



Through “Peony Pavilion” and “The Taming of the Shrew”’: Reveal the Influence of Female Education on Women in the Renaissance and Ming Dynasty

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Abstract. “Peony Pavilion” and “The Taming of the Shrew” were written in the same period and successfully gained recognition respectively. It is actual that on the performing stage, the female character of “Peony Pavilion” and “The Taming of the Shrew” were both performed by men, while the effect of education which was more likely to teach Du Lininang and Katharina the ethical contents was implied in the plots of these two works. This paper will emphasize analyzing the female image of Du Liniang and Katharina and how the plots of female education impact them. Moreover, these plots shall reveal how education influenced women’s daily life and how did women fight for their rights in different fields and the real world.

Keywords: Peony Pavilion · female image · The Taming of the Shrew

1 Introduction

“Peony Pavilion” is the work of the Legend of the Ming Dynasty and “The Taming of the Shrew” is the work of Western drama, meanwhile both Tang Xianzu and William Shakespeare is known as a master of drama. It is amazing that they wrote similar scripts at the same time but lived in different societies, which also provided many inspirations for other art forms. Both “Peony Pavilion” and “The Taming of The Shrew” are adapted to opera, movies, and ballet in different periods, especially the edition of the opera “Peony Pavilion” which was adapted by Tan Dun. It is the perfect example of the combination of Chinese and Western music. Moreover, there are various female images in their works with distinctive characteristics (Du Liniang and Chun Xiang in “Peony Pavilion”, and Katharina and Bianca in “The Taming of the Shrew”). These two works are great in their field respectively. In “Peony Pavilion”, most scholars are more likely to research the love plots or single images of Du Liniang. In “The Taming of the Shrew”, most scholars also emphasized researching the plots and female image. Recently, fewer investigations are paying more attention to research education with these two works in the academic field, while education is a non-negligible element throughout the plots in “Peony Pavilion” and “The Taming of the Shrew”. According to this research phenomenon, this paper will compare the female image of Du Liniang in “Peony Pavilion” with that of Katharina in

“The Taming of the Shrew”, which shows how education makes an effect on them. Additionally, it is trying to reveal what is the real definition and contents of female education and how female education impacted women and their living conditions between Ming Dynasty and Renaissance society in the same period. More importantly, how they use the knowledge derived from education to change their lives and gain their position and why women’s development have different trends between Ming Dynasty and Renaissance.

2 The Main Parallels Between “Peony Pavilion” and “The Taming of the Shrew”

Revealing the plots of “Peony Pavilion”, at first glance, it just illustrates the love story of Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei to the audience, while it also shows how Tang Xianzu used veiled and magical plots to express his wish and to oppose feudal ethics. Additionally, in a long historical period, it is difficult to see a single female image that can separate from the romantic plots before modern feminism becomes flourishes.

In turn, in “The Taming of the Shrew”, Shakespeare uses the story of Katharina and Petruchio to highlight the social situation of women who are controlled by their husbands and unable to express their thinking.

2.1 The Main Character in “Peony Pavilion”

Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei are the main characters in “Peony Pavilion”, and more importantly before Act 2 Scene 4 “An Enchanting Dream”, education which is more likely to tame women is often hidden in the former plots.

Du Liniang’s personality can be divided into two periods. In the early stage, Du Liniang’s image is that of a beautiful lady and a good daughter of her parents. The love of beauty is inborn with me, why is beauty inborn for no man to see? On seeing me, fish would feel shy, wild geese come down from the sky, the moon would close her eye, and flowers with me can’t vie [1]. From this dialogue, it shows how beautiful Du Liniang looks and what absolute confidence she has in how she looks. Her image conforms to that of the familiar traditional Ancient Chinese lady, which shows the reason why she accepts all the arrangements from her parents without being against them. This phenomenon is called “sān cóng sì dé” which means three obediences (in ancient China a woman was required to obey her father before marriage, and her husband during married life, and her sons in widowhood) and four virtues (fidelity, physical charm, propriety in speech and efficiency in needlework).

However, in the later period, she become obsessed with the love of Liu Mengmei and abandoned her traditional life and family. This appearance of Du Liniang’s change is caused by the education she got, she learns the Book of Song (Shi-Jing) which is the main teaching material of ancient Chinese female education and its purpose is to educate women to become a self-denying woman, while most of its contents are related to love and marriage, which is actually to wish people to have their own life with having learned the happy life from Shi-Jing. In “Peony Pavilion”, Du Liniang is taught to learn “The Cry of the Fish-hawk”, in this way Du Liniang follows the true purpose of Shi-Jing rather than the purpose of ancient Chinese female education [2].

