Chinese Theatre* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), p. 79.

[256] Maxwell K. Hearn, 'In Conversation: Tan Dun', *Beijing Review*, December 7, 2012.

Historical authenticity for performers: the *kunqu* tradition of performing *Mudan ting*

In addition to the historical authenticity of physical stage and historical period, historical performance conventions are emphasised in *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting*. As an artistic form, *kunqu* is not only supposed to be beautiful and elegant, but also to be fixed. Renowned academics such as Pai Hsien-yung, Yu Qiuyu and Yu Dan promote *kunqu* as the best embodiment of excellent Chinese cultural traditions that are stable, solid, and eternal.[257] *Kunqu* has never failed to be figured as 'a single, uncompromised lotus flower that resists all the temptations of hybridization and assimilation, symbolizing a perfect Chineseness' even though the meaning of 'Chineseness' is uncertain; in fact, the definition of so-called '-ness' like in 'Chineseness' and 'Englishness' should be called into question.[258] When *kunqu* becomes a symbol of 'Chineseness', it has to be as unchangeable and fixed as the Northern star that serves as the guiding axis. Chen Fang directly names *zhezixi* as *ding shi zhezi* 定式折子 'fixed *kunqu zhezi'* to announce the fixity of *kunqu*.[259]

Today's *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting* show a clear nostalgia for the 'good old days' – the heyday of *kunqu* during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. *Kunqu*

---

257 See Pai Hsien-yung, *Pai Hsien-yung on Kunqu* 白先勇说昆曲 (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004), Yu Qiuyu, *The Extreme Beauty: Chinese Calligraphy, Kunqu and Pu'er Tea* 极端之美——书法、昆曲、普洱茶 (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi publishing house, 2013), *The Sound of Dizi: About Kunqu* 笛声何处——关于昆曲 (Suzhou: Guwu xuan publishing house, 2004), and Yu Dan, *A Startled Dream in the Garden: The Aesthetic Journey of Kunqu* 游园惊梦——昆曲艺术审美之旅 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007).

258 Daphne Pi-Wei Lei, *Operatic China: Staging Chinese Identities Across the Pacific* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 255.

259 Chen Fang, *Performance and Inheritance of Kunju* 昆剧的表演与传承 (Taipei: National Publishing House, 2010), p. 88.

self-presumes a 'time-honoured tradition' of the Gusu style dating back to the reign of Qing dynasty Emperors Qianlong and Jiaqing (short-named as the Qian-Jia era).[260] The highest standard of today's *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting* is *yuanzhi yuanwei* 原汁原味 'original sauce, original flavour', to be the most faithful to the original and traditional performance style. The clinging to and absolute faithfulness towards traditions are encouraged in *kunqu* theatres. The selling point of any *kunqu* production of *Mudan ting* is its 'authenticity' to the historical performance conventions. Each theatre advertises that their performance style as the most 'authentic' by 'sourcing lines of transmission' from the Qian-jia tradition and tracing the lineage of inheritance.[261] From the seventeenth century onwards, '[t]he claim that a new production had greater 'authenticity' than that of a rival company was often a weapon in the wars between the theatres'.[262] The situation also existed in the *kunqu* productions where '[historical] authenticity' is highlighted in publicity.

In addition to the supposed authenticity of performance conventions, there are productions claiming on different aspects of authenticity of physical appearances. But as Eric Hobsbawn argued, tradition is a cultural conception that is subject to changes.[263] Despite a self-proclaimed history of 600 years, the time-honoured *kunqu* tradition itself may be a fallacy. *Kunqu* has been losing audience favour since its eclipse by *jingju* (Peking opera) in the late Qing dynasty. After the dynasty change

---

260 See Chen Fang, *Performance and Inheritance of Kunju* (Taipei: National Publishing House, 2010), pp. 78-9.

261 Kim Hunter-Gordon, 'Contesting Traditional *Luzi* ('Choreographic Paths'): A Performance-Based Study of *Kunqu*' (Royal Holloway, University of London: PhD thesis, 2016), p. 119.

262 Jonathan Bate, 'Introduction', *The Oxford Illustrated History of Shakespeare on Stage*, ed. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001): 1-9 (4).

263 Eric Hobsbawn, *On History* (The New Press, 1998), intro.

from the Qing dynasty to the Republic of China with the threat of Japanese invasion, the *kunqu* artists could hardly make a living. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) *kunqu* was regarded as a 'residue of feudal society', performers were sent to the countryside or local factories to be 're-educated' by the labourers, and were forbidden to sing or act *kunqu*.[264] Kim Hunter-Gordon deduced his conclusion after interviewing *kunqu* practitioners, that most of the performance traditions of *kunqu* were invented in the 1980s through the process of *nīe xì* 捏戏 'kneading a play' [like a clay], which is to design new choreography and musical structure for old plays because previous performance conventions have been lost.[265] Thus, the 'time-honoured' tradition is in fact around 40 years old instead of hundreds of years old.

As previous scholars have pointed out the fallacy of authentic 'gestures and movement', I would like to throw light on other physical aspects of performance, and to emphasise that authenticity to the historical tradition is a relative concept, and is changing all the time.[266]

First of all, the official regulations concerning the gender of the actors were changing across time. During the Qian-Jia era, due to the discrimination of women, there were no actresses on the public stage, and all the female roles were performed by male actors. This cross-dressing convention was carried on to the reign of Emperor Tongguang. During the late Qing dynasty and the Republic of China, influenced by

---

[264] See the memoir of *Kunqu* actress, Wang Zhiquan, Zhang Hong, *Da Wudan* 大武旦 (王芝泉) *The Great Martial Dan Actor Wang Zhiquan* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2012).

[265] For a more detailed account, see Kim Hunter-Gordon, 'Contesting Traditional *Luzi*', pp. 85-6.

[266] For more on the *kunqu* costume, make-up, hairstyle, see Gu Duhuang, Guan Zhi, *A Preliminary Study of Kunqu Opera Stage Art* (Taipei: National Press, 2010), and Song Junhua, 'A Study on the Chinese Ancient Theatrical Costume' (Sun Yat-sen University: PhD diss., 2002).

the co-existence of male and female actors on the Western stage, Shanghai theatres started to recruit actresses. Since the establishment of People's Republic of China, female impersonators were once again banned as the femininity in male actors went against the masculine power called for in the construction of a 'New China'. Today, all *kunqu* theatres consist of actors from both genders. The actors' voice condition instead of their biological gender primarily influences their role-type choices. As Li Yü suggested, actors with clear and deep voices can play young male characters, and actors with melodious and graceful voices are ideal for playing young female characters.[267] For example, Yue Meiti from the Shanghai *Kunqu* Theatre, Shi Xiaomei from the Jiangsu *Kunqu* Theatre, and Yang Junru from the Taiwan Half-Q Theatre are female actors who are chosen to perform Liu Mengmei because of their unusually deep voices. Respect for the Qian-Jia tradition does not require a revival of the female impersonator tradition which was based upon the discrimination of women. It is better to consider each actor's potential based on their professional skills rather than distributing characters based on gender.

Secondly, the costume design is related to the actor's gender. Though *kunqu* actors across time generally observe similar Ming dynasty dress code, and all Liniang performers wear a knee-length gown and a pleated skirt, there are nuanced differences. For female impersonators during the Qing dynasty, the costume was baggy to hide the actor's male physical features. But today, for actresses performing Liniang, the costume is often designed to flatter the actress's body shape, as Pai Hsien-yung points out in his 'young lovers' edition of *Peony Pavilion*. For Peter Sellars's *Peony Pavilion*, the *kunqu* actress Hua Wenyi's silk suite also flatters her body line rather than hides it.

---

[267] Li Yü, *Xianqing Ouji*, pp. 291-4.

The special feature of *shuî xìu* 水袖 lit. 'water sleeves' (long white sleeves flowing like water) also develops over time. Originally, the actors wore an undershirt to prevent the sweat from contaminating the costly costume. There are no records of water sleeves from the Qing dynasty. What comes closest is a reference to páo *xìu* 袍袖 lit. 'sleeves attached to a baggy gown' in Li Dou's *Memoirs of Pleasure Boats in Yangzhou* (1795). Li Dou observed that a famous *kunqu* actor Dong Lunbiao could vividly portray the character of Liu Mengmei without his hands coming out of his sleeves once.[268] Based on Li Dou's observation, Dong Lunbiao's sleeves were long enough to cover his hands. Gradually, the *kunqu* actors draw the inspiration from traditional Chinese dance which employed long silk to express different emotions. Then *kunqu* actors lengthened the sleeves of their undershirts and gave birth to the independent water sleeves. Now it is a popular *kunqu* practice to use water sleeves as an extension of the characters' emotions.

Thirdly, a look at visual evidence of actors' portraits in different times will reveal that the make-up styles are changing all the time. Due to the lack of visual records of *kunqu* actors in the Qing dynasty, I turn to a portrait of *jingju* actors which could also provide evidence for the looks on the *kunqu* stage because most *jingju* actors could also perform *kunqu* plays, like *The Jade Hairpin*, and the make-up style was shared among different theatre troupes. The following is a portrait of the thirteen most famous *jingju* actors during the Qing dynasty Emperor Tongguang's reign (1875-1908); the actors wore very little make-up and are without the exaggerated eye-liner and a large shade of red rue around the eye often seen in today's *kunqu* productions.

---

[268] Li Dou, *Yangzhou huafang lu* 扬州画舫录 *Memoirs of Pleasure Boats in Yangzhou* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), vol. 5, p.127.

The nun Chen Miaochang

in *The Jade Hairpin*

Figure 9 The portrait of the thirteen most famous *jingju* actors during the Qing-dynasty Emperor Tongguang’s reign.

Take the nun Chen Miaochang in *The Jade Hairpin* as an example. In the portrait, the Qing dynasty actor, Zhu Lianfen performed Chen Miaochang and he did not use headdress to cover his high forehead. Had the tradition being observed, Chen Miaochang’s look would be more akin to the one performed by Shao Tianshuai in the photo below.

Figure 10 Shao Tianshuai performing Chen Miaochang, 20 August 2022, Guanqifu Kunqu Studio, Northern Kunqu Theatre, Beijing. Photo by Feng Hai. Courtesy of Guanqifu Kunqu Studio.

But the practice of showing one's high forehead is no longer in the vogue, and the *kunqu-jingju* maestro Mei Lanfang pasted *pìan zi* 片子 'black plastic curves' in the late 19th century and early 20th century in the face to modify the face shape. Thus most of today's actresses performing Chen Miaochang tend to cover their forehead with elaborated headdresses, as Wei Chunrong shows in photo below.

Figure 11 Wei Chunrong (left) performing Chen Miaochang, 17 December 2010, Daguanyuan Theatre, Beijing. Courtesy of Northern Kunqu Theatre.

Figure 12 (left) Shen Fengying performing Du Liniang on 12 October 2004, Suzhou Kunqu Theatre; (right) Shen Fengying performing Du Liniang on 17-9 August 2019, Tianjin Theatre. Photo by Hsu Pei-hung. Courtesy of Suzhou Kunqu Theatre.

The make-up style for the same character performed by the same actor also differs across time, as does the style for the same character by different actors. The 2004 photo above was taken in the rear garden of the Suzhou Kunqu Theatre in natural light, and the eye-liner and the red hues around the eye were less obvious than that in the 2019 performance in the Tianjin Grand Theatre. In private garden performances with natural light, the actor usually applies less make-up than for performances in grand theatres with a darkened auditorium. The make-up of different actors performing the same character also differs. For example, compared with Shen Fengying, another *kunqu* actress from the Suzhou Kunqu Theatre, Shen Guofang applies more eye-liner to amplify her relatively smaller eyes while performing Du Liniang.

Though the aspects of costume, make-up, and hairstyle are minor, they vividly reflect that the *kunqu* tradition is changing with the contemporary aesthetic tastes and varies in different performance locales. The Qing dynasty style reflected the Qing dynasty audience's taste, and thus being authentic to the *kunqu* historical performance does not mean copying the historical style, but rather to cater to today's audience's aesthetic tastes.

Chapter 4 Suggestions for future productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*

It is well known that both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* are popular during both dramatists' time. As *Mudan ting* and its performance history is less well-known in the West, this chapter will spend more ink on *Mudan ting*. *Romeo and Juliet* was very popular among the Elizabethans. The title page of *Romeo and Juliet*'s 1597 Quarto 1 edition says, 'it hath been often (with great applause) plaid publiquely'. The play was printed and reprinted in quarto; in contrast, most Elizabethan plays were never printed.

