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## Study Of Symbolic Expressions In Peking Opera'scostumes And Lyrics

Yiman Li  
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STUDY OF SYMBOLIC EXPRESSIONS IN PEKING OPERA'S  
COSTUMES AND LYRICS

by

YIMAN LI

B.A. Capital University of Economics and Business, 2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Nicholson School of Communication  
in the College of Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis represents an analysis of symbolic expressions used to convey traditional Chinese cultural values in marital relations as expressed through costumes and lyrics in Peking Opera plays and performances. Two symbols, *dragon* and *phoenix*, were selected from the costume collection. Four symbols—*bird*, *tiger*, *wild goose*, and *dragon*—were selected from compilations of lyrics. These symbols were selected because they expressed Chinese core cultural values, an imperial ideology based on Confucian thoughts, which were practiced rigidly during Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Modeling Theory is applied to argue that *dragon* and *phoenix* as visual symbols convey ideas about characters' background, marital relationship, social status shifts, and socio-culturally desirable values. Social Drama Theory is employed to analyze the lyrics to understand how ideal images of husband and wife are constructed. The archetypes of Chinese traditional culture that have influenced Chinese thought and action for centuries are discovered and discussed.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*Peking Opera* is just one form of Chinese traditional opera. Because Peking is another name for *Beijing*, the capital of China, Peking Opera is also known as *Beijing Opera*, which implies the capital or “heart” of the Chinese. Integrating operatic and artistic forms from other regions of China, Peking Opera was created two hundred years ago and designed according to a strict ideological and value system, which the ruling aristocrats wanted to diffuse and teach to all members of the ancient imperial society. Peking Opera has always been performed with symbolic expression through costumes and lyrics (Wu, Huang, & Mei, 1981). Throughout Chinese epochs—the Imperial period (1790-1911), the Republic period (1911-1949), and the Communist period (1949-present)—Peking Opera has existed at the core of traditional culture. Many of China’s social rules, conventions, rituals, and socially desirable models have been communicated to audiences through the symbolic expressions of Peking Opera. In recent years, however, due to Westernization and modernization in China, its popularity has decreased among the younger generation.

This thesis examines the system of symbols used in Peking Opera through its costumes and its lyrics to convey traditional values of marital relations. Studying both costumes and lyrics is imperative because archetypes represented by the costumes relate to symbolic messages embedded in the lyrics. This thesis specifically illuminates key symbols used in three classical operatic scripts. Their narratives are examined closely for how the symbols represent an attempt at ideological influence over behavior, according to socially desirable models, specifically in the area of marital relations.

First, this thesis provides historical background and a review of relevant research into the uses and meanings of Peking Opera symbols in different contexts. Then, theoretical bases for

analysis and interpretation are explained. Next, by the qualitative method of textual analysis, this thesis examines the archetypes and meanings behind the symbols in costumes and lyrics to provide insights into traditional Chinese culture. Ultimately, this study is meant to contribute to a better understanding of Chinese people and their culture beyond the mere understanding of Peking Opera.

The next section of this introduction provides background that unfolds the history of Peking Opera and its place in Chinese culture.

## Background

This section covers the formation of Peking Opera beginning with the Imperial Period (1790-1911) and moving through the Republic Period (1911-49), the early Communist Period and Cultural Revolution<sup>1</sup> (1949-76), and the Contemporary Period (1976-present).

### *Imperial Period (1790-1911)*

Peking Opera arose in the late Qing Dynasty (1790) and became fully developed by the Qing Dynasty Court (1644-1911) and post-Qing officialdom. The Qing Dynasty was the last feudal dynasty in China's history. The audience for Peking Opera then came from all walks of life and contributed to its maturity and perfection; for this reason, the Peking Opera art manifests a concentrated core of traditional ideas. Confucianism was considered the foundation of the ideological and value system in traditional China for more than 2,000 years. Confucian thought,

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<sup>1</sup> The Cultural Revolution (1966-76): "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" launched by Mao Zedong, the Chairman of the Communist Party of China, on May 16, 1966. It began with a struggle for power within the Communist Party, a fight with the "liberal bourgeoisie" against the backdrop of a developing economy and class struggle. The revolution was wide scale; social, political, economic, and cultural chaos permeated the country and brought the nation to the brink of civil war.

therefore, dominated Peking Opera. During this period, popular classical scripts of Peking Opera became lessons by which people were educated to think and behave according to Confucian creeds, including such ideals as loyalty and devotion for all people to the emperors and the ideal of women's subordination to men.

### *Republic Period (1911-49)*

The Republic of China was established after the Qing Dynasty and capitalism was introduced to China. During this period, democratic and scientific ideas from Western countries had an impact on all traditional arts in China. As a result, the Confucianist ideological system of the Qing Dynasty was on the wane. Peking Opera was improved by Western-influenced literati, although debate about values and behaviors continued between reformers and conservatives. The Republic government, among others, committed itself to building Peking Opera as an exemplar of China. This movement climaxed when Mei Lanfang, one of the greatest of Peking Opera's artists, traveled to the United States to perform in 1930 (Carter, 1930; Cosdon, 1995; Goldstein, 1999; Guy, 2001). Both Chinese and U.S. governments endorsed this trip, and celebrities and organizations from both countries sponsored it. In those days, Mei and other Chinese scholars and professionals studied American culture to find the best way to present Peking Opera in an authentic and artistic style that American audiences could understand. The Chinese shortened the scripts, selected costumes carefully for symbolic meaning, and modified performances to keep audiences interested. Moreover, well-designed promotions through various mass media and interpersonal networks worked to attract audiences. Journalists in the West widely reported every aspect of this trip, and critics commented on it, too. Western scholars eagerly studied and analyzed Mei's performance to better understand Peking Opera and Chinese traditional culture for the first time.

### *Communist Period and Cultural Revolution (1949-76)*

In 1949, the People's Republic of China, a Communist form of government, took hold over the nation. Earlier Republic authorities were forced to move to Taiwan. During this period, the Communist government started the in-depth reformation of Peking Opera performances, aimed at establishing and communicating a new ideology that the Communists believed would best satisfy the people's needs. The Communist government considered traditional ideas such as Confucian thought undesirable. Rejection and denial of Confucianism culminated in "Eight Model Plays," Peking Opera shows that were produced by government-sponsored theatrical companies in an example of monopolization during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). "Eight Model Plays" depicted characters struggling for freedom from the ruling class that governed before 1949. The government changed ideologies expressed in Peking Opera by altering artistic expressions in the performance, costumes, makeup, and stage arrangements. Traditional ideas stemming from imperial ideology and the values they imparted were eliminated. In contrast, the exiled Republic government on the island of Taiwan began to re-emphasize Peking Opera as a national icon to preserve Chinese traditions and even to evoke nostalgia. Both Chinese and Western scholars, however, paid more attention to the comprehensive reformation of Peking Opera during this period. Many scholars discussed Peking Opera in the context of and in accordance with political change and social movements on the mainland (See Ahn, 1972; Guy, 1995; Guy, 1999; Houn, 1959; Johnson, 1974; Yang, 1969).

### *Contemporary Period (1976-Present)*

After the Cultural Revolution, China began to develop by opening its economy to the outside world. The influx of Western culture began immediately to influence ideas and lifestyles. Westernization affected all traditional arts, including Peking Opera. Theatrical narratives

regarding political revolution and animosities between social classes were played down. As a result, Peking Opera faced the potential loss of audiences. Script writers and performers attempted to infuse Peking Opera with new innovative ideas. One of the outcomes was that Shakespearean dramas were incorporated into Peking Opera and performed. Some researchers and scholars were intrigued by these changes and began once again to eagerly study the Peking Opera of this period (See Fei & Sun, 2006; and Wichmann-Walczak, 2000).

In sum, Peking Opera was engendered during a time of traditional society, when people still believed in Confucianism and the Imperial Court held power. Peking Opera conveys that traditional ideological and value system through a combination of traditional art forms, such as music, singing, dancing, speech and mime, fine arts, literature, and acrobatics. Throughout the performance at every level, ideas and values connoted in the Peking Opera art touch audiences, inspiring their minds, cultivating certain aesthetics and appreciation, and, most important, reinforcing ideology. Ideas and values embedded in Peking Opera affect how people live their everyday lives and conduct themselves at socio-ritual events such as weddings and funerals. Therefore, Peking Opera is acknowledged as one of the most systematic and comprehensive arts in China (Wu, Huang & Mei, 1981).

The next chapter represents a review of relevant research and other writing about Peking Opera to situate this thesis into the field of study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars from both China and the West have studied Peking Opera since the late Qing Dynasty, when Peking Opera came into creation, to the present. Most Chinese writers and scholars of Peking Opera focus on: (1) historical documentation; (2) biography and autobiography; (3) artistic theories and practices; or (4) lore and knowledge about the costumes, theater and stage styles and arrangements, and collections of lyrics. Western-based research falls primarily into one of four areas: (1) Peking Opera pertaining to the socio-political situation and history in China; (2) Mei Lanfang's trip to the United States in 1930; (3) Peking Opera's unique musical style; or (4) production of general guide and introductory books about Peking Opera for foreign visitors and learners.

### Chinese Research and Literature

#### *Historical Documentation*

Zhang's (1934) work was one of the most comprehensive and authoritative historical works of Chinese traditional dramatic forms. The book dealt with not only Peking Opera, but also regional operas. This work embodies the traditional dramas performed 51 categories of operatic styles in the Qing Dynasty. It also explored the drama companies' performances and activities, their development and reformation, famous artists, and other legends and stories in dramatic arena of the day. Wang (1937) provided the most basic and important historical record of Peking Opera based on the official record of the Qing Court. It records the dramas, the actors, the time, and the location for each performance in the Emperor's Palace (the Forbidden City). The information in the book provides valuable and authentic data for later research of Peking Opera. Various writers and scholars of Peking Opera's history rely on Wang's work and refer to his book when they discuss the ancient artists' names, plays, and performances.

The next significant book about Peking Opera's history was not written until 1999, when Ma and his colleagues wrote a comprehensive history of Peking Opera. The book includes factual information and documentation about artists, performances, dramas, social contexts, essential developments, and reformations between 1790 and 1999 (from the late Qing Dynasty, the Republic of China, the early period of the People's Republic of China, the Cultural Revolution time, to the post-Cultural Revolution time). Wang's (2005) book introduced makeup and costumes for each character with vivid photos based on the original record from the Qing Court.

These historical works presented factual information about the Peking Opera art in various social contexts. They provided an overview of the development of the Peking Opera art according to history, but the scholars did not focus on the theory of the art and deeper reasons, such as the connection between Peking Opera and peoples' lives.

### *Biographies and Autobiographies*

During the heyday of Peking Opera in the early Twentieth Century, talented and skilled Peking Opera artists became famous as their art was refined. For each respective role in a play, actors developed their own styles and schools. Biographies and autobiographies about the artists came into vogue. Peking Opera's artistic theories and practices can be studied from these works.