Another character is Liu Mengmei who is the male character of “Peony Pavilion”, while actually, he is not a real man. There is a reason why he is not a real man. Specifically, the image of Liu Mengmei is created by Du Liniang in her dream, his image is over-idealistic and has defects at the same time. Scene 4 gives an ambiguous description of the sexual behavior between them: “I will unfasten your buttons and belt so that pressure and pleasure may be felt. The study will bring a fresh shower for your thirsting flower.” From this dialogue, illustrates that Li Mengmei is not a mature and balanced man, when he faces the invitation of the sexual he quickly joins in it with Du Linaing without any thinking or disagreement. Moreover, this behavior unquestionably is not tolerated and was against ethics at that time.

2.2 The Main Character in “The Taming of the Shrew”

Some scholars think, in Shakespeare’s works female image is distinctive and can be divided into six kinds of women. Firstly, the female image highlights the female subject status. Secondly, the female image with quick thinking and intelligence. Third, a woman dares to do everything. Fourthly, women who want to decide on their marriage. Fifth, moral women. Finally, women who have an open mind [3]. However, Katharina’s characteristics are very sophisticated, which are divided into two periods.

In the early stage, Katharina is described as a rude and barbarous female character. She can burst out to express her dissatisfaction, which is very usual in nowadays society but is not tolerated at that time. Scene 1 Act 2 shows that Katharina’s sound of swearing is like the sound of thunder rumbles and she is famous for cursing [4]. In the later period, her image turns out to be a good wife who fits the requirements of that time. Katharina even advises her sister to listen to her husband, which is contrary to a free and open-mind woman of her image, she is tamed.

Katharina’s image can be regarded as a woman who is controlled by social oppression and lost herself in real life.

2.3 Comparison of Du Liniang and Katharina

In these two works, both protagonists lived in the 17th century, born into an official family. Their biggest social value was seen to get married and having babies. They were not permitted to choose their husband and the dowry did not belong to them. In this kind of environment, they could not fulfill themselves. Nevertheless, both got a special kind of education.

Du Liniang got a pedantic Confucian education which had many traditional contents limiting people’s thinking. However, this helped her to know what she wanted, and through the dream, she knew what types of love she did love and had a self-awakening. She fell in love with Liu Mengmei and was going to break the rules and risk life which is more likely to cross life and death (live for love and die for love).

In turn, their education for Katharina was like a conversion, which had become an approach to limit her to gain her position. She was changed by her husband, Petruchio who converted her from being a free woman into what he considered to be too good a wife at that time. Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot, and place your hands your

husband's foot; In token of which duty, if he please, my hand is ready, may it do him ease [4]. From this dialogue, can learn that Katharina was completely tamed by Petruchio.

Both Du Liniang and Katharina were significant characters in these respective works. More importantly, they were the epitome of the real world, and the impact of education was also highlighted in these two works. In "Peony Pavilion", Du Liniang's parents hired a teacher to educate her: "Our daughter need not read all the books of the sage but learn good manners fit for her age. Let her be worthy of her family, and know to spin and speak fluently. It is not difficult to find a teacher, but he should be well treated as a preacher." From this dialogue, it shows that Du Liniang's parents did not concern about the real knowledge of what Du Liniang learned and what did she love to learn, they just want her to become a virtuous woman by educating. In turn, "The Taming of the Shrew" had an episode of Baptista saying that he will find an old-style private school to teach his daughter Bianca: "And for I know she taketh most delight in music, instruments, and poetry. Schoolmasters will I keep within my house. Fit to instruct her youth. If you, Hortensio, or Signior Gremio, you, know any such, Prefer them hither, for to cunning men I will be very kind and liberal. To mine own children in good bringing up. And so farewell." From this dialogue, it shows that Baptista's educational idea was different from Du Liniang's parents, although he educated his daughter also to push her to become a good wife, he still takes into account what his daughter loves to do.

Actually, in the same period of the real world, women were also the protagonist of history and education had a strong impact on women's life and development.

3 Women and Their Education in the Renaissance Era

At the beginning of the Renaissance era, The Aristotelian thinking of gender has always imprisoned women, which advocated to women are not only different from men in terms of internal abilities, but are also "lower" than men, so their natural role in society is to obey and yield [5]. Moreover, women's social role in the Renaissance era was defined by marriage, a woman depended on whom she got married to and she had little power except by her husband or father. Her education was to teach her to be a good wife, mother, or qualified royal woman, and the content of this was based on religion.

However, women have high emotional sensitivity, which helps them show more talent on the stage than men. Moreover, they have a chance to get an education. The education still let them talk among each other and try to advocate for women to get an education, which also allowed them to become a focal point. They held art salons and formed girl bands and dance companies, which were sponsored by Margherita Gonzaga the Duchess of Ferrara [5]. Through these activities, women's positions increased, and many fabulous female singers, artists, and writers emerged during this period. Most of them were more excellent than men in their field. Specifically, Sofonisba Anguissola who was the first internationally respected and pretentious female painter in the late Renaissance introduced the Italian school to Spain. In her childhood, her father allowed her to learn knowledge of painting, which gave her the chance to make her more professional than a male painter in the male-dominated era.