Similar to *Romeo and Juliet*, *Mudan ting* was an instant success. As Tang Xianzu's contemporary, Shen Defu commented, 'As soon as Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting* came out, it was transmitted and recited in every household, which almost diminished the popularity of *The West Wing*.'[269] During Tang Xianzu's time, the theatre performance was passionately received by the audience, as Tang described in the 'Epigraph':

> The spectators react simultaneously and differently...sometimes they rush to the stage in a huge crowd. The rich and the privileged put aside their arrogance, even the poor and miserly vie to make charitable contributions. The blind hunger for sight, the deaf crave for sound, the mute want to shout, and the lame want to run...[270]

---

[269] Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian* 万历野获编 *Field Records in the Reign of Wanli Emperor* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997, 1st in 1619), p. 643.

[270] *TXZJQB*, pp. 1596-99, trans. Fei Chunfang, with my variation and my emphasis, in Fei Chunfang, ed. & trans. *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 55-6.

Sometimes the audience might 'rush to the stage in a huge crowd' indicated that Tang was describing a public performance that entertained a large number of audience from all walks of life—the emperor, the officials, and commoners, the rich, the poor, the young and the old, female and male, the deaf, the blind, the mute and the lame.

Both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* not only attract numerous productions and adaptations, but also become the inspiration for new writings. 'This is a Spectacle of like Woe/To that of Juliet and her Romeo', from 'The Tragedy of the unhappy fair Irene' (1658) by Gilbert Swinhoe testifies to the popularity of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* during the Restoration. Thomas Otway's *Caius Marius* adapted *Romeo and Juliet* with a mixture of a story from Plutarch, and was staged in 1679, and continued to be staged during the early 18th century. *Mudan ting* also inspires Hong Sheng's play creation of *The Palace of Eternal Youth* (1688). Hong's well-received play is nicknamed 'a bustling *Mudan ting*' because the two plays share the similar theme of love except that *The Palace of Eternal Youth* centres around the love between an emperor and his concubine.

How can today's productions capture the essence of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, and speak to the audience? To achieve this aim requires emotional authenticity, which does not lie in the reproduction of the early modern theatre but in the recreation of 'the spirit and intention of the original'.[271] And the only path to recreate the spirit of the original is through a process that parallels the original creative one.[272] In other words, it is to produce the plays in the way that the creative team and the audience feel both 'the spirit and intention' of the original plays and the

---

[271] J. L. Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1977), p. 82.

[272] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996, 1st 1968), p. 12, with my rephrasing.

pressing needs of their present. To this end, it is important to understand why both dramatists' plays have been so well-received by their coeval audiences. Their experience in making the play speak to their audience will also enable today's theatre practitioners to speak to today's audience. Producers should understand the original play and its effect in the context of its own space-time, and to be capable of reproducing the play via the negotiation of the producers' own society and culture.

Divergence between the performance history of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*

Despite common problems shared by productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*, there have been successful productions and adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* in different artistic forms, such as *West Side Story*, the musical that uses no word of Shakespeare. Increasingly since the 1950s, productions of *Romeo and Juliet* have considered wider social problems, in multi-cultural settings. This coincided with the growing realisation that there was more to tragedy than simply being cursed by the gods. In China alone, *Romeo and Juliet* has been adapted in various forms including theatre and film. Chinese theatre director, Tian Qinxin, transplanted Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers to a fictitious mainland city in the 1980s.[273] Four stolen bicycles, the main means of transport at the time, are the cause of the feud between the two families. Instead of a balcony scene, Romeo and Juliet lean against a telegraph pole, a common sight on Chinese *hutong* 胡同 alley. This sinicised adaptation is not only welcomed by local Chinese white-collar audiences, but also tours to neighbouring

[273] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Tian Qinxin, perf. by Li Guangjie, Yin Tao, et al., 1 March 2014, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Hong Kong.

countries, such as Korea. Another well-received adaptation is the blockbuster film, *Qingren jie* 情人结 *A Time to Love* (2005) in which childhood sweethearts Qu Ran and Hou Jia are separated by parental hatred.[274] Qu and Hou clearly know that it is impossible for them to marry. They read *Romeo and Juliet* together and feel as hopeless as the title characters. After spending one night in a motel, they decide to commit suicide, but at the last moment, they give up and live against their will. By the time their parents discover that they have misunderstood each other, the protagonists had long since passed their prime time.

While *Romeo and Juliet* is open to multiple interpretations across different cultures and media, there have not been substantial efforts in innovating *Mudan ting*, either in China or abroad, ever since Sellars's and Chen's productions more than twenty years ago. *Mudan ting* is still largely confined by the *kunqu* performance tradition. After *Zhuibaiqiu* in the mid-18th century, *kunqu* actors still dominate the interpretation of *Mudan ting*, and have a great freedom of rewriting as recorded in *Shenyin jiangulu*, which is also a miscellany of *zhezixi*.[275] First published in 1834, it is regarded as the most comprehensive and detailed collection of *zhezixi*, and is thus often reprinted until today. *Shenyin jiangulu* keeps the rewriting in *Zhuibaiqiu*, and adds more, as recorded in the stage directions. It includes nine *zhezixi* from *Mudan ting*, i.e. 'Speed the plough', 'The schoolroom', 'Wandering in the garden', 'The interrupted dream', 'Pursuing the dream', 'The soul's departure', 'Infernal judgment', 'Interrogation under the rod' and 'Reunion at court'. Again, the title of each *zhezixi* in

[274] *Qingren jie* 情人结 *A Time to Love*, dir. by Huo Jianqi (Xingguang International Media, 2005).

[275] *Shenyin jiangulu* 审音鉴古录 *A Record for Parsing Notes and Mirroring Great Performances*, complied by Qinyinweng 琴隐翁, reprinted in *Shanben xiqu congkan* 善本戏曲丛刊, compiled by Wang Qiugui 王秋桂, vols. 73-74 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1984-1987).

Shenyin jiangulu is the same as that in *Zhuibaiqiu*, a colloquial version of the original scene titles.

Nowadays, *Shenyin jiangulu* is the main reference book for *kunqu Mudan ting* performance. The *kunqu* productions of *Mudan ting* centre on the major love story and cut the subplot. Characters belonging to the role types of *sheng* and *dan* are often the lead roles, while characters belonging to other types, especially the comic ones, are often cut. Swatek rightly points out 'the interpretive chasm' that has opened up over the centuries between Tang's *Mudan ting* and the play now canonised in the *kunqu* tradition.[276] While Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting* is philosophically full of depth of thought, the *kunqu* productions opt for the visual spectacles and the manifestation of singing, dancing, and acrobatics.

As *kunqu* tradition gains the authoritative voice in the performance of Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting*, the artistic features of *kunqu*, beauty and elegance, become the judging criteria for every production of *Mudan ting* either in the artistic form of *kunqu* or in other forms. Chen Shi-zheng's *The Peony Pavilion* and Peter Sellars's opera *Peony Pavilion* are not well-received in mainland China, because they deviate from the artistic standard of *kunqu*. Peter Sellars himself had clearly stated that his production of *Mudan ting* was not a *kunqu* play, but rather, an avant-garde opera. Even though the Chinese critics like Zou Yuanjiang knew well that Peter Sellars was not trying to produce *kunqu*, still they judged the production according to *kunqu* standards and criticised Sellars for deviating from the *kunqu* tradition.[277] One recurrent word throughout Zou Yuanjiang's analysis is *bù lún bù lèi* 不伦不类 'inappropriate and indecent'.

---

[276] Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage,* p. 256.

277 Zou Yuanjiang, 'Is Peter Sellars's Avant-garde *Peony Pavilion* an effort to revive *Kunqu*?' *Journal of Capital Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 6(2021): 135-145.

Outside the field of *kunqu*, even in ballet, 'beauty and elegance' is the dominant artistic standard. The China's National Ballet Theatre's production of *Mudan ting* (2008) was praised for its beautiful choreography, 'as picturesque as *kunqu*'.[278] Furthermore, the figure of Liniang in full *kunqu* costumes have been 'imported' into non-*kunqu* adaptations of the play. In *Jīng mèng* 惊梦 *The Dreamer* (2016), co-presented by the British Gecko Theatre and Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre and said to be an adaptation of Tang Xianzu's *Mudan ting* and Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there is a Liniang figure in *kunqu* costume who briefly appears on the stage in silhouette. In the play, the Liniang figure stands for a courageous woman who pursues her love against hardships, and serves as the spiritual mentor for Helena, the female protagonist of *The Dreamer*, to embrace her true love. But Liniang's presence in the play can be replaceable with any other historical women figures who gallantly strive for their own happiness. The deliberate addition of Liniang makes one wonder whether the addition is a political response gesturing to the quatercentenary celebration of Tang Xianzu's death. In the 2008 ballet adaptation as well, there is a *kunqu* Liniang in addition to the 'original Liniang', and the 'Flower Spirit Liniang'. But the rationale for having three Liniangs is not clear, and their roles are not distinguished clearly. Leaving behind the artistic concerns, the *kunqu* Liniang in the ballet production reminds one that the *kunqu* tradition haunts all modern adaptations of *Mudan ting*.

[278] Hou Xia, 'Aesthetic thinking on contemporary ballet *Peony Pavilion*', *Art Education*, 12 (2013): 45-7 (46).

Importance of restoring the complete text of *Mudan ting*

In addition to authoritative voice of *kunqu*, another reason accounting for the contrasting receptions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* is different attitudes towards the written text. Great divergence from Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet* has been observed in later Samuel Phelps' and William Poel's productions which progresses towards textual fidelity. A detailed study of promptbooks leads Sylvia Alexa Berg to reach the conclusion that Samuel Phelps' (1804-78) revival of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1846 is probably the most fully restored presentation of the text on the 19th century stage, as he replaces the acting versions with Shakespeare's folio texts.[279] Phelps made a conscious effort to use the dramatist's words rather than those of the actors. He advocates 'Shakespeare in his integrity', which paves the way to more textually integrated performances.[280] Henry Irving has also realized the importance of textual fidelity and identified the previous disrespect of Shakespeare's text. He condemned the past 'improvers', i.e. adapters of Shakespeare's plays, and deplored Garrick's rewriting of Shakespeare, like Garrick's cutting of Rosaline. Irving restored the character of Rosaline in his 1882 production as 'Shakespeare has carefully worked out this first baseless love of Romeo as a palpable evidence of the subjective nature of the man and his passion.'[281] Compared with Garrick's rewriting, Irving adopts the strategy of cutting rather than rewriting, and cuts certain parts in order to present the

---

[279] Sylvia Alexa Berg, 'The Interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* from Garrick to Bridges-Adams: An Historical Study of Tradition and Innovation in English Shakespearean Production' (The University of Alberta, British Columbia: PhD diss, 1989), p. 4.

[280] See Sylvia Alexa Berg, ch.2.

[281] Henry Irving, 'Preface', in *Romeo and Juliet, A Tragedy in Five Acts, by William Shakespeare, as arranged for the stage by Henry Irving, and presented at the Lyceum Theatre, on Wednesday, March 8th, 1882* (London: Chiswick Press, 1882), pp.v-vi (p. v).

play ‘within a reasonable limit of time’.[282] But cutting can be as powerful as rewriting. His severe cutting of the final scene, for example, also centralizes the protagonists’ love, robs the uncertainty of play’s ending, and downplays the importance of social riot in the background.

Moving on to William Poel (1852-1934), Poel has been acutely aware of the mutilation of text in Shakespeare’s plays, and he attributes this reason to ‘the despotism of the actor on the English stage, and consequently to the star system’.[283] Actors’ and stage-managers’ dominance of text lends them the freedom of adaptation, which is against Poel’s upholding of absolute textual fidelity, as he shouts,

> To all stage-managers who wish to mend or improve Shakespeare I say: ‘Hands off! Produce this play as it is written or leave it alone. Don’t take liberties with it; the man who does that does not understand his own limitations!’[284]

Having said that, Poel’s practice does not always accord with his words as sometimes he rewrites the play due to the influence of his religious belief.[285] He cuts the last scene almost entirely out of his production of *Romeo and Juliet*.[286] Despite the discrepancy between adapters’ words and practice, the importance of textual fidelity towards Shakespeare’s text is gaining ground.

---

[282] Henry Irving, ‘Preface’, p. v.

[283] William Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p. 154.

[284] William Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, pp. 180-1.

[285] See Claris Glick, ‘William Poel: His Theories and Influence’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15.1 (1964): 15-25 (p. 17).

[286] See Glick, pp. 17-9.

