

Qingzhongpu: An Elegy of Past with Qiubude

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Abstract

Emotion has been a trending topic in literature discipline recently. However, scholars tend to study Chinese literature with westernized approach and concept. This essay opposes such tendency and tries to dig out the concept within the Chinese own cultural context. The Chinese concept Qiubude will be used to analyze a drama Qingzhongpu written by Li Yu. By analyzing this drama, the research argues that Qiubude became a general "structure of feeling" of Qing society, as well as proves the deficiency of indifference theory about Chinese people.

Keywords

Emotion; Qing Dynasty; Literature; Theater; Drama.

1. Introduction

Theater space of later Imperial China was a public sphere between literati, commoner and government. The literati, representing in the author of the drama, tend to construct "an ideal reality" in their works [1]. However, the tastes of commoners, especially the city residents, also had great influence on both the material and form of the commercial drama.

What is more, the government often intervened in the production of play by enforcing surveillance [2]. Different agents in theater activity made the theater "a channel for the propagation of conventional morality and official ideology" [3].

Nevertheless, the intervention of Government, especially the Qing Empire, did not mean that intellectuals unconditionally accepted all official ideology from Manchu ruling group. On the other hand, the author usually tried to conceal his critique of status quo and nostalgia in the narrative. Moreover, these works often hinted a desire of restore the order between class, gender, and race in the narrative violence. The dissatisfaction of current situation, the nostalgia for the past and an desire for change the society comprises the emotion of *Qiubude* (chase for unattainable). *Qiubude* can be used to describe the structure of feeling in Qing Dynasty.

Qingzhongpu (the List of Loyalty Person) written by Li Yu (1610-1671) is one of these drama manifesting *Qiubude* in its narrative. This essay will uncover the sub-consciousness of Qing's society under the despotism ruling. By analyzing texts of *Qingzhongpu*, the research will investigate how the literati both cooperated and resisted with the hegemony ideology of Manchu. Under this interaction, the structure of feeling in Late Imperial was constructed. The analysis of *Qiubude* in this drama will be an attempt to apply the method of emotion history in pre-modern Chinese literature. Coincidentally, this research will show the weakness of the "indifferent theory" of Chinese people in Late Imperial by showing the vivid and intensive emotion expression in *Qingzhongpu*.

2. The Structure of Feeling in Late Imperial: Mamu Versus Qiubude

Raymond Williams proposed the conception "structure of feeling". This concept refers to how popular responses to the social and historical event in cultural activity. For example, the

resentment of Industrial Revolution was the "structure of feeling" of 19th century English popular, which was manifested in the Dicken's novel [4].

Mamu (indifference) have been used by many intellectuals to summarize the "structure of feeling" in the Late Imperial, especially the Qing Dynasty. However, this research opposes such idea and substitutes *Mamu* with *Qiubude*, emphasizing the positive power behind the "structure of feeling".

2.1. Mamu: An Orientalism Perspective

Traditional Chinese people were habitually portrayed as human without emotions in the orientalism gaze of western. John Barrow, a member of Marcartney Embassy, criticizes Chinese "indifferent, unfeeling and cruel" characteristics due to the tyranny rule[5]. This idea would be internalized by the later intellectuals and reached its climax when Luxun condemned *Mamu* as national idiosyncrasy in his novel[6].

However, this *Mamu* theory has been challenged by later scholars. The practice of emotions in Confucius culture is different from that of Judeo-Christian culture, which does not proves the detachment of Chinese people[7]. Moreover, both the elite literati and plebeians generates different strategy to expresses their emotions under the rigorous cultural absolutism of the late imperial government. Influenced by orientalism, *Mamu* theory hugely dismisses the diversity in Chinese culture and society.

2.2. Qiubude: Repression Theory with Buddhism

Instead of using the Latin-rooted psychological term, this research sticks to conceptualize Chinese emotion with its own context. *Qiubude*, hard to translate in English, is the concept this research will apply to describe the structure of feeling in Qing Dynasty.

Qiubude is one of the *dukkha* (suffering), which refers to "seeking for something you cannot attain". It can trace to early-Buddhism period and translated in Chinese *Zhong A Han Jing* in Eastern Jin Period (about 400). *Qiubude* points that all things in the world is ephemeral, so the material satisfaction is just a hallucination and may cause suffer[8].