In stage performing, the court masque was dominated in early modern English drama to status and a special type combined poetry, music, and dance, which not only made

women become mainstream in the court masque dramas, moreover it also act as a challenge to male consciousness State, made out the female voice and shaped the active subject of the female community [6]. Women who took place of men had more opportunities to perform on stage and emphasized encouraging women to gain their position.

In these ways, European women became more and more visible in the development of history and their movement gained some impetus during this period, which provided the basis of the later feminist movement.

4 Women and the Female Education in Ming Dynasty

In Ming Dynasty, women’s thinking was controlled by husbands and Neo-Confucianism which advocated preserving the natural justice, and destroying human desires [7]. It was the goal of moral cultivation proposed by Zhu Xi in the Song Dynasty and became a popular social goal in Ming Dynasty. Natural justice means the truth of nature, the common sense of all things, and the social order, destroying human desires means people’s desires will impact the social order. In this way, people need to limit their desire, which will maintain the harmony and beauty of society. Some scholars believe that women in Ming Dynasty were strongly affected by the official female educated book and the concept of chastity, their thinking had an increasing trend of shackles. Therefore, women who died in defense of their honor chastity or virginity became a victim of the feudal ethics system [8]. Specifically, in the time of Ming Chengzu, Empress Xu who was familiar with traditional Chinese literature assist her husband to advertise moral obligations and preaching, which can advocate the conception of traditional Chinese moral ethics. Some official books of civilized women were published in her name [9]. These official books had a strong effect on women’s education and the development of their thinking, which taught women to become good wives or qualified royal women to support their husbands or look after their children. Moreover, it was suitable for the idea of society and childbearing became the main responsibility of women. Therefore women.

However, women’s position in merchant families improved. They were allowed to support their husbands in managing the household business and arranging the slaves in the house. Therefore, merchant families’ women had to learn to be good at business, manage to farm, and perform female workers’ techniques such as embroidery and weaving [9]. At this time women’s image became a majordomo. This phenomenon’s appearance was caused by the Ancient Chinese idea of social classes which were split into four hierarchies called scholar, farmer, artisan, and merchant, with merchant being the lowest level of society [10].

Therefore, women’s education had the following characteristics. Firstly, the content of education was more inclined to serve marriage and ethics. Secondly, women were educated to conform to the requirement of society instead of being themselves. While different women in different social classes had education and the content of it was different.

Moreover, women who had been got education showed more talent both on the stage performance and Art field. In the stage performance, at the beginning female roles were played by men in Chinese opera (Qunqu Opera, Peking Opera, and Local Opera). However, in the late Ming Dynasty for the sake of attracting more audience and

obtaining more box office (the financial harvest of a special type of ticket ‘xì piào’), some professional theatrical troupes began to allow women to perform on stage. In turn, in the Art field, the patrol inspector or academician bachelor of the Ming Dynasty who deliberately annihilated women’s names and the age of the creation recorded this talented female calligraphy and painting. Therefore, it is difficult for women to leave their name on Danqing which originally refers to the red sand and green ore pigment, because it is not easy to fade, historians to this metaphor as a person whose performance is clear. Moreover, the volume of Dan had many records of achievements and the Volume of Qing kept a record of events. Therefore “Danqing” means with annals [9]. However, women who were recorded had a distinguishing feature, either they are well-educated or erudite.

The development of women in the Ming Dynasty was different from women in Renaissance. Although they had the ability or chance to get an education, they still do not take away from controlling by traditional social concepts or have a positive development in fighting for their rights, which did not make them become feminists.

5 Conclusion

First and foremost, both “Peony Pavilion” and “The Taming of the Shrew” were brilliant drama works of the world. There were some elements of education involved in these respective works, which reflected the contents and measures of female education. Although Du Liniang and Katharina were the fictional characters of “Peony Pavilion” and “The Taming of the Shrew” respectively, they still were the epitome of women in the real world, the different changes in their lives, which were the real situation in these two categories of real women in Ancient China (Ming Dynasty) and European world. In the real world, with the development of the legend of the Ming Dynasty and the drama of Europe, women increasingly became significant on the stage. Both in China and Europe, women could get an education and gained more and more places to show their talents instead of men performing the female role on stage, which also became a means to show a breakthrough for women. Although the education of Chinese and European women was more likely to tame them, it still made their original thinking absorbed by new ideas. In China, in the male-dominated era, educated women still were controlled by men and most of their living situations do not have many improvements effectually. However, female education also stirred up a splash into the calm development of women, which gave women to contact a new field outside of their original life and showed their talents in these fields. In Europe, education spurred women’s awakening of self-awareness, and women’s voices can be seen no matter on the art stage or literature stage increasingly. In this way, these phenomena can state that education kicked off, in various realms, a long-term women’s liberation fight, which developed into the modern feminist movement. To conclude, education made a strong impact on women no matter whether they are fictional characters or real people of the world, their stories and situation were altered in various fields. Specifically in Music, Drama, Literature, and so on.

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