In addition to performance practices, academic studies of *Romeo and Juliet* have also stressed textual integrity. Stanley Wells pinpoints that past theatre practitioners may have not faced up to the challenge of interpreting the text as written. Thus Wells advocates that '[i]f directors are to realize this script in its full richness, they need to free themselves of the conventional connotations of tragedy and to play each episode in its own terms'[287] And Wells promisingly predicts that the script of *Romeo and Juliet* 'can be interpreted in all its richness and diversity only if we abandon the idea that because it is called a tragedy it must centre on the fate of individuals, and accept its emphasis on the multifarious society in which these individuals have their being.'[288]

In contrast, today's Chinese theatre practitioners still lack the respect toward the complete text of *Mudan ting*. Even some scholars on *Mudan ting* have not read the full play, as the previous example of Zhou Xishan shows. Tang Xianzu's original play is not much respected in *kunqu* theatres. 'At an early stage of the rehearsals in Shanghai, it was reported that Chen was startled to learn that no member of his cast had ever read the complete text of a work they regularly performed'.[289] This problem was also mentioned by William Sun Huizhu in 1999 that 'the majority of traditional actors in the past did not take literature seriously enough but concentrated on superficial virtuosities which seemed to have autonomous value'.[290] And this problem is also contingent today as the *kunqu* performers emphasise more the manifestation of

---

[287] Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare on Page and Stage: Selected Essays*, ed. Paul Edmondson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 95.

[288] Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare on Page and Stage: Selected Essays*, p. 102.

[289]Zhai Qing, 'A complete Peony pavilion to go to America in July, Zhongguo wenhua bao,' Feb 6, 1998'. Qtd. in Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, p. 234.

[290] Sun Huizhu William, 'The Paradox of Acting in the Traditional Chinese Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 15.1 (1999): 17–25 (p. 25).

professional skills rather than understanding the depth of thought and the complicated pictures in the complete play. When I asked the female lead of *kunqu Mudan ting* from a renowned *kunqu* theatre how many scenes were there in the play, she replied 'thirty something'. There are of course fifty-five scenes. Her mistake is understandable as her teacher might not have taught her the full text, and only around 20-30 scenes of *Mudan ting* are consistently performed.

To be authentic to *Mudan ting*, it is first of all important to read the text. Only by understanding the complicated emotional picture depicted by Tang Xianzu can the actor perform with depth. In Li Yü's view, 'Having understood the plot and its meaning, a performer can then sing the words with conviction.'[291] An in-depth understanding of the plot and meaning of a play can enable an actor to sing convincingly. Li criticised the phenomenon of contemporary actors who only knew how to pronounce a line without understanding it. What's worse, some coeval actors performed the same play all day long for months without knowing what they were singing about. Li Yü concluded that those actors only sang with their mouths, without using their minds: 'An aria that comes straight from the mouth but is not reflected in the facial expressions or body movements deprives the play of its meaning and feeling.'[292] Based on an understanding of the meaning and feeling of a play, actors can try to persuade the audience through their rich vocal tones and nuanced gestures and movements to convey emotions beyond the sung aria.

But there is resistance towards restoring the full text of *Mudan ting*. Scholars and theatre practitioners are very conservative towards excretory and sexual aspects in the

---

[291] Li Yü, *Xianqing Ouji*, pp. 178-9, trans. Fei Chunfang, in Fei Chunfang, ed. & trans. *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 83.

[292] ibid.

play. In Sister Stone's self-introduction, she says though she has vaginal obstruction, her anus and urethra work in good function. She compares the sound of her peeing to the sound of water drops falling from lotus leaves ('小净处也" 渠荷滴沥"', *MDT*, 91). In the same fashion, 'toilet' is euphemistically named as 'rain-hearing pavilion' in China due to the similar sounds of 'rain' and 'urine'. But the editors of the most authoritative and most cited edition of *Mudan ting* noted that Sister Stone's description was *wêi xiè* 猥亵 'obscene', and was part of the *zāo pò* 糟粕 'dregs' in the play.[293] Perhaps influenced by the Chinese edition, Cyril Birch's English translation of this line reads, 'I've got...a piddle hole and flowerets clustering everywhere', which has nothing to do with Sister Stone's original meaning and avoids references to the excretory system (*PP*, 80). This line has rarely been put on the stage, not even in Chen Shi-zheng's 'complete' production of *Mudan ting*. Scholars, translators, and theatre practitioners seem to be rather ashamed of our body's excretory system.

Later in Scene 36, the boatman enters, and sings a Tang-dynasty poem by Li Changfu, 'A woman [*níang zi* 娘子] made me stay the night' (*MDT*, 207).[294] A boatman boasts that last night a lovely girl invited him to stay in her boudoir (to have sex). Xu Shuofang and Yang Xiaomei noted, 'The boring literati insulted the working-class [boatman], which reflected the negative side of Tang Xianzu's thoughts.'[295] In Xu and Yang's view, it is an insult to let the boatman talk of sex, even indirectly; 'sex' is 'insulting' and 'negative'. The meaning of *níang zi* is changing over time, it means 'maiden' before the Song dynasty, and later it means 'married

---

[293] Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting*, ed. by Xu Shuofang, Yang Xiaomei(Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2015, 1st 1963), p. 95.

[294] My translation.

[295] Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting*, ed. by Xu Shuofang, Yang Xiaomei, pp. 210-1.

woman'.[296] Considering that the poem is written before the Song dynasty and the boatman previously says he meets the woman in a tavern, it is less likely that *níang zi* means 'married woman'. But Birch translates *níang zi* as 'goodwife', suggesting that the boatman has sex with his own wife after marriage (*PP*, 210). Birch's translation is negative towards 'sex-before-marriage', while the boatman boasts that he is so charming that a girl will have sex with him whether he marries her or not.

Tang Xianzu's other indirect descriptions of sex are criticised as being 'obscene' by Xu and Yang, and they suggest the reader to ignore them.[297] As Xu is the founding father of Tang Xianzu studies in China, his opinion is echoed by later-generation scholars—both home and abroad, until today.[298] Tang Xianzu also describes homosexuality in Scene 23 of *Mudan ting*, but this detail can only gain its access to the mainland Chinese stage when the society is more open about the existence of different sexual orientations.

The above-mentioned parts are often regarded as 'dregs' of *Mudan ting*, but those 'dregs' are indispensable for the understanding of the whole play. Only when the importance of the 'dregs' are acknowledged, and when the play is performed with the complete text in mind, can future productions be of social significance and emotional appeal.

Besides, though mounting a full 55-scene play is difficult, it is not impossible. The Chinese theatre companies could take note of the tradition that has developed in the UK over the last 40 years of staging all parts of Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, even all

---

[296] For the detailed meaning of 'niang zi', see the Chinese website https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/198207364 (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[297] Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting*, ed. by Xu Shuofang, Yang Xiaomei, p. 52.

[298] For example, Chen Fang, *Performance and Inheritance of Kunju* (Taipei: National Publishing House, 2010).

plays in the so-called Wars of the Roses series, in a single weekend. The English Shakespeare Company which did this in the 1980s was selling souvenirs such as T-shirts and badges with 'I survived the Wars of the Roses' emblazoned on them.[299] In addition to traditional Chinese theatre performances that last several days, like the Tibetan theatre, in China there are rising numbers of professional theatre companies that have produced long plays, like Beijing People's Art Theatre (est. 1952), Performance Workshop led by Stan Lai Shengchuan (est. 1984 Taipei), Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre (est. 1995), and Meng Jinghui's Drama Studios (est. 1997 Beijing, est. 2020 Shanghai, and est. 2010 Hangzhou). Stan Lai is famous for producing marathon plays, like the 8-hour *A Dream like A Dream* (2000), and Meng Jinghui has planned to produce an 11-hour drama production of *Le Rouge et le Noir*.[300] Leaving the slow-tempo aria-singing behind, it is probable to perform the 55-scene *Mudan ting* for around 12 hours.

If *Mudan ting* is performed on a daily basis, it is not hard to perform the full 55 scenes in a week's time with two-hour performance each night. This week-long performance has the potential to become a unique cultural brand in Fuzhou, Jiangxi, Tang Xianzu's birthplace. The rising middle-class in China may choose to visit Fuzhou during their holiday break for a week's theatre trip, just like the Shakespearean audience who flock to Stratford-upon-Avon watching the Royal Shakespeare Company productions. A regular *Mudan ting* performance can benefit

[299] Michael Bogdanov and Michael Pennington, *The English Shakespeare Company: The Story of 'The Wars of the Roses', 1986–1989* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), pp. 1-12. For recordings of performances, see https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1ajIEjsTGMnRkRGufSdEaqmOTC0im590 (last accessed on 5 March 2024).

[300] Meng Jinghui's 2021 production of *Le Rouge et le Noir* actually lasted three hours and eight minutes during the Wuzhen International Theatre Festival.

from the working mechanism of successful *kunqu* productions of the play. Pai Hsien-yung's production of the 'young lovers' edition of *Peony Pavilion* premiered in 2004 in collaboration with Suzhou Kunqu Theatre, and is still touring around the world; and the Jiangsu Kunqu Theatre's essence-edition of the play led by Shi Xiaomei, Kong Aiping, and Shi Xiaming premiered in 2001, and is still well-welcomed by today's audience. For both productions, the creative team belongs to the same professional theatre troupe, promotes their production via various social media, and performs regularly which builds a solid audience base.

Modernising *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting*

Both Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu dress their actors in contemporary costumes regardless of the background of their play. But as mentioned in the previous chapter, today's productions tend to dress the actors in period costumes which alienate the audience, especially in productions of *Mudan ting*. All productions of *Mudan ting* except the one by Peter Sellars have dressed the actors in Ming dynasty costumes.

Probably due to the lack of visual materials, the actual stage costume and make-up has not been part of the current studies on *Mudan ting*. But a close reading of the extant lines and stage directions of Tang's *Mudan ting* can provide some relevant information about the actors' costume style. In Scene 5 'Engaging the Tutor', Tutor Chen enters the stage in scholar's cap and blue robe (*MDT*, 20; *PP*, 14). As Xu Shuofang informs us, the blue robe with a cyan edge is worn by Ming dynasty rather than Southern Song dynasty scholars.[301] This is a very suggestive evidence for today's

[301] Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting*, ed. Xu Shuofang and Yang Xiaomei, p. 22. Xu and Yang draw the evidence from *Zheng zi tong* 正字通, a 17th-century Chinese dictionary published by the Ming dynasty scholar Zhang Zilie in 1627. See https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=en&res=148786&remap=gb (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

productions of *Mudan ting*: it can be justified to wear contemporary costume, rather than the Ming dynasty costume. Besides, there are illustrated wood engravings in Ming dynasty publications of *Mudan ting*. Though the wood engravings might not accurately reflect the stage costume, but they are better than nothing, and could give a hint about the actor's costume, makeup, and hairstyle on the Ming stage. The Ming dynasty noble ladies usually wore a knee-length or ankle-length gown and a *mâ mìan qún* 马面裙 lit. 'horse face skirt', or 'pleated skirt' underneath. According to the wood engravings, Du Liniang wore the Ming dynasty costume with a cross-collar long gown rather than the Song dynasty costume: an inner vest, a symmetry shirt in the middle and the outwear of a *bèi zi* 褙子, a long gown with narrow sleeves, parallel collars that run the length of the robe, and a long skirt. So far, there has not been a historical record evidencing that the characters on the Ming stage wore the costume according to the specific time and space that the character belonged to; the actors probably wore the contemporary Ming costume.

Figure 13 Illustration of Du Liniang in the garden in a Ming dynasty publication of *Mudan ting*.[302]

Figure 14 Ming dynasty women's over-the-shoulder gown with python patterns, Shandong Museum.[303]

Figure 15 Ming dynasty women's *ma-mian* skirt, Shandong Museum.[304]

---

[302] Tang Xianzu, *Mudan ting*, ed. Xu Shuofang and Yang Xiaomei (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2015, 1st 1963), pp. 66-7.

[303] https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_9573884 (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[304] https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_9573884 (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

Figure 16 Song dynasty noble ladies in *bèi zi* 褙子 enjoying the moon on a terrace.[305]

For the make-up and the hair style, the wood engravings also showed that the Liniang was in contemporary hair style instead of Song dynasty hairstyle featured with a high bun decorated with a jade tiara. Neither does Liniang apply very heavy makeup as often seen on today's *xiqu* stage. As the minor characters play multiple roles, it is not likely that they put on heavy make-up which would take time to remove and reapply. It is more likely that they indicated their identity via their costume and headdress which are easier to change.

The choice of costume reflects a production's attitude towards *Mudan ting*. There are so many similar problems still contingent in contemporary China, such as gender inequality, regional discrimination, class division, and corruption, that to explore cautiously these problems, it is less helpful to dress the actors in historical costumes far removed from the audience's reality than to rigorously excavate the play's contemporary relevance. Of almost all productions of *Mudan ting*, only Peter Sellars's adaptation of *Mudan ting* dresses the actors in contemporary costume and attempts to address contemporary issues. He asks a pair of young American actors to

[305] Anonymous (Song dynasty), ink and colour on silk, the Palace Museum, from the online exhibition, 'The Song Painted', see https://news.cgtn.com/event/2022/The-Song-Painted/index.html?num=4&lang=en (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

perform the contemporary Liniang and Liu Mengmei, and explores what it feels like to be Liniang in contemporary America. But Sellars leaves out the context for the ennui of American youth, making it difficult for the audience to understand the reason for the dilemma of the American Liniang.

