The Frustrations of Heaven's Fragrance:

An Analysis and Translation of Guan Hanqing's

Qian Dayin zhichong Xie Tianxiang

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the play *Qian Dayin zhichong Xie Tianxiang* (錢大尹智寵謝天香), written by the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) playwright Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 (c.1225–1302). The first chapter of this paper provides brief background information about northern style Yuan drama (*zaju* 雜劇) as well as a plot summary and notes about the analysis and translation. Through a close reading of the play, I hope to illustrate how the play’s complicated ending and lack of complete resolution reveals why it has received relatively little attention from scholars who have previously discussed other strong, intelligent female characters in Guan Hanqing’s plays. The second chapter of this thesis includes translation of the play that is comprised of a wedge preceding the four acts. Before each act of the play is a critical introduction and analysis of the act to follow. Although many of Guan Hanqing’s plays have been translated into English, this play has never been translated.
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A. **PREFECT QIAN WISELY BESTOWS FAVOR UPON XIE**

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Authorship

Yuan 元 dynasty (1271-1368) drama (zaju 雜劇) is a performance genre that originated in the northern region of China. The structure of this genre alternates between sung arias and spoken dialogue. The dialogue is usually comprised of colloquial vernacular of the time and occasionally some classical Chinese. The arias elegantly articulate the emotions of the singer, while the dialogue drives the plot. Due to the prosimetric style of Yuan drama and because it is a performance literature, it is normally thought to have stemmed from earlier performance genres including both transformation tales (bianwen 變文) as well as tales in all keys and modes (zhugongdiao 諸宮調).1 The popularity of drama rose dramatically during the Ming 明 dynasty (1368-1644). In fact, the majority of the northern style Yuan plays that are extant today were written in the Ming dynasty. There are only thirty independent late Yuan editions of plays that are collected under the modern title, Thirty Zaju in Yuan Editions (Yuan zaju sanshi zhong 元雜劇三十種) currently extant today. Many Yuan zaju were revised and reprinted in the Ming dynasty. There are 162 zaju currently extant.2

Arguably the most prominent and talented playwright during the Yuan dynasty was Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 (c.1225–1302). The Register of Ghosts (Lugui

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1 “Literature from the late Jin to the early Ming: ca. 1230-ca 1375,” 620-50.
2 “A Study in Appropriation: Zang Maoxun’s Injustice to Dou E,” 283.
bu 錄鬼簿) by Zhong Sicheng 鐘嗣成 (ca. 1279- ca.1360) provided a significant amount of the information we know about Yuan dramas and playwrights. This work documented many playwrights’ compositions and also included short biographies, and it attributed sixty-seven plays to Guan. It is generally accepted, however, that he did not actually compose all of these plays, and thus it is uncertain how many he did write.³ The play that this paper examines was attributed to Guan and his authorship has never been questioned. This is probably because it was well crafted like his other plays, and even shares a character, Qian Ke, who was in another of his plays.⁴ Guan Hanqing can be considered a world-class dramatist, noted for his sympathetic portrayals of common folk and for the beauty of his language.⁵

Editions

Even though this play was originally written in the Yuan dynasty, no editions have survived from the Yuan. The earliest editions of the play are from the Ming dynasty. The play was actually reprinted in many Ming collections, which may be an indication of the play’s popularity. Although not an exhaustive list, the play was collected in Zang Maoxun’s 灞懋循 (1550-1620) Selection of Yuan Plays (元曲選 Yuanqu xuan), the Xu family of Longfeng’s block-printed editions Zaju by

³ Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals, 1.
⁴ Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals, 5.
⁵ “Ling yizhong jingshen shijie de toushi: wei Guan Hanqing Xie Tianxiang yibian,” 76.
the hands of famous authors (古名家雜劇 Gu mingjia zaju), and the same print edition preserved in the Maiwang guan (脈望館) collection by Zhao Qimei (趙琦美 (1553–1624) and published sometime between 1612 and 1617.6

Introduction to the Play

The play’s full title, “Prefect Qian wisely bestows favor upon Xie Tianxiang” (Qian Dayin zhichong Xie Tianxiang 錢大尹智寵謝天香) introduces the lead of the play, Xie Tianxiang, as well as the Prefect Qian, whose formal name is Qian Ke. The historical poet Liu Yong 柳永 (987–1053), who was known for his lyric poetry (ci 詞) and specifically the songs he wrote for singsong girls, is also a character in the play, but his role is more minor than that of Prefect Qian and Xie Tianxiang. He only appears on stage in the first and final acts.

The play begins with Liu Yong preparing to leave Xie Tianxiang to go to the capital to take the imperial examinations. It is clear that they have already developed a relationship. Liu decides to remain with Xie an extra day so that he can welcome the new Prefect who is also his old friend, Qian Ke. In act one, Liu goes to see Qian Ke and requests that he take care of Xie. Liu had been drinking the whole night, and he stupidly goes five times to request Qian’s help to watch over Xie. The fifth time, Qian is outraged and rebukes Liu. Liu leaves, but before

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he does, he composes a poem for Xie. Zhang Qian, the Prefect’s main servant, secretly transcribes the poem.

In act two, Qian requests that Xie perform Liu’s poem. There is a twist in the plot because the poem contains the Prefect’s personal name, which in the Prefect’s presence no one inferior to him is allowed to speak. Xie begins singing, and just as she is about to sing the Prefect’s name “Ke,”\(^7\) Zhang Qian coughs, causing her to realize that she is about to fall into a trap. She quickly changes the words and then successfully changes the poem’s rhyme. Prefect Qian is very impressed by her talent and he decides to remove her name from the Entertainment Bureau registry and make her a concubine in his home. Qian also reveals to the audience that he has a scheme planned.

