

# *A Comparative Study on the Compromise and Struggle Between the False Overlord and the Real Concubine in Farewell My Concubine*

——*Based on Hegel's Tragedy Aesthetics*

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**Abstract:** In the study of the text *Farewell to My Concubine*, most of the studies are on the interpretation of different characters and the direction of drama film art and Chinese literature. The author believes that the tragedy of Different characters in the *Farewell to My Concubine* tragic theory can be used as a novel and necessary research direction. Hegel's Aesthetics Tragic Theory is based on his philosophical theory. He uses conflict and reconciliation, regarding the generation and solving of tragedy as an aliasing uniform dialectical process, having special historical value and research significance, used to analyze the *Farewell to My Concubine*, it can enable readers to understand and appreciate the tragedy while producing more profound thinking. The original book embodies the turmoil of the troubled times, the distinct time passages, the span of time. From the melee period at the end of the Qing Dynasty, the anti-Japanese period, to the Kuomintang rule period or the liberation War period, and finally to the Cultural Revolution period, and the new China period. Named after the Peking Opera name, it not only reflects the author Li Bihua's thinking about the traditional culture represented by Peking Opera, but also contains the emotion about the situation and fate of Peking Opera actors under the changing times. There is also the relationship between ideal and reality, which is often discussed in literature. In the later film remake, director Chen Kaige not only tells the content of the original well, but also uses the contrast of cold and warm colors from a visual point of view; Light intensity and side light and backlight; The joys and sorrows of musical tunes; In different scenes, the closed, framed, and Chinese-style composition, playing the story alive.

**Keywords:** *Farewell to My Concubine*, tragedy aesthetics, Hegel aesthetics tragedy

## 1. Introduction

*Farewell to My Concubine* is one of the representative works of the famous Hong Kong novelist Li Bihua in the 1990s. Around the two men (Duan Xiaolou, Cheng Dieyi) and a woman (Ju Xian) across half a century of grief and joy, it shows profound thinking about Chinese political history, traditional culture and humanity. The text contains the beauty of traditional Peking Opera art, the beauty of true temperament, and the beauty of sincere feelings. But at the same time, the different beauty is broken

to the reader, so that the good step by step towards destruction. The text interpretation is carried out by using Hegel's Aesthetics Tragic Theory, we can enrich the understanding and application of Hegel's aesthetics; At the same time, the comparative study of two types of people in *Farewell to My Concubine* can help improve readers the appreciation of tragedy, understand the dialectical relationship of the intersection and resolution of the tragedy. Cultivate the appreciation of tragic aesthetics and more active calm attitudes.

In the original work, Li Bihua integrates her own classical romance and modern rational artistic characteristics. Throughout her literary creation process, Li Bihua prefers to take the strange stories in historical culture and classical literature as the prototype, while integrating the diverse Hong Kong culture. But Li Bihua is also a deviant storyteller, on the basis of the prototype of the story to carry out a "completely different" subversive creation. Let her create in the blurred and gorgeous gallop imagination exudes the romantic classicism, but also places her rational criticism as a modern man. The character image created by her has distinct personality and compact plot, which can be deeply understood in the following close reading of the text *Farewell My Concubine*.

## 2. Literature Summary

For many years, the novel *Farewell to My Concubine* has been loved by the reader. In 1993, it was edited into a movie. Chen Kaige directed, Zhang Guorong, Zhang Fengyi and Gong Li starred. The film was placed in the Cannes film festival, and the movie was exported to more than 30 countries, making the story of "*Farewell to My Concubine*" more widely known and appreciated by the world. In many studies on the text *Farewell to My Concubine*, the image of different characters and the research of drama film art and Chinese literature direction. [1]

Scholar Lei Fangfang analyzes the tragic aesthetics in *Farewell to My Concubine* from individual, culture, and history levels. The three levels of layers reflect the author's deep thinking on individual destiny, era and Beijing opera culture. [2]

Wang Xinmei is an example of belief, image, and artistic conception, starting from the destiny of Cheng Dieyi, seeing the big with the small, shows the author's reflection on The Times.

