

A Preliminary Analysis of the Progressiveness and Limitations of "*The Wall Mounted Horseman*" from a Feminist Perspective

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Abstract. This paper provides a feminist critique of the Chinese opera "*The Wall Mounted Horseman*" by Bai Park, delving into the characterisation of Li Qianjin and the social forces that shape her tragic narrative. The opera is set in a feudal society and outlines the struggle for love and freedom amidst repressive norms. The analysis emphasises that the character of Li Qianjin symbolises the awakening of women's consciousness and resistance to feudal strictures, while also exploring the internal and external factors that led to her tragic fate. The thesis emphasises the crucial nature of women's intellectual and spiritual independence as the key to true freedom. Through a comparative analysis of 'wall' imagery with other literary works, the study reveals the universal theme of emotional obstacles and the courage required to overcome them. The conclusion highlights the continuing relevance of the opera's themes to modern feminist discourse, noting that while progress has been made, the quest for gender equality and the recognition of women's dignity remain relevant issues. The paper appeals for the continued exploration of women's rights and the promotion of feminist ideas, advocating that society support and encourage women in their quest for freedom and equality.

Keywords: feminism, "*The Wall Mounted Horseman*", Li Qianjin, feudal society

1. Introduction

"*The Wall Mounted Horseman*" is a play about a male (Pei Shaojun) and female (Li Qianjin) character who rebel against the feudal rites and rituals of parents' orders and matchmakers' words and expresses the will of young people to pursue the freedom of marriage and fidelity to love. The inspiration and material for the opera originated from the poem "*Jingdiyinyingping*" by Chinese poet Bai Juyi of the Tang Dynasty, in which Bai Pu skillfully drew on the essence of Bai Juyi's poem and artistically reinvented it, so that the play not only retains the mood and emotion of the original poem, but also adds a richer storyline and characterization. Through this cross-generational literary dialogue, Bai Pu successfully transformed the poetic emotions in "*Jingdiyinyingping*" into a vivid story on the theater stage, allowing the audience to experience the unique charm of Bai Juyi's poetry while enjoying the opera. The current research mainly analyzes the character image and the tragic causes from the aspect of opera creation, or family ethics. As one of the representatives of opposing feudalism, the image of Li Qianjin is also one of the imprints of the awakening of women's consciousness and change of the era at that time, and she has many excellent qualities and unique personal charisma, wisdom, bravery, and independence [1]. The compilation of this image also introduces the process of the germination and development of the awakening of women's consciousness in the Yuan Dynasty period in China.

From a feminist perspective, this article explores the progress and limitations of "*The Wall Mounted Horseman*" through the methods of literature review and theoretical analysis. In particular, it reveals the reasons for the tragic elements through the exploration of the most important female character in the opera, Li Qianjin. In addition, by recognizing the positive significance of the play and reflecting on the social phenomena and limitations it reflects, the relationship between human nature itself and social phenomena is deeply explored. Through an in-depth analysis of the character of Li Qianjin, it is possible to better understand the challenges and dilemmas faced by women in different periods of history, and how they show resilience and courage in the face of adversity.

2. The Characteristic Factors of Li Qianjin

In the comparison between the original and the adapted version of *"The Wall Mounted Horseman"*, the changes in the character of Li Qianjin are not significant, and the leading actor Pei Shaojun's coverage of the character has been weakened in order to emphasize the precious qualities of Li Qianjin, the concept of faithful love, and the sorrowful, sad, bumpy, and uncertain nature of her life. In addition, some of the major scenes have been re-drawn to achieve a comprehensive characterization and portrayal of the characters, and to further promote the highlighting of conflicts and changes in the plot.

The first is the scene of their first meeting, where they are looking at each other from a distance on a wall and a horse. This scene symbolizes the breaking down of feudal social etiquette, and also heralds the beginning of their emotional exchange. The next scene is that the two of them choose to elope, which is a second rebellion against the feudal rituals that restrict the freedom of love, as well as a strong call for the freedom of human nature. This behavior was particularly brave and shocking in the social context at that time. Then there is the scene where the two are caught by their parents after living together for seven years and confronted by Pei Shaojun's father. This conflict also drives the story to its climax, revealing Li Qianjin's loyalty to love and her desire for freedom, as well as the immense social pressure and inner pain she has endured. The final scene, which is also the conclusion of the play, shows Pei Yingjun welcoming Li Qianjin home after he has achieved success in the traditional sense of the word. In this scene, Li Qianjin presents a profoundly alarming monologue about her suffering in her struggle against fate and society, which contrasts and contrasts with the irony of the happy ending.