The third act begins with Tianxiang indicating that three years have already passed. Two of the other concubines come to visit Xie and one of the girls decides that they should go to a pavilion to gamble. As they are gambling, Prefect Qian enters the pavilion, but it is unbeknownst to Xie. Her other sisters leave, and she makes slanderous comments against Prefect Qian. Once she realizes he has witnessed her remarks, she is mortified. In order to spare her, Qian requests that she perform for him. She successfully does so, and he rewards her by informing her that she is to become a second wife. Xie assumes Qian means a second wife in his home and is skeptical of his promises.

Liu Yong returns in the final act after he has officially become a top scholar. Prefect Qian invites him to a banquet. It is here that Qian reveals his

\(^7\) i.e. 可
hidden plot. He reunites Xie with Liu and they presumably resume their relationship.

**Notes on Translation and Analysis:**

This play has never been translated into a western language and there is little scholarship compared to some of the other plays by Guan Hanqing. One possible reason as to why scholars overlooked this play is because the lead character, Xie Tianxiang, although extremely intelligent, is actually secondary to Liu Yong’s absurd actions and Prefect Qian’s scheming.

One element for which Guan Hanqing is particularly known is his sympathy for women whom society oppressed. Many of his plays were written for a female lead, and that role is usually a very strong and compelling character. Normally, when discussing Guan Hanqing’s treatment of women in his plays, scholars have chosen to develop their arguments based on the plays *Zhao Pan’er Flirts to Rescue a Harlot* (*Zhao Pan’er fengyue jiu fengchen* 趙盼兒風月救風塵), *Du Ruiniang Learns to Appreciate Gold Thread Pond* (*Durui Niang zhi shang jinxian chi* 杜蕊娘智賞金線池), *A Beauty Pining in her Boudoir: The Pavilion for Praying to the Moon* (*Guiyuan jiaren baiyue ting* 閨怨佳人拜月亭), and *Moving Heaven and Shaking Earth: The Injustice to Dou E* (*Gantian dongdi Dou E yuan* 感天動地竇娥冤) rather than *Xie Tianxiang*.  

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8 The translations of the first two titles are from Dale R. Johnson’s article “Courtesans, Lovers, and Gold Thread Pond in Guan Hanqing’s Music Dramas.” This article also includes a translation of *Durui Niang zhi shang jinxian chi. Jiu fengchen* is translated in Stephen Owen’s *Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 744-770. The latter two
Xie Tianxiang is also a strong female lead; however, a close reading of the play demonstrates that she is not the same type of woman as the women in the previously mentioned plays. Because this play includes a strong female character, it is tempting to classify this play among other plays about women by Guan Hanqing, however Xie Tianxiang’s talent and intelligence do not command the stage the entire length of the play. Unlike the other plays, the final two acts, and particularly the resolution of this play, is unsettling. Whereas in the other plays, the resolution is satisfying and the leading woman actually controls the plot, here Xie Tianxiang is essentially Prefect Qian’s prop, and even though he is not the lead, his actions control the fate of the other characters as well as the plot of the play. Prefect Qian to some degree actually becomes the most important character in the play and his scheming overshadows Xie Tianxiang’s character development.

Cultural customs and literary authority are recurring themes in the play and the narrative structure is unusual, with a partial resolution at the end of act two, a climax in the third act, and then a forced resolution in the final act. The unusual narrative arc complicates the play, and the final act, while it does resolve the drama to some degree, leaves the audience with unsettled and dissatisfied feelings. The ending feels abrupt and somewhat forced, and another reason that the play may be overlooked is because of these loose ends. However, rather than titles are translated in *Monks, Bandits, Lovers and Immortals*, v, which also includes translations of the two plays. In the remainder of the paper, I will refer to these plays by their short titles: *Jiu Fengchen, Jinxian chi, Bai yueting*, and *Dou E yuanch*.
continue to gloss this piece as simply another strong female role in Guan Hanqing’s plays, through a close analysis, I hope to provide new insight and inspire continued reading and analysis of the play.

My translation is based on the Yuanqu xuan edition, edited by Zang Maoxun. Modern editions offer extensive notes that proved useful for translation. This play follows a tradition in consisting of four acts preceded by a wedge. The first act is noticeably longer than the other three, and also a significant proportion of the play’s action occurs in it. Even though the first act is the longest, it actually has the fewest arias, which is because Prefect Qian and Liu Yong have larger roles than Xie Tianxiang. Xie has very few spoken lines in the entire play, but in accordance with the Yuan zaju form, she does sing all of the arias.

One of the important features in this play and in Chinese literary history is the use of pronouns. In most of the dialogue, the characters do not use “I,” “you,” or “he.” Instead everyone calls one another by either their titles or family designations such as “elder brother.” These serve an important role in establishing hierarchy, and the characters would have been constantly reminded of it. For the purpose of translation, however, I use a title the first time it is mentioned to refer to a specific character, but afterward may substitute a regular pronoun where it is appropriate. In the first act, for example, Liu Yong refers to Prefect Qian as “Brother,” but then he literally begins every response with “Brother.” At times the pronoun may be omitted altogether for the sake of reading fluency. However, it is
still important to recognize that these hierarchies existed and observe how they influence the themes in the play.

One final note on translation, I have not explained all idiomatic phrases in the footnotes simply because their meaning can easily be understood in the translation, and because the use of idioms had become a part of everyday speech in the Yuan dynasty. The same is true with some English idioms, such as “To thine own self be true.” It is unnecessary to cite Hamlet each time this phrase is used, because the general public knows the meaning of the phrase and it has become commonplace in everyday speech.