The most prosperous time was in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, which bridged the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China with an interruption by the Sino-Japan War in 1937. Mei Lanfang (1894-1961) was one of the greatest artists who performed young female roles and gained his fame at his early age. Not only was he well-known as a sophisticated artist but also was he built as the national icon of Chinese traditional culture throughout the whole nation (Qi, 1937). Autobiographies and biographies centering on Mei's art

and his life with various interpretations were published over a period of more than half a century. For instance, Li (2001) composed the complete biography of Mei Lanfang. Mei Shaowu (2004), the second son of Mei, published a book with memoirs of his father on stage and introduced his father's artistic achievements. Mei Shaowu and Mei Weidong (2005) edited the self-accounts of Mei Lanfang according to first-hand material. Mei Lanfang's autobiography, with records of his arts and life on the stage of forty years, was published in 2006.

Other well-known contemporary opera artists were Cheng Yanqiu (1904-1957), Ma Lianliang (1906-1966), and Zhou Xinfang (1895-1975). They all made great contributions to the Peking Opera art with their extraordinary talents and unique features. They established their own schools for the roles they performed. Each artist further promoted Peking Opera and encouraged researchers to explore the world of Peking Opera more deeply. The literal works dealing with these great artists are a valuable part of Peking Opera's resources. For years, both professionals and ordinary fans have collected these biographies and autobiographies of certain artists they pursue for studying and remembering.

### *Textbooks and General Guides*

Textbooks for professional students and artists have been used to teach Peking Opera's performance theories and practices, skills for aria and dance, and for other professional knowledge. These books have been revised, updated, and republished periodically by senior artists and scholars to meet the needs of educators. These textbooks' target readers are Peking Opera's professionals and some amateurs who know much about the art.

Comprehensive introductory Peking Opera books were published to please ordinary audiences and beginning Peking Opera learners. Zhang (1971) published a general guidebook for Peking Opera's makeup, costumes, props, and drama discussion with pictures. Li (1998)

introduced the evolution of Peking Opera's stages and theaters along with Chinese societal development. Xie (1999) compiled folk stories, which were scripted as traditional dramas. Hou (2003) analyzed various styles of theaters for Peking Opera.

Some general-introduction books were translated into foreign languages for exporting Chinese traditional culture. "*Peking Opera and Mei Lanfang: A guide to China's traditional theater and the art of its great master*" (Wu, Huang, & Mei, 1981) was a representative one that was translated into English. It was a concise but comprehensive introduction to Peking Opera. Moreover, it discussed and compared the Western performance theories of Bertold Brecht (1898-1956), the German poet, playwright, and theater director, and Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938), the Russian actor and theater director, to Mei Lanfang's theater performance.

#### *Anthropological Study*

A few anthropological studies combining Peking Opera art with artists' kinship and lineage, social conventions, folk customs, gender issues, and social development have been published. Pan (1941) researched the blood relations of Chinese performers. He reviewed performers' record in ancient China and studied the Western research, focusing on genetic inheritance. He collected data about performers' lineage to analyze their demographic distribution, social mobility, and social status to show how performers' clans kept their talented genes through arranged marriages.

Another interesting anthropological work was done by Rong (1997). He edited academic articles to explore traditional Chinese dramas (which contain similar elements with Peking Opera) and their influences on communities in China and overseas. Huang (1998) investigated the gender construction of Chinese females that are reflected by a special prop used by Peking Opera's artists to imitate footbinding. In terms of ideological study of Peking Opera, Wan (2006)

commented on the relationships between Peking Opera and different schools of Chinese traditional dogma, including Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Mohist, and Legalism.

These researchers took the study of Peking Opera a step further to explore lifestyles. From them, we can see ideological foundation, gender differences, aesthetics, and community organization all are reflected by the Peking Opera art. The changing society also pushed forward the evolution of the art. Ideology embedded in Peking Opera, as the core of Chinese traditional culture, permeates the society and continues to re-create the Chinese culture, as long as people keep going to see Peking Opera and keep practicing the ideas they learned in their everyday life. The scholars discussed in this section are leading researchers who examined the Peking Opera art from the anthropological angle.

#### *Other Research*

Some studies have focused on the visual expressions of Peking Opera's costumes and literature of Peking Opera's scripts, which is directly relevant to this thesis, which proposes to fill gaps described in the review of the literature in this section.

The number of publications focusing on visual aspects of Peking Opera is increasing. Publications with photos help researchers to explore the meanings and ideology further. For instance, Zhao (1999) and Liu (2002) categorized the styles of Peking Opera's costumes and accessories with detailed explanations, including headwear, costumes, boots and shoes, jewelry, and even other props. These authors, however, did not explore deeper ideological rules behind those visual symbols used on the costumes.

The foundation of Peking Opera's scripting and composing derived from traditional Chinese literature. Xu (1936) examined the schools of Chinese literature and the schools of Peking Opera. He also studied the techniques of phraseology for creating Peking Opera's scripts

and lyrics. However, he did not address the use of symbols in lyrics that manifest the meanings of for characters and situations in the play.

Peking Opera is a comprehensive art that combines art forms such as music, singing, dancing, fine arts, literatures, and acrobatics. Scripting Peking Opera requires that writers possess expert knowledge of Chinese traditional arts. Wei (1977) discussed knowledge and techniques used for writing scripts. He also demonstrated the pedagogical role of Peking Opera in the narrative of scripts. The current thesis examines how certain symbols embedded in Peking Opera's lyrics can create socially desirable models through narratives and inform people's lives.

In one of the most recent and prominent works of scholarship about Peking Opera, Yan (2005) conducted the first comprehensive and systematic study of the history of its literature during the Qing Dynasty. Yan examined the historical evolution of Chinese traditional literatures, which fused literate works with folklore. This fusion formed unique dramatic scripts, which are not only coordinated with the musical style of Peking Opera but also are produced to reach both educated and uneducated classes. Yan discussed the use of symbols that manifest the meanings of characters and situations as a clever way to help audiences from all social classes to understand what is going on and to ideologically influence them.

#### Western Research and Literature

##### *China's Sociopolitical Situation*

Mackerras (1972) examined the social and economic factors that helped Peking Opera to rise and flourish late during the Qing Dynasty. He began with an analysis of economic development in southern China that changed people's everyone lives, especially the boom in the number of theaters. As merchants relocated to northern China, drama companies moved with them in the 1500s and 1600s. This resulted in a migration of drama performers. To meet the

Qing Court's needs, some successful drama companies moved to Peking (now called Beijing), which marked the beginning of Peking Opera (1790). Mackerras (1975) also examined the Chinese theater between the late Qing Dynasty (1840) and the beginning of the People's Republic of China (1950s). The origin and evolution of theaters in different regions are reflected along with China's history.

Goldstein (2003) focused on the teahouse of the late Qing Dynasty. Peking Opera was performed in teahouses where audience could watch performances while drinking tea and eating snacks. Seating reflected the audience's social statuses and backgrounds and the off-stage relationship between performers and theatergoers. The structure and seating arrangements of these old-style teahouses changed when the Republic of China replaced the Qing Dynasty in 1911. By examining the evolution of the teahouse, Goldstein explicated the social evolution in the early Twentieth Century in China.

The foundation of ideological and cultural meanings for Peking Opera was established during the Imperial Period (1790-1911). The Republic Period (1911-1949) pushed forward the improvement of the Peking Opera art. Mackerras (1975) and Goldstein (2005) studied the social movement pertaining to Peking Opera. When the People's Republic of China was established (1949), the heated debate over the revisions of Peking Opera became essential. For one, some people wanted opera producers to apply contemporary themes. The in-depth reformation of Peking Opera reached a climax during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976).

Yang (1969) argued that "The traditional Peking drama, in the view of the Communists, could only depict the lives and needs of the old ruling class: emperors, princes, ministers, generals, scholars, and beauties" (p. 167). However, opera producers and performers were

required to reform Peking Opera to depict ordinary citizens, the majority of Chinese society. Many people believed that Peking Opera should serve the workers.

Ahn (1972) dealt with the process of reforming Peking Opera during the Cultural Revolution, which followed political debate in the Communist party. Much other research focused on similar subjects, such as the analysis of “Eight Model Plays,” which deal with heroic stories during the revolutionary period before 1949. Researchers also paid close attention to the fact that the “Eight Model Plays” replaced all traditional dramas that appeared to be “feudalistic superstitious and anti-labor themes ...” (Houn, 1959, p. 226).

Similarly, but not coincidentally, some scholars studied the influences of the politics on Peking Opera art in Taiwan. Johnson’s (1974) examination of “aesthetic and theatrical aspects of the changes taking place in Taiwan,” noted that there was no escape for Peking Opera from being “disentangled from social and political force” (p. 140). Guy (1995 & 1999) discussed how the Taiwan government built Peking Opera as the national opera to promote nationalism and reinforce cultural identity.

Because Peking Opera can potentially affect people’s belief systems, reformation or preservation by reinforcing ideological influences was a popular topic for study on the surface only; the deep ideological mechanism has gone largely unexplored.

In contemporary China, people’s values and lifestyles have changed because of economic development. Western ideas have reached China through mass media such as magazines, TV programs, films, and the Internet. The promotion of Peking Opera as an icon of Chinese traditional culture is a point of contention between the government and the media.

In the early 1980s, Peking Opera “faced serious and growing problems, including: oversized troupes and companies; shrinking and aging audiences; diminishing state support; and

competition from television, film, and popular, often Western-inspired, entertainment” (Wichmann-Walczak, 2000, p. 98). To overcome the problems, Shanghai<sup>2</sup> Jingju Company, a pioneer Peking Opera company, came up with a strategic collaborative plan to reform Peking Opera from political, economic, administrative, cultural, and artistic angles. They did attract more audience back to theaters; however, traditional themes and performing forms were changed to please the contemporary audiences.

China, Casmir, Zhang, and Lin (2003) conducted a survey of 400 students to measure the impact of Peking Opera on people’s lives. The results indicated that the students recognized the contemporary role of Peking Opera as still significant, although they may not understand Peking Opera deeply and comprehensively.

Peking Opera art was engendered out of the imperial ideological system. Some scholars have expressed their concerns about the fate of Peking Opera in modern times. On one hand, some scholars have explored strategies for changing Peking Opera art to modernize it. On the other hand, they appeared not to want Peking Opera to lose its traditional core values and expressions for future generations.

### *Mei Lanfang’s Trip to the U.S. in 1930*

When China communicates with the outside world, Peking Opera often is promoted as a national icon because it projects the core of China’s traditional cultural values. Mei Lanfang was one of the greatest artists of Peking Opera, who traveled to United States, Russia, and Japan in his heyday. Many cultural study researchers studied Mei’s trip to the U.S. in 1930. Carter (1930) discussed the relationship between Chinese people and traditional art. He was impressed by the

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<sup>2</sup> Shanghai is a city south of Beijing, with a population of 18,670,000. It is famous for its diversity of cultures as a cosmopolitan city from 1930s to the present.

“mutual appreciation and respect” (p. 833) among American audiences and Chinese professionals based on the intercultural understanding of the symbol, Mei Lanfang.