The success of a drama cannot be determined by the setting of the ending, the success of the characterization, or whether the characterization is positive or not. Bai Pu portrays the character of Li Qianjin in the context of the society in which the story is enacted, focusing on women's awakening of their consciousness while attacking the dogmas of the feudal society and thus creating a successful characterization of the drama. This is exactly the progressiveness of the opera *"The Wall Mounted Horseman"*, so this paper re-examines the tragic causes of Li Qianjin's character in the comedy by combining today's social angle and women's point of view.

2.1. External factors

The fate of the character Li Qianjin is full of tragedy, and this tragic factor mainly stems from the bondage and discrimination against women in the feudal society. Under the oppression of feudalism, women were often deprived of the right to make their own choices and were forced to accept the mandatory marriage arrangement by parents' orders. Although Li Qianjin is a daughter of a wealthy family, her fate is similarly unable to escape the social shackles. Her love and marriage are dominated by family interests, and her personal desires are ruthlessly ignored, which is the root of her tragic fate [2]. Secondly, Li Qianjin's traceability is also reflected in the huge contrast between her desire for freedom and love and the reality. Despite her persistent pursuit of love, she eventually has to succumb to the pressure of reality. This contrast not only reveals the passive position of women in love and marriage, but also reflects the unfair treatment of women in the social context of the time.

2.2. Internal factors

First of all, the depiction of women's miserable fates in the operas is often romanticized, which makes it easier for the audience to overlook the real pain suffered by women when enjoying the light comedies. Suffering itself should not be glorified, but remembering suffering is to learn from it, and then crusade against unfairness and injustice in society, and fight for the equal rights it deserves. The soft and beautiful singing, graceful and slender body, and elegant and romantic recitation can't help but intoxicate people with the romance and beauty of love, and then neglect the pain and oppression that women have been suffering behind it [3]. Secondly, the portrayal of female characters in the play still cannot get rid of traditional gender stereotypes. Although Li Qianjin bravely pursues love, her image is still limited to the framework of a good wife and mother, lacking deeper individuality and independence. Thirdly, as a progressive woman who courageously pursued freedom, Li Qianjin possessed many excellent qualities that were different from those of traditional women, such as intelligence, bravery, and independence. The plot also shows her unique personal charms through the continuous portrayal and narration of the character, but all these are covered up by the one-sided plot of eloping for love, which is intended to advance the plot, and even "slut-shaming" her from the perspective of public opinion.

Under the feudal dogma, a young lady of a high family like Li Qianjin could only move around in a fixed area, and all her time was spent on improving the skills needed by women. As a result, Li Qianjin can only sit in the narrow world surrounded by high walls every day, longing for the world and freedom outside the walls [3]. Pei Shaojun's appearance is like a beam of light in Li Qianjin's day-to-day dull life, bringing color to her otherwise monochromatic world for the first time like ink splashed into water. The young girl's heartbeat is their common pursuit of free love, but also a deeper level of resistance to the oppression of human nature by the feudal society, and the desire for human freedom. As for their common resistance to fate and society, Li Qianjin has to accept more criticism and accusation from the world because she is a woman, while Pei Shaojun as a man has great tolerance from society, which in itself is the inequality and spiritual oppression of society for women.

This is one of the many obstacles that feminism has to face on the road to development. Although women's rights and interests in terms of material equality have greatly improved, there is still a long way to go in terms of spiritual equality. The characterisation of Li Qianjin provides a glimpse of the awakening and change of female consciousness in a particular era [1]. It further leads to the germination and development of women's consciousness during the Yuan Dynasty in China, as well as the socio-cultural motivation behind this phenomenon.

2.3. The significance of Li Qianjin's characterisation research

As a result of the oppression of women in feudal society, women lacked the opportunity and rights to pursue freedom and equality, so literary works are usually based on the theme of love, with love as the basis for women's pursuit of freedom. Although women in today's society can realize freedom of choice in many fields, women's pursuit of spiritual equality still has a long way to go and needs more social care. Li Qianjin's brave pursuit of love, the courage to take responsibility for her family, and her great talent have reached the extreme of conventional characterization, but she dares to break through the shackles of her mind, abandoning everything she owns, including a favorable living environment, family and friends, and a decent identity, just to pursue the freedom she desires, so it is clear that the importance of human nature and spiritual freedom for women.

It takes a certain amount of time for the awakening of consciousness to develop and mature, and at the same time, it requires the efforts of more people. For women who have the courage to break the rules in the adverse social environment and the tragedy of women under the oppression of the social system, it is necessary for the society to give some support and encouragement instead of criticizing and blaming. An in-depth analysis of the characters will help to further understand the characters and thus the importance of the work for the development of ideas. The play *"The Wall Mounted Horseman"* has a strong constructive significance to the development of theater culture and ideological enlightenment of later generations, and plays a great role in promoting the dissemination of feminist ideology and cultural progress. It affirms the importance of women's intellectual enlightenment, and also argues the persuasiveness of the viewpoint of women's intellectual emancipation by comparing and contrasting different nationalities and classes.