Chapter 2

Analysis and Translation of Xie Tianxiang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Type</th>
<th>Name, family role, or social role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male lead</td>
<td>Liu Yong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Lead</td>
<td>Xie Tianxiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clown</td>
<td>Zhang Qian, Prefect Qian’s Servant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra male</td>
<td>Prefect Qian Ke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>A group of singsong girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Females</td>
<td>Prefect Qian’s Household Concubines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Wedge:

The play begins with the lovers Liu Yong and Xie Tianxiang on the eve of Liu’s departure to go to the capital, Kaifeng, to take the imperial examinations. Liu opens the play by reciting a four-line poem in which he explains that he had no intention of falling in love, but had originally planned to “ascend to the clouds in the blue sky,” meaning he was focused on becoming the top scholar in the examinations. It is immediately clear from the introduction that the relationship he has is not one that was socially acceptable. He is quite aware of his weakness for women, “In my life, I have given thought only to flowers and wine,” but recognizes that he no longer has the leisure to knock about, and must travel to the capital before examinations began. Liu’s opening lines may seem to indicate that this play is romantic, but in fact Liu does not care too much for Xie and views her as an unplanned incident who is an obstacle in his path to success. Leaving her is difficult, but it is clear that he must leave.

Although Liu Yong’s character in this play is not identical to him as a real historical person, his character is similar to the historical accounts of his life, and the audience would have had assumptions about him that are certainly true in this play, namely that he spent his time in the brothels and wrote poetry for singsong girls.

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9 All quotations to my translation have been cross-referenced. See Wedge, p.13 of this document.

10 Wedge, 13. Here, “flowers” refers to women.

It was very common for love stories to be about the relationship between a scholar and a courtesan, so it is not surprising that this play replicates this theme and also depicts this type of relationship. It is interesting, however, for Yuan playwrights to discuss this theme because the examinations were suspended during the Mongol-governed dynasty. Shi Zhengrong suggested that these authors longed to have the same prestige of passing the examinations and would instead live vicariously through the scholars in their writings.

The next character on stage is Xie Tianxiang, the play’s leading role. Her name has great meaning and is delightfully ambiguous. Her name can mean “fragrance to thank heaven,” and simply Tianxiang can mean “sweet smelling flowers” or “a beautiful woman.” She enters the stage to tell Liu that she has prepared his travel expenses; this already indicates that Liu is indebted to her and that their relationship is atypical in the sense that the woman is providing for the man.

Zhang Qian, in the role of clown, is the Head Clerk in charge of procuring entertainers and prostitutes. He is the Prefect’s main servant and the go-between in the play. He informs Xie Tianxiang that a new Prefect, Qian Ke, has been appointed to govern in Hangzhou and that all of the entertainers are required to go and greet him. Xie Tianxiang is the Head of the Guild, meaning that she was in

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12 “Courtesans, Lovers, and Gold Thread Pond,” 112.

charge of the other women in the entertainment and prostitution business. Her title as “Head of the Guild” means she was both the most talented and the most desirable woman.

It is at this point Liu realizes that the Prefect is his old friend. Because Liu wants to greet his friend and new Prefect he decides to leave the next day which allows him and Xie to have one more night together to spend drinking and philandering. Xie sings two songs simultaneously lamenting Liu’simpeding departure and feeling grateful that they have one more night together because of the new prefect.
Prefect Qian Wisely Bestows Favor Upon Xie Tianxiang

Wedge

(OPENING MALE costumed as Liu Qiqing\textsuperscript{14} leading FEMALE LEAD as Xie Tianxiang,\textsuperscript{15} enters:) (LIU recites:)

Originally\textsubscript{2}, I planned, with steady step, to ascend to the clouds in the blue sky\textsuperscript{16}

Simply because of a rouged face\textsubscript{2}, I lingered here.\textsuperscript{17}

Old Heaven gave me birth, endowed me with imaginative power;

On the battlefield of wind and moon, am I willing to yield to others?

My family name is Liu, first name is Yong, and given name is Qiqing, and I am from Qiantang Commandery.\textsuperscript{18} My life has given thought only to flowers\textsuperscript{19} and wine, and I liked to ascend the flowery terrace to act as a playboy. I never

\textsuperscript{14} Liu Qiqing is the historical figure Liu Yong 柳永 (987–1053). He was a famous poet from the Song 宋 Dynasty (960-1279) and was also known as Liu the seventh 柳七. He had a reputation for spending his time in the courtesan’s quarters and the Yuan audience would have been aware of these character traits.

\textsuperscript{15} Xie Tianxiang 謝天香, this name could be translated literally a fragrance to thank heaven. Tianxiang, can mean sweet smelling flowers, incense to burn to the gods, and also a beautiful woman.

\textsuperscript{16} Here Liu is alluding to becoming the top scholar in the imperial examinations. He had planned to go to the capital and pursue an official career without hindrance, but he has unintentionally become sidetracked by his relationship with Xie Tianxiang.

\textsuperscript{17} This is referring to Xie Tianxiang.

\textsuperscript{18} Qiantang 錢塘 commandery is located near Hangzhou.

\textsuperscript{19} I.e., women.
expected my “wandering for study” to bring me here, and take the Number One Woman of the Guild, Xie Tianxiang as my companion. But I’ve come to the conclusion that, when the examinations are held this spring, should I miss by one day, I would have to wait three more years. So, I’d better take my leave from Elder Sister and go to the capital to take the imperial exams. Sister, you have treated me very well while I’ve been here. If I manage to get an official post at the capital, you will be a Noble Lady, complete with that five-colored letter of patent and a fragrant cart pulled by a four-in-hand.\(^{20}\) (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Qiqing, I have prepared clothing and travel expenses, so don’t miss your date with success because of me.

(CLOWN costumed as ZHANG QIAN, enters and speaks) I am Zhang Qian and am the Head Clerk in Charge of Procuring Entertainers.\(^{21}\) I manage Buddhist nuns, Daoist laywomen and entertainers. Anything to do with “greeting the new and sending off the old,”\(^{22}\) is my responsibility. Now, the newly appointed Prefect is surnamed Qian. Everyone who should go and greet him as the new official has done so, except for these prostitutes. The Head of the Guild here is named Xie Tianxiang. She’s in charge of these miscellaneous women. I must go and have a word with her. Here I am at the front door. Is Sister Xie home? (FEMALE LEAD

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20 The emperor used to confer the official titles on silk paper with five colored golden flowers on it.