The social significance of a play has been increasingly realised in Shakespearean productions since the 1950s. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the division between 'us' and 'them' leads to the conflict between Capulets and Montagues in the play, and the fights between Catholics and Protestants outside the play. The social division between 'us' and 'them' has been picked up in various productions and adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*. The musical *West Side Story* (filmed 1961 and 2021) dresses its actors in modern costume and centres around the serious social problem of gang fight. The 1996 movie *Romeo+Juliet* addresses the gun violence and adolescents' use of drug. In David Leveaux's *Romeo and Juliet*, the Montagues are played by white actors and the Capulets by black ones which addresses the problem of racial animosity. Due to the religion separation in Pakistan, love between people from different religious belief is forbidden. *Romeo and Juliet* thus become the vehicle to express the forbidden love against the pressure of religion. The Pakistani press regularly describes young people who love each with tragic consequences (e.g. against parental wishes) as 'Romeo and Juliet'. The British Tara Arts production used *Romeo and Juliet* to raise the question of forced marriage.

In addition to dressing actors in contemporary costumes and addressing contemporary problems, Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu also employ contemporary popular music. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare employs 'Heart's Ease', a popular

ballad about the joys of the carefree life.[306] After musicians reject to sing 'Heart's Ease', Peter sings, 'When griping griefs the heart doth wound, / And doleful dumps the mind oppress, / Then music with her silver sound / With speedy help doth lend redress.' (4.5.122-4, 136-7) These lines express the idea that music is a God-given gift with the power to relieve grief, and Peter's lines are a slight alteration of Richard Edwards' 'In Commendation of Music', which had been trendy for more than twenty years by the time of *Romeo and Juliet*'s debut in 1597.[307]

Tang Xianzu wrote *Mudan ting* for the then popular Haiyan tune. Ye Changhai has argued that Tang Xianzu wrote *Mudan ting* to be sung in Haiyan tune with Yihuang features by Yihuang actors, and Ye opposed the widely-followed opinion that *Mudan ting* was written for Yihuang tune because there was no historical record of this tune.[308] In the debate on the actual tune that Tang used, the thesis's interest is that Tang incorporated the tune that was popular in his time and place, which can justify producing *Mudan ting* with contemporary music. According to Li Yü's theory of 'Shifting to Another Key', it is vital to adjust older plays to contemporary taste in every aspect of performance, including music.[309] But so far, there is only one production in the entire repertoire of classic Chinese drama that updates the tune, that is Grant Shen Guangren's English musical adaptation of Wang Shifu's (1260-1336) *The West Wing Chamber* produced by the Asian Theatre Laboratory (ATL) at the

---

[306] William Chappell, *Old English Popular Music*. A new edition with a preface and notes, and the earlier examples entirely revised by H. Ellis Wooldridge (London: Forgotten Books, 2019, 1st in 1893), pp. 97-98.

[307] Richard Edwards, *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (Forgotten Books, 2018, 1st in 1576), p. 216.

[308] Ye Changhai, 'Tang Xianzu and Haiyan Tune (in discussion with Gao Yu and Zhan Mutao)', *Theatre Arts*, 2(1981): 136-141.

[309] Li Yü, *Xianqing Ouji*, p. 163.

National University of Singapore in 2008.[310] Grant Guangren Shen recomposed the tune of singing arias according to modern music, such as 'All I Ask of You' from *The Phantom Of The Opera*. In the Chinese version of the play, he matched the lyrics to popular songs by Jay Chou, Faye Wong, etc. He explained that the Yuan dynasty dramatists were employing the coeval popular tunes while writing the play, and thus he himself also could employ his contemporary songs to hit the chord. His explanation can also apply to modernise the music of *Mudan ting*.

Playfulness and playful theatricality

Playfulness inherent in *nanxi*, *chuanqi* and other theatre traditions should also be encouraged in future productions of both plays. Though Sellars might not have known *nanxi* and *chuanqi*, he playfully employs humans as stage properties. For example, *kunqu* Liniang and her maid are referring to Lauren Tom in the front as the peony flower while they sing 'However fine the peony, how can she rank as queen coming to bloom when spring has said farewell!' Besides, the actor performing the American Liu Mengmei also acts as the apricot tree against which the American Liniang leans.

---

[310] See Shen, Grant Guangren, 'Chinese Chuanqi Opera in English: Directing The West Wing with Modern Music', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 29.1(2012): 183-205. The English version of the adaptation was performed in 2008, and the Chinese adaptation was performed no later than 2018. The official Youtube link to the English version is https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ce2vIoWdYd0, and the official Youtube link to the Chinese version is https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpecyYpDiwk.

Figure 17 Lauren Tom as the ‘peony’, 5 March 1999, Zellerbach Hall, University of California at Berkeley, courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

Figure 18 Joel de la Fuente as the ‘apricot tree’, 5 March 1999, Zellerbach Hall, University of California at Berkeley, courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles.

Chen Shi-zheng also successfully restores the playful tradition of using human beings as stage properties. ‘The ghosts amused themselves in various ways...and were

sometimes used as furniture to sit or stand on, as had been done by actors playing minor parts at the very beginning of the Southern dramatic tradition to which Tang's *Peony Pavilion* belongs.'[311] But for most part, Chen Shi-zheng understands 'theatricality' literally, and employs estranging effects to show the theatricality of his production. Chen Shi-zheng deliberately reminds the audience that they are watching a play by sometimes calling attention to the final exit lines, especially in those scenes where the upper class is oppressing the lower class. For example, in Scene 16 where Madam Du scolds and physically punishes Liniang's maid, Chen ends the scene with the Madam Du and Chunxiang walking in parallel to the front of the stage, saying their exit lines together to indicate that they are in equal terms. Later in Scene 21, where the official Miao Shunbin enjoys a higher social position than the poor scholar Liu Mengmei, Chen again ends the scene with the two characters speaking the exit lines as equals before leaving the stage in opposite directions. Similar cases are abundant which shows Chen's lack of confidence in the audience's ability to distinguish the stage truth and the physical truth. Most audience are well aware that the actor performing Madam Du are not really beating the other actor performing Chunxiang. Thus, for most of the time it is unnecessary to employ extra devices such as formalised exit lines to remind the audience that what is presented on the stage is illusions rather than real domestic violence.

[311] David Rolston, 'Tradition and innovation in Chen Shi-zheng's *Peony Pavilion*', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 19.1(2002): 134-146 (141).

Figure 19 The wooden snow blower in Chen Shi-zheng's *The Peony Pavilion*, the Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, 1999 [DVD recording].

In fact, Chen Shi-zheng's staging is more akin to Brecht's conception of the traditional Chinese theatre than the convention in traditional theatre. The employment of an onstage chorus, and visible stage hands show the influence of Brecht. For example, in Scene 22 'Traveller's Rest', while Liu Mengmei is singing an aria lamenting the hardship of traveling far away in a snowy day, two property men dressed up as ghosts push a large wooden snow blower from stage right to stage left in full visibility of the audience. In the video recording of the performance, the camera zooms up on the property men, and Liu Mengmei's singing is reduced to be the background music.

Neither is the wooden snow blower ever seen on the traditional Chinese stage which employs very few special effects. The actor convinces the audience that he is traveling in a snowy day through his lines, and his body language without the realistic presence of snow on the stage. Sometimes the musician will produce the sound of wind by rotating a cloth strip; the British theatre company, the Willow Globe, produced the sound of wind in a similar fashion for its 2019 production of *Pericles* in

Oystermouth Castle, Swansea.[312] The property of snow will only be used in plays where the snow is part of the plot and is thus indispensable, the prime example of which is the performances of Guan Hanqing's *Snow in Midsummer*, also named, *Injustice to Dou'er*. The female protagonist, Dou're is wronged to death, and she casts the spell that snow will fall in hot August to prove her innocence. To make the special effects of snow, the property men invisible to the audience pour a basket of paper snowflakes from the top of the stage. According to the memoir of the *jingju* maestro, Yang Xiaolou, when *Snow in Midsummer* was performed in the grand royal three-storey stage, the property men went up to the second storey and they scattered the snow via the skylight to the performers on the first storey.[313]

[312] William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, Willow Globe Company, dir. by Sue Best and Ian Yeoman, perf. by Nathan Goode, Caitlin Williams, et al., 20 July 2019, Oystermouth Castle, Swansea.
[313] See Zhu Jiajin, *Gugong Tuishilu·Qingdai neiting yanxi zatan* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2000).

Conclusion

Overall, *Romeo and Juliet* has been successfully adapted into a variety of artistic forms, media, and culture, including the Oscar-winning musical *West Side Story* (1961, 2021), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), and *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). In stark contrast, few Chinese theatre practitioners outside the realm of traditional theatre are taking the initiative to produce *Mudan ting*. Their reluctance to produce classic plays can be explained by age-old stereotypes about traditional Chinese theatre and its repertoire.

As I have explained earlier, generally speaking there are two main genres of theatre in mainland China, one is the traditional Chinese theatre, *xiqu*, and the other is *huàjû* 话剧 'spoken drama'.[314] The two genres have developed into two academic disciplines in China, including higher education institutes in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau. This is similar in Europe, where the study of 'musical theatre', including song, dance, spectacle, and 'the book' are separated from the study of 'serious drama' in the English department. In China, however, the situation is more complicated - performance is the focus of the two disciplines of *xiqu* and *huaju*, while written drama is studied as literature in the Chinese department.

When *huaju* and *xiqu* are mentioned in the same breath, their differences are often highlighted with stereotypes: *xiqu* has a long history of several hundred of years, and combines four basic skills - singing, speaking, acting, and martial arts - to present clichéd love stories between beautiful maidens and talented scholars. Its fossilised style has become outdated, making it the pastime of the older generation. In contrast,

---

[314] For a detailed introduction about *huaju*, see Liu Siyuan, 'Modern Chinese Theatre', in *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*, ed. Liu Siyuan (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 311-328.

huaju imitated Western-style drama, and its awareness of engaging with social issues has won over the younger generation since the early 20th century. Part of the reason why *huaju* tries to distinguish itself from the traditional *xiqu* is to emphasise *huaju*'s 'modernity'. Because of their stereotypes towards traditional Chinese theatre and classic Chinese drama, modern Chinese *huaju* practitioners prefer to stage Western classics by Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov rather than Chinese plays.

The binary opposition between *xiqu* and *huaju* is unhelpful to the development of either, and it is vital for both art forms to learn from each other, especially for *huaju* practitioners. 'The lack of originality in the Chinese *huaju* market was problematic and could not be ignored,' said the award-winning US born, Taiwan based playwright and theatre director, Stan Lai Sheng-chuan, lauded by the BBC as 'the best Chinese language playwright and director in the world' who has helped revolutionize modern theatre in Taiwan in the 1980s, and is one of the co-founders of the Wuzhen International Theatre Festival, China.[315] Lai continued, 'the Chinese *xiqu* tradition is a source of inspiration that can help us [Chinese *huaju* practitioners] to create our own theatre.'[316] Departing from the Western traditions, in order for Chinese *huaju* practitioners to make further innovation, it is important to re-examine our own theatre traditions.

But to date, Chinese theatre practitioners including Stan Lai himself have not comprehensively understood the value of *xiqu* as a whole. In other words, they have mainly learned from the performance conventions of traditional theatre, while few of them have seriously approached the dramaturgical structure embedded in classic Chinese playwriting. Hu Xingliang's *Chinese Huaju and Chinese Xiqu* (2000)

---

[315] Interview on Stan lai, see https://news.zynews.cn/culture/2018-07/23/content_11459983.htm (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

[316] Ibid.

describes how *huaju* directors such as Tian Han, Cao Yu, Xia Yan, Guo Moruo, Lao She, Jiao Juyin, Huang Zuolin, and Xu Xiaozhong have benefited from the unique characteristics of *xiqu*, especially the minimalist set (the 'empty stage') and symbolic gestures and movement.[317] In addition to Hu Xingliang's examples, Gao Xingjian learns from the preparation process of *jingju* actors before entering the stage and Gao develops his own theory of 'neutral actor status' and 'the tripartite nature of performance—from self to neutral actor status to character'.[318] Lin Zhaohua and Tian Qinxin also fused *xiqu* characteristics in their respective productions of *The Orphan of the Zhao Family*.[319] Ding Yiteng, one of the youngest theatre directors in China, has made a conscious effort to learn from traditional performance conventions, adding the prefix 'new convention' to his productions of *Dou'er* (2016) and *New West Wing Romance* (2020).