Banu, Wiswell, and Gibson (1986) studied Mei Lanfang as a symbolic figure and analyzed his performance based on various dramatic theory systems. Cosdon (1995) documented the success of Mei’s performance in New York. Cosdon also compared the rules for the Peking Opera performers to theater rules in Shakespearean times, such as the prohibition of female performers. Cosdon was not sure whether Occidental audiences would understand and appreciate Peking Opera.

Goldstein (1999) studied how Mei Lanfang came to national icon status during the Republic era by looking at Mei’s biography in a historical context. Goldstein analyzed “the Republican era effort to recode Peking Opera into a genre representative of Chinese national culture” (p. 379) and exposed it through “mass media, commercial theaters, personal networks, and scholarly debates on national aesthetics” (p. 379).

Guy (2001) reviewed Mei’s trip as a “brokering glory for the Chinese nation” (p. 377). She explored the whole of Mei’s trip and reviewed how Mei and other literati packaged Peking Opera for American audience. She argued that Peking Opera was a Chinese national icon through which to spread traditional culture with a well-designed cross-cultural communication process, in which the presenters had certain intentions and the receivers had certain expectations. She viewed Mei’s trip as a tested cross-cultural model that could inspire future studies.

Other cross-cultural studies about Peking Opera focused on Eastern and Western dramatic features and influences. Du (1995) traced the history of adaptation of “the Chalk Circle,” a traditional Chinese drama from the Yuan Dynasty that has been performed as Peking Opera. He discussed the employment of Chinese staging techniques, such as “. . . the stylization

in acting and the symbolism in setting . . . and the rich, colorful costumes and music” (pp. 313-314) in the Western theater. Du observed “a paradigm of mutual influences between Eastern and Western drama” (p. 308). More recently, Fei and Sun (2006) examined how Chinese and American actors used Peking Opera to perform Shakespeare’s *Othello* in Beijing and Boston in the 1990s.

For scholars, Peking Opera is not only the representation of China’s face, the core of Chinese culture, but also a reference substance when they compare Chinese art forms to their Western counterparts. Symbolism was viewed as the basic philosophy of Peking Opera, even the Chinese dramatic system. Still, previous research has not explained the mechanism of Peking Opera, how it is performed through the use of certain ideological symbolic expressions.

### *Musical Style*

Unique music performed during the play is an essential part of Peking Opera. Its music has attracted scholars’ attention for many years. Hsu (1964) examined the musical elements and scales. Focusing on practice in Peking Opera, he claimed that reinforcing “the exact rules of symbolic dramatic technique” was essential to heighten dramatic effect and human emotions, compared with realism performance systems. Lu and Chen (1972) examined musical structures and styles for female and male characters to reflect the caricature of the male chauvinist in the Peking Opera art.

Yao (1990) analyzed a certain scene from *The Three-Forked Crossroad*, a traditional drama that was filmed in 1950s. He examined the musical expression at certain movement points of actors (p. 39). Wichmann (1993) studied Peking Opera’s music in the Chinese cultural context. She examined the representation of music by “natives” in their own cultural system. More recently, the intercultural combination of Eastern music style (e.g., Peking Opera) and the

Western musical system became significant with different theoretical foundations and the rise of multiculturalism (Huang, 1997).

The music style of Peking Opera has been attracting researchers to investigate its theoretical foundation, its prominent characteristics, especially comparing them with the Western musical system, and its representation and expression in Chinese cultural system. Symbolic expressions are also evident in musical expressions of Peking Opera. Scholars have suggested that a certain piece of music symbolizes a certain scene with certain functions. The discussion of symbolic expressions of Peking Opera's music is a good approach to examine how the music is conveyed through symbolic expressions and what results when the music connects with listeners. This thesis includes acoustic expressions, but the literature discussed here reaffirms that there are sets of rules behind symbolic expressions in Peking Opera.

#### *General Guide and Introductory Books*

Scott's (1957) *The classical theater of China* is the most authoritative foreign-language (non-Chinese) introduction to Peking Opera. Rewi (1957) introduced Peking Opera to Westerners with pictures. Halson (1966) wrote a short guide to Peking Opera's history, art criticism, appreciation conventions, and dramatic stories and plots. Marie-Luise (1980) interpreted Peking Opera as a Westerner. Siu and Lovrick (1997) worked together to offer a visual expression of Chinese opera (Peking Opera) with outstanding photography and brilliant explanations. One of the West's authorities on Chinese theater, Mackerras (1997) contributed a general introduction, in which it was noted that Peking Opera will likely play a diplomatic role for China due to the increase in international interfaces between China and other countries.

Although many researchers argued that symbolism is the basic premise and purpose of Peking Opera, few explained how and where its symbolism works or delved deeply enough to

explicate the systematic meanings of the symbolic expressions. This thesis is a study of symbolic expressions, both visual (costumes) and literal (lyrics), by close analysis of these operatic art forms as texts. No such previous research of Peking Opera has been identified. Scholars, artists, writers, and audiences have expressed only the vaguest ideas about traditional Chinese culture and symbols used in Peking Opera.

Especially since the Cultural Revolution, which denounced Confucianism, culture, literature, and education, Chinese people have struggled to find their cultural roots. When they see Peking Opera, many Chinese can only guess at meanings because the Chinese do not have the wherewithal to investigate the authentic, original meanings. This thesis study of the archetypes behind the creation of ideological and ethical messages in Peking Opera, therefore, represents an innovation in research. As authorities on Peking Opera pass away, and a younger generation of Chinese grows up less influenced by traditional culture, this research of the systematic interpretation of symbols should fill a gap in the research and literature as one of the first concrete studies of Peking Opera's symbolism.

## CHAPTER THREE: THEORY

Symbolic expressions permeate Peking Opera's performance, costumes, lyrics, and musical styles. Researchers have long noted that Peking Opera has long played an important role in Chinese society. Many of them have noted also that Peking Opera is performed symbolically, communicating ideas through symbols. Generations of Chinese have lived under the influence of ideas and values diffused by Peking Opera. Even today, it continues to hold a central position as one of the most important of China's cultural heritages and is viewed as the quintessence of the country.

### Symbolic Communication

According to Geertz (1973), culture is "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life" (p. 89). Traditional Chinese cultural values have been transmitted and re-created by people who go to see Peking Opera and then practice what they learn. Meanwhile, Peking Opera producers create and transmit ideas symbolically to people. As a communicator of Chinese culture, Peking Opera relies on symbolic expression through archetypes that derive from traditions of ancient periods. These archetypes are communicated through certain symbols that have been created and used to diffuse certain messages. In traditional China, theatrical plays have long been a significant public space where crucial information is disseminated.

### *Model Theory*

According to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1988), people read, identify, realize, remember, perform, and positively reinforce conceptions through exposure to an intentionally designed

system of symbols. In doing so, people's cognitions toward their lives are modeled. Based on values and beliefs, people infiltrate the messages coming from outside. People may internalize the message, or give away the message to others. And people apply the use of the symbols in some conventionalized contexts, such as weddings and other rituals. Peking Opera art is one such system of symbolic forms performed that communicate certain meanings repeatedly. Thus, DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach's Model Theory tells us that we learn from what we are exposed to; a certain message, for example, may transform our behavior or lead us to acquire new behaviors. Audiences listen to, observe, learn about, and remember messages mediated through Peking Opera. Repeated exposure reinforces learning (Bandura, 1973). Applying Model Theory, we can analyze the content of messages and attempt to discern the relationship between messages and resulting behaviors. This thesis employed Model Theory to analyze the symbolic expressions in Peking Opera's costumes and lyrics and to understand what audiences might learn from those messages and how they might apply what they learn: "the acquisition of new behavior" (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1988, p. 216).

### *Social Drama Theory*

Victor Turner (1987) asserted that "the basic stuff of social life is performance" (p. 2). He defined social drama "as a unit of harmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict." His resulting Social Drama Theory is useful for analyzing the social process. In this thesis, it is applied to analyze the narratives of Peking Opera's lyrics, to help understand how symbols are used to express social tensions; and to identify characters' actions in their trying to resolve situations and normalize their behavior. The analysis in this thesis attempts to explain how opera characters' behaviors were meant to satisfy social expectations based on the imperial ideological and value system and to model for audiences what they must do in their own lives.

## Confucianism

Confucianism<sup>3</sup> has been treated as the basis of the imperial ideological and value system and the creeds for everyday life in China for thousands of years, due to “its deep involvement in politics...” and “...its ambition to bring order and peace to the world” (Yao, 2000, p. 34). During the Former Han Dynasty (206 BCE-8 BCE), “...Confucianism became a dominant school and an orthodox ideology during the reign of Emperor Wu” (Yao, 2000, p. 28). The ruling aristocrats of successive dynasties adhered to Confucian thought and diffused it among the masses in ancient imperial Chinese society. Confucianism’s basic ethics, rites, and values have been guiding the most Chinese people’s ways of thinking and doing for thousands of years. “Humaneness” and “righteousness” are essential elements of Confucianism. Those who possess these virtues are *junzi*, or “‘a person of virtue’ ... ‘an ideal man’, or ‘a gentleman’ ” (Yao, 2000, p. 214).

The Confucian idea of “The Ten Right Things” includes

... Kindness on the part of the father, and filial duty on that of the son; gentleness on the part of the elder brother, and obedience on that of the younger; righteousness on the part of the husband, and submission on that of the wife; kindness on the part of elders, and deference on that of juniors; with benevolence on the part of the ruler, and loyalty on that of the minister; these ten are the things which men consider to be right. (Legge, trans. 1885).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Confucianism: (儒家) is a complex system of ancient Chinese ethical and philosophical system stemming from Confucius’ thoughts and focusing on morality and good deeds. It has been influencing the culture and history of East Asia for more than 2,000 years. Confucius, or Kong Fuzi, the Master Kong, was born in the Spring and Autumn period of the Zhou Dynasty (from the second half of the Eighth Century B.C. to the first half of the Fifth Century B.C.). His thoughts became orthodox ideology during the Former Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-24 A.D.).

<sup>4</sup> From *Classic of rites (Book of rites), li yun.* (禮記, 禮運: “父慈, 子孝, 兄良, 弟弟, 伏羲, 婦聽, 長惠, 幼順 君仁, 臣忠, 十者, 謂之人義。”) Because the Confucian texts were written and edited by various authors during different periods of times in Chinese history, this thesis quotes English translations noting names of translators of the latest translations. This thesis follows this style in all quotations from Confucian texts.

Duties and proprieties among family members are the basis of all other relationships.

*Li* (禮), or “rituals,” are prominent in Confucian thought because they are orthodox practices (Huters, Wong, & Yu, 1997). As one of *the Five classics*<sup>5</sup> of learning Confucianism, *Classic of rites (Book of rites)*<sup>6</sup> recorded the Six Ceremonial Observances<sup>7</sup>: “capping, marrying, mourning rites, sacrifices, feasts, and interviews.” The proprieties among certain ethical relationships are reflected by the Seven Lessons (of morality)<sup>8</sup>, which were demonstrated as: “(the duties between) father and son; elder brother and younger; husband and wife; ruler and minister; old and young; friend and friend; host and guest.”