Hegel's theory of tragedy aesthetics argues that the creation and solution of tragedy is a dialectical process of unity of opposites, which has a special historical value and significance for the study of tragedy aesthetics. On the basis of Hegel's tragedy aesthetics, scholar Li Xiaoxue studied the tragedy aesthetics in Tess of the D 'Urbervilles. Xu Fenzhuo, Anja's study of Macbeth's character image analysis, is based on the theory of Hegel's aesthetic theory of tragedy. [3-6]

Based on the above research summary, the author believes that the comparative study of the tragedies of different characters in *Farewell to My Concubine* by Hegel's aesthetic tragedy theory can be a novel research direction, which can not only enrich the application of Hegel's tragedy aesthetics, but also understand the tragic fate of different characters through the text of *Farewell to My Concubine* and feel its profound cultural connotation.

## 3. Research Objective

The author aims to investigate four objectives through this research. First, Clarify the connotation of Hegel's aesthetic tragedy theory, and explain its promoting effect on the appreciation of literary works and film works; Second, Read closely the text *Farewell to My Concubine*; Third, Explore the different attitudes of two kinds of people towards the suffering life in *Farewell to My Concubine* under Hegel's aesthetic tragedy theory, and appreciate the aesthetic value. Fourth, In the context of The Times, the life trend of different characters is analyzed, and the connection between political, economic, cultural and other factors of The Times and personal fate is better connected, so as to understand the shaping of character images in literary creation.

## 4. Case Study

### 4.1. Hegel's Theory of Aesthetic Tragedy

Hegel's great contribution to the theory of tragedy is to study tragedy dialectically from the contradiction. He pointed out that "tragedy is the conflict and mediation of two opposing ideals." [7] Or due to personal factors, such as internal personality, the two conflicting forces will inevitably damage the rationality of the other side's position when they fulfill their one-sidedness requirements. Therefore, the conflict is inevitable. Hegel divides conflict into three categories: the first is "conflict arising from physical or natural circumstances", the second is "conflict of mind arising from natural conditions", Hegel believes that the first two kinds of conflict are unreasonable or unfair, they are only a "help", the ideal conflict must arise from the "action of man", from the struggle of two universal forces. Among the three kinds of conflicts: the conflict of nature, the conflict between man and the outside world, and the conflict of the self of the soul, the conflict of the self of the soul is the highest conflict. The confrontation between the two sides constitutes the conflict in the tragedy, and the unity after the confrontation is the solution of the contradiction, which can be divided into two kinds: one is the mutual destruction of the two sides; One is the individual subjective internal reconciliation, that is, the subject of the action gives up his one-sidedness, so as to achieve reconciliation.

### 4.2. The Generation of Tragedy: Conflict Theory

#### 4.2.1. The Emergence of the Tragedy of False Overlord

The words Duan Xiaolou once said to Cheng Dieyi had long indicated their future fate [8]" Master said that if you are not crazy, you will not survive. It is true that you get crazy, but if you are crazy alive, how can you live in this world, in this mortal crowd?" Different from the "integration of human and drama" of Cheng Dieyi, the Duan Xiaolou outside the drama is just a human being with seven emotions and six desires. Especially in the environment of changing times and interweaving old and new cultures, the change of external conditions will inevitably have conflicts on his mind, thus affecting the development of his character. From the beginning of the brick patting head, vigorous youth; To the kind and considerate, chivalrous saving youth; Later, the section Xiaolou forced by the situation, promised chrysanthemum fairy no longer singing, just play katydid, selling watermelon. [9] As Wang Xiaobo wrote, "Life itself is a slow process of being hammered. People get older day by day, and their hopes disappear day by day. The "Conqueror" who would fight against the insolent Japanese officers and soldiers became humble and cautious; In order to protect himself, the "Conqueror" who had rejected Mr. Yuan neither servile nor over-bearing revealed the scars of Cheng Dieyi and drew a line with Ju Xian. He failed the two "Yu Ji" who loved him most in the world, and the brave "Conqueror" finally became a mediocre and cowardly man.

Fundamentally, compared with Xiang Yu, the overlord in Peking Opera, Duan Xiaolou is more of a common person with a free and easy way. He does not adhere to the belief in Peking Opera as Cheng Dieyi does, nor does he vigorously defend heroism as the overlord in the opera does. Duan Xiaolou is just an ordinary person who wants to face the real life in troubled times, which is reflected from this role. In fact, it is the image of the majority of the bottom working people, they will not be trapped by the so-called faith, but just want to earn their own way and live their own life.

