ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a comprehensive comparative study on two female characters in the Classical Chinese dramas. One is Cui Yingying (崔莺莺) from Wang Shifu's "The West Chamber" (王实甫《西厢记》) of the Yuan dynasty, and the other is Du Liniang (杜丽娘) from Tang Xianzu's "The Peony Pavilion" (汤显祖《牡丹亭》) of the Ming dynasty.

In ancient China, women were considered as the weaker sex who had to obey the traditional ethics. However, Cui Yingying and Du Liniang are portrayed as individuals who rebelled against these ethics.

This dissertation mentions that Cui Yingying and Du Liniang are not the original creation of Wang Shifu and Tang Xianzu. Their embryonic forms can be found in literary works before Wang Shifu's "The West Chamber" and Tang Xianzu's "The Peony Pavilion". However, in the earlier works, the images of Cui Yingying and Du Liniang were not as rebellious.

The reasons behind Wang Shifu and Tang Xianzu's recreation of the images of Cui Yingying and Du Liniang are discussed in relation to how the authors' time and society had influenced their thoughts and creations.

This dissertation also identifies the factors leading to Cui Yingying and Du Liniang's rebellious action, namely their family backgrounds and the societies they lived in.
Previous studies on these two protagonists tend to conclude that Cui Yingying is not as rebellious as Du Liniang. By analysing the process of Cui Yingying and Du Liniang's rebellion, this dissertation suggests that they are both as bold in revolting against the traditional ethics.

Lastly, though Cui Yingying and Du Liniang are both female characters with rebellious spirit, there were differences between them. By identifying and analysing their differences, we can better appreciate the different themes in the two dramas.

In conclusion, Cui Yingying and Du Liniang are female characters who revolted against the traditional ethics. Though they are similar in this aspect, the differences between them and the different themes their images reflect should not be overlooked.