Confucians believe that family is the basic unit of a state, and “... politics in an extension of family and personal ethics, and political conflicts must be dealt with according to the same principles used in a family context” (Yao, 2000, p. 184). Ethical relationships in families are prior to political and social relationships in courts or between states. Individuals’ virtues are the foundation of a state. Especially during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), filial piety was viewed as a tool to rule the whole country stated by the Kangxi (康熙, May 4, 1654-December 20, 1722) emperor (Rawski, 1998). Harmonious marital relations and virtues possessed by husband and wife were also treated as the basis of a harmonious society. Confucians described that “...Faithfulness is requisite in all service of others, and faithfulness is (specially) the virtue of a

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<sup>5</sup> *The five classics (五經)*: five ancient Chinese books as an important resource of learning Confucianism. Traditionally, it is said that they were compiled or edited by Confucius himself. They include Classic of Changes, Classic of Poetry, Classic of Rites, Classic of History, and Spring and Autumn Annals.

<sup>6</sup> *Classic of Rites (禮記)*: one of the Five Classics of the Confucian canon. It explained the social forms, ancient rites, and court ceremonies of the Zhou Dynasty.

<sup>7</sup> The Six Ceremonial Observances, from *Classic of Rites, wang zhi*. (禮記, 王製: “六禮: 冠, 昏, 喪, 祭, 鄉, 相見”)

<sup>8</sup> The Seven Lessons (of morality), from *Classic of Rites, jiao te sheng*. (禮記, 郊特牲: “七教: 父子, 兄弟, 夫婦, 君臣, 長幼, 朋友, 賓客”)

wife ...”<sup>9</sup> As for propriety between husband and wife, it was claimed that “...In passing out from the great gate (of a house), he precedes and she follows, and with this the right relation between husband and wife commences.”<sup>10</sup> During the Qing Dynasty, “marriage” was advocated as “... a public event, which involves not just the bride and groom but the social recognition of their union by their community” (Rawski, 1998, p. 274). This thesis focuses on two Confucian virtues, filial piety and harmonious marital relations, as they were communicated symbolically through Peking Opera.

Confucians also advocate “poetry education and music education” (Chen, 1998). Literature and music were deemed appropriate and efficient ways to educate and to moralize. Literati and upper-class Chinese were encouraged to study literature and learn traditional ethical values from literature. On the other hand, lower classes were educated more through singing and dancing (Chen, 1998; Zheng, 1990). Originating from Confucian thought, *yue* (樂) or “music” was one of six arts required for students during the Zhou Dynasty (1122BC-256BC). Men who mastered the six arts—rites, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics—were desired as qualified gentlemen.

### Research Questions

Based on the literature review and the theories, this thesis sought explanations in response to the following questions:

1. What archetypes are behind the symbols used in Peking Opera costumes and lyrics?

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<sup>9</sup> From *Classic of Rites, li yun*. (禮記, 禮運: “……信, 事人也; 信, 婦德也……” )

<sup>10</sup> From *Classic of Rites, li yun*. (禮記, 禮運: “……男帥女, 女從男, 伋婦之義由此始也……” )

2. How do these symbols communicate socially desirable marital relations meant as model behavior for husbands and wives?

3. How do people adopt and practice ideas they learn from Peking Opera?

## CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD

The study for this thesis was conducted through the method of textual analysis, which can be a valuable way to understand culture by examining “a set of communicative practice constituting a way of life” (Potter, 1996, p. 63). Textual analysis is used to examine texts (symbols) to try to perceive the ways they represent a culture. This method enabled me to focus on texts (symbols) to understand their implied meanings and functions in a Chinese traditional cultural context (Potter, 1996). In other words, by analyzing what, where, and how certain symbols, or texts, are used in the Peking Opera art, the core of Chinese traditional culture may be illuminated and better understood. Chinese people’s minds and behavior have evolved greatly due to changes in society since the late Qing Dynasty. Focusing on texts, not people, guided me to examine more authentic and universal hidden meanings of the selected texts according to other related cultural texts. Therefore, textual analysis is an efficient way to examine the archetypes and connotations behind certain symbols.

The texts studied in this thesis were Peking Opera’s costumes and lyrics, which are manifestations of Chinese communicative practices. More specifically, three classic, encyclopedic books that describe and depict Peking Opera costumes and lyrics thoroughly and in detail, along with the lyrics of three classic operas, represented a rich site for study of these cultural communicative practices. Through textual analysis, hidden but implied meanings of symbolic expressions used in lyrics and costumes were uncovered, allowing the exploration and interpretation of archetypes and cultural rules behind the symbols used in Peking Opera. The method enabled me to consider the use of certain symbols used in traditional society as well as in modern China.

In qualitative analysis, establishing the cultural knowledge, understanding, and perspective of the researcher is essential, especially when that researcher's lived experience is intimately and intricately involved with that culture (Peshkin, 1988). Geertz's (1973) ethnographic research in Southeast Asia led him to decipher "a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structure" (p. 7), in which he discovered hidden cultural meanings—what symbols and symbolic behaviors signified—despite his being an outsider. Eyre's (1985) critique questioned the validity of Geertz's data and interpretation as those of an outsider researcher. Hammerstedt and Loughlin (2001) argued that Geertz's method worked well only for a researcher coming from outside the culture at issue. Unlike Geertz's research, this thesis does not constitute ethnography, nor is the researcher foreign to Chinese culture or Peking Opera.

Being a native, however, does not automatically qualify one to study the native culture (Peshkin, 1988). Adorno (2003)<sup>11</sup> argued that a native researcher can employ an *immanent method*, meaning that a native researcher may be more capable than any typical researcher of identifying hidden *ideologies, consistency, and inconsistency* in her/his culture. The author of this thesis is a native researcher with an authentic understanding of Peking Opera; not only because she was born and raised in China with an understanding of Confucianism, but also because she was exposed to Peking Opera throughout her life as both spectator and scholar. Through that nativity and experience, she can assert with authority that ideology expressed through Peking Opera was that of the imperial system, or Confucian creeds. This thesis, therefore, focuses on imperial *ideology* and Confucianism in Peking Opera and investigates the consistent use of those ideas in the visual symbols (costumes) and literal symbols (lyrics).

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<sup>11</sup> The author thanks Professor George Bagley, one of the thesis committee members, for an introduction to Adorno's (2003) work, which discussed three levels of a researcher's identity. Of those three levels, the idea of *immanent method* fits because of the thesis author's being native to Chinese culture.

As a native researcher, the author of this thesis had a strong command of Chinese language and a well-developed understanding of classic Chinese texts and of Chinese culture and was able to translate classic Chinese texts into understandable modern language. Text-based interpretations, however, rely heavily on any given researcher's subjectivities and interpretations (Peshkin, 1988). The explanation of meanings of the symbols, for example, "are [were] charged with emotional value" (Bunzl, 2004, p.439). On the other hand, the author's life and education in the U.S. for one year and a half, including the research for this thesis, at least exposed her to more Westernized views of Chinese culture. In graduate study, she developed some Western critical thinking and was able to at least begin to look at native culture with additional perspective. To whatever limited extent, studying Chinese culture while living outside of China allowed her to step outside strict boundaries of "the culture and the blindness of society" (Adorno, 2003, p. 158). The Western perspective helped sort out symbols and symbolic expressions from a different standpoint and helped develop some "analytic and comparative perspective" (Clifford, 1997, p. 206).

For the study of Peking Opera's costumes, two classic books—"Zhong guo jing ju fu shi [*The costume collection of Peking Opera*]" (Zhao, 1999) and "Zhong guo jing ju yi xiang [*The costumes' closet of Peking Opera*]" (Liu, 2002)—were located in the Yenching Library at Harvard University. After obtaining special permission from the librarian, the researcher traveled to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to examine the books carefully over a period of several days. Each book includes the complete collections of Peking Opera's costumes published in recent years. From the images of these costumes therein, key symbols were selected for textual analysis and the examination of archetypes behind those symbols. To allow for the "long soak" that textual analysis requires (Hall, 1975; 1977; 1980), the researcher later obtained personal copies of the

books and spent additional hours closely reading the images. For the study of Peking Opera lyrics, one other classic book—“*Jing ju da xi kao [The complete compilation of Peking Opera’s scripts and lyrics]*” (Chai, 2004)—also was identified and located in the same library collection at Harvard.

Informed by the theoretical standpoints of imperial ideology and Confucianism, the researcher selected two visual symbols found in Peking Opera costumes—“dragon” and “phoenix”—and four literal symbols found in lyrics—“bird,” “tiger,” “wild goose,” and “dragon.” These symbols were chosen for their widely understood representations among the Chinese of men and women in marital relations.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DATA

This chapter presents the data collected (the findings) from three authoritative, encyclopedic books about Peking Opera: “*Zhong guo jing ju fu shi [The costume collection of Peking Opera]*” (Zhao, 1999); “*Zhong guo jing ju yi xiang [The costumes’ closet of Peking Opera]*” (Liu, 2002); and “*Jing ju da xi kao [The complete compilation of Peking Opera’s scripts and lyrics]*” (Chai, 2004).

### Visual Symbols

From “*Zhong guo jing ju fu shi [The costume collection of Peking Opera]*” (Zhao, 1999), the costumes were assorted according to the function of each costume. The author of the book described each costume in detail with specific instructions for its usage, but there was no mention of the interpretation of symbols and costumes. The Peking Opera performers used these costumes for centuries. The following costumes were selected: 1) Mang (蟒), which was worn only by a performer who played the role of a royal member, a prime minister, or a general; 2) Guan Yi (官衣), worn by a performer who played the role of a lower officer; 3) Gong Zhuang (宮裝), worn as casual clothing by a performer who played a princess; 4) Pei (帔), worn as casual clothing by a performer who played a royal member or upper-class person; 5) Kai Chang (開氅), worn for ceremonial roles or military officer roles; 6) Zhe Zi (褶子), worn as casual clothes by a performer for the middle class and ordinary person’s role; 7) Jian Yi (箭衣), worn for the role of hunting and horse riding; 8) Xian Nü Zhuang (仙女裝), special costumes worn for the role of a fairy; 9) Ba Gua Yi (八卦衣), special costumes worn for the role of a fortuneteller or a counselor; 10) Kao (靠), a kind of loricae, worn for warrior roles; 11) Da Yi Da Ku (打衣打

褲) and Bao Yi Bao Ku (抱衣抱褲), worn for acrobatic fighting roles; and 12) certain stylized costumes for young, ordinary female roles or maid roles in upper-class families.