## **4.2.2. The Tragedy of the Two Concubines**

### **4.2.2.1. Cheng Dieyi: The True Yu Ji Who Is Not Mad and Demonic**

Cheng Dieyi was born in Baida Hutong and was sent to learn opera by his mother when he was young. The dual identity label of the prostitute's son and actor immaterially put a layer of natural shackles on him in the old society, but Cheng Dieyi did not form a humble and cowardly character because of this. Cheng Dieyi, like Yu Ji, always has his own idealistic attitude towards Peking Opera, neither servile nor over-bearing. [10] "I am meant to be a lady, but not a man" is a general prophecy of Cheng Dieyi in the future human drama, male and female tragedy of life, the confrontation between ideal and reality throughout his life, and Cheng Dieyi's "true" without madness and demons, and the "chaos" of that era and human "false" is doomed to not coexist. So the "truth" in Cheng Dieyi's character is the source of his tragedy. Hegel sees this as the ideal conflict: the conflict of the mind. Elder brother Duan Xiaolou took care of him since childhood and became famous after many years of hard work, so that Cheng Dieyi gave birth to a different kind of dependence and affection on Duan Xiaolou. But Duan Xiaolou does not have the magnanimity and magnanimity of Xiang Yu, the overlord of Chu in the drama. The segment of Duan Xiaolou married courtesan's "betrayal" shattered Cheng Dieyi's hope of love; Cheng Dieyi to save Duan Xiaolou to Mr. Yuan and the Japanese opera, but was finally exposed by his love, is he once again in their sincere and selfish confrontation defeated; The chaotic times also did not spare him. During the Cultural Revolution, Cheng Dieyi could no longer perform on the stage. Even his costumes had to be burned. At the same time, being set on fire is Cheng Dieyi's love for Beijing Opera; Seeing Ju Xian hanging, Cheng broke down to sit and cry, his feelings for Ju Xian is complex, there is hostility as a rival; There is also recognition of Ju Xian's gummy strength; But at this point, the same affectionate people are sympathetic to each other. Hegel put forward: "When the limited form of external sensibility cannot bear the powerful inner spirit, it will inevitably be distorted and even destroyed." Losing the chance to pursue love outside the play and the chance to play Yu Ji in the play, Cheng Dieyi's spiritual world finally collapsed under a series of conflicts.

For Peking Opera, Cheng Dieyi is also consistent. No matter in what era, in what situation, as long as there is a seat under the stage, Cheng Dieyi is Yu Ji. He always insisted on the persistence and love of Peking Opera. Later, during the Cultural Revolution, some people proposed to abolish Peking Opera and return to modern opera. The reality and Cheng Dieyi's artistic ideal of not being crazy and not living had obviously clashed, but Cheng Dieyi still insisted on the attitude of Peking Opera from one end to the other and reached the real integration of human and drama.

### **4.2.2.2. Ju Xian: The True Yu Ji Who Pays the Wrong Price with Deep Feeling**

Hegel believed that situations full of conflict could express the fullest and most profound development of beauty. Juxian used to be a prostitute in a house full of flowers. Her experience of seeking a life at the bottom of the society makes her a person who is "exquisite and familiar to the world" as described by Li Bihua. She pursues beautiful love and longing for an ordinary life, but the intolerant reality and Juxian's personal courage and deep feeling consume Juxian's beautiful vitality as Yu Ji in conflicts, reflecting the charm of tragedy: To destroy beautiful things for people to see. Ju Xian understands and trusts Duan Xiaolou, not afraid of the secular rumors, gives herself redemption, entrusted to him life, but since then overwhelming Ju Xian every straw tells the root of her tragedy: deep feeling and wrong payment. As the "third party" in Cheng Dieyi's eyes, bears the hostility from him; To save the arrested Duan Xiaolou, promises Cheng Dieyi herself will leave; Worried about Duan Xiaolou who was in the turbulent situation caused her miscarriage. These were not enough to drive this strong and decisive woman to ruin, until the "Cultural Revolution" when the last straw:

Duan Xiaolou said “I do not love her”, and he tried to protect himself by revealing Ju Xian’s former prostitute origins, let Ju Xian completely heart death.