21 That is he was the “Yamen procurer” the official in Yamen in charge of singsong girls. The music entertainment bureau organized performers and also trained them.

22 I.e., prostitution.
Big brother, why did you call for me? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Sister, a new Prefect has come to take over. Prepare to go and make a formal visit. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Brother, who is this newly appointed official? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) He is Prefect Qian. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Is it possible that he is the Persian Prefect Qian? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Don’t speak so crazily by using the taboo name of this great man! I am going. Sister Xie, tomorrow morning come and make your formal visit.

(Exits)

(Liu speaks:) Sister, This is great! Prefect Qian is an old classmate and friend. I’ll go with you tomorrow to meet him, and I’ll ask him to look after you. Then I can go away to the capital without a worry. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

XIANLÜ MODE: (Shanghua shi)

This one song will turn into a Collection of Mixed Tears;
The greatest bitterness is the Heaven of Separation’s Regret so high;²⁴ Paired tears fall in front of the goblet.²⁵

²³ Prefect Qian’s taboo name is Qian Kedao. Anyone who referred to any part of his name that was not of his same status would disrespect his superiority and would be punished.

²⁴ This is referring to the belief that heaven had thirty-three levels. The name of the top layer is “occupied heaven.” Here it is used as a metaphor to represent romantic lovers who are unable to see one another for a long time and are extremely grieved. A common saying in early vernacular literature: “Of the thirty-three heavens above, the heaven of parting’s regret is the highest.” Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals: Eleven Early Chinese Plays, 147.

²⁵ The tears fell from both lovers, which is why they were “paired.”
The mountains go on and on, the rivers run far away—

In sorrow I see you prepare your carriage for travel.

(Reprise)

To wait for the simurgh glue to mend the zither string; ²⁶

I must gaze at the engraved saddle, hard to hold back by love alone.

Let’s thank the newly appointed official;

True it is, “He makes things easier for the people,” ²⁷

And we have one last night of the “double-headed lotus.” ²⁸

(All exit.)

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²⁶ In a note in the article, “Tragedy and Melodrama in Early "ch'uan-ch'i" Plays: 'Lute Song' and 'Thorn Hairpin' Compared” Cyril Birch explains that the Han emperor Wu di used the simurgh glue to repair a string, which was supposedly the strongest glue, but it failed. See Cyril Birch, “Tragedy and Melodrama in Early "ch'uan-ch'i" Plays: 'Lute Song' and 'Thorn Hairpin' Compared,” Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 36, no. 2, (1973): 241.

²⁷ This is a common phrase to indicate that a good official made the life for his people better and was on their side. Here Xie feels this way because the new prefect’s arrival has allowed them to spend one more night together.

²⁸ This refers to sexual intercourse.
Act One:

Act one is not only the longest act, but it is also the one with the most dialogue and action. The act opens by introducing Prefect Qian. His opening poem establishes his concern that as a new leader, in order to be considered good, he needs to know the condition of the people. He establishes that he already had a good reputation and this indirectly implies that he will need to prove himself in his new position, which foreshadows the ending of the play. This is one of many examples of foreshadowing in the play. In Qian’s opening monologue, he coincidentally brings up his old friend, Liu Yong, with absolutely no prompting or any information that Liu Yong is in the same town. Zhang Qian, his head clerk, arrives to inform him of the precedent that was established by the previous prefect that all of the musicians come to pay their respects at formal occasions, including Qian’s own appointment. Qian questions this, but since it was already established, he grudgingly goes along with it. The initial framing of his character already illustrates his attention to standards. He serves as the arbiter of propriety and respect in the play and demands that all people uphold cultural standards in his presence.

When the singsong girls arrive, he requests to see only Xie because she is the “head of the guild” and is in charge of the other girls, meaning she has the responsibility of making sure they behave appropriately. Xie Tianxiang immediately shows her fiery and keen personality. She does not hesitate to sing about her unfortunate circumstances and her frustration with the fact that she has no freedom. Her greatest complaint is the fact that she must always perform for
others and that she is constantly under the scrutiny of others who are anticipating
she will make mistake. Her greatest fear is that she will act inappropriately or
make a social faux pas that will ruin her life. She struggles with her fear
throughout the play and it results in the turning point of her life. In her very first
aria, she sings about her life as a singsong girl.29

We discuss poetry and lyrics,
Laughingly chat on the market streets,
We imitate what is hard to emulate: willow floss blowing in the wind;
Our whole lives are always like this. 30

Her discussion and awareness of some agency, which appears to be very rare for
women in real life, is an important characteristic of Guan Hanqing’s writings. At
this point in her life, she feels imprisoned in her career and unable to escape the
life of an entertainer who is always forced to perform upon request. She compares
her life to willow floss blowing in the wind, which is both an image of the
delicate and refined walk of lithe young girls but also of how easily they are
swept away by the vicissitudes of life. It is clear that she is forced to act in a way
that she does not feel reflects her true spirit. She has a remarkable understanding

29 For further reading about the lives of entertainers, see chapter two “The
Institutional and Professional Organization of Entertainers” in Wilt L. Idema and
Stephen H. West, Chinese Theater 1100-1450: A Source Book (Wiesbaden:
Steiner, 1982), 95-142.

30 Act 1, Xianlü (仙呂) mode: Dian jiang chun, (點絳唇) 29.
of rhyme, language, and prosody; her character is strong and smart, but she is forced to behave in a soft and delicate manner.

