This study aims to provide a comprehensive discussion of the image transformation of the young scholar in Classical Chinese drama. Love-betrayal theme is common in the Classical tale of Tang period (Tang chuanqi) and southern theater of Song and Yuan period (Song Yuan nanxi). However, the images of some heartless forsakers in these pieces were transformed into those of loyal lovers in the later Classical Chinese drama.

Although this phenomenon has caught scholars’ attention since 1934, it has not been sufficiently studied. Previous studies failed to explain the reasons why these authors had chosen to re-write an old story, rather than creating an original one. The majority of the scholars subscribe to the view that the phenomenon only existed in a particular dynasty.

By examining these re-written pieces, this dissertation indicates that this image transformation actually took place over the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties. Therefore, any explanation limited to a particular dynasty would be incorrect. The study finds that to provide an overall explanation, the aesthetic expectation of people to have a “happy ending” has to be noted. It also suggests that the transformation of the young scholar’s image is not only a reflection of the change of time and society, but also a “response” to the parent-stories.

This study limits itself to only one of the many types of transformations in Chinese literature. It is hoped that through further research on the different types of transformations in the future, a more general theory or plausible explanation on this theme can perhaps emerge.