



“All Shall Be Well, Jack Shall Have Jill”—On the Value and Significance of Feelings in *The Romance of Western Chamber* by Wang Shifu

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Abstract. *The Romance of Western Chamber*, created by Wang Shifu in the Yuan Dynasty, was adapted on the basis of Tang Yuanzhen’s *Biography of YingYing* and Dong Jieyuan’s *Western Chamber Zhugongdiao*, reflecting the influence of social backgrounds and emotional concepts in different times. Wang Shifu’s *The Romance of Western Chamber* develops the traditional story mode of “talented people and beauty” and expands the scope of emotional care. At the same time, it highlights the autonomy of women in the pursuit of freedom of love and breaks the marriage tradition of “men are superior to women” to a certain extent. Not only because of the beauty of its lyrics, but also because it reflects the value of emotion, it depicts the beauty of faithful love in the struggle for freedom of marriage and love, which fits the psychology of ordinary people who are deeply bound by the concepts of feudal society.

Keywords: Wang Shifu · *The Romance of Western Chamber* · Sentiment

1 Introduction

In Taihe Zhengyin Pu, Zhu Quan of the Ming Dynasty praised Wang Shifu’s lyrics and songs as “beautiful women among flowers”, “euphemistic narratives, deep interest of poets” and “excellent sentences”. Jia Zhongming of the Ming Dynasty continued to compile the Ghost Record Book, commenting on Wang Shifu “The wind and moon camp is packed with banners. Yinghua Stronghold is a place where swords and halberds are arranged in a fierce way in the Ming Dynasty. In Cuihong Township, men of valor are wise. Composing poems is beautiful, and the middle generation of scholars is low. New drama, old legend, *The Romance of Western Chamber* wins the World Championship” [1]. This shows the praise for Wang Shifu and his work *The Romance of Western Chamber*. Of course, the controversy over the concept of feelings in Wang Xixiang has also lasted for a long time, such as whether it only focuses on the love between men and women with narrow content. Others believe that Wang Xixiang is still limited by the traditional etiquette system, and denies its sentimental nature because of his propriety.

2 The Change of Emotion View and the Formation of *The Romance of Western Chamber*

The story of Cui YingYing and Zhang Gong described in *The Romance of Western Chamber* has undergone several changes, from the Biography of YingYing in Yuanzhen of the Tang Dynasty [2], Zhao lingchou’s Drum lyrics of butterfly in love with flower in ShangDiao of the Song Dynasty [3], Dong Jieyuan’s Western Chamber Zhugongdiao of the Jin Dynasty [4], and then to the Wang Shifu’s *The Romance of Western Chamber* of Yuan Dynasty [3], many changes have taken place in the character relationship, plot content and theme, which is closely related to the differences in social emotional concepts in different periods, mainly feudal marriage concepts.

Yuan Zhen’s Biography of YingYing in the Tang Dynasty has taken the shape of the characters and plots in Wang Xixiang, but this is a story centered on male value judgment. Lu Xun called the author of Biography of YingYing to “describe the scene of his own experience” with the theme of his work [5]. From the beginning to the end, Yingying has no independent emotional needs and appeals, and passively accepts male choices without complaint. However, Zhang Sheng’s untimely behavior has been glorified as “good atonement”, which ends with the meaning of a admonition for future generations. It can be said that Biography of YingYing mainly reflects the marriage concept of the upper class literati in the Tang Dynasty. At that time, men in the patriarchal era were afraid of the love relationship with women. Therefore, the writing purpose of Biography of YingYing was mainly to promote ethics and avoid men’s infatuation with women, “so that those who know will not do it, and those who do it will not be confused.”

By the Song Dynasty, stories of the Western Chamber had become widely spread in the society in the form of rap literature. During the Song and Jin Dynasties, rap literature for the general public gradually prevailed, drama performance began to go to the market, and folk culture gradually became the main trend of literary development at that time. In the Jin Dynasty, Dong Jieyuan adapted it into a rap literary work, which is Western Chamber Zhugongdiao. Western Chamber Zhugongdiao has expanded its length, enriched its plot and changed the identity of its characters. Dong Xixiang shows the marriage ideal of the lower class of the Jin Dynasty, which was influenced by the culture of the northern minorities. Compared with Biography Yingying created in the Tang Dynasty, its theme is completely different. In Yuan Dynasty, Wang Shifu wrote *The Romance of Western Chamber*, many straightforward and explicit love descriptions in Western Chamber Zhugongdiao were deleted from the plot, which was more subtle and elegant. The theme of the story is no longer just the expression and indulgence of male passions, but the idealized imagination and respect of men for women.

The imperial examination in the Yuan Dynasty was abolished for 80 years. Confucians were unable to enter the official ranks and they were forced to stay in the market and integrate into the public class. This makes the playwrights bring more common people into their works, and also leads to a kind of idealistic psychology of the imperial examination. They fantasize about realizing social and life aspirations through the imperial examination. In addition, marriage has become another way to realize the value of life. Therefore, literary works are filled with a large number of perfect imagination of “On the wedding night, when the golden list was inscribed”, and the contradiction between love and fame is reconciled to a certain extent.