To summarize, from a feminist perspective, *"The Wall Mounted Horseman"* is progressive in revealing women's tragic destiny, but its limitations should not be ignored as well. Through the in-depth analysis of the character of Li Qianjin, we can better understand the oppression and discrimination against women in the society at that time, as well as the various dilemmas faced by women in the pursuit of freedom and love. At the same time, this work also reminds us that despite the continuous progress of society, equality and respect for women is still a subject that requires continuous attention and efforts.

3. The importance of independence of thought and personality

3.1. Independence of thought

"The Wall Mounted Horseman" is not only a drama about love, but it is actually a microcosm of society, which deeply reflects the necessity of women's independence of thought and personality. In the process of creating this work, Bai Pu seems to have failed to show the courage to make a complete break with traditional rules and rituals. In his artworks, he fervently declares the love between the two sexes, and at the same time, he weaves the illusion of the traditional concept of marriage in a state of self-congratulation [4]. Li Qianjin is courageous in pursuing what she wants, and although she is not fully independent in thought and personality under the situation of being suppressed, she has already had the germ of such ideological enlightenment as the pursuit of freedom and emancipation of human nature, which is somewhat progressive in thought. Women in the context of a feudal society are extremely limited in the areas and ways in which their minds can break through. As an essential beginning of the enlightenment of thought, the women who produce a breakthrough in the shackles of thought, such as by heart and with the heart, also need to develop and evolve on the basis of a certain degree of ideological affluence, and this process has not been easy for the women who have been oppressed by the idea of women [5].

Bai Juyi's *Jingdiyinyingping* was originally written with the intention of "Zhi Yin Ben", i.e., to criticize young men and women who run away without authorization and without regard for morality. Bai Pu's adaptation on this basis has a more constructive significance and progress, especially in the context of a feudal society. This not only enriches the object image of Li Qianjin, but also suggests possible paths and directions for the character and the women behind it, which is a progressive aspect. However, this drama also amplifies the male-dominated feudal society's tolerance of men and its harshness towards women, who have to bear more obligations and responsibilities than men and are more easily bound by rituals.

In feudal society, "Yin Ben" is abhorred and firmly punished. But in the end, only Li Qianjin was severely punished for "Yin Ben". Pei Shaojun, bound by the idea of etiquette, did not dare to disobey his father's order to repudiate his wife. He then continued his studies in the favorable conditions created by the Pei family and eventually achieved success. After achieving success, he searched for Li Qianjin and returned home. In this process, Pei Shaojun gained much more than he lost, and in the end he gained fame for welcoming back Li Qianjin. On the other hand, Li Qianjin was abandoned by her family after her husband's cruel abandonment, and she had no place to go to become a beggar woman on the street, and finally she hid in a nunnery in the mountains and barely survived. In contrast, Pei Shaojun and Li Qianjin are both under the oppression of feudalism, but the degree of

persecution they suffer is vastly different. This difference breaks the beautiful illusion of traditional talents and beauties and reveals the cruel social reality that under the feudal ideology, the persecution suffered by women due to their persistent pursuit of freedom is indiscriminate regardless of their status [6]. This all-encompassing oppression greatly reflects the importance of women's urgent need to accomplish intellectual independence and thus spiritual independence. This pursuit of freedom and compromise with reality actually epitomizes the background of Bai Pu's creation.

3.2. Independence of personality

The most crucial factor for the perfect ending of the play is not whether Li Qianjin understood her husband, but that Li Qianjin did not die because of years of material and spiritual suffering, and finally waited for the family reunion of her husband and children. This is similar to *the Kongque Dongnanfei*, in which the one who waited for years and finally waited for a perfect ending was Li Qianjin, while the one who waited for years and failed to wait for a perfect ending was Liu Lanzhi [7]. Jiao Zhongqing and Pei Shaojun are not "heartless men" in the traditional sense, and even Liu Lanzhi and Jiao Zhongqing are a normal couple under the legal and moral norms, but Liu Lanzhi, as a representative of traditional female qualities such as virtue, is inevitably persecuted. The oppression of women by the system and dogma of the feudal society cannot be ignored or alleviated because Liu Lanzhi and Li Qianjin are still loved by their husbands. In this environment, the pressure and persecution that women endured far exceeded that of men. Therefore, women need more social care.

The story of Li Qianjin is a tragedy in the context of the times, and it is also this tragedy that, with the end of the feudal society, more women and other people in the society have gradually begun to think deeply about feminism and rights. While upholding the equal rights of men and women, there is a need to think deeply about how to promote women's individuality and independence through the new ways of modern society so that feminism can develop to new heights.