Indeed, *xiqu*'s performance techniques have been incorporated into productions of traditional and Western plays by different generations of Chinese theatre directors, but the critical dramaturgical structure of classic Chinese drama has not yet been in the spotlight. The importance of dramaturgical structure cannot be over-emphasised. Both Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu understand the importance of dramaturgy - the naked truth irritates the authority, and didactic messages bore the audience, thus it is important to dress the play with humour. Humour is the prerequisite for understanding the cultural and social significance of a play. Via dramaturgical mix of different

---

317 Hu Xingliang, *Zhōngguó huàjù yú zhōngguó xìqû* 中国话剧与中国戏曲 *Chinese Huaju and Chinese Xiqu* (Shanghai: Xuelin Publishing House, 2000).

318 Gao Xingjian, *Aesthetics and Creation*, tran. Mabel Lee (New York: Cambria Press, 2012), pp. 49-50, 55.

319 For a detailed analysis of the approach of Lin, Tian, and other directors to producing *The Orphan of Zhao*, see Jin Xiaorong, 'The Canonisation and Reproduction of Traditional Opera: Centred by *The Orphan of Zhao*' (Wuhan University: PhD. Diss., 2014).

generic elements and *mises en scène*, both dramatists enable the audience to laugh through characters' tears, and to cry over characters' laughter. Both dramatists inform the audience at the very beginning that the play is just a fictional play set in a distant time and space, but throughout the performance, the audience is constantly reminded that the bloody truth holds true for their own space-time.

Theatre is not only about telling the truth, more importantly, it is about how to tell the truth. Speaking the naked truth to power is likely to end in exile or jail, but speaking the truth with humour can prevent one's head from being chopped off. Both dramatists present the 'safe' side on the stage, and leave the structure of their plays open for the audience to savour in private the 'dangerous' aspect. This is the dramaturgical wisdom of having the cake and eating it too, and this is the wisdom shared by Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu.

In a word, Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu deftly construct two love stories to deal with socially significant issues in their own time and space. They address issues to the concern of their audience, such as cultural and structural problems repeatedly demonstrated in the play concerning parental tyranny, greed, interference, social climbing, lack of actual love for children and young people or care for their well-being. The humanistic concerns reflected in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* contribute to both plays' popularity. Problems that have troubled Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu four hundred years ago are still contingent today; and if theatre practitioners wish to present *Romeo and Juliet* and *Mudan ting* with social significance and emotional appeal, they must tackle these problems head on, with humour.

Appendices

Appendix 1 English translations of scene titles, Chinese characters and pinyin in *Mudan ting* (by Cyril Birch)

1 *Bīao mù* 标目 Legend

2 *Yǎn huaí* 言怀 Declaring Ambition

3 *Xùn nû* 训女 Admonishing the Daughter

4 *Fû tàn* 腐叹 Pedant's Lament

5 *Yǎn shī* 延师 Engaging the Tutor

6 *Chàng tìao* 怅眺 Despairing Hopes

7 *Guī shú* 闺塾 The Schoolroom

8 *Quàn nóng* 劝农 Speed the Plough

9 *Sù yùan* 肃苑 Sweeping the Garden

10 *Jīng mèng* 惊梦 The Interrupted Dream

11 *Cí Jie* 慈戒 Well-meant Warning

12 *Xún mèng* 寻梦 Pursuing the Dream

13 *Jué yè* 诀谒 In Search of Patronage

14 *Xíe zhēn* 写真 The Portrait

15 *Lû Díe* 虏谍 A Spy for the Tartars

16 *Jíe bìng* 诘病 The Invalid

17 *Dào xí* 道觋 Sorceress of the Tao

18 *Zhên suì* 诊祟 Diagnosis

19 *Pìn zeí* 牝贼 Brigandess

20 *Nào shāng* 闹殇 Keening

21 *Yē yù* 谒遇 The Interview

22 *Lü jì* 旅寄 Traveller's Rest

23 *Míng pàn* 冥判 Infernal Judgement

24 *Shí huà* 拾画 The Portrait Recovered

25 *Yì nü* 忆女 Maternal Remembrance

26 *Wán zhēn* 玩真 The Portrait Examined

27 *Hún Yóu* 魂游 Spirit Roaming

28 *Yōu gòu* 幽媾 Union in the Shades

29 *Páng yí* 旁疑 Gossip

30 *Huān nâo* 欢挠 Disrupted Joy

31 *Shàn bèi* 缮备 Defensive Works

32 *Míng shì* 冥誓 Spectral Vows

33 *Mì Yì* 秘议 Confidential Plans

34 *Xìong Yào* 诇药 Consultation

35 *Huí shēng* 回生 Resurrection

36 *Hūn zôu* 婚走 Elopement

37 *Haì bìan* 骇变 The Alarm

38 *Huaí jîng* 淮警 The Scourge of the Huai

39 *Rú háng* 如杭 Hangzhou

40 *Pú zhēn* 仆侦 In Search of the Master

41 *Dān shì* 耽试 Delayed Examination

42 *Yí zhèn* 移镇 Troop Transfer

43 *Yù huaí* 御淮 The Siege of Huaian

44 *Jí nàn* 急难 Concern for the Besieged

45 *Kòu jìan* 寇间 A Spy for the Rebels

46 *Zhé kòu* 折寇 The Rebels Countered

47 *Weí shì* 围释 Raising the Siege

48 *Yù mû* 遇母 Mother and Daughter Reunited

49 *Huaí bó* 淮泊 Moored before Huai'an

50 *Nào yàn* 闹宴 Uproar at the Banquet

51 *Bâng xìa* 榜下 The Lists Proclaimed

52 *Suô yuán* 索元 The Search for the Candidate

53 *Dìao dâ* 吊打 Interrogation under the Rod

54 *Wén xí* 闻喜 Glad News

55 *Yuán jìa* 圆驾 Reunion at Court

Appendix 2 *Chuanqi* role types and the corresponding characters in *Mudan ting*[320]

1.*Shēng* 生: dignified young male characters (Liu Mengmei)

Waì 外: dignified elder male characters (Du Bao)

Mò 末: elder male characters (Tutor Chen)

2.*Dàn* 旦: female characters (Du Liniang)

Tīe dàn 贴旦, or simply *tīe* 贴: supporting female characters (Chunxiang)

Lâo dàn, 老旦: old female characters (Madam Du)

Hún dàn 魂旦: The *hundan* is costumed and moves in ways that suggest ghostliness (Du Liniang's ghost)

3.*Jìng* 净: painted face, a miscellaneous category, largely but nost exclusively male (Judge Hu, Camel Guo, jailer, colonel, Li Quan, Miao Shunbin, Sister Stone, Jin Emperor).

4.*Chôu* 丑: humorous characters (Scholar Han Zicai, Flower Lad, Scabby Turtle)

Acronyms in the following table:

LMM: Liu Mengmei

DLN: Du Liniang

DB: Du Bao, Du Liniang's father

M Du: Madam Du, Du Liniang's mother

CX: Chunxiang, Du Liniang's maid

CZL: Chen Zuiliang, Du Liniang's tutor

SS: Sister Stone

[320] English translation of each role type is borrowed from Catherine Swatek's *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, Appendix A: System of Roles for *Chuanqi* Drama and *Kun* opera, pp. 257-260.

	Shēng	*Dàn*	*Lâo dàn*	*Waì*	*Tīe dàn*	*Jìng*	*Mò*	*Chôu*
1							*Mò* prologue	
2	LMM							
3		DLN	M Du	DB	CX			
4							CZL	janitor
5		DLN		DB	attendant CX	page boy	CZL	under-ling
6	LMM							Han Zicai
7		DLN			CX		CZL	
8	elder	mul-berry leaves picker	ser-geant mul-berry leaves picker tea-	DB	page boy	underling farmer	elder	county official sergeant herd boy tea-picker

			picker					
9					CX		CZL	flower lad
10	LMM	DLN	M Du		CX		flower spirit	
11			M Du		CX			
12		DLN			CX			
13	LMM					Camel Guo		
14		DLN			CX			flower lad
15						Barbarian prince (with attendants)		
16			M Du	DB	CX			steward
17						SS		Du’s serving-man
18		DLN			CX	SS	CZL	
1						rebel Li		rebel Li

9						Quan		Quan’s wife
20		DLN	M Du	DB	CX	SS	CZL	steward
21	LMM		abbot	atten-dant	attendant	Miao Shunbin	interpre-ter	foreign trader
22	LMM						CZL	
23	prison-er Zhao, loves sing-ing	DLN	prison-er Sun, whore-mon-ger	homo se-xual priso n-er Li	lictor	Judge Hu	prisoner Qian flower spirit	under-world clerk
24	LMM					SS		
25			M Du		CX			
26	LMM							
27		DLN’s ghost			young nun	SS		young nun’s novice
28	LMM	DLN’s						

		ghost						
29					young nun	SS	CZL	
30	LMM	DLN’s ghost			young nun	SS		
31			mer-chant	DB	civil official	military officer	merchant	
32	LMM	DLN’s ghost						
33	LMM					SS		
34						SS	CZL	
35	LMM	DLN				SS		Scabby Turtle
36	LMM	DLN		boat-man		SS	CZL	Scabby Turtle
37							CZL	
38			arrow-maker			rebel Li Quan		rebel Li Quan’s wife
3	LMM	DLN				SS		

39								
40						Camel Guo		Scabby Turtle
41	LMM			aged privy coun-cilor		Miao Shunbin (with attendants)		gate-keeper
42			M Du	DB	CX	1st messenger	2nd messen-ger	post station comman-der 3rd messen-ger
43	soldier mess-enger		civil official	DB	rebel soldier officer of protocol	rebel Li Quan military officer	soldier civil official	rebel soldier military officer
44	LMM	DLN						
45	rebel adju-		rebel sentry	rebel sen-		rebel Li Quan	CZL	rebel Li Quan’s

	tant			try				wife
46				DB		messenger	CZL	
47			Tartar general	groo-m	interpre-ter	rebel Li Quan	CZL	rebel Li Quan's wife
48		DLN	M Du		CX	SS		
49	LMM							inn-keeper
50	LMM	mili-tary prosti-tute	messen-ger adju-tant		military prostitute	military officer	civil official	gate-keeper
51			general	aged privy coun-cilor		Miao Shunbin	CZL	general
52			colonel		prostitute	Camel Guo		colonel
53	LMM		colonel Miao's atten-	DB	lictor colonel	jailer Camel Guo	messen-ger	turnkey

			dant		Miao's attendant	Miao Shunbin	CZL	
54		DLN	M Du	colo-nel	CX	SS Camel Guo		colonel
55	LMM	DLN	M Du	DB	CX	general SS	CZL	general Han Zicai

Appendix 3 Chinese dynasties and theatre forms in Chinese history[321]

ca. 2100–1600 BCE Xia Dynasty 夏

ca. 1600–1050 BCE Shang Dynasty 商

ca. 1046–256 BCE Zhou Dynasty 周

Western Zhou (ca. 1046–770 BCE) 西周

Eastern Zhou (ca. 770–256 BCE) 东周

221–206 BCE Qin Dynasty 秦

206 BCE–220 CE Han Dynasty 汉

Western/Former Han (206 BCE–25 CE) 西汉

Eastern/Later Han (25–220 CE) 东汉

220–280 CE Three Kingdoms 三国

265–420 CE Jin Dynasty 晋

420–589 CE Period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties 南北朝

581–618 CE Sui Dynasty 隋

618–907 CE Tang Dynasty 唐

907–960 CE Five Dynasties Period 五代

960–1279 Song Dynasty 宋

Northern Song (960–1127) 北宋

Southern Song (1127–1279) 南宋

1206–1368 Yuan Dynasty 元

[321] This is based on Feng Wei, *Intercultural Aesthetics in Traditional Chinese Theatre From 1978 to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 257.

1368–1644 Ming Dynasty 明

1616–1911 Qing Dynasty 清

1912–1949 Republic of China 中华民国

1949–present People's Republic of China 中华人民共和国

Dynasties and the corresponding theatre forms

Dynasties	Name for its theatre form
Tang Dynasty and earlier	*gē wû xì* 歌舞戏 'narrative dances'
Song Dynasty	*nán xì* 南戏 'Southern theatre', Song *yuàn bên* 院本 'farce skits'
Jin (1115-1234)	Jin *yuàn bên* 院本 'farce skits'
Yuan Dynasty	*zá jü* 杂剧 'variety plays' / 'Northern theatre', *nán xì* 南戏 'Southern theatre'
Ming Dynasty	*chuanqi* 传奇 'dramatic romance'
Qing Dynasty	*chuanqi* 传奇 'dramatic romance'

Filmography

Romeo and Juliet

Films

Romeo and Juliet, dir. by Franco Zeffirelli (Paramount Pictures Corporation, 1968).

Romeo + Juliet, dir. by Baz Luhrmann (Twentieth Century Fox, 1996).

Shakespeare in Love, dir. by John Madden (Harvey Weinstein, 1998).

West Side Story, dir. by Jerome Robbins (The Mirisch Corporation, 1961).

West Side Story, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Amblin Entertainment, Twentieth Century Fox, 2021).