Qiubude can be explained by Freud repression theory. Freud dissects the personality as three part: id, ego and superego. The unconsciousness desire hides under the id while superego represents the moral standard. The conflict between id and superego determines the function of ego, which is the consciousness and action of the subject. (Figure 1: the Structure of Personality)

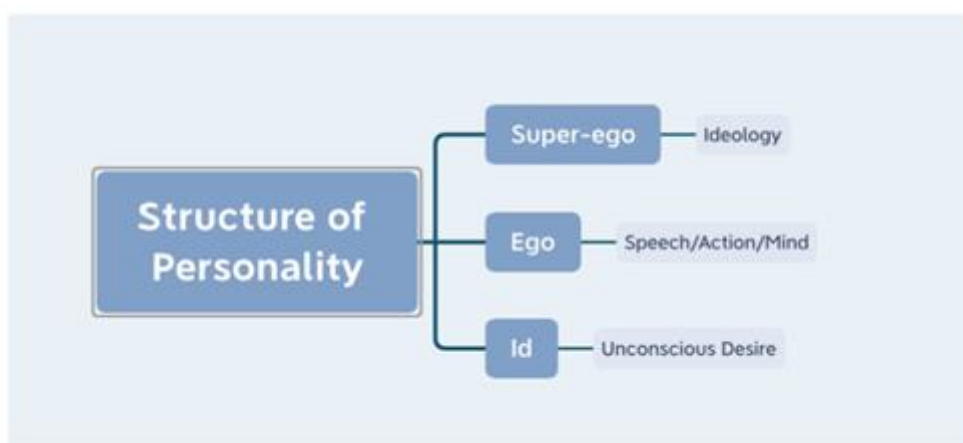


Figure 1. The Structure of personality

This module can sufficiently explain the structure of *Qiubude* in Qing Dynasty. On the one hand, the superego acts as the cultural despotism of Manchu, who wants to eliminate every possibility of rebellion. On the other hand, the unconsciousness of conquered Han people still wants to restore their “The Good Old Days”. The tension between the superego and the ego leads to the expression of emotion: indifference, nostalgia or anger. The memory, restricted by Manchu ruler, become a *Qiubude* for majority subject of the empire. (Figure 2:the Structure of *Qiubude*). This tripartite structure of feeling evidently reflected in the Li Yu's work *Qingzhongpu*.

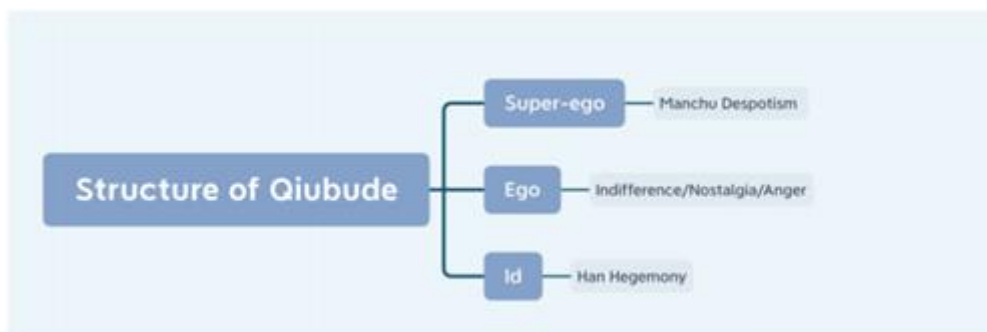


Figure 2. The structure of *Qiubude*

3. Background

3.1. Suzhou School and Ming-Qing Transition

In the Late Ming period, the practice of drama flourished in Southern China with the growth of economy. The popular theaters whose target audiences were the city residuals began to appear in the commercial center, such as Suzhou. The professional writers of drama for the popular theaters were emerging from the private-owned theater. These profession writers were usually lower literati who relies their works for living.

Suzhou school is one community of such professional play writers during the Ming-Qing transition period. They communicated with each other and shared the same topics, such as “mourning for the dead Ming dynasty” and “criticism of treacherous and evil officials”[9].

Li Yu was an important member of Suzhou school. According to the limited literature resources, Li Yu maybe served as a *jiaren* (domestic slave) in a local powerful family. He tried to pass the imperial examination but was blocked by a family memeber of his master. After the decline of Ming dynasty, he never tried the examination again. He received highly reputation posthumously. However, his life experience is lack in details due to his poor social status[10].