Second, symbols were selected from all kinds of costumes, including dragons, phoenixes, fowls, wild beasts, flowers, and plants, designated by Chinese characters “福” (good fortune) and “壽” (longevity), and icons from Buddhism and Taoism. These symbols appeared in different functional costumes to signify characters’ social status, occupation, marital status, and family role. Associations between the frequency of usage of certain symbols/designed images and characters’ roles were noted. “Dragon” and “phoenix” were found in this close reading to represent royal member roles and upper-class person’s roles; blooming flowers represented ordinary, but educated and wealthy people; and simply designed dark costumes represented a character of lower class. Specifically, fowl and wild beasts were used strictly to represent ranks of civilian officers and military officers. For civilian officers, from the first rank to the ninth rank, the crane, golden pheasant, peacock, wild goose, silver pheasant, bittern, Xichi<sup>12</sup> (鸚鵡), quail, and lianque (練雀)<sup>13</sup> marked the front of the costumes. Correspondingly, for a military officer’s role, from the first rank to the ninth rank, *kylin* (mythical, hooved creature), lion, leopard, tiger, bear, liger<sup>14</sup>, rhinoceros, and sea horse were embroidered on the robes. Among others, the dragon and phoenix were selected as key symbols in the analysis for this thesis.

The book *Zhong guo jing ju yi xiang [The costumes’ closet of Peking Opera]* (Liu, 2002) was used to study the variation of costumes for different roles in different scenes. Three plays were analyzed, noting the change of costumes and symbols of main characters’ on different

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<sup>12</sup> Xichi (鸚鵡): a kind of bird.

<sup>13</sup> Lianque (練雀): a kind of bird.

<sup>14</sup> Liger: a symbol for both the sixth and the seventh rank of military officers.

occasions. In the play *The marriage of dragon and phoenix*, an actor for a male leading role (Liu Bei) wore a red robe (*mang*) with dragon insignia on formal occasions and the yellow casual costume (*pei*) with dragon when living in the palace or when hunting and riding. An actress who played a female leading role (*Sun Shangxiang*) wore the red robe (*mang*) with phoenix and the crown with phoenix on formal occasions and the yellow casual costume (*pei*) with phoenix when living in the palace. In the sequel *Farewell palace and sacrifice husband*, the actress for a leading female role (*Sun Shangxiang*) wore the yellow casual costume (*pei*) with phoenix when she was about to leave the palace, and white robe (*mang*) with phoenix when sacrificing her husband.

In the series of plays about Wang Baochuan, the actor for a male leading role (Xue Pinggui) wore a special modest costume<sup>15</sup> in the presence of other poor people, if his role was from a low class. He wore a warrior costume if his character was to become a military officer. He wore a red robe with dragon if his character was to become a son-in-law of a state. He wore a red hunting and horse riding costume with dragon if his role was to visit home. The female leading character (Wan Baochuan) wore a robe with phoenix when she lived with her family; a dark/white casual costume when she married the poor man (Xue Pinggui); and a red robe with multicolored phoenix when she reunited with her husband and was conferred as empress.

### Literal Symbols

From the book *Jing ju da xi kao [The complete compilation of Peking Opera's scripts and lyrics]* (Chai, 2004), a compilation of 2,124 pieces of lyrics and performances by 873 artists, classical and popular plays, the classic theme of the “visiting mother” was selected for analysis.

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<sup>15</sup> The special costume for poor people is not included in the above collection of costumes from *Zhong guo jing ju fu shi [The costume collection of Peking Opera]*” (Zhao, 1999), because the special costume was used to highlight certain roles’ low background and poor status.

The justification for selecting this theme and its iteration in plays was its frequency of occurrence: It appears in the book 92 times, and 59 artists have performed the play. Also, the play has endured for more than a century; the earliest recorded performance of this play was in 1903. Some scholars and amateurs claim that the play was first performed by Peking Opera about the end of the nineteenth century<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, it is one of the classic Peking Opera's plays. The book shows that, from 1903 to 1984, this play, or some parts of the play, was performed or recorded by 59 famous artists<sup>17</sup>. Prominent entertainment companies, radio station, and film companies produced albums and films of this play, such as, EMI, Columbia Records, RCA Victor Records<sup>18</sup>, and Shanghai Film Studio. This play narrates a complicated story about Yang's family, a military family famous for its loyalty and bravery during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1279). Some parts of the play are extremely popular, such as Yang's missing his mother and the communication between Yang and his wife, Tian Jing Princess. For example, the character Yang sings:

I am like a *bird* in a cage, unable to fly with wings;

I am like a *tiger* leaving the mountain alone;

I am like a *wild goose* flying from the South, leaving the flock;

I am like a *dragon* trapped in a shallow ford.

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<sup>16</sup> The Peking Opera play *Visiting Mother* (四郎探母) is viewed one of the most classic plays in the Peking Opera's history. According to some Chinese scholars, this play was performed by artists who lived in the Qing Dynasty. However, there are no precise dates on which the play was performed. Therefore, it is assumed that the history of the play exceeds 100 years.

<sup>17</sup> According to *Jing ju da xi kao* [*The complete compilation of Peking Opera's scripts and lyrics*] (Chai, 2004), the play *Visiting Mother* had been performed by 59 famous artists. Those artists played different roles, not just the main character, or Yang Yanhui.

<sup>18</sup> The EMI Group is a British music company, one of the largest record companies, and came to China in the early Twentieth Century. *Columbia Records* dates to 1888. *RCA Records*, originally the Victor Talking Machine Company, then RCA Victor, was founded in 1901. RCA Records is one of the labels on Sony BMG Music Entertainment.

Therefore, the literal symbols *bird*, *tiger*, *wild goose*, and *dragon* were selected for study in this thesis.

### The Origin and Connotation of Dragon and Phoenix

Peking Opera narratives have been extrapolated from the daily lived experiences of the Chinese over thousands of years and in different epochs, during different dynasties. What it represents is based on what Chinese people have perceived about their world. Following is a brief introduction to the origins of *dragon* and *phoenix* in Chinese culture, which is the basis of analysis, in the next section, of their positions and functions among Peking Opera's symbolic expressions.

The dragon and phoenix symbols originated in the ancient mythology that has communicated the Chinese people's perceptions of the universe, faith, and the spirits of Chinese culture (Zhao, 1999). Images of dragons and phoenixes are used in many aspects in Chinese people's lives for generations, such as sculptures, stone statues, bronzes, chinaware, jade articles, silverwares, lacquers, paper-cuts, embroiders, dyeing and weaving, costumes, decorations, architectures, and fresco paintings (Zheng, 1995). The application of *dragon* and *phoenix* together date to 500-223 B.C.E.; they began to come to symbolize the emperor and empress during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) (Fang, 2004). Not only do they concentrate the canonical thoughts in imperial China, but they also permeate everyday life.

The dragon, a significant mythical creature, has been described in various appearances. In 1987, according to the archeological results from the Xishuipo Cemetery Ruin in Puyang County, Henan Province, a dragon appeared in a tomb more than 6,000 years ago (Yang, An, & Turner, 2005). In China's history, the dragon has been treated as a totem for worship, a ruler of nature, and the imperial authority in ancient China because of its power and divinity. In *Chinese classic*

*texts (Chinese canonical texts)*<sup>19</sup>, the dragon was described under various names. Using a dragon to connote someone or something is prevalent in other Chinese texts: literature, poems, dramas, and oral expressions. The dragon is an embodiment of masculinity, which is related to *Yang* (male) in the *Yin* and *Yang* relationship<sup>20</sup> from Chinese traditional philosophy. A dragon symbolizes the origins of emperors to illustrate their supreme status and noble backgrounds. More broadly, the dragon also refers to people born of upper-class families, although the appropriation of the symbol by these kinds of families must follow strict rules to avoid offending royalty. In modern China, the dragon is still invoked for newborn boys. An idiom that means “hoping one’s son will become a dragon” is popular because it conveys parents’ wishes that their sons will have a brilliant future. The Chinese character for *dragon* (龍) is used in boys’ names to bring success, power, and a promising future. Famous figures whose names include *dragon* are Bruce Lee<sup>21</sup> (李小龍) and Jackie Chan<sup>22</sup> (成龍). They have promoted *kung fu* as representative of Chinese traditional culture around the world, and they are viewed as descendants of the dragon.

The phoenix is the counterpart of the dragon. It has been used to refer to femininity, or *Yin*, to complement *Yang*, or masculinity. *Phoenix* also connotes supreme dignity of royal female members and proper and virtuous female images of upper classes. Corresponding to *dragon* connoting emperor, *phoenix* symbolized the origin of empresses who matched the emperors perfectly. Therefore, the *dragon* and *phoenix* couple harmonizes the *Yin* and *Yang* relationship

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<sup>19</sup> *Chinese classic texts (Chinese canonical texts)*: the pre-Qin (before 221 BC) Chinese texts. They mainly refer to the Confucian Four Books and Five Classics (四書五經).

<sup>20</sup> *Yin* and *Yang*: the dual concepts are used to describe dynamic mutual correlation in the natural world. It reflects human perception of the universe in Chinese philosophy.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Lee (李小龍) (November 27, 1940-July 20, 1973) was an American-born martial artist, philosopher, instructor, and martial-arts actor.

<sup>22</sup> Jackie Chan (成龍), born April 7, 1954, is a Chinese actor, choreographer, film director, producer, martial artist, comedian, screenwriter, singer, and stunt performer.

and reflects traditional Chinese beliefs and cultural essence. According to *Er Ya*<sup>23</sup>, the phoenix appears as the combination of the beak of a rooster, the face of a swallow, the forehead of a snake, the breast of a goose, the back of a tortoise, the hindquarters of a stag, and the tail of fish. In *Guideways through mountains and seas (Shan Hai Jing)*<sup>24</sup>, an ancient Chinese text that recorded “religious, mythology, geography, flora, fauna, minerals and medicine” (Strassberg, 2002, p. XIII), the phoenix is described as the king of all birds. According to *Chapter 1, Nanshan Jing*, a phoenix lived in *Danxue* Mountain, where the water moved south into Bohai<sup>25</sup>. It explains the implied virtues of each part of the phoenix. The head symbolizes *duty*; the back symbolizes *ritual*; the breast symbolizes *humaneness*, and the stomach symbolizes *trust* (Strassberg, 2002). These virtues are related to Confucian-advocated virtues. A phoenix foretells peace and good fortune when it appears. In traditional society, newborn girls were usually named using the Chinese character of *phoenix* (鳳). Parents often incorporated *phoenix* into their daughters’ given names, hoping that their daughters could better themselves through a good marriage. Nowadays, *phoenix* in names is thought to be an antiquated notion. However, similar to the meaning of the idiom “hoping one’s son will become a dragon,” the idiom “hoping one’s daughter will become a phoenix” means that parents wish their daughters a wonderful life and happy marriage.

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<sup>23</sup> *Erya*: (爾雅): the oldest extant Chinese dictionary. Its author is unknown. The *Erya* was considered the authoritative lexicographic guide to Chinese classic texts during the Han Dynasty.

<sup>24</sup> *Shan Hai Jing* (山海經) is a Chinese classic text about the world, including religion, mythology, geography, flora, fauna, minerals, and medicine, all compiled from the Warring States period to the Western Han dynasty (c. 4<sup>th</sup> –c. 1<sup>st</sup> cent. B.C.E.).