Qingren jie 情人结 *A Time to Love*, dir. by Huo Jianqi (Xingguang International Media, 2005).

Plays

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Peter Brook, perf. by Daphne Slater, Laurence Payne, et al., Royal Shakespeare Company, 5 April 1947, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Terry Hands, perf. by Timothy Dalton, Estelle Kohler, et al., Royal Shakespeare Company, 1 April 1973, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Trevor Nunn, perf. by Ian McKellen, Francesca Annis, et al., Royal Shakespeare Company, 29 March 1976, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Michael Bogdanov, perf. by Niamh Cusack, Sean Bean, et al., 6 April 1986, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Terry Hands, perf. by Mark Rylance, Georgia Slowe, et al., Royal Shakespeare Company, 1 April 1989, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Rupert Goold, perf. by Sam Troughton, Mariah Gale, et al., Royal Shakespeare Company, 3 December 2010, Courtyard Theatre, London.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Dominic Dromgoole, perf. by Ellie Kendrick, Adetomiwa Edun, et al., Shakespeare's Globe Theatre / Opus Arte co-production in association with Electric Sky, 4 May 2009, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, London.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by David Leveaux, perf. by Orlando Bloom, Condola Rashad, et al., 19 September 2013, Richard Rodgers Theatre, New York.

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Michael Oakley, perf. by Charlotte Beaumont, Nathan Welsh, et al., 4 January 2019, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, London.

William Shakespeare, Luo Zhou, *Zuì xīn huā* 醉心花 *Belladonna*, dir. by Li Xiaoping, perf. by Shan Wen, Shi Xiaming, et al., Jiangsu Kunqu Theatre of the Jiangsu Performing Arts Group, 14 August 2019, The Golden Hall, Changzhou (premiered in 2016).

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. by Tian Qinxin, perf. by Yin Tao, Li Guangjie, et al., 1 March 2014, Hong Kong Arts Festival, Hong Kong.

Mudan ting

Tang Xianzu, *The Peony Pavilion*, dir. by Chen Shizheng, perf. by Qian Yi, Wen Yuhang et al., produced by the Lincoln Center Festival, the Festival d'Automne à Paris, The Sydney Festival and the Hong Kong Arts Festival, 1999, the Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris. Recorded live from The Grande Halle de la Villette, Paris, narrated by Robert Powell [DVD recording].

Tang Xianzu, *Peony Pavilion*, dir. by Peter Sellars, perf. by Hua Wenyi, Lauren Tom, et al., 5 March 1999, Zellerbach Hall, University of California at Berkeley.

Tang Xianzu, The Essence-edition of *Peony Pavilion*, dir. by Zhou Shizong, perf. by Shi Xiaomei, Kong Aiping, et al., Jiangsu Kunqu Theatre, 16-7 May 2023, Beijing Tianqiao Performing Arts Centre (premiered in 2001).

Tang Xianzu, The 'Young Lovers' edition of *Peony Pavilion*, dir. by Wang Shiyu, perf. by Yu Jiulin, Shen Fengying, Suzhou Kunqu Theatre, 17-9 August 2019 Tianjin Grand Theatre, Tianjin (premiered in 2004).

Tang Xianzu, *Re-encountering Peony Pavilion*, dir. by Ma Junfeng, perf. by Shan Wen, Zhang Jun, et al., 10 August 2022, Shanghai Grand Theatre, Shanghai.

Stan Lai, *Nightwalk in the Chinese Garden*, dir. by Stan Lai, perf. by Peter Mark, Lizinke Kruger, Luo Chenxue, et al., CalArts Center for New Performance, Shanghai Kunqu Theatre and Shanghai Theatre Above, 17 October 2018, Huntington Library, San Marino.

Others

Film

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, dir. by Peter Jackson (Warner Bros. 2001-3).

Plays

William Shakespeare, Yu Rongjun, *The Dreamer*, dir. by Rich Rusk, perf. by Yang Ziyi, Liu Peng, et al., Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre & Gecko co-production, 11 October 2016, Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre, Shanghai.

Gao Lian, *Yù zān jì* 玉簪记 *Jade Hairpin*, dir. by Zhang Peng, perf. by Shao Tianshuai, Weng Jiahui, et al., Guanqifu Kunqu Studio, 20 August 2022, Daguanyuan Theatre, Beijing.

Gao Lian, *Yù zān jì* 玉簪记 *Jade Hairpin*, dir. by Yang Fengyi, perf. by Wei Chunrong, Shao Zheng, et al., Northern Kunqu Theatre, 17 December 2010, Daguanyuan Theatre, Beijing.

Guan Hanqin, Liu Miyang, *Dou'er* 窦娥, dir. by Ding Yiteng, perf. by Ding Yiteng, Guan Xiaotian, et al., Ding Yiteng Theatre Studio, 3 October 2016, Qinglan Theatre, Beijing.

Li Yü, Wang Yan, *Lían xīang bàn* 怜香伴 *Two Belles in Love*, dir. by Zhang Peng, perf. by Shao Tianshuai, Yu Xuejiao, et al., Guanqifu Kunqu Studio, 25 April 2016, Zhengyici Theatre, Beijing.

William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, Willow Globe Company, dir. by Sue Best and Ian Yeoman, perf. by Nathan Goode, Caitlin Williams, et al., 20 July 2019, Oystermouth Castle, Swansea.

Wang Shifu, *Xī xīang jì* 西厢记 *The West Wing*, dir. by Shen Guangren Grant, perf. by anonymous, Asian theatre Laboratory, 2008, Grand Hall, National University of Singapore.

Wang Shifu, Ding Yiteng, Chen Miao, *New West Wing Romance*, dir. by Ding Yiteng, perf. by Sun Liang, Qie Yi, et al., Ding Yiteng Theatre Studio, 20 November 2020, Fanxing Theatre, Chengdu.

Stan Lai, *A Dream Like A Dream*, dir. by Stan Lai, perf. by Mei Ruoying, Yan Yiwen et al., Performance Workshop, 18 May 2000, National Taipei University of the Arts Theatre, Taipei.

Marie-Henri Beyle, Meng Jinghui, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, dir. by Meng Jinghui, perf. by Mei Ting, Zhang Micheng, Meng Jinghui's Drama Studio, 15 October 2021, Wuzhen Grand Theatre, Jiaxing.

Ballet

Tang Xianzu, Li Liuyi, *The Peony Pavilion*, dir. by Li Liuyi, perf. by Zhu Yan, Ma Xiaodong, et al., National Ballet of China, 15 June 2012, Poly Theatre, Beijing.

Bibliography

Manuscripts

Romeo and Juliet, Quarto 1 (1597), Quarto 2 (1599), First Folio (1623), https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Rom_Q2/scene/2.2/index.html (last accessed on 17 June 2023).

Primary Texts

Anonymous. *Shenyin jiangulu* 审音鉴古录 *A Record for Parsing Notes and Mirroring Great Performances*, complied by Qinyinweng 琴隐翁, reprinted in Shanben xiqu congkan 善本戏曲丛刊, compiled by Wang Qiugui 王秋桂, vols. 73-74 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1984-1987).

Anonymous. *Zhuibaiqiu* 缀白裘 *A Patched Cloak of White Fur*, compiled by Qian Decang, ed. by Wang Xieru 汪协如 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2005).

Anonymous, 'The Spring and Autumn Annals, Gu Liang Biography·The Tenth Year of Emperor Lu Dinggong', in *Annotations on the Thirteen Classics · The Spring and Autumn Annals, Gu Liang Biography,* annotated and edited by Ruan Yuan (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1980).

Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. S. H. Butcher, Provided by The Internet Classics Archive, 7. http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html, (last accessed on 16 June 2023).

Chappell, William. *Old English Popular Music*. A new edition with a preface and notes, and the earlier examples entirely revised by H. Ellis Wooldridge (London: Forgotten Books, 2019, 1st in 1893).

Confucius, *The Analects of Confucius* (BCD 480-350) trans. James Legge, with my variation, https://ctext.org/analects/yan-yuan/zh?searchu=%E5%90%9B%E5%90%9B&en=on (last accessed on 16 June 2023).

Davies, John. *Wittes Pilgrimage (by poeticall essaies) through a vvorld of amorous sonnets, soule-passions, and other passages, diuine, philosophicall, morall, poeticall, and politicall* (London: John Brown, 1605).

Descartes, René. *Philosophical Works*, trans. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1911) vol. 1, p. 373.

Edwards, Richard, *The Excellent Comedie of Two the Most Faithful Friends, Damon and Pithias* (London: Richard Iones, 1582, 1st in 1571).

Edwards, Richard. *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018, 1st in 1576).

Gao, Ming. *The Lute: Kao Ming's P'i-p'a Chi*. trans. Jean Mulligan (New York: Columbia University Press).

Garrick, David. *The Plays of David Garrick,* edited with commentary and notes by Harry William Pedicord and Fredrick Louis Bergmann (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 4 vols.

Han, Yu. *Han Changli quanji* 韩昌黎全集 *The Complete Works of Han Changli*, eds. Yang Yi and Jiang Yewei (Beijing: Yanshan chubanshe, 1996).

Kielmansegge, Count Frederick. *Diary of A Journey to England 1761-1762*, trans. Countess Kielmansegge (London, 1902).

Lai, Stan. *Nightwalk in the Chinese Garden*, unpublished script, courtesy of the Shanghai Theatre Above.

Lai, Stan. *Dreamwalking*, unpublished script, courtesy of the Shanghai Theatre Above.

Lao Zi, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing/zh?en=on (last accessed on 16 June 2023).

Li, Dou. *The Painted Pleasure Boat of Yangzhou* 扬州画舫录, ed. by Zhou Chundong (Jinan: Shandong Youyi Chubanshe, 2001, 1st in 1795).

Li, Yü. *Xianqing Ouji* 闲情偶寄 *Casual Notes of Idle Feelings*, ed. Du Shuying (Beijing: Xueyuan, 1998).

Luo, Guanzhong. *San guo yanyi* 三国演义 *Legends of Three Kingdoms* (Jilin: Jilin Wenshi Press, 2017).

Mencius, *Mencius· Lí lôu shàng* I.26, trans. James Legge, https://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-i (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

Puttenham, George. *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: CUP, 1936).

Schlegel, August. *Sämmtliche Werke*, 12 vol. (Leipzig, 1846-47).

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*. Fully annotated, with an Introduction, by Burton Raffel and With an essay by Harold Bloom (New Haven and London: The Yale University, 2004).

Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. with a glossary by W. J. Craig, M.A. (London: OUP, 1966).

Shakespeare, William. *The Norton Shakespeare*, With an Essay on the Shakespearean stage by Andrew Gurr, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2nd edn. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet. A Tragedy Altered from Shakespeare*, by David Garrick, ESQ. Taken from the Manager's Book (London: printed for R. Butters, at the Theatre Royal in Covent-Garden, 1795).

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet, A Tragedy in Five Acts, by William Shakespeare, as arranged for the stage by Henry Irving, and presented at the Lyceum Theatre, on Wednesday, March 8th, 1882* (London: Chiswick Press, 1882).

Shen, Defu. *Wanli yehuo bian 万历野获编 Field Records in the Reign of Wanli Emperor* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997, 1st in 1619).

Sima, Qian. *War-lords, Translated with Twelves other Stories from his Historical Records*, trans. William Dolby and John Scott (Edinburgh: Southside, 1974).

Tang, Xianzu. *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭, ed. by Xu Shuofang, Yang Xiaomei (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 2005).

Tang, Xianzu. *Mudan ting* [*The Peony Pavilion*], trans. Cyril Birch (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002).

Tang, Xianzu. *Tang Xianzu's Complete Works*, ed. Xu Shuofang (Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 2015), 6 vols.

Zeng, Changsheng. *Kunju Chuandai* 昆剧穿戴 *The Costume of Kunju* 昆剧穿戴, ed. by Xu Lingyun, Bei Jinmei (Suzhou: Suzhou *Xiqu* Research Office, 1963).

Secondary Texts

Agnew, Jean-Christophe. *Worlds Apart: The Market and the theatre in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
Aoki Masaru, *History of Chinese Theatre in Recent Times*, trans. Wang Gulu (Hong Kong: Zhonghua, 1975, 1st in 1930).

Bary, Theodora de. 'Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought', in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 145-247.

Bate, Jonathan. ed. *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

Bate, Jonathan. 'Introduction' in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Shakespeare on Stage*, ed. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001): 1-9.

Berg, Sylvia Alexa. 'The Interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* from Garrick to Bridges-Adams: An Historical Study of Tradition and Innovation in English Shakespearean Production' (The University of Alberta, British Columbia: PhD diss, 1989).

Birch, Cyril. 'A comparative view of dramatic romance: *The Winter's Tale* and *The Peony Pavilion*', in *Interpreting Culture through Translation. A Festschrift for D.C. Lau*, eds. Roger T. Ames, Chan Sin-wai and Mau-sang Ng (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1991).