In the next aria, Xie truly displays her literary talent. When discussing her role as Head of the Guild, she reinvents the common phrase “Teacher for a day, father for life” 一日為師，終身為父. She reverses the order of the phrase, “If you are going ‘to be a father your whole life,’ You must keep in mind ‘being a teacher for a day’” 31 (但能勾終朝為父，也想著一日為師). This reversal of a common phrase, conventional enough in most plays, creates two threads. The first is that in her world of the guild, she has assumed the position held by patriarchs in outside society. In the second, it begins a string of linguistic play in which she splits apart concepts that would normally be understood as a single idea: “I have destroyed all of my prospects because of four things; these are simply: wisdom, wit, knowledge, and perspicacity.”³² (則為四般兒誤了前程事，都只為聰明智慧) She separates the two words normally meaning wisdom (zhìhuì 智慧) and intelligence (congming 聰明) to understand them as individual concepts. This ability to look beyond cliché begins to demonstrate her deeper understanding of literature and society that eventually leads to her disenchantment. Her talent and intelligence serve only to perpetuate her career as a singsong girl and keep her under the constant scrutiny of men. Her talent leads to her grief and, she believes, ruined her prospects of eventual marriage.

³¹ Act 1 Hunjiang long, (混江龍) 29-30.
³² Act 1 Hunjiang long, (混江龍) 29-30.
For men, being talented is advantageous; but for Xie it is actually a burden. She complains about her literary talent, because it is very thing that constrains her freedom. She compares her life in one of her early arias to that of a parrot: “In its golden cage a parrot can recite poems,’ This then is a good metaphor for us.”

She thinks of freedom as domestication, the ability to choose her own daily actions and to marry a person of her choice. At this point in her life, she has a freedom of movement denied women who are in the domestic realm: she can choose her daily routine, but only until she is called to perform. She also has the freedom to think about and question her life. She does not have, however, the freedom to break institutional bonds to vacate her career or change her social status. She is trapped in what is essentially a slave status in traditional China: she is on the tax roles as an entertainer. The life of a married woman is the highest status that a woman could attain in her society. She is not free to leave her life as an entertainer and marry a noble man like Liu Yong. Ironically if she were not as talented, she would not be considered a desirable entertainer and could have her name removed from the Music Bureaus’ list of entertainers.

After this set of arias, she goes into greet Qian who hardly even acknowledges her. Her only feeling after meeting him is that he “has a cold face!”

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33 Act 1, Youhulu, (油葫蘆) 30.
34 Act 1, 32.
has developed a healthy confidence in front of officials, but he instantly makes her uneasy and she believes he is someone to be feared. She not only is able to understand literature, but she can read people. She knows from their expressions and tone of voice what they are thinking. This is a quality that the comic character, Liu Yong, completely lacks. When Liu follows her to go meet the Prefect, it is initially a much warmer visit. Since Liu and Prefect Qian had been classmates, Qian welcomes him and tries to persuade him to stay awhile; however, Liu pleads that he cannot because of his obligation to take the examinations, and he leaves. But Liu Yong realizes that he forgot to say something and returns to see Prefect Qian once more before he leaves. Qian initially believes that he has come back to give him advice about something that Qian might have overlooked in his new position and he welcomes Liu. Liu instead requests that he “take good care of the one named Xie” (好覲謝氏). Prefect Qian agrees to watch over “him,” but is immediately disappointed that Liu didn’t have something better and more important to say and also wrongly assumes that “Xie” refers to a scholar that he has yet to meet. But after Liu leaves, Zhang Qian reminds him that Xie is actually the singsong girl who had visited him earlier that morning. He now realizes that not only did Liu have no thoughtful advice about Qian’s new appointment, he is not even focused on his career and is only worried about a singsong girl.

Liu goes to report to Xie Tianxiang that Prefect Qian will watch over her, and Xie is immediately upset that Liu would even discuss her with the Prefect.

35 Act 1, 35-6.
But Liu, who has been drinking all night and continues to drink with Qian is apparently intoxicated. When she explains to Liu that Qian was not as welcoming the second time since he had used Liu’s personal name, Liu unhesitatingly returns. He asks Prefect Qian again to watch over her. Qian this time tells Liu “I will take care of her”\(^{36}\) and Liu goes out to report to Xie. Xie understands the implicit meaning behind the Prefect’s words to which Liu is completely oblivious. She will not only prove herself better at composing songs and poetry compared to her lover Liu, but she is also a better reader of people.

When Liu requests that Prefect Qian take care of her while he is gone, he is too drunk, and possibly too dense, to realize that Prefect Qian’s retort is actually criticizing him. She explains the Prefect’s words to Liu:

He said "I will take care of you", there were several things implicit in that:

When he said “kan” he wants to see you fish out that huge sea tortoise with an eight-rhymed rhapsody.

When he said “dai” he waits in expectation for you to snap off the cassia branch with a poem of five lines,

When he said “jing” he respects the will that let you endure ten years of hard work,

When he said “zhong” he meant values your becoming valedictorian in a single try.\(^{37}\)

他道敬重看待，
自有幾樁兒：
看則看你那釣鱉八韻賦，
待則待你那折桂五言詩，
敬則敬你那十年辛苦志，
重則重你那一舉狀元時。

\(^{36}\) Act 1, 36.

\(^{37}\) Act 1, Jin zhan’er, (金盞兒) 36-7.
Liu Yong completely misses the Prefect’s true meaning. Xie has the ability to think about the world in a different and actually more critical manner. Liu Yong’s inability to discern how to behave in such crucial social situations adds entertainment value to the play. Liu continues to completely dismiss Xie’s wisdom. He decides to go in to talk with Qian again, and at this point his behavior is absolutely ridiculous. He behaves as a complete idiot who infuriates his old friend Qian.