4. Comparative analysis of 'wall' imagery

4.1. Horizontal comparative analysis

"The Wall Mounted Horseman" is a drama in which the most frequently occurring imagery is "wall (Qiang)" [8], which corresponds to different contexts and story expressions. This image not only symbolizes the first encounter between the hero and heroine in the play, but also metaphorically represents the emotional barrier and separation between them. The wall, as a physical presence, is both a physical separation and a psychological barrier. It is on top of the wall that the hero and heroine meet in the play, and the romance and beauty of this moment contrasts sharply with the challenges they face afterwards. The "wall" in different literary works often carries similar emotional symbols. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the hatred between the families builds an invisible wall, making the path of love between the two main characters full of difficulties. In *Wutongyu*, Bai Pu skillfully uses the sycamore tree as a carrier of emotions, which is different from the wall imagery, but also expresses the emotional gap between people and the difficulty of communication.

"The Wall Mounted Horseman" is indeed a light comedy about love, but in creating this play, Bai Pu is not just lamenting the fact that the two bitter lovebirds have finally come together. It is a theatrical presentation through the expression of a deeper critical meaning, and it is precisely because the subject of love is more accessible, more widely circulated, and has a strong mass base, that this can be more deeply rooted in people's minds.

The discussion and analysis of this play are mostly from the cause of the love tragedy between Pei Shaojun and Li Qianjin, even many ancient Chinese plays also express the feudal women's spirit of resistance through the aspect of bravely pursuing love, Li Qianjin is undoubtedly courageous and great, and her bravery and greatness do not only lie in the small aspect of her courageous pursuit of love, but also in the deeper sense of her resistance to the feudal women's spirit of resistance. Her bravery and greatness do not only lie in the small aspect of her courage to pursue love, but also in her deeper resistance to the oppression of the feudal patriarchy [9]. But she did not only pursue the aspect of free love, she pursued true freedom. The courageous pursuit of love is only one of the manifestations in her courageous pursuit, while more and deeper manifestations are what need to be studied more deeply.

4.2. Vertical comparative analysis

A vertical comparison of *Wutongyu* and *"The Wall Mounted Horseman"* reveals the similarities in emotional expression. The representative sycamore tree (*Wutongshu*) in *Wutongyu*, like the wall in *"The Wall Mounted Horseman"*, becomes the witness of the protagonist's emotions. The meeting under the sycamore tree and the first meeting on the wall are both full of poetry and romance, but at the same time, they also foretell the future emotional twist and challenge.

A vertical comparison between *"The Wall Mounted Horseman"* and *Wutongyu* reveals similarities in the emotional expression of the opera treatments. The *Wutongshu* (sycamore tree) in *Wutongyu* and the wall in *"The Wall Mounted Horseman"* become witnesses to the emotional development of the protagonists. Both the meeting under the sycamore tree and the first meeting on the wall are poetic and romantic, but they also foreshadow the future difficulties and challenges of the emotional.

Wall is not only a physical existence, but usually a metaphorical symbol in cultural works, carrying people's thoughts on emotions, society, morality, and other aspects. The wall implies a kind of boundary demarcation, and the crossing of this boundary requires courage and determination. Therefore, the behaviour of the characters crossing the wall in the drama is not just a breakthrough in physical space, but also an exploration and transcendence of the inner world. This imagery adds a strong romantic colour to the drama, as well as reveals more profoundly the contradictions and conflicts between love and reality. Through the interpretation of this imagery, the emotional connotation and humanistic concern conveyed by traditional theatre can be more deeply appreciated.

5. Conclusion

This article discusses "*The Wall Mounted Horseman*", a Chinese opera work by the Yuan dynasty writer Bai Pu, and analyses the characters' themes and significance in terms of the awakening of women's consciousness, rebellion against feudal rites, and the pursuit of freedom and fidelity in love. Starting from a feminist perspective, the article thoroughly explores the image of Li Qianjin, and the reasons for her tragedy through literature review and theoretical analysis methods.

The tragic fate of Li Qianjin mainly stems from the bondage and discrimination against women in the feudal society, so her image also shows the plight of women in pursuit of freedom and equality in the feudal society, as well as the resilience and courage they show in the face of adversity. Through the analysis, the article stresses the necessity of women's independence of thought and personality, pointing out that in the feudal society, women's liberation of thought and independence of personality are the key to achieving spiritual freedom. The development of feminism has been full of difficulties and obstacles, and although it has achieved some positive results, it still needs to continue to explore and strive for the value of existence and human dignity of every woman.

Although the article analyses the image of Li Qianjin from a feminist point of view, it may not have fully considered the influence of the social and cultural background of the Yuan dynasty on the characterisation and plot development. Although the article mentions modern women's quest for spiritual equality, it lacks analyses that directly link the themes in *On the Wall* to modern feminist issues. In addition, the article provides an analysis of Li Qianjin's tragic fate, but it may be insufficient in presenting concrete solutions and recommendations to address the challenges and dilemmas faced by women in their quest for freedom and equality.

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