Birch, Cyril. *Scenes for Mandarins: The Elite Theatre of the Ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

Birch, Cyril. 'The Architecture of *The Peony Pavilion*', *Tamkang Review*, X, 3 and 4 (1980).

Black, James. 'The Visual Artistry of *Romeo and Juliet*'. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 15.2(1975): 245-256.

Boguszak, Jakub. *The Self-centred Art: Ben Jonson's Parts in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

Branam, George C. 'The Genesis of David Garrick's *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35.2(1984): 170-179.

Brandon, James R., Martin Banham. eds. *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993).

Burkus-Chasson, Anne. 'Like Not Like: Writing Portraits in *The Peony Pavilion*', *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 2.1(2015): 134-172.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Carlson, Marvin. *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

Carlson, Marvin. *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Cornell University Press, 1984).

Chen, Duo. *Xiqu Meixue* 戏曲美学 *Aesthetics of Xiqu* (Chengdu: Sishuan renmin publishing house, 2001).

Chen, Duo, Ye Changhai. eds. *Zhongguo Lidai Julian Xuanzhu* 中国历代剧论选注 *Annotations on Selected Historical Chinese Drama Theories* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1987).

Chen, Fang. *Kunju de biaoyan yu chuancheng* 昆剧的表演与传承 *Performance and Inheritance of Kunju* (Taipei: National Publishing House, 2010).

Chirita, Andreea. 'History as Farce and the Intellectual as Comedian: Li Jing's Metahistorical Drama *Comedies from the State of Qin*', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 40.1(2023): 44-74.

Clopper, Lawrence M. *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago University Press, 2001).

Cooper, Helen. *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010).

Crosman, Robert. *World's a Stage: Shakespeare and the Dramatic View of Life* (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2004).

Daley, Brian E. 'The "Closed Garden" and the "Sealed Fountain": *Song of Songs* 4:12 in the Late Medieval Iconography of Mary', in *Medieval Gardens: History of Landscape Architecture Colloquium*, vol. 9, ed. Elizabeth B. Macdougall (Harvard University Press, 1986).

Ding, Shumei. 'On the prohibition and destruction of Chinese ancient drama' (Shanghai: East China Normal University: PhD. Diss., 2006).

Ding, Shumei. 'On the prohibition and destruction of Chinese ancient drama' (Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2008).

Dolby, William. *History of Chinese Drama* (London: Paul Elek, 1976).

Dong, Meikan. 'On "Farce"' "滑稽戏"漫谈, *Theatre Arts*, 2(1980): 100-5.

Dong, Meikan. *zhōngguó xìjù jîan shî* 中国戏剧简史 *A Brief History of Chinese Theatre* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1949).

Falaschi, Isabella. 'Tang Xianzu, *Peony Pavilion*, and Qing' in Tian Yuan Tan, and Paolo Santangelo, ed. *Passion, Romance, and Qing: The World of Emotions and States of Mind in Peony Pavilion*. 4 vols (Boston: Brill, 2015), vol.1, pp. 1-43.

Farmer, Maine. 'Absurd Stage Deaths: Nature Outrageously Violated Instead of Being Shown a Mirror', *Augusta* 63.17(1895): 2.

Fei, Chunfang. ed. & trans. *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Confucius to the Present* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

Feng, Wei. *Intercultural Aesthetics in Traditional Chinese Theatre From 1978 to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

Feng, Yuanjun. *gû yoū jíe* 古优解 A Study on Ancient [Chinese] Players (1944).

Foster, Verna. *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy* (London: Routledge, 2004).

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams: The Complete and Definitive Text*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2010 [1900]).

Gao, Xingjian. *Aesthetics and Creation*, tran. Mabel Lee (New York: Cambria Press, 2012).

Gao, Xingjian. 'The Case for Literature', trans. Mabel Lee, NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2022. Fri. 8 Apr 2022.

Gibbons, Brian. *Shakespeare and Multiplicity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993).

Glick, Claris. 'William Poel: His Theories and Influence', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15.1(1964): 15-25.

Goodland, Katharine. *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Greenblatt, Stephen. 'Survival Strategies: Shakespeare and Renaissance truth-telling', *Cahiers Élisabéthains: A Journal of English Renaissance*, 108.1(2022): 21-34.

Gross, Oscar, Franklin J. Hildy. eds. *History of the Theatre* (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2014, 1st in 2008).

Guo, Baochang, Tao Qingmei. *Liaobuqi de youxi: jingju jiujing hao zai na'er* 了不起的游戏：京剧究竟好在哪儿 *The Great Play - What is the Beauty of Jingju* (Beijing: Joint Publishing, 2021).

Guo, Jiuqi, 'Three-story Grand Theatre Buildings in the Royal Palace of Qing Dynasty', *Forbidden City*, 3 (2012): 12-5.

Hanan, Patrick. *The Invention of Li Yü* (Harvard University Press, 1988).

Hayden, George A. 'Li Li-weng: A Playwright on Performance', *CHINOPERL Papers 9* (1979-1980): 80-91.

Hearn, Maxwell K. ‘In Conversation: Tan Dun’, *Beijing Review*, December 7, 2012.

Henry, Eric. *Chinese Amusement: the Lively Plays of Li Yü* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980).

Holding, Peter. *Romeo and Juliet: Text and Performance* (London, 1992).

Hopkins, Lisa. ‘Herb Paris, *Romeo and Juliet* and Thomas Hesketh’, *Notes and Queries*, 65.4(2018): 530-533.

Hua, Wei. ‘The Search for Great Harmony: A Study of Tang Xianzu’s Dramatic Art’ (University of California, Berkeley: PhD diss., 1991).

Huang, Dianqi. *Zhongguo xiqu lianpu* 中国戏曲脸谱 *A Complete Compendium of Chinese Opera’s Painted Faces* (Beijing: Chaohua, 2017).

Hunt, Alice. *The Drama of Coronation: Medieval Ceremony in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008).

Hunter-Gordon, Kim. ‘Contesting Traditional *Luzi* ('Choreographic Paths'): A Performance-Based Study of *Kunqu*’ (Royal Holloway, University of London: PhD thesis, 2016).

Hu, Xingliang. *Zhōngguó huàjù yú zhōngguó xìqû* 中国话剧与中国戏曲 *Chinese Huaju and Chinese Xiqu* (Shanghai: Xuelin Publishing House, 2000).

Irving, Henry. *The Henry Irving Shakespeare*, ed. by Frank A. Marshall (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 8 vols.

Iyengar, Sujata. 'Shakespeare's Anti-Balcony Scene', *Arrêt sur Scène/Scene Focus*, 6(2017): 135-45.

James, William. *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Dover Publications, 1950 [1890]), 2 vols.

Jin, Xiaorong. 'The Canonization and Reproduction of Traditional Opera: Centred by *The Orphan of Zhao*' (Wuhan University: PhD. Diss., 2014).

Joubin, Alexa Alice. ed., 'Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare Quatercentenary Celebration', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 36.2(2019): 275-348.

Karim-Cooper, Farah. *The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

Kile, S. E. *Towers in the Void: Li Yu and Early Modern Chinese Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

King, Ros. *Cymbeline: Constructions of Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

King, Ros. 'In lieu of democracy, or how not to lose your head: theatre and authority in Renaissance England', in *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, ed. Subha Mukherji and Raphael Lyne (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007).

King, Ros. *Shakespeare: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford : Oneworld, 2011).

King, Ros. *The Works of Richard Edwards: Politics, Poetry and Performance in Sixteenth-century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

Ko, Dorothy. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture In Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994).

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 11-2.

Leveen, Lois. '*Romeo and Juliet* has no Balcony', *The Atlantic*, October 29, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/10/romeo-and-juliets-balcony-scene-doesnt-exist/381969/ (last accessed on 15 June 2023).

Lei, Daphne Pi-Wei. *Operatic China: Staging Chinese Identities Across the Pacific* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

Levenson, Jill L. *Romeo and Juliet: Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1987).

Li, Jianjun. *Bingshi shuang xing: Tang Xianzu he shashibiya* 并世双星：汤显祖与莎士比亚 *Two of the Fairest Stars: Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare* (Beijing: 21st Century Publishing House, 2016).

Li, Ruru. *Shashibiya: Staging Shakespeare in China* (Hong Kong: HKU Press, 2003).

Lin, Qianxiu. 'Mudanting Juan yaozhe; 'cuishengren' anran shenshang', *The Peony Pavilion* dies premature; 'expectant father' depressed, Shijie ribao, June 25, 1998.

Li, Shanshan, 'An Analysis of Madam Du in *Mudan ting*', *Literature Life*, 7(2011): 4, 7.

Li, Xiao. 'Qianjia tradition' of the performance art of *kunju* and its inheritance 昆剧表演艺术的 '乾嘉传统' 及其传承', *Hundreds Schools in Arts*, 4(1997): 86-115.

Liu, Aileen Young. '"From Strange to Stranger": the Problem of Romance on the Shakespearean Stage' (University of California, Berkeley: PhD diss, 2018).

Liu, Jiasi. *Cao Yu xiju de Juchang Xing Yanjiu* 曹禺戏剧的剧场性研究 *A Study on the Theatricality of Cao Yu's Plays* (Beijing: China Social Science Publishing House, 2010).

Liu, Qing. 'The Different Performance Forms of *Mudan ting* in *Zhuibaiqiu* and *Shenyin jiangulu* 《审音鉴古录》和《缀白裘》中 《牡丹亭》演出形态的差异', *Theatre Arts* , 6 (2012): 69-74.

Liu, Siyuan (Steven). ed. *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Liu, Siyuan (Steven). 'The Impact of *Shinpa* on Early Chinese *Huaju*', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 23.2(2006): 342-55.

Lowenthal, Leo. *Literature and the Image of Man: Studies of the European Drama and Novel, 1600-1900* (Boston, 1957).

Lu, E'ting. *Kunju Yanchu shigao* 昆剧演出史稿 *Historical Records of Kunju Performance*, ed. Zhao Jingshen (Shanghai: Wenyi Publishing House, 1980).

Lu, Jiye. *Zhongguo xiju gailun* 中国戏剧概论 *A Generation Observation of Chinese Theatre* (Shanghai: Shijie Shuju, 1934).

Lu, Tina. *Persons, Roles, and Minds: Identity in Mudan ting and Peach Blossom Fan* (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press 2001).

Mackerras, Colin. ed. *Chinese Theatre: From Its Origins to the Present Day* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983).

Mackerras, Colin. 'Review of Catherine C. Swatek's *Peony Pavilion Onstage: Four Centuries in the Career of a Chinese Drama*', Journal of Oriental Studies, 40.1/2(2005): 184-185.

Mackerras, Colin. 'Architecture and Stage of Traditional Theatre (China)', in *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*, ed. Liu Siyuan (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 226-231.

Ma, Haili. *Understanding Cultural and Creative Industries through Chinese Theatre* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024).

Man, Sai-cheong. 'Li Yü on the performing arts', *Renditions*, 3(1974): 62-5.

Mao, Jie. '*The Study of Kunju zhezixi in Zhuibaiqiu*' 《缀白裘》昆剧折子戏研究 (Nanjing University: Master thesis, 2014).

Mao, Nathan K. and Liu Ts'un-yun, *Li Yü* (Boston: Twayne, 1977).

Marini, Guillermo. 'Aristotelic learning through the arts.' *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 33.2 (2014): 171-184.

Martin, Helmut. *Li Li-weng uber das Theater: Eine Chinesische Dramaturgie des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Taipei: Mei Ya, 1968).

McLuskie, Kate. 'There be salmons in both': Models of connection for 17th century English and Chinese drama', in Tan Tian Yuan, Paul Edmondson and Shih-pe Wang, eds, *1616: Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu's China* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 277-93.

McNulty, Charles. '"Nightwalk in the Chinese Garden" is a nocturnal journey at the Huntington that blurs the line between reality and illusion'. *Los Angeles Times*. Sep 24, 2018.

Morse, Ruth, Peter Holland, and Helen Cooper. eds. *Medieval Shakespeare: Pasts and Presents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Otto, Beatrice K. *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World* (Chicago UP, 2001).

Pai, Hsien-yung, *Pai Hsien-yung on Kunqu* 白先勇说昆曲 (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2004).

Pai, Hsien-yung. 'The New Aesthetics of *Kunqu* - From the 'Young Lovers' Edition of *Mudan ting* to the New Version of *The Jade Hairpin* 昆曲新美学——从青春版《牡丹亭》到新版《玉簪记》', *Arts Criticism*, 3(2010): 5-9.

Palfrey, Simon, Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Pang, Wing-yin. 'A Historical Review of the Comparative Study of Mohism and Christianity during the Late Qing and Republican China Periods', *Religions*, 15.2(2024): 162-189 (p. 165).