3 The Characteristics of Wang Shifu's View of Emotion Embodied in *The Romance of Western Chamber*

Wang Shifu felt the dissatisfaction of ordinary people with the feudal ethics, social system and personal living conditions, and used a variety of opera methods to depict the personality relationships of the characters in the play to clarify his ideological understanding and social ideals, which greatly improved the value of *The Romance of Western Chamber* in both ideological and artistic aspects. Specifically, Wang Xixiang embodies the following two characteristics.

3.1 Breaking Through the Traditional "Talented People and Beauty" Mode, the Scope of Emotional Concept Care is Expanded

The discussion of talented people seeking beauty has been handed down since the Qin Dynasty. Since then, there has been no shortage of love stories about talented people and beautiful women in literary works of all dynasties. *The Romance of Western Chamber* of Wang also conforms to this popular story model, which continues the love at first sight and the plot of separation and happy ending between men and women due to obstruction. However, Wang Xixiang has further developed this traditional model.

In "Wang Xixiang", it is shown that sincere love is the foundation of marriage, to a certain extent, it breaks through the concept of feudal clans and the restrictions of "parents' orders, matchmakers' words" and fame and fortune. From Zhang Sheng's point of view, although the imperial examinations in the Yuan Dynasty became fashionable and abolished, the ideal of the lower-class literati "becomes a farmer in the morning and ascends to the Hall of the Son of Heaven in the evening". Zhang Sheng experienced "the firefly window snow case, scratched and polished, and learned a lot of articles", but "still drifting in the lake and sea", hoping to "achieve great ambitions" in the future, but for the sake of Yingying, he was willing to give up The long-cherished wish for many years, "it's not worth going to the capital", only to stay in the monastery to pursue Yingying. After the old lady changed her mind through her marriage, she resolutely rejected the old lady's plan to "reward each other with gold and silk, choose the daughter of a wealthy family, and don't ask for it", and she was saddened to get a serious illness, which reflects Zhang Sheng's "honesty" "species" characteristics.

Different from Dong Xixiang's view of love that "a beautiful woman matches a talented person from ancient times to the present", it believes that "a man with talent", "a woman with appearance", and fame and fortune are the decisive conditions for love and marriage. The love ideal proposed in Wang Xixiang cares for those who have "universal love", which goes beyond the combination of "talented men" and "beautiful women". This ideal of love is not restricted by the orders of parents, the words of matchmakers, nor by the restrictions of family status and fame. It is proposed that only the "love" that belongs to the subjective will of both men and women is the basis of mutual love and marriage. Wang Shifu is the first person who really put forward the idea of "lovers get married". He included young men and women who fell in love without their parents' approval, emphasized the importance of freedom of love and hoped that all people who really loved each other could achieve their wishes, which broke the feudal marriage

system of “parents’ orders and matchmakers’ words”, and he was the first to touch the essence of love to a certain extent.

3.2 Highlight Women’s Emotional Autonomy and Break the Tradition of “Men Being Superior to Women”

Wang Xixiang recognizes the importance of mutual love in the marriage system. At the same time, in the process of pursuing the realization of love, it highlights the autonomy of Cui Yingying in breaking the restrictions of feudal ethics, and changes the stereotyped way of female image shaping in previous literary works. This kind of breakthrough from the perspective of women bound by feudal ethics and morality breaks the limitation of the marriage concept of “a beautiful woman matches a talented person from ancient times to the present” with the feudal consciousness of “men are superior to women.” to a certain extent.

When they first met at the temple, Cui Yingying took the initiative to turn around and “look”, which became the first reason for the two to fall in love. Although Yingying was already married at that time, and she was in the temple in mourning and filial piety, she was strictly disciplined and blocked by her mother, but none could stop Yingying’s persistent pursuit of love. In Jin Shengtan’s “Book of the Sixth Talented Son”, Yingying was changed from a girl with a rebellious spirit because of her love to a polite and beautiful woman who is “the most noble, the most intelligent, the most affectionate, and the most talented” [Jin Shengtan. *Guanhua Tang Sixth Talented Book of the West Chamber* [M]. Nanjing: Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House, 1986.], Yingying’s behavior is always within the scope allowed by “li”, and does not fully recognize the independent and rebellious nature of Yingying’s character. important aspects.

In addition, there is also an important female character in “Wang Xixiang”, that is Yingying’s maid matchmaker. When talking about the relationship between characters in “The Story of the West Chamber”, Jin Shengtan said: “For example, the title is the title, Zhang Sheng is the text, and Hongniang is the succession and transformation of the text. There are so many successions and transformations, so that the title reveals the text and the text penetrates. The title is also.” [Jin Shengtan. *The Sixth Talented Book of Guanhuatang* [M]. Nanjing: Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House, 1986.] In the emotional communication and combination of Cui and Zhang, Hongniang played an indispensable role. The old lady relied on her marriage. She stood up and refuted the old lady’s feudal concept of etiquette and maintained Cui Zhang’s love, which fully reflected the charm of the role of Hongniang.