### **4.3. The Solution of Tragedy: The Theory of Reconciliation**

#### **4.3.1. The Subjective Internal Reconciliation of the False Overlord**

According to Hegel, The essence of tragedy is the self-split and rereconciliation of ethical entities. Under the polishing of a series of changes, Duan Xiaolou chose to compromise and concession to reality again and again, gave up the image of overlord on the stage, and made a living in reality as a common person. He completed the subjective internal reconciliation of his own life tragedy. In Hegel’s theory, the end of tragedy can only be the final victory of eternal justice, that is to say, the one-sidedness of the two sides of the struggle has disappeared, and the absolute idea has been unified on a higher level. It can be said that the transformation from a high-spirited teenager to a servile coward is the embodiment of Duan Xiaolou’s tragedy, but at the same time, the constant compromise to the reality is also the process of Duan Xiaolou’s self-reconciliation: unable to change the environment, he changes himself to adapt to the environment of survival. In line with what Hegel said: the tragic outcome is that the one-sidedness of the two sides of the struggle disappears.

#### **4.3.2. The Two True Concubines and Conflicts Are Mutually Destructive**

The task of art is to achieve a harmonious result from the elimination of conflict, thus reflecting the essence of perfection of beauty. Chen Kaige’s film has a different ending from Li Bihua’s original. In the film, at the end of the story, Ju Xian hangs herself and Cheng Dieyi commits suicide. The two beautiful individuals are headed for self-destruction in the confrontation with reality. Ju Xian sticks to her dignity by hanging herself; Cheng Dieyi cut his throat to bid farewell to the real world that constantly let him down. Like Yu Ji who was brave and determined, Cheng Dieyi truly realized the “integration of human and drama”, which was also a relief for both of them. In the confrontation with the real suffering, the two people have retained their own light, refusing to sacrifice their one-sidedness in the conflict, so the final fall of these two living bodies is also a tragic inevitability. And the original Cheng Dieyi did not end his life in the wake of the dream, but more than a point from the bottom of the social crawling up the fireworks, he is not willing to die. It’s just a matter of surviving. He hid his name in the middle of the world and even married a wife. Say goodbye to the past and forget that you fell in love with a man. Compared with the temperament and dramatic legend of the characters given by the film, the portrayal of the characters in the original work is more real and helpless. In the original book, in the contradiction and conflict with reality, Cheng Dieyi also gave up his true temperament and one-sidedness, and lived on.

## **5. Conclusion**

*Farewell to My Concubine* reflects the destruction of beautiful things in the generation and reconciliation of conflicts and uses the theory of Hegel’s tragedy aesthetics to make a comparative study, further enriching the application of Hegel’s tragedy aesthetics theory, while experiencing the profound cultural connotation of *Farewell to My Concubine* and feeling the charm of tragedy aesthetics.

From the perspective of conflict theory, factors such as internal character factors and external situation that cause conflicts have foxed the tragic fate of the three protagonists, so just as Hegel said, tragedy is inevitable, and the contradictions and conflicts of the three protagonists are reasonable. From the perspective of reconciliation, just like in real life, some people choose to give up their one-sidedness to reconcile contradictions and conflicts, so the compromise and concession to reality is

the choice of most ordinary citizens like Duan Xiaolou. Some people choose to insist on their one-sidedness, perhaps like Ju Xian, for their own innocence, perhaps like Cheng Dieyi, in order to adhere to the faith, although they are defeated in the confrontation with the reality contradiction, but they use the way to end their own life, so that the conflict can be ended, is also the sacrifice of their one-sidedness, the embodiment of contradiction reconciliation.

With Hegel's aesthetic tragedy theory as the theoretical basis, this paper makes a hierarchical comparative study of the two types of people who compromise and struggle with fate in the text *Farewell to My Concubine*, enriching the practical application of Hegel's aesthetic tragedy theory from different perspectives of conflict and reconciliation. At the same time, it makes a comparative study of the life tragedy of the two types of people who compromise and struggle with fate from a novel per-spective. It expands the academic research on the text *Farewell to My Concubine*.

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