Li Yu's personal experience shows his special position in the new-fledged public media-theater drama. Like his Suzhou School fellows, Li Yu had to maintain a balance between the elitism and folk culture. Although he got orthodox Confucianism education to some extent, he had to cater for his target audience: the merchants in the commercial center city. What is more, he had also to face the intervention from the government. Thus, his work like *Qingzhongpu* echoed the structure of feeling in this uprising period, struggling with the ideology from different social group.

3.2. The Narrative of *Qingzhongpu*

Qingzhongpu tells a story of loyalty. The story happens in the *Tian Qi* period (1620-1627). The eunuch Wei Zhongxian take charge of the central power. The literati community *Dong Lin Party* resisted to accept the dominance of wei. Wei and *Donglin Party* struggled with each other for power. The story began as the Suzhou's local officer decided to build an temple for

Wei. In Chinese tradition, only the great figure like Confucius and Guan Yu are recognized as the semi-God to be worship. Zhou Shunchang, the hero of the play, abused the local officer and Wei Zhongxian publicly in the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Zhou was wanted by Jin Yiwei (the imperial secret police). The Suzhou citizen, who protests for the arrest and kill one Jin Yiwei. Then five leader of this protestants and the Zhou were caught and prosecuted secretly. In the end of the story, Emperor Chongzhen enthroned and exiles Wei. The temple is knocked down and Zhou and the five leader becomes the patron saint of the city.

It is worth to point out this drama is adapted from the real political event in Late Ming Emperor. Zhang Pu's memorial article *Wu Ren Mu Bei Ji* (Epitaph for the five men) recorded this event. This article are selected in some version of China's high school textbook.

4. Analysis of Qiubude in Qingzhongpu

The dissatisfaction of presence, the nostalgia of past, and the irrational desire for changing is three important manifestation of *Qiubude*, the pursue of unattainable thing. The following essay will analyze *Qingzhongpu* from these three perspective.

4.1. Dissatisfaction of Presence

Being conquered by the minority Manchu is an unavoidable situation for the people who suffers the Ming-Qing transition. Qing's repressive cultural regime prevents the literati from commenting current political events. However, this does not mean literati accepted the ideology from authority without resistance. In the historical drama *Qingzhongpu*, Li Yu cleverly concealed the dissatisfaction of presence in the details of his work.

Qingzhongpu is based on the real political event in Late Ming. So it is hard to escape the topic of Liaodong war between Manchu and Ming, which is a important topic between Wei and *Donglin*. In the drama, the battle of Liaodong, which caused Ming Dynasty loosing their east-northern territory, was indirectly referred in the death of Xiong Tingbi, who is a general fight with Manchu. Xiong's death is reckoned as a reason for the fail of Ming's east-northern strategy. The death is attributes to Wei's jealousy in Qing Zhong Pu. However, the image of Xiong's enemy-the Manchu state is totally absence from the narrative.

However, the Wei in the drama actually hints the Manchu ruling. First, the drama depicted Wei as an conspirator who wants to usurps the throne. However, this event cannot happen in the real history since Wei is a eunuch. Second, Wei in the drama plans to massacre Suzhou after the revolt, this is also a fiction event. The massacre is in fact points to Qing's massacre in southern China, which leaves great trauma for the literati [11]. The disability and violence of Wei designates for the conquer of Qing.

However, the resistance of the ruling of Qing is also hidden in the text. Yue Fei is a Song genera fight with Manchu's ancestor Jurchen. The five citizen of Suzhou first meet when hearing a story of Yuefei in a theater. Their loyalty is learned through the story of Yue. In early-Qing, Yue Fei's position is deliberated ignored if not fully denied for its strongly refers to the anti-Qing information. For example, the Yongzheng government raises the worship of Guan Yu while disregard Yue Fei [12]. What is more, various dramas and novels about Yue Fei are forbidden [13]. The real audience would secretly show their loyalty to Ming hearing a-play-with-a-play about Yue Fei while the actor fervently appraised the loyalty of Yue.

There is also a evidence of author's reaction towards Manchu's censorship. After the five citizen were killed, they are leaded by Xu Yuan, a general in Tang Dynasty who fight with rebellion Anshi army, to becomes a patron saint of the city. Li Yu described the world from the perspective of the five citizen. He uses a words of "Yi dui zhu yan shan" (the ant chasing for the smelly of goat). This metaphor can be used to described tendency of inflammation. However, the word "shan" (smelly) is also a stigmatized vocabulary for the nomadic tribe in the northern

China. In some version, shan is deleted purposely[14]. It may be a result of literary inhibition for fear of punishment.