Patterson, Annabel M. *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

Peacock, Louise. *Slapstick and Comic Performance: Comedy and Pain* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Peng, Feng. 'Li Yu's theory of drama: a moderate moralism', *Philosophy East & West* 66.1(2016): 73–91.

Percec, Dana. 'Sposami a Verona', in *What's in a Balcony Scene? A Study on Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and its Adaptations*, ed. Luminita Frentiu (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), pp. 1-11.

Peterson, Willard J. 'Introduction: The Ch'ing Dynasty, the Ch'ing Empire, and the Great Ch'ing Integrated Domain', in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 9, ed. By Willard J. Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp.1-15.

Pfister, Manfred. 'The Balcony Scenes from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* across Cultures and Media', in *Romeo and Juliet in European Culture*, ed. Juan F. Cerdá, Dirk Delabastita, and Keith Gregor (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017), pp. 37-59.

Poel, William. *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (London and Toronto: Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1913), reprint by AMS Press in 1974.

Pollard, David. trans. & ed. *The Chinese Essay* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

Prentki, Tim. *The Fool in European Theatre: Stages of Folly* (Palgrave macmillan, 2012), pp. 1-2.

Richter, David H. ed. *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

Ropp, Paul S. *Dissent in Early Modern China. Ju-lin wai-shi and Ch'ing Social Criticism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981).

Scheff, Thomas J. 'Audience Awareness and Catharsis in Drama,' *Psychoanalytic Review*, 63.4(1976-77): 529-554.

Schoenbaum, Samuel. 'Enter a Porter (*Macbeth*, 2.3)', in *Shakespeare: Text, Language, Criticism: Essays in Honour of Marvin Spevack*. ed. Bernhard Fabioan and Jurt tetzeli von Rosado (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1987).

Schreyer, Kurt A. *Shakespeare's Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014).

Shen, Grant Guangren. 'Chinese *chuanqi* Opera in English: Directing *The West Wing* with Modern Music', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 29.1(2012): 183-205.

Shen, Grant Guangren. *Elite Theatre in Ming China, 1368-1644* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Shen, Grant Guangren. ‘Libretto Translation and Musical Arrangement in Chinese Chuanqi Opera’, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 35 (2013): 177-207.

Shen, Grant Guangren. ‘Zaju and Kabuki in English: Directing in the Classical Styles’, *The Drama Review* 171(2001): 134–148.

Shen, Jing. *Playwrights and Literary Games in Seventeenth-Century China: Plays by Tang Xianzu, Mei Dingzuo, Wu Bing, Li Yü, and Kong Shangren* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010).

Shu, Wu. *Shu Wu Shuoshi* 舒芜说诗 *Shu Wu on Poem* (Beijing: Beijing Publishing House, 2016).

Sieber, Patricia. ‘Is there a playwright in the text? The 1610s and the consolidation of dramatic authorship in late Ming print culture’, in *1616: Shakespeare and TangXianzu’s China*, pp. 150-62.

Smith, Donald M. ‘“And I'll go to bed at noon”: The Fool in *King Lear*’, *Essays in Arts and Sciences*, 5.1(1976): 37-45.

Snyder, Susan. ‘*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy’, *Essays in Criticism*, 20.4(1970): 391-402.

Stagg, Robert. 'Against "the Music of Poetry"' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Literature and Music*, ed. Delia da Sousa Correa (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), pp. 183-8.

Stern, Tiffany. *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009).

Stewart, W. A. *Dictionary of Images and Symbols in Counselling* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1998).

Stone, George Winchester. '*Romeo and Juliet*: The Source of Its Modern Stage Career', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15.2(1964): 191–206.

Stone, Lawrence. *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641*, abridged ed. (Oxford: OUP, 1967).

Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper, 1977).

Sterrett, Joseph. '"On my word": Trust and the Word in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Études Anglaises* 71.4(2018): 409-423.

Stewart, Stanley. *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).

Styan, John. *The English Stage: A History of Drama and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Sun, Chang-hong. *Zhongguo chuantong shixing zhengyi yu beiju de quefa* 中国传统诗性正义与悲剧的缺乏 ‘Chinese Traditional Poetic Justice and the Lack of Tragedy’, *Huazhong University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, 35.5(2021): 43-51.

Sun, Huizhu. ‘The Paradox of Acting in the Traditional Chinese Theatre’, *New Theatre Quarterly*, 15.1(1999):17–25.

Swatek, Catherine. *Peony Pavilion Onstage: Four Centuries in the Career of a Chinese Drama* (Ann Arbor: Centre for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2002).

Swatek, Catherine. ‘Boundary Crossings: Peter Sellars's Production of Peony Pavilion.’ *Asian Theatre Journal* (2002): 147-158.

Tan, Tian Yuan, Paul Edmondson and Shih-pe Wang, eds, *1616: Shakespeare and Tang Xianzu’s China* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

Tatlow, Antony. *Shakespeare, Brecht, and the Intercultural Sign* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 3-4.

Thorpe, Ashley. *The Role of the Chou ('Clown') in Traditional Chinese Drama: Comedy, Criticism, and Cosmology on the Chinese Stage* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

Tigner, Amy L. *Literature and the Renaissance Garden from Elizabeth I to Charles II: England's Paradise* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

Tillis, Steve. *The Challenge of World Theatre History* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

Volpp, Sophie. *Worldly Stage: Theatricality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011).

Wang, Huimin. 'From Page to Stage: A Transcultural Comparison of the "Garden Scene" in *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Peony Pavilion* in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *eSharp Transitions, Transformations, 'Trans' Narratives*, 27(2019): 61-69.

Wang, Huimin. 'Inclusion and Exclusion: Gender Politics in the Performance Traditions of the flower spirits in *The Peony Pavilion*', *Emergence* 11(2020):1-12.

Wang, Liqi. *Yuan Ming Qing sandai jinghui xiaoshuo xiqu shiliao* 元明清三代禁毁小说戏曲史料 *The Historical Accounts of the Forbidden or Destroyed Fictions and Dramas during the Dynasties of the Yuan, Ming and Qing* (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1958, an amended version was published by the Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1981).

Wang, Ning. *Kunju Zhezixi Yanjiu* 昆剧折子戏研究 *A Study on Kunju Zhezixi* (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2012).

Wang, Jisi. ed. *Zhongguo shida gudian beiju ji* 中国十大古典悲剧集 *Top Ten Classical Chinese Tragedies*, 2 vols. (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1991).

Wang, Jisi. ed. *Zhongguo shida gudian xiju ji* 中国十大古典喜剧集 *Top Ten Classical Chinese Comedies* (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1991).

Way, Twigs. *Virgins, Weeders and Queens. A History of Women in the Garden* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006).

Weimann, Robert. *Author's Pen and Actor's Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Weimann, Robert. *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theatre: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. by Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

Wells, Stanley. 'The Challenges of *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Survey* 49(1996): 1-14.

Wells, Stanley. *Shakespeare on Page and Stage: Selected Essays*, ed. Paul Edmondson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Wichmann, Elizabeth. 'Traditional theatre in contemporary China', in *Chinese Theatre: From Its Origins to the Present Day*, ed. Colin Mackerras (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983).

Willes, Margaret. *A Shakespearean Botanical* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Wright, Katherine L. *Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in Performance: Traditions and Departures* (Lewiston: Mellen University Press, 1997).

Xia, Mu, Jie Chen, Hong Li, 'Tragedy or tragicomedy: Mixed feelings induced by positive and negative emotional events,' *Cognition and Emotion*, 30.5(2016): 857-867.

Xu, Muyun. *Zhongguo xiju shi* 中国戏剧史 *A History of Chinese Theatre* (Shanghai: Shijie Shuju, 1938).

Xu, Shuofang. *Chronicles of Tang Xianzu* 汤显祖年谱 *Tang Xianzu nian pu* (Shanghai: Guji Press, 1980).

Yang, Huiling. *Ming-Qing Jiangnan wangzu he kunqu yishu* 明清江南望族和昆曲艺术 *Jiangnan Familial Culture and the Art of Kunqu during the Ming and the Qing Dynasties* (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2016).

Yang, Ming. ‘Return of the Soul: Inheritance and Innovation in the Process of Artistic Creation in Major *Kunqu* Productions in the PRC, 2001-2015’ (University of Hawai’I: PhD thesis, 2019).

Ye, Changhai. ‘*Mudan ting* de beixiju yinsu’ 牡丹亭的悲喜剧因素 ‘The Tragicomic Structure of *Mudan ting*’, in *Mudan ting: Antou yu changshang* 牡丹亭：案头与场上 *Mudan ting: Page and Stage*, ed. Ye Changhai (Shanghai: Sanlian, 2001).

Ye, Changhai. *Zhongguo xijuxue shigao* 中国戏剧学史稿 *A History of Theatre Studies in China* (Shanghai: Shanghai Arts and Literature Press, 1986).

Yu, Dan. *Youyuan jingmeng - kunqu yishu shenmei zhilv* 游园惊梦——昆曲艺术审美之旅 *A Startled Dream in the Garden: The Aesthetic Journey of Kunqu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007).

Yung, Sai-shing. ‘A critical study of *Han-tan chi*’ (Princeton University : PhD diss., 1992).

Yu, Qiuyu. *Jiduan zhimei - shufa, kunqu, pu’er cha* 极端之美——书法、昆曲、普洱茶 *The Extreme Beauty: Chinese Calligraphy, Kunqu and Pu’er Tea* (Wuhan: Changjiang wenyi publishing house, 2013).

Yu, Qiuyu. *Disheng hechu - guanyu kunqu* 笛声何处——关于昆曲 *The Sound of Dizi: About Kunqu* (Suzhou: Guwu xuan publishing house, 2004).

Zeami, Motokiyo. *On the Art of the Nō Drama. The Major Treatises of Zeami*, trans. J. Thomas Rimer and Yamazaki Masakazu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Zeitlin, Judith T. 'My Year of Peonies', *Asian Theatre Journal*, 19.1(2002): 124-133.

Zeki, Semir. *Splendours and Miseries of the Brain: Love, Creativity, and the Quest for Human Happiness* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

Zhai, Qing, 'A complete Peony pavilion to go to America in July, Zhongguo wenhua bao,' Feb 6, 1998.

Zhang, Hong. *Da Wudan* 大武旦 (王芝泉) *The Great Martial Dan Actor Wang Zhiquan* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2012).

Zhang Jia, 'Research on the shapes of Washe Goulan in Song dynasties 两宋时期瓦舍勾栏形制探究' (Xi'an University of Architecture and Technology: Master diss., 2013).

Zhang, Jinke. '*Mudan ting*'s Satire and Criticism of the Late-Ming Society' 《牡丹亭》对晚明社会的讽刺与批判, *Ming Zuo Xin Shang* 27(2022): 96-8.

Zhang, Xueli. 'A Study on Commentaries, Revisions and Miscellanies of *Mudan ting*' 《牡丹亭》评点本、改本及选本研究 (Fudan University: PhD thesis, 2010).

Zhou, Ning. ‘Private Garden: the Heterotopia of Chinese Opera’. *Drama Literature*, 3(2004): 22-26.

Zhou, Ning. *Xiang xiang yu quanli: xiju yishi xingtai yanjiu* 想象与权利：戏剧意识形态研究 *Imagination and Power: The Ideological Analysis of Theatre* (Xiamen: Xiamen University Press, 2003).

Zhou, Xishan, ‘How to compare Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare today? Starting from widespread wrong ideas on the internet’ in *2016 China Fuzhou Tang Xianzu Drama Exhibition and Selected Papers of International Academic Summit*, ed. Fuzhou Social Science Association (Fuzhou: Fuzhou Social Science Association Publishing, 2016), pp. 413-29.

Zhou, Yibai. *Zhongguo juchang shi* 中国剧场史 *A History of Chinese Theatre* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936).

Zhou, Yibai. *Zhongguo xijushi jiangzuo* 中国戏剧史讲座 *Lectures on the History of Chinese Theatre* (Beijing: Beijing publishing house, 2016), p. 149.

Zhu, Jiajin. *Gugong Tuishilu·Qingdai neiting yanxi zatan* 故宫退食录·清代内廷演戏情况杂谈 (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2000).

Zou, Yuanjiang. 'Is Peter Sellars's Avant-garde *Peony Pavilion* an effort to revive *Kunqu*?' 彼得·塞勒斯导演的"先锋版"《牡丹亭》是"复兴昆曲的努力"? *Journal of Capital Normal University (Social Science Edition)*, 6(2021): 135-145.

Zou, Yuanjiang. *Lun xiqu choujue de meixue tezheng* 论戏曲丑角的美学特征 'On the Aesthetic Characteristics of Chou in Traditional Chinese Theatre', *Wenyi Yanjiu (Literature & Art Studies)*, 6(1996): 84-95.

Zou, Zizhen. *Tang Xianzu and His Dramatic Works* (Nanchang: Jiangxi Gaoxiao Publishing House, 2016).