<sup>25</sup> Bohai (渤海): known as Bohai Sea or Bohai Bay or Bohai Gulf, is the innermost gulf of the Yellow Sea on the coast of northeastern China. It is about 78,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and its proximity to Beijing, the capital of China, makes it one of the busiest seaways in the world.

In sum, the key symbols from Peking Opera's costumes, as texts selected for analysis, were the *dragon* and *phoenix* which are used in *The marriage of dragon and phoenix (Farewell, palace, and sacrifice husband)* and plays about Wang Baochuan. Lyrical references to *bird, tiger, goose, and dragon* from *Visiting Mother* also were selected for analysis. Their symbolic expression prevail in Peking Opera's performances prevalently. Three representative plays and typical symbols were analyzed.

The next chapter presents a discussion of the archetypes and connotations of those symbols in context of Chinese culture and influences.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

This chapter includes analysis of the data and application of Modeling Theory and Social Drama Theory. The discussion encompasses how the symbols in Peking Opera's costumes and lyrics constructs socially desirable marital relations and perfect role models of husband and wife; and the foundations of thoughts and traditions of visual and literal symbolic expressions in the history of China. Modeling Theory was used to examine the visual symbols *dragon* and *phoenix* in Peking Opera's costumes. The purpose was to explore the performance and exposure of the two symbols to the masses (as spectators), who would be conditioned over time and expected to readily recognize and understand their meanings, and thereby acquire and adopt socially acceptable behaviors. Social Drama Theory was employed to perceive one of the most classical Peking Opera's plays, *Visiting Mother*. Four archetypal symbols were used to highlight the dramatic tension of the play. The inherent conflict and its denouement, communicated through costumes and lyrics, eventually established role models of the ideal husband and ideal wife. In fact, the symbols were used to connote socially desirable values during the imperial period.

The visual and literal symbolic expressions performed through Peking Opera are interwoven to embody Chinese traditional culture, values, aesthetics, and communication styles. Peking Opera art was created in traditional society during the Qing Dynasty (1790). The stylized performances on Peking Opera's stage concentrated people's daily lives and systematized them through the imperial ideological and value system. The stylized performances also provided examples for people's imitating, especially in some ritualized contexts. Since these ideas have been communicated and diffused and transmitted over generations through Peking Opera, what Chinese people have learned reinforced and re-created Chinese traditional culture. It is why Peking Opera represents the essence of Chinese spirit.

## The Origins of Using Symbols in Peking Opera's Costumes and Lyrics

The use of a system of symbolic expression in Peking Opera's costumes have been extrapolated from everyday lives in different dynasties following the strict hierarchy of traditional China (Zhang & Yu, 1996). Specifically, the symbols used in Peking Opera's costumes are mainly based on the official uniforms in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), which immediately preceded the Qing Dynasty. In the Ming Court, officers at each level were required to wear uniform with certain symbols according to strict rules (Huang & Chen, 2002; Zhang & Yu, 1996). These rules of the Ming Court were the origin of the use of symbols in Peking Opera art, as summarized in the Data chapter. Through such symbols, characters' background, social status, occupation, and relationship are implied.

Moreover, the symbols used in Peking Opera's costumes and lyrics are related. Some of the symbols share meanings. The symbolic expression of costumes extended to the rhetoric of the lyrics. Plays of the Peking Opera were scripted based on popular fiction and folklore. Gu (2006) noted that the evolution of Chinese fiction experienced "two fundamental shifts: a transition from street talk and gossip to mature form of storytelling and a shift from storytelling to fictional art" (p.67). The latter formed Chinese *xiaoshuo's* (fiction) aesthetics.

This shift of aestheticization influences many branches of Chinese arts, including drama. Peking Opera's literature went through the same evolution that other literate works did, synthesizing folklore and forming a unique dramatic literature (Yan, 2005). Logically, literary techniques of fiction were borrowed to script dramas of Peking Opera. Using certain symbolic expressions is one of the important fictional techniques which represent "...a hyperreality that simulates social conditions and mental states that realistic technique are incapable of capturing"

(Gu, 2006, p. 119). With certain aesthetics and expression techniques, symbols such as *dragon* and *tiger* help narrate stories and express human emotions connotatively.

The symbols used in Peking Opera's lyrics connote characters' relationships, characters' social status and its occasional change, as well as circumstances and situations. These symbolic expressions follow a certain set of rules and relate to the visual symbol of the costumes. Not only do they formalize Chinese stylized aesthetics and ways of communication, but the symbolic expressions also aim to build pedagogical role models through script narratives (Wei, 1977). Specifically in this thesis, the symbols were analyzed for their usefulness in communicating virtues of the ideal husband and wife in traditional Chinese marriage.

#### The Analysis of Symbols in Costumes, Dragon and Phoenix

In this section, Modeling Theory and Social Drama Theory are used to analyze how the selected symbols became the mediators between Confucian ideas (imperial ideological and value system) and people's ways of thinking and doing. Specifically, the visual symbols (*dragon* and *phoenix*) are identified, analyzed, and interpreted for their expected reception by audiences, who possess some knowledge of the symbols formulated through repeated exposure to certain dramatic performances. The literal symbols (*bird*, *tiger*, *wild goose*, and *dragon*) were used to highlight conflict. The resolution of conflict was evaluated according to Confucian creeds. The resulting interpretation in this section is not only of what the symbols conveyed but also of the corresponding Confucian-based virtues of ideal marital relations.

#### The Analysis of Dragon and Phoenix

Due to the long history and cultural concepts of *dragon* and *phoenix*, the two symbols are irreplaceable embodiments of Chinese traditional culture. The Peking Opera art concentrates the

core of Chinese traditional culture following a strict imperial ideological and value system. Repeated exposure to Peking Opera reinforces the concepts of an intentionally designed system of symbols conveyed by the art (DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1988). In this section, Modeling Theory is used to analyze what Chinese people may have learned from the meanings symbolized by dragon and phoenix through Peking Opera art. The acquisition of new concepts and behavior through watching Peking Opera's performances has been experienced by every generation. The shared meanings of the symbols, the rules of use of the symbols, the values people desire, and the behavior they appreciate all are embodied in ritualized contexts, such as wedding, winning Imperial examination, and celebration having a new-born baby. To understand the desirable marriage relationship reflected in Peking Opera art, *dragon* and *phoenix* are examined for three aspects of their connotations: backgrounds and relationship; social status shifts; and desirable values.

### *Social Background and Marital Relations*

As the significant mythical symbols representing Chinese culture and history, *dragon* and *phoenix* have been used for decorating many things that embody Chinese style. An intentionally designed system of symbols used in Peking Opera's costumes stemmed from people's daily ideas and life patterns and followed strict imperial ideological and value rules. *Dragon* and *phoenix* are used in Peking Opera's costumes to provide information about characters' background and marital relations. The symbols are prominently displayed in Peking Opera's costumes. When audiences are exposed to the visual icons during performances, they identify the characters' background and social status by reading the symbols on costumes. For example, in

*The marriage of dragon and phoenix* (龍鳳呈祥), the male character (Liu Bei)<sup>26</sup>, characterized by his loyalty, mercy, and compassion, is the King of Shu during the Three Kingdoms era of China<sup>27</sup>. For political reasons, he marries Sun Shangxiang, the sister of the King of Wu. The play narrates a series of events during their marriage. But the point here is that the symbols used in their costumes reflect their origins from upper class. Categorized by functions, Liu's costumes are the red robe with *dragon* for formal occasions, the yellow casual costume with *dragon* in palace, and a hunting and riding costume for traveling, according to the data. No matter what the occasion, his background decrees that *dragon* always appears in his costumes. Correspondingly, for his wife, Sun, *phoenix* is used in her robe, casual costume, and traveling costume. The symbols of *dragon* and *phoenix* here embody the couple's grand backgrounds, their matching statuses, and harmonious marital relations. Moreover, the use of *dragon* and *phoenix* to identify them does not change as long as their social status remains intact. In the play *Farewell, palace, and sacrifice husband* (別宮祭江), a sequel to *The marriage of dragon and phoenix* (龍鳳呈祥), Liu dies. Sun leaves the palace and goes to the river to memorize her husband. Sun wears the yellow casual costume for royal members (*pei*) with the *phoenix* symbol as she is about to leave the palace. Sun changes into a white robe with a less colorful *phoenix* when she conducts a ceremony for her dead husband.

Through the above analysis, we learn that *dragon* and *phoenix* in the costumes symbolize characters' grand backgrounds and their pairing connotes harmonious marital relations. These connotations are based on the origins and meanings of *dragon* and *phoenix* in Chinese cultural

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<sup>26</sup> Liu Bei (劉備 161-223 AD): a powerful warlord and the founding emperor of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms era of China.

<sup>27</sup> Three Kingdoms era of China (三國): a period in the history of China from 220-280. The three kingdoms are Wei (魏), Shu (蜀), and Wu (吳).

contexts. The visual symbols used in costumes are the direct and preliminary step which makes audience realize the connotations behind *dragon* and *phoenix*, or the social statuses and marital relationship. These connotations discussed here are conveyed by the intentionally selected system of symbols, in other words, the use of *dragon* and *phoenix*. According to visual rhetorical theory (Smith, Moriarty, Barbatsis, Kenney, & Smith, 2004), the intentionally selected symbols make feel, think, react, and interact. Peking Opera audiences think about and understand what is communicated through the symbols in conjunction with their prior knowledge. It will lead audiences to deep interpretation of the symbols in their minds.

#### *Social Status Shift and Desirable Values of Perfect Husband and Wife*

Not only do *dragon* and *phoenix* reflect roles' backgrounds and marital relationship, they also imply roles' statuses shifts and the desirable values which guide their minds and behavior. Not like the direct display in costumes, the characters' social status shifts are reflected in the appearance and disappearance of *dragon* and *phoenix* in their costumes. This change is processing along with the vicissitudes of the main characters' fortune. Meanwhile, the characters' desirable values are reflected in how they think and what they choose to do, corresponding to are supposed to match the connotations of *dragon* and *phoenix*. Therefore, *dragon* and *phoenix* symbolize socially desirable virtues. Characters who possess these virtues deserve the two symbols and vice versa.

The series plays about Wang Baochuan (王寶釧), tell a twisted story about Wang, whose father was a leading chancellor of the Tang Court (618-907). Wang insisted on marrying a man of lower class. Facing resistance from her family, she decided to break relations with her family and marry Xue Pinggui (薛平貴). As a newlywed, Wang lived a simple and austere life. To improve their lot, Wang Baochuan's husband joins the army and crusades for Xi Liang state. The

couple were apart for 18 years. Wang lived a poor and monotonous life to remain chaste and faithful to her husband, ignoring all temptation. However, during this period of time, her husband became a military officer because of his extraordinary battle achievement. And the end of the play, Wang's husband becomes the son-in-law of the emperor of Xi Liang state after marrying its princess. Having endured martial life, Xue proclaims himself emperor. In appreciation of Wang's faithfulness and chastity, Xue welcomes her to the palace and makes her empress, superior to the princess.