This time, Qian tells Liu “You have planted peach flowers until they blossomed and hacked at bamboo until it broke, cutting the bamboo at its joint!”38 (你種的桃花放，砍的竹竿折!) Liu, an imbecile, takes this as confirmation of his request, and again Xie has to rescue him from his stupidity. She explains it to him:

“He said ‘you planted peach flowers until they blossomed and hacked at bamboo until it broke, cutting the bamboo at its joint.’ That is to say, you consider sex important and make light of being a gentleman!”39

Liu again disregards her wisdom and for the fifth time goes to talk with Qian. The fact that Liu goes to see the prefect five times violates the rule of three in writing. Liu is expected to visit the Prefect three times and no more, each additional visit makes the plot more unusual and unbearable. The fact that he goes five times is

38 Act 1, 39.
not only uncomfortable for Xie Tianxiang, but also it would be uncomfortable, awkward, and perhaps even boring to the audience. At the fifth visit, Prefect Qian is entirely outraged. He uses several quotes from the classics to absolutely berate Liu’s failure as a Confucian gentleman. Prefect Qian not only upholds social standards, but he actually sets the standards for Liu’s potential achievement and finally makes him aware of proper behavior for a scholar. Before Liu leaves, Qian recites a four-line poem wherein he implies that Liu is a waste of resources. He has studied his whole life, and if he does not take the examinations seriously, then it will be a waste of his life. Liu has no response to Qian’s reprimand. But, after Liu leaves, Qian whispers in Zhang Qian’s ear to follow Liu and Xie as they set out for their parting banquet, because he wants him to copy down the parting words that Liu has for Xie.

Before Liu departs for the capital, he recites a poem that he composed for Xie. Zhang Qian secretly transcribes the poem as Liu recites it. On the surface, Liu’s actions demonstrate the complete stupidity of the poet, and this is particularly true in this context because his lack of respected literary skill is then contrasted with his ability to compose romantic poems such as the one contained in this play. The plot hinges on this poem. Had he not composed the poem in this manner, he and Xie would have never been reunited. To the tune of “Ding Fengbo” (定風波) he recited:

Since it has turned spring,
I lament the green and sorrow over the red,
And my fragrant heart feels everything is needless and bland.
The sun rises on flowers’ tips,
The orioles warble along a belt of willows, (5)  
And I am still lying here weighed down by this fragrant quilt.
   My milky warmth disappearing
   My oily clouds drooping,
All day long too listless and tired to make myself up.
   There is nothing I can do! (10)
   Since that heartless wretch left
   There’s not been a word or a letter.
If I had known earlier it would be like this. . . .
I regret that I did not hold back that carved saddle.
Before by that “rooster window” (15)
You arranged your silken stationery and ivory writing brush
   Made me match your verses.
You stayed with me all day long and did not cast me away,
   I picked up my needlework and sat with you,
   Now match me, (20)
Do not let the days and nights of our youth pass by with no meaning.

This poem has a rather pompous tone because Liu assumes Xie will never be able
to move on from her love for him, and the fact that he does not promise to return
or write does not make the poem seem very kind or indicate that he will also feel
grief after leaving, instead he will remain with her even if only in memory;
however, it is somewhat conventional for a male author to make himself the
object of female desire in his writing. The poem is replete with irony and imagery.

40 Line numbers were added for ease of reference in the discussion, and were not
present in the original text. Act 1, 44-5.
Lines 1 and 2 refer to life among the courtesans’ quarters. Liu’s name means “willow” and courtesans are often alluded to as willows and flowers. In line 3, the final words in Chinese are ke ke (可可), which also happens to be Prefect Qian’s personal taboo name, Qian Ke (錢可). The reference to Qian in the poem can be translated “needless and bland;” and it is clear that Liu is not alluding to the Prefect in a favorable manor.

In lines 7-10, Liu indicates that she will be so depressed and heartbroken that she will not have the will to get out of bed or comb her hair. Yet, in the rest of the play, Xie Tianxiang hardly grieves over his absence and especially not to the same degree that she is upset about her life as a singsong girl. In fact in the final act, she seems to have moved on from Liu. On two occasions she stops herself from dwelling on him, and she seems to find contentment in her assumption that he will never return. This poem is actually a very strange departing poem because rather than promising to return, in line 12, he imagines her upset with him for not having sent a single letter. Liu’s presumptuous nature contributes to the rendering of his character as one that is insensitive to the feelings of others and also presents him as unpredictable and a ridiculously comedic character.

From line 15 of the poem, the perspective changes to discussing their literary relationship before he leaves, in which Liu directs composition and Xie is forced to match his verses. Once again this is ironic because she will actually prove herself superior to him in literary talent; their roles are completely reversed of society’s expectation for them. Liu was expected to perform extremely well and pass the exams, which he ultimately does, however at the beginning of the
play it is clearly Xie, the lowly singsong girl, who understands composition. The final line reflects Liu’s assumption of Xie’s sentiment for him. He assumes that she recognizes once he enters public life he will reject her. She is pleading that he would stay with her and turn down success. The irony in this poem illustrates the portrayal of Liu as a comedic character. The fact that Liu goes back to talk with Prefect Qian five times cannot be dismissed as a mistake by this master playwright, but instead should perhaps be understood as intentionally portraying Liu as an imbecile in order to evoke negative feelings toward the scholar from the audience. It is possible that Guan Hanqing may have been expressing resentment toward scholars because of the helplessness of his own situation as a scholar who did not have the opportunity to take the examinations. The first act concludes after Liu recites this poem, then Xie sings one final aria, in which she reflects on the impact that Liu has had on her life. It seems that being with Liu has allowed her to experience a small escape from her pitiful life, but now she must return to her previous daily life. The romance of their relationship is continually downplayed, and their separation is mostly pragmatic. Their relationship is hardly important to the main themes in the play.

41 For a discussion of the humorous aspects of this play see Xu Zifang 徐子方, “Shixi Xie Tianxiang Jinxian chi de youmo ziju benzhi” 試析《謝天香》, 《金線池》的幽默喜劇本質, Journal of Southeast University (Philosophy and Social Science) 4.5 (2002): ?-?.
Act One

(EXTRA dressed as PREFECT QIAN, leading ZHANG QIAN enters, recites:)

The late autumn cricket on an autumn night compels weaving,\textsuperscript{42}

The hoopoe on a spring morning urges on plowing.

If you say “officials do not understand the condition of the people,”

Then you must know why the birds and insects are chirping!