These evidences shows Li Yu expresses his disappointment towards the Manchu hegemony. However, he can only express his dissatisfaction in an overtone.

4.2. The Nostalgia of Past

It is worth to pointed out that theater is one of the limited place where the Han-traditional costumes are permitted. To some extent, it makes the historical drama a “ritual” for people to memorize. What is more, these dramas are viewed as history instead of art in the contemporary knowledge system[15]. *Qingzhongpu* provides a place for the Han audience to learn and mourn their past history.

However, these does not mean the drama objectively records the real history. Actually, Li Yu is trying to describe an ideal past for his audience. It is an unattainable illusion for the audience to dream instead of realize. In fact, a dream actually appears when the protagonist Zhou Shunchang after he scorns Wei publicly. Zhou dreams that emperor gives him the power to arrest and prosecute Wei. Ironically, when he wakes up, the story turns conversely, he was caught and put into jail by Wei.

This dream reveals the paradoxically position of the past. On the other hand, it is a ideal society, where people like Wei and the five citizen who holds a high moral standard, on the other hand, the ruling group is corrupted which leads to the tragedy of the story-line. The author Li Yu and his potential audience realize the past is not a savior for the present, since it is a reason for the current situation. However, they cannot provide a solution instead of indulge in the dreaming of a good king.

4.3. The Desire for the Future

The unachievable past and the intolerable presence impels human for future with ideal order. The expectations for the future can be practiced in two ways: the peaceful or the violence.

The peaceful approach is restored by the gender order. For example, without the faith the democracy, Vichy french male audience turns their taste for a strict gender roles of films due to the less confidence masculinity[16]. This trendy appears in Early Qing theater, the male audience prefers to bloody revenge for the cheating women while in Ming dynasty, they holds more sympathy for the women[17]. In *Qingzhongpu*, the gender order is restored by the marriage between Zhou’s daughter and the son of a Donglin Party member whose father has been killed. This marriage is a result of Zhou’s agreement of his friend’s last wishes. Paradoxically, this marriage to some extent violate the moral standard. The children should mourned several years after the death of their parents, when the marriage is forbidden. However, the desire for restore social order outweighs the ordinary moral standard.

In Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II*, the violence is an important elements for the order between the king and the aristocracy to be restored both in the drama and the 16th century, when the play is written [18]. *Qingzhongpu* also depicts the violence from the “people” as an approaches for re-establish social order. The actor of violence is not from the literati or aristocracy but from the emerging bourgeois, as the five citizen. Their fight with the Jinyi Wei, in real history usually also a tax-collector, are rewarded with praise. However, the farmer uprising are labeled as “yaozeizaofan” (the rebellion of monster) in the text. These difference infers Qiu Zhong Pu supports the proto-bourgeois order in southern China, which contains the primitive consciousness of nationality(their admiration of Yuefei) and their desires for immature democracy.

However, both the peaceful or violence attempt to restore the social order will ends in vain. Even Li has wrote an happy ending for the drama. He and his audience will understand the invasion of Manchu in southern China will destroy both the private and public life of the

protagonist. Qing Zhong Pu can be witnessed as a prequel of Tao Hua Shan,(The Peach Blossom Fan), in which all future is dismantled by the transition.

5. Conclusion

The structure of *Qiubude* manifested in *Qingzhongpu's* attitude towards the past, present, and future. The whole society felt dissatisfaction of being conquered, so they imagined a "golden old days" with dream and participated in unintended violence action for an ideal future. This work reflects the mentality of the people who undergoes Ming-Qing transition.

It is noteworthy to point out that this structure of feeling was not only embedded in the theater or other culture products. *Qiubude* became a foundation logic for many cultural and social events in Ming-Qing transition time. For example, this structure could be noticed in the Messiahism of *Bailian* Religion. This religion called for a revolution by the prophet to restore a golden age. Moreover, the new emerging Confucianism school *Gongyang* School held the same worldview.

Qiubude proves the vividly of psychological condition of Chinese person, which strongly shows the incompleteness of *Mamu* model. Even with the heavy emotional regime, the writer and the audience in this period are not positively receive the whole ideology settled by the ruling group. They generated an emotion strategy to cope with their current status and resisted secretly.

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