A pair of social status shifts is interlaced in the play. First, Wang's status slips from daughter of the Court's chancellor to countrywoman, the wife of a humble man. The symbols in her costumes illustrate this. In the process, Wang changes her robe with *phoenix* to an extremely simple costume in dark color. By contrast, when her husband begins his military career, he exchanges his simple and shabby costume for one with *dragon*. When Wang was welcomed to the Palace and conferred as empress, she wore the robe with *phoenix* once again. Reappearance of *phoenix* signifies Wang's elevation from countrywoman to royalty and matches her identity to *dragon*, or emperor.

The use of these two symbols is popular and explicit to illustrate characters' social status. This symbolic expression in costumes delineates a dynamic development of characters, not just their status or background. For the audience, *dragon* and *phoenix* are not only recognizable symbols, but also interpreted according to connotations and social norms. As audiences deepen their understanding of *dragon* and *phoenix*, they begin to understand the meanings behind the symbols. Further, they learn to identify with them and appropriate them into their own experiences. It follows that the characters' deeds provide audiences with criteria for interpreting and evaluating their own thought and behavior. Specifically, in this series of plays, Xue was born

a plebeian but became a *dragon* because of his persistence and achievement. His seeking status promotion was legitimate and desirable according to Confucius' idea: "Riches and position are what men desire. If their attainment is to be by departing from the way, do not have them. Poverty and lowliness are what men hate. If their abandonment is to be by departing from the way, do not abandon them (Muller, trans. 2004)<sup>28</sup>.

Wang was born a *phoenix* but slipped, in social status, to countrywoman. Eventually, she rose to *phoenix* again. Her virtues of faithfulness and chastity made her a role-model wife. Her behavior satisfied the norms of the imperial ideological and value system, meriting *phoenix* status and symbol. Through an understanding of why and how *dragon* and *phoenix* are used, what the audience can interpret lies beyond the connotations of the symbols themselves, and in the socially desirable values that match the symbols and are reflected by them.

### *Practicing Symbols in Chinese Traditional Wedding*

Yao (2000) summarized the concept of "*li*," or ritual, in Confucian thought: "...*li* has religious, social and psychological dimensions, and ... its meaning extends from ritual to propriety, from civil laws to codified customs, and from moral rules for behaviour to ethical sense or thinking, feeling and acting" (p. 192). As an ethical foundation, the ceremony of marriage embodies the orthodox explanation of couples in Chinese cultural contexts. Good marriages are also the origin of the universe and the reflection of filial piety. Confucian ideas claimed that "By the united action of heaven and earth all things spring up. Thus the ceremony of

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<sup>28</sup> From *Analects of Confucius, li ren*. (論語, 里仁: "子曰: '富與貴, 是人之所慾也; 不以其道得之, 不處也。貧與賤, 是人之所惡; 不以其道得之, 不去也。' ")

marriage is the beginning of a (line that shall last for a) myriad ages.”<sup>29</sup> As the meanings behind *dragon* and *phoenix* become ingrained in everyone’s mind, people are better able to interpret them, exchange them, and ultimately, apply them in everyday life. They “perform” what they learn from Peking Opera’s performance. They positively reinforce the meanings conveyed by *dragon* and *phoenix*.

By definition, ritual refers to “the orderly expression of feelings appropriate to a social situation” (Kutsche, 1998, p. 51). Symbolized sentiments are expressed to attach to given situation that includes person, place, time, conception, thing, or occasion (Kutsche, 1998). The Chinese traditional wedding is a ritualized activity that emphasizes the meanings symbolized by *dragon* and *phoenix*. The symbols’ visual expression, with various colors in Peking Opera’s costumes constantly communicate meanings that audiences use to satisfy certain occasions, time, and needs in daily life. In the Chinese traditional wedding, the symbols are used for decoration according to their connotations. They attach their sentiments to the certain symbols, in this way, they organize and “orderly express” their feelings through this ritualized activity.

The *dragon* and *phoenix* are embroidered on the bridegroom’s and bride’s clothing, signifying the match and ideal marital relations implied by Peking Opera’s costumes. Ordinarily, a bridegroom dresses in dark colors. The bride is dressed more elaborately, with *phoenix* in the wedding dress and crown. Other images, such as butterflies, flowers, and boneset, signify good fortune and best wishes are used to enhance the image of the bride. *Dragon* and *phoenix* are used also on paired candles, cakes, and bedding (sheets, pillow covers, and quilt covers). Social backgrounds reflected by *dragon* and *phoenix* become secondary in ordinary people’s wedding.

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<sup>29</sup> From *Classic of Rites, jiao te sheng*. (禮記, 郊特牲: “天地闔而后萬物興鄴。伏昏禮, 萬事之始也。”)

Those not from royalty or upper classes may use the symbols to express happiness and enhance the romantic atmosphere. Couples' desire for a good future—their hope of becoming a dragon and a phoenix—are connoted in their application of *dragon* and *phoenix*.

The visual symbolic expression of *dragon* and *phoenix* in Peking Opera's costumes provide systematic meanings behind the symbols: social backgrounds and marital relations, characters' social status shifts, desirable values, and virtues. These layers of connotations of *dragon* and *phoenix* influence people's thinking and behavior through an almost step-by-step process. According to the Modeling Theory, their understanding of the symbols is a gradual process as they begin to realize and interpret these connotations continuously. Their reflections on the symbols, ultimately, in conjunction with other knowledge, become embedded in their behavior or their new behavior.

Ideas originating in Chinese traditional culture are extracted and stylized by Peking Opera. These ideas are diffused through theater productions and become commonly practiced, as in weddings. Such behavior is learned from art and becomes the embodiment of Chinese traditional culture. These ideas and behavior are transmitted over generations. Essentially, then, the significance of *dragon* and *phoenix* is well beyond art forms and people's lives. The symbols actually represent the spirit of China as a nation. By knowing about their meanings and their influences on Chinese people's minds and behavior, we can perceive the essence of Chinese traditional culture.

### The Analysis of Symbols in Lyrics

Related to the symbolic expression of *dragon* and *phoenix* in Peking Opera costumes, *bird*, *tiger*, *wild goose*, and *dragon* are textual symbols in Peking Opera lyrics to be analyzed for their meaning and role in establishing socially desirable marital relations and role models of

husbands and wives based in Confucianism. In the lyrics of *Visiting Mother*, the four key symbols help narrate plots and express emotions. Here, the symbols become “operators in the social process” that were scripted as the play performed by Peking Opera (Ortner, 1983). Turner (1987) used the concept of “social drama” to analyze social process and defined social drama “as the unit of harmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict” (p. 2). Scripts for Peking Opera plays are based on legends and folk stories to create socially desirable models. The evaluation of these models follows the ideological and value system of traditional society, mainly Confucian creeds.

The formulation of Peking Opera’s scripting can be analyzed by the four phases of Turner’s (1987) social drama model; they are, breach (deviation from regular norms), crisis (widening the breach), redressive (mediating the crisis) and reintegration (regaining social cognition and legitimation). The symbols used to narrate Peking Opera’s plots appear in the crisis phase where the dramaturgical phase begins as the metaphor for dilemmas in which characters are trapped. In this way, the degree of difficulty is emphasized to highlight characters’ heroism and moralism in the following redressive and reintegration phases.

Through an appreciation and understanding of Peking Opera, audiences combine their social lives in reality and dramatized social lives on stage to achieve psychological identification and learn behaviors to satisfy the social expectation and aesthetics. In this way, “common symbols, customary behaviors, role expectations ... ideologies” shared by both actors on stage and off stage “exist and frame mutual communication and action” (Turner, 1987, p. 4) within a cultural group. Those symbols used in lyrics, as a form of literary texts, become the “mediation between textual narrative and the extratextual discourses” (Foster, 2006, p. 70) that make them sense in real life.

### *The Introduction of the Play*

The play *Visiting Mother* is derived from a legend originating during the political struggle between the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1279) and the Liao Dynasty (970-1125). Yang's military family was a well-known for generations during the Song Dynasty (Northern Song, 960-1279). The series of stories and plays about the family has been transmitted until today to praise its unflinching loyalty toward the Song Court. The play begins with a scheme: The Liao Dynasty (970-1125) pretends to invite Emperor Taizong<sup>30</sup> of Northern Song to negotiate peace. The eight brothers from Yang's family receive the order to protect the emperor but are ambushed by Liao's soldiers. One brother is captured but conceals his identity by changing his name from Yang Yanhui to Mu Yi to survive in Liao's territory. The princess of the Liao Dynasty admires Yang, and they marry, so Yang becomes the ruler's son-in-law. Fifteen years later, while the political struggle continues, Yang's mother is escorted to the border. Yang, who misses his mother, learns of this news and seeks an opportunity to meet her. He feels sad and frustrated that he has concealed his identity and repressed thoughts of his mother. Yang's wife, the princess of Liao, sees what he is going through and understands his filial respect to his mother. The princess helps Yang steal a pass to cross the borderland and make Yang's wish to see his mother again come true. When Yang returns, the Empress Dowager Xiao (蕭太后), the ruler of the Liao Dynasty and mother of the princess, detects the truth and determines to have Yang executed. Her daughter, the princess, pleads with her mother to pardon Yang. The Empress Dowager Xiao agrees to do so, out of her love to her family members.

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<sup>30</sup> Emperor Taizong (宋太宗, November, 20, 939-May 8, 997): the second emperor of the Song Dynasty of China from 976 to 997.

### *Analysis Applying “Social Drama Theory”*

According to Confucian creeds for gentlemen, filial piety is a superior man’s primary virtue. As previously outlined in the “The Ten Right Things,” if a man is humane and righteous, his wife will submit to him. Therefore, the perfect marriage is based on the virtues the couple possesses. These virtues provide criteria for Peking Opera scripts to depict socially desirable role models of husband and wife. In *Visiting Mother*, symbols used to describe the crisis highlight the husband’s deviation from social norms, or the virtues expected of him. And the role of wife comes up is highlighted in the redressive phase to help resolve the crisis, or to help complement what her husband lost based on social norms. The connotations of visual symbols and literal symbols are related and function together to display the couple’s statuses and virtues which are implanted in people’s minds. These values conveyed by the Peking Opera art provide concrete examples for ordinary people’s learning in daily lives.

Yang is a gentleman who was educated and ambitious, and his loyalty toward Emperor Taizong is one of the most prominent virtues stemming from his grand family’s tradition. Confucius said, “A prince should employ his minister according to the rules of propriety; ministers should serve their prince with faithfulness.”<sup>31</sup> It was orthodox that emperors treated ministers as appropriate etiquette, and the ministers gave emperors their loyalty. Yang was captured by the enemy from the Liao Dynasty when he, as a soldier, protected the Emperor Taizong. In this situation, Yang’s belief as a loyal gentleman toward the emperor was challenged. To be perfectly loyal, he might have chosen to commit suicide to avoid being captured, as his father had. To survive and possibly return to his home one day, Yang instead chooses to change his name and hide his identity. By using a fake name, Yang can live without dishonoring his

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<sup>31</sup> From *Analects of Confucius, bayi*. (論語, 八佾: “君使臣以禮, 臣事君以忠。”)

family's fame. In Confucian thought, kinship and ethics are prior to the appropriate sense of righteousness between emperor and minister. Confucius said: "For teaching the people to be affectionate and loving, there is nothing better than filial piety," and "The filial piety with which the superior man serves his parents may be transferred as loyalty to the ruler."<sup>32</sup> In other words, filial piety is the basic virtue for educated and righteous men. Confucius said: "During your parents' lifetime, do not journey afar. If a journey has to be made, your direction must be told."<sup>33</sup> This signifies the importance of keeping close contact with one's parents. At the beginning of the play, however, Yang is trapped in a dilemma in which a breach emerges between his belief in filial piety/loyalty and his deed of hiding his identity in an enemy state. The two points combine to force Yang's behavior to deviate from social norms in the light of the imperial ideological and value criterions, or Confucian creeds.