My surname is Qian and my first name is Ke and my given name is Kedao.\textsuperscript{43} I am from Qiantang. From the time I passed the highest exam, time and time again I have been appointed to important positions and have gained a reputation as an official. Now I thank the emperor for his favor in appointing me Prefect in the capital Kaifeng.\textsuperscript{44} Since childhood I have grown a long, full beard. Those soldiers and civilians who know me, and those who don't, all call me the Persian Prefect Qian. I have been thinking, I had a classmate and old friend in those days named Liu Yong, called Qiqing. To discuss this man's scholarship—he is as good as me. Separated from each other several years ago, I don't know whether he has fulfilled his ambition or not. This makes me anxious and worried about him. At present, I am going up into the hall to begin morning court. Zhang Qian, if there are any

\textsuperscript{42} The sound of the cricket was believed to imitate the click of a shuttle in the loom. *Monks, Bandits, Lovers and Immortals*, 154.

\textsuperscript{43} West and Idema argue that although there have been some unconvincing attempts at arguing Qian Ke is a historical figure. *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals*, 5.

\textsuperscript{44} Kaifeng 開封 was the capital of China during the Song dynasty.
documents that need to be signed, bring them and I will take care of it. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Oh, I just want to tell you, Sire, the musicians have not yet paid their respects. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) How could the previous prefect have had such a precedent? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) We have had this a long time. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Since it is like this, have them come to pay respects. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) You musicians visiting the official, get a move on! (FEMALE LEAD together with a group of FEMALES enters, speaks:) Today a new official has taken his post so we should all go to pay respects. Be careful and attentive! (FEMALES speak:) We understand. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

XIANLÜ MODE: (Dian jiang chun)

We discuss poetry and lyrics,
Laughingly chat on the market streets,
We imitate what is hard to emulate: willow floss blowing in the wind;\(^{45}\)
Our whole lives are always like this.

(Hunjiang long)
Day after day, I test you,
Earnestly wishing to teach you to become good persons,
If you are going “to be a father your whole life,”
You must keep in mind “being a teacher for a day.” \(^{46}\)

\(^{45}\) The delicate and refined walk of the lithe young girls.

\(^{46}\) Here she has split apart a saying that is normally one saying, “a teacher for one day, a father for life” (一日為師，終身為父).
But if there is one who dares to take over my status as the Head Mistress of the Guild,

Then with all of my heart I give you this performing stage.

I have destroyed all of my prospects because of four things;

These are simply: wisdom, wit, knowledge, and perspicacity. ⁴⁷

And because of this, I labor hard with no end.

(FEMALES speak:) Sister, look at that caged parrot reciting poetry. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) This is a metaphor for us. (Sings)

(Youhulu)

You say, “In its golden cage a parrot can recite poems,”

This then is a good metaphor for us.

It turns out that the more intelligent you are the harder to get out of the cage!

The ability to play wind and stringed instruments equals: someone watching you everyday like a spy, ⁴⁸

Being used to singing songs equals: someone being sent out on a mission.

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⁴⁷ Here she separates two words to understand them as individual concepts, zhihui 智慧 and congming 聰明.

⁴⁸ She is complaining about the fact that her life as a performer is always being criticized. As a singsong girl she was constantly watched and people were just waiting for her to make a mistake.
(Speaks:) I don’t resent anyone else. (FEMALES speak:) Sister, who do you blame?

(FEMALE LEAD speaks:) We can play and sing songs, so daily we are called to perform for officials; those who can’t play and sing songs are the ones who get to be free! (Sings:)

I resent those clerks who are in the Office of Rites,

All officials who hold our lives in their hands,

First they remove the names of those who can’t play and sing,

If I had known that, I would have acted a mute monkey bitch.

(Tianxia le)

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49 Each Yamen had six offices 六部 that matched the six major offices of government. These included: Administration, Finance, Rites, War, Punishments, and Public Works.

50 Here she is complaining that her talent has actually imprisoned her, because the inept were removed from the official tax registers and from the tax status as performers. Therefore, they no longer had to answer the official summons and, in her view, had freedom.

51 In Idema and West’s *Chinese Theater 1100–1250* they explain this image: “Monkey-bitch: nao is an overall term for courtesans. The nao is a species of monkey and is a covetous beast. It delights in eating the liver and brains of tigers. When a tiger sees it, it loves the monkey-bitch and bears it on his back where the nao picks lice, but leaves their heads in. As soon as the tiger falls dead, the nao seeks out the brains, liver, and organs to eat. The ancients took this to make a simile: the tiger is like youth that delights in and loves sex. As for the monkey bitch: it entices youth and covets their wealth. So it comes about that these wastrels come to a sad end or lose their fortune.” See, Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West, *Chinese Theater 1100-1450: A Source Book*. (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982) 139.
How can I plan any “fragrant reputation that penetrates the ears of everyone!”

I think, back then, not thinking thrice,

The more intelligent you are the more difficult to remain uninvolved with the outside.

Show off that you have a little skill,

Show off that you have a voluptuous form,

You’ll wind up being called a whore when you get older.

(ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Sister Xie, how have you just now arrived? Stay here, I am going to go report. (Acts out reporting, speaks:) Reporting to you, Sire, so you may know, we have musicians arriving here to pay respects. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Don't send the others in, simply have the one who is the leader come and meet me. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) All others can go back home, only Sister Xie go in! (FEMALES exit.) (FEMALE LEAD acts out greeting him and performing obeisance, and speaks:) Ascending the hall, I, Head of the Guild Xie Tianxiang, sincerely come to pay respects. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Do not be late for your official duty. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) I got it. (Acts out going out the door, speaks:) Father, that official has a cold face! (Sings:)

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52 This is essentially a translation of her name Tianxiang 天香, and thus a reference to herself.

