Abstract

*Palace of the Eternal Youth* (长生殿) is a much studied play in the literary world of Chinese drama, especially on the study of the play’s theme. However, scholastic opinions on the main theme of the play are very much diverse and this regrettably, has lead to the difficulty of evaluating the value of the latter part of the play.

This study sought to dig deeper into the underlying essence of the play as purported by the playwright, Hong Sheng (洪升) in his preface instead of using the usual thematic approach in analyzing the play in order to gain a more insightful and comprehensive understanding of the play as a whole and thus able to evaluate the value of the latter part of the play more objectively.

*Ni-shang-yu-yi-qu* (霓裳羽衣曲) is a highly symbolic piece of music depicted in the play, it not only encapsulates the main actions of the play but following the unfolding of scenes, also manifests itself to different yet interconnected expressions which are highly relevant to our understanding of the underlying essence of the play.
As such, this study aims to look into the different yet inter-related manifestation of *Ni-shang*, mainly the concept of “extreme happiness begets sorrow” (乐极哀来) and the “interplay of reality and illusory” (凡情、仙意俩参详) and their significance with respect to the underlying essence and the evaluation of the value of latter part of the play.

It is evinced by the manifestation of *Ni-shang* that the play’s fundamental essence is that of a “reunion mirror” (团圆宝镜), which not only reflects the detrimental consequences of over-indulgence but with compassion, transformed the tragedy to a big reunion ending. This essence of a “reunion mirror” not only applied to the love and political arena as shown in the play but actually embodied the fundamental philosophical principle of life itself. And it is this universality of the underlying essence that gives the play such in depth-ness!