After living incognito for fifteen years, Yang learns his mother's whereabouts, and his internal and interwoven struggle erupts as a crisis for him. The thought of his mother trapped in enemy territory, his filial piety toward his mother and his affection to his wife (the princess), his real and fake identities, and his loyalty toward the original emperor and betrayal of his current master intensify Yang's psychological and emotional conflicts. The narrative widens the breach and pushes the plot to reach an extremely disharmonized situation. In this extremely tense part of the play, symbols are used in the lyrics to help express the character's thoughts and emotions. This part of the play depicts Yang sitting in a garden, remembering his battle experience and contemplating a strategy to go to the borderland and meet his mother secretly. While thinking, he sighs sadly about his dilemma. The lyrics he sings, including the four symbols here, *bird*, *tiger*,

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<sup>32</sup> From *Classic of Filial Piety*. (孝經: “教民親愛, 莫善于孝”。 “君子之事親孝, 故忠可移于君”。)

<sup>33</sup> From *Analects of Confucius, li ren*. (論語, 里仁: “父母在, 不遠遊, 遊必有方”。)

*wild goose*, and *dragon*, symbolize his fate, his confusion, and his feelings. First, he compares himself to a caged *bird*, incapable of flying even though with wings. This signifies that Yang was trapped in enemy territory and lost his freedom. The second symbol, *tiger*, is used to describe that Yang, previously a general, was like a *tiger* that had to come down from the mountain. He felt lonely and forced to mask his natural instincts. That also implies Yang's hidden identity. Third, a *wild goose* flying aloof from the flock signifies that *Yang* deviated from normal social groups, no longer a filial son and loyal gentleman. Finally, the *dragon* swimming in a shallow ford signifies his social status shift from distinguished general to one living in personal disgrace, even though his outward identity, as son-in-law of Liao's ruler, is grand. In this crisis phase, the four symbols tell the story with certain connotations that reflect socially desirable virtues based in Confucianism and legitimated ideas and behavior from Chinese traditional cultural contexts. Meanwhile, the degree of distortion and difficulty Yang faces are highlighted. It is during this extremely tense part of the play, that Yang's way of thinking communicates the way a gentleman filial son, and loyal general should be patient and courageous in facing his predicament.

When the crisis reaches a climax, Yang's wife, the princess of the Liao Dynasty, appears to mediate the conflict. Her thought and action follow Confucian thought and thereby establish her as a role model of the perfect wife in Chinese traditional society. Confucius stressed that the wife must listen to her husband. Women's subordination to men was viewed as the origin of marriage. Yang's wife, Tian Jing Princess, needs to know the truth. She is a considerate wife who takes care of her husband and son. She is conscious of Yang's worry and tries to figure out what is happening. She discerns why Yang is not happy even though they have been happily married for years. He hesitates but eventually tells her his real identity and his thoughts about his mother. The princess is surprised but admires Yang's filial piety and respects his own grand

background. Even though she knows now that she has been deceived for a long time and had married an enemy military general, she still understands that it behooves her husband to visit his mother. Respecting Yang's family and filial piety, she even bows to her husband after learning the truth. Her admiration is in keeping with Confucian philosophy; that a gentleman from a grand background should be filial and loyal. These two basic merits are prior to any other values for gentlemen, even if they are trapped in some undesirable situations (such as living in enemy territory) and condemned to do something undesirable (such as hiding one's identity). As a wife who was able to satisfy social desirable criteria, the princess is supposed to understand Yang's circumstance and support his idea of visiting his mother. However, because of the special relationship between the countries and families, Yang needed a pass to cross the borderland. Facing Yang's entreaty, the princess is so selfless and brave that she decides to help her husband steal the pass, even though it violates her mother's, the Empress Dowager Xiao's, authority and the Court's rules. What the princess thinks and does represents her favor and compliance with her husband. But the premise is that her husband's thinking and doing is righteous. It exactly corresponds with the principles for sons, husbands, and wives based on Confucius' "The Ten Right Things," namely that a son should be filial, a husband should be righteous, and a wife should submit to her husband. The princess's only concern is that Yang may take advantage of this opportunity for escaping home. Yang swears to return immediately after he meets his mother. He also appreciates and cannot give up his affection for the princess. After their interaction full of values, emotions, conflicts, sympathy and such, the princess has the will to steal the pass to support her husband—actually, support her husband's virtues.

After getting the pass and showing appreciation for the princess's help, Yang's secret quest begins. He goes to the Song barrack to visit his mother. With the pass, he goes through the

frontier smoothly. When he meets his mother, brother, his first wife, and other family members, Yang sobs while telling his experience of being captured, hiding his identity, marrying the princess, and having a son. When his mother learns that his new daughter-in-law was taking care of her son with her heart and soul, she faces north, where *Yang* just came from, and bows in appreciation of the princess as her son's perfect wife. This act, which transcends the political struggle between dynasties and emperors, actually is a sign in support of a filial son, a supportive wife, and the perfect marriage of this couple, who possess these virtues.

The final, or "reintegration," phase is extremely tense at the end of the play. When Yang returns from the Song barrack, he is arrested for going across the borderland secretly. The Empress Dowager Xiao flies into a rage. Yang is forced to reveal his true identity to explain himself. The empress is shocked and wants to have him beheaded. At the eleventh hour, the princess pleads with her mother to forgive their deception, for their son's sake. The empress must forgive Yang, her son-in-law, out of kinship. Here, the basic ethical values among family members transcend the political struggle once again. This conflict provides an opportunity for Yang to reveal his authentic identity. His hidden identity is the crucial point, for the whole play, by which desirable values could be developed, based on the imperial ideological system, or Confucian creeds. These values are concretized in the characters' expressive thoughts and action during the process resolving the "crisis."

Through the Peking Opera performance, ideals of filial piety toward parents, a husband's righteousness, and wives' consideration and obedience are communicated to the audience and diffused. The symbols are used to color the crisis and guide the roles to figure out the crisis. Specifically, because of Yang's filial piety and righteousness, the princess listens to him and supports her husband's virtues. In the play, everything she chooses to do is aiming at letting

Yang be free and be a filial son, or releasing the *bird* from cage, letting Yang regain his natural instincts; or freeing the *tiger* to the mountains, letting Yang return to his normal social group and legitimate his behavior; or guiding the *wild goose* to return to the flock, and letting Yang recover his status as an honorable and perfect man; or allowing the *dragon* to swim back to the sea. In this way, the “crisis” is resolved, and the wife helps her husband reintegrate into “the disturbed social groups” (Turner, 1987). The symbols are used as mediators to imply the virtues (legitimated ideas and behavior) that Yang lost during the “crisis” phase. And these virtues provide his wife, the princess, with criteria for helping Yang regain the virtues in the “redressive” phase. The symbols make the virtues of the ideal marital relationship meaningful in people’s daily lives.

Besides the four symbols in the lyrics, *dragon* and *phoenix* are also used in their costumes to reveal the couple’s grand backgrounds, social statuses, marital relationship, and virtues, by which they deserve to be represented symbolically as *dragon* and *phoenix*. Watching the play year after year, audiences read the symbols, come understand the social backgrounds and marriage relationship, and interpret their ways of thinking and doing. Ordinary audiences, which may be less learned about Confucian creeds, learn these virtues through Peking Opera performances, which are an entertaining and efficient way to communicate and diffuse ideas. Using visual and literal symbols to express meanings helps ideological ideas coalesce in people’s minds. The symbolic expressions also help transfer orthodox ideology from the elite group to the masses and reinforce the dominant ideology.

Using visual and literal symbols in Peking Opera’s costumes and lyrics also embodies Chinese unique aesthetic values and communication style, which are in accord with other

Chinese arts. In this way, Peking Opera is not only the epitome of Chinese traditional culture, but also an indispensable element for enriching Chinese culture as a whole.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This thesis has attempted to connect Chinese classic texts with people's lives through the symbolic expressions of Peking Opera art. This thesis has explored the archetypes and connotations behind certain symbolic expressions communicated through Peking Opera and interpreted the meanings and social rules that followed. The resulting analysis of key symbols used in Peking Opera's costumes and lyrics revealed, identified, and interpreted certain elements of Chinese traditional culture regarding marital relations. Through this study, this thesis has further identified how Chinese traditional ideas, Confucian thought, Chinese art forms, and Chinese stylized activities or rituals have combined to communicate and transmit Chinese spirit for thousands of years. The people and the culture they created embodied their perceptions of the world. The dynamic interactions also reflected the basic philosophical idea of the combination of "heaven" and "people" in imperial China.

More specifically, this thesis has described the intended functions of key symbolic expressions of socially desirable marital relationships and role models of the ideal husband and ideal wife. The analysis should help us understand how and why Peking Opera has long influenced the Chinese people so deeply. Peking Opera performances and plays operate and are used like textbooks to educate the masses. In recent decades, economic development and international communication—globalization—has caused shifts in values and thinking among the Chinese who hope to adapt, survive, and even thrive. Traditional arts such as Peking Opera, which convey traditional values, are losing audience. This realization, amid further contact with the outside world, however, has led some Chinese to begin to understand and value the importance of their essential spirit. As a result, many Chinese have begun trying to find and perhaps return, to their cultural roots. Peking Opera art, as representative Chinese traditional

culture, is regaining popularity and even fame. This trend may ultimately prove that Peking Opera reflects the core of Chinese traditional culture and its influences on Chinese people continue, in despite of the ups and downs of China's social history.

The research underlying this thesis had its limits. First, given Peking Opera's—let alone Chinese culture's—long and rich history, only a fraction of the tremendous amount of relevant texts were possible to analyze. Selection of these references was subject to the narrowness of focus for this study. This thesis, however, provided one way of understanding the symbolic expressions of Peking Opera art and an example to formalize those symbolic expressions. So it is hoped that this thesis will stimulate further discussion and the expression of informed viewpoints about Peking Opera and traditional Chinese culture.

Second, that narrow focus, on marital relations and role models of the ideal husband and ideal wife, was all that was analyzed from among the rich and expansive symbolic expressions of Peking Opera, which is itself only a subset—albeit a significant (maybe the most significant) subset—of traditional Chinese culture. Thus, this thesis is too narrow to encompass the entirety of symbolic expressions of Peking Opera art.

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