4 The Value and Significance of Wang Shifu’s View of Emotion in *The Romance of Western Chamber*

Many literary works before the Yuan Dynasty did not fully express the beauty and poetry of love. Wang Xixiang has been singing for many years since then, and his performance has never failed, not only because of the beauty of his songs and lyrics, but also because of the spirit of fighting firmly with the feudal forces for freedom of marriage, which has moved the ordinary people under the yoke of such forces for a long time. Its wish

of “wishing all lovers in the world get married” puts forward that “love” is the basis of marriage, representing the ideal of all people, and it has aroused resonance. The value orientation and aesthetic ideal of the masses not only promoted the birth of this classic, but also served as the soil for its vigorous growth. Jin Shengtian commented “Is Wang Shifu the only one who can create *The Romance of Western Chamber*? He just took it out of the hearts of the people all over the world.” [6].

At the same time, the influence of Wang Xixiang is also reflected in these aspects. Firstly, the exploration which directly takes the story of the Western Chamber as the content. For example, “The Story of the East Wall” is a copy of “The Romance of Western Chamber”. “Although there are some advantages in” The Plum Fragrance “... The number of sets, appearances, and guest speeches, all of which are from The Romance of Western Chamber.” Lu Cai’s “Huai Xiang Ji Jia Hui”, which follows the pattern of The Romance of Western Chamber [7]. Since then, in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there have also been many works adapted from the stories of the Western Chamber in novels and operas, including Nanxixiang, Xinxixiang, Xuxixiang, Fanxixiang, Jinxixiang, Houxixiang, Jingxixiang and so on.

The second is the reference of the Western Chamber method, such as the use of “wall”, “dream” and other images. For example, the book of Strange Dreams, which was criticized by Yumingtang, was inscribed with an article of General Comments on Strange Dreams, which said “Those who talk about dreams in the theater begin with the” grass bridge “in the West Chamber. “Grass bridge” is a dream. Now there is Peony Pavilion again, which is a quiet dream. “Nanke” and “Huangliang” are also containment of dream. It affirmed the influence of the image of “dream” in Wang Shifu’s West Chamber on Tang Xianzu’s creation.

The third is the inheritance of the Western Chamber spirit. In Peony Pavilion of Ming Dynasty, [8] Tang Xianzu wrote that Du Liniang envied “Zhang Sheng meets Cui Family... and later becomes Qin and Jin”, In A Dream of Red Mansion of Qing Dynasty, [9] Cao Xueqin wrote that Baochai objected to reading The Romance of Western Chamber, fearing that it would “change her temperament”, while Baodai couldn’t help reading it. The Peony Pavilion and A Dream of Red Mansion not only inherit the form of The Romance of Western Chamber in terms of theme, but also the spiritual continuity. In The Peony Pavilion, it is described that “love goes on without knowing where it comes from. The living can die, and the dead can live.” The heroine Du Liniang pushes down the restrictions of the doctrine with “original intention”. She can seek dreams for ideal love, and live again for the happiness she craves. She should also argue for the marriage “without the introduction of a matchmaker”, and challenge the ethics with “true feelings”. This is not only the pursuit of free love, but also the pursuit of self-worth and personality consciousness, which reflects the call for human liberation and requires recognition and respect for people. While A Dream of Red Mansion in Qing Dynasty put universal love in the complex social life, and explored the conflict between the free pursuit of mutually compatible spirit and real life. It has gone beyond the love of men and women and pursued the survival as well as freedom of people with philosophical thinking and implication. However, these two works both continue the spirit of pursuing love autonomy advocated in The Romance of Western Chamber in different significance levels, and further develop, explore and recognize the absolute value of human emotion

and personality. “The freedom of spirit and the lack of freedom of action, the high ideal and the restriction of reality, the awakening people and the immature historical conditions, there is a tragic conflict between the historical necessity that constitutes the basis of tragedy and the fact that this requirement is impossible to achieve.” [10].

5 Conclusion

On the basis of previous works such as *Biography of Yingying and Western Chamber Zhugongdiao*, Wang Shifu’s *The Romance of Western Chamber* of the Yuan Dynasty not only inherited, but also further developed. His emotional concept of “wishing all lovers in the world get married” expanded the scope of care to all young men and women, breaking through the traditional category of “talented women and beautiful women” and emphasizing women’s autonomy in fighting for freedom of marriage and love, changed the stereotype of women’s roles in the past. Due to the limitations of the times, “Wang Xixiang” still shows the returning and compliance with the etiquette system, but the value of the emotional concept can not be completely denied. Wang Xixiang not only influenced the later drama creation in terms of subject matter, content and creation techniques, but also influenced the later literary creation because of the self-recognition and independent love pursuit spirit advocated therein.

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