53 She was not thinking ahead and got caught up in the moment.

54 The term dizi 弟子 is used as a curse word to designate over-the-hill prostitutes. She is mainly upset about having no agency and no companion.
(Jin zhan’er)

After I had suddenly seen that guy’s looks,
I mindlessly came down the steps of dais,
The final scene of my life will surely be to die in front of this office.
I always considered ranked officials and high officials like small children,
But he just said, “In performing your duty, don’t be late,”
I opened my mouth but had nothing to say.
Just stood there long enough to eat one meal,
My heart was trembling as if it were the time needed to cook two.\textsuperscript{55}

(LIU enters, speaks:) Sister went to visit the official, I’m going to see her. (Acts out greeting FEMALE LEAD, speaks:) Sister, you’ve seen that official now. I am going in to see him. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Don't go see him, this lord is not like the others! (LIU speaks:) It doesn't matter, my brother doesn’t treat me like others. (Acts out greeting ZHANG QIAN, speaks:) Older brother, go on and report that I am here: Hangzhou's Liu Yong has come specifically to pay his respects. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) This is the guy who was at sister Xie’s home early this morning.\textsuperscript{56} You stay here. I will go report it.

(Acts out reporting, speaks:) Outside the Yamen gate is a certain Liu Yong from Hangzhou who has come specifically to pay his respects. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:)

\textsuperscript{55} Here she is saying that she stood in front of him for a brief moment, but it felt like hours.

\textsuperscript{56} It is clear from the context that this line is spoken to himself.
Did he say Liu Yong of Hangzhou? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Yes. (PREFECT QIAN laughingly speaks:) The words were barely out of my mouth! I can't believe my dear brother has really arrived at this place, overwhelming me with happiness.
 Tell him to come in!

(ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Please enter. (LIU acts out greeting QIAN, speaks:) I have come to study at this place; I never thought it would be at exactly the same time that you were promoted! I firstly came to congratulate my elder brother and, secondly, to go off to seek my success. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) I have been separated from you, dear brother, for a long time; you have been on my mind, causing me to obsessively think about you. Now we have a chance to meet and it is truly my lucky day. Servants, bring wine! (LIU speaks:) I must leave in a hurry; there is no need to prepare a feast. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Although it is so, it has been a long time. Why begrudge a bit of time? Zhang Qian, lay out the feast in the courtroom to treat our scholar! (LIU speaks:) Brother, this is the state's public office, not a place for me to be sitting. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) My dear brother, you are wrong! In the first place, you are my classmate and old friend, secondly, you are our generation’s literary giant, and so you deserve to be treated well! I want you to stay here and relax for a few days. But it's well said that “a real man should consider success and fame first,” therefore I shouldn’t detain you. Dear brother, please drink a full cup! (Acts out holding the wine) (LIU speaks:) I have had plenty of wine! I will take my leave, and embark on my long journey.

57 That you must leave.
(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) I didn't get a chance to treat you well. When I hear you are successful another day, then I will make a special acclamation and celebration. Forgive me for not sending you off. (LIU speaks:) There is no need to send me off.

(Acts out going out and greeting FEMALE LEAD, [LIU] speaks to himself:) Liu Yong, why did you come in the first place? It was for her, how could you have forgotten? I am going back inside again! (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Qiqing, don't go! This lord is not like the others. (LIU speaks:) It doesn't matter; Brother treats me especially well.

(Acts out greeting ZHANG QIAN, speaks:) Zhang Qian, go and report I am here again. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) What are you doing here again? (LIU speaks:) You tell him Liu Yong from Hangzhou has come again to pay respects, and has something to say.

(ZHANG QIAN acts out reporting, speaks:) Liu Yong of Hangzhou wants to see Your Excellency again, and has something to say. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Right! As the person in charge here there must be something I have overlooked, there is something I have missed. Tell him I request to see him! (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Please come inside. (Acts out greeting, PREFECT QIAN speaks:) In my governance here, there are many places I have overlooked. I presume, dear brother, that you must have fine words and deeds with which to instruct me! (LIU speaks:) I have no other business with you, Brother, except to ask that you take good care of the
one named Xie. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Qiqing, I will respectfully take good care of him.\(^{58}\) I am sorry I cannot see you off! (LIU speaks:) Many thanks, Brother.

(LIU greets FEMALE LEAD, speaks:) Sister, I spoke with him. He said he would, “respectfully take good care of you.” (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Qiqing, do you know what he means by that? (LIU speaks:) I don't know. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Zui zhong tian)

When you first went in he called you, “scholar,”

Precisely respectful;

This time he turned his body away from you and gave you instructions,

That noble one looked stealthily at you with cold eyes.

Just look how he raised his head from his chair,\(^{59}\)

Treating you differently from the time before,

He then dismissively called you by your courtesy name.

(LIU speaks:) Lest you are uneasy, I will go in again. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Qiqing, don't go in. (LIU speaks:) It doesn't matter, Brother treats me especially well.

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Zhang Qian, come closer. Just now when Qiqing said, "Please take care of the one named Xie," it must be a famous literati who wears a tall hat and a wide-belt. Please clarify it for me. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) I will

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\(^{58}\) While there is no object pronoun in this phrase, Qian has clearly misunderstood this to refer to a man of significance instead of Xie Tianxiang.

\(^{59}\) He did not rise to respectfully greet Liu when he came in.
report to you so you may know, it is that Xie Tianxiang, who visited you earlier this morning. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Huh? That Xie from this morning! Qiqing, you have misused your heart!

(LIU acts out greeting ZHANG QIAN, speaks:) Brother Zhang, go and report again: Liu Yong from Hangzhou is here again and has something to say. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Why did you come here again? I don't dare go in. (LIU speaks:) There is no problem, say it again.

(ZHANG QIAN acts out reporting, speaks:) Liu Yong of Hangzhou has come to say something. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Send him inside. (LIU acts out entering and greeting) (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Qiqing, what do you have to enlighten me? (LIU speaks:) Brother, it’s just that I really want you to take care of Miss Xie!

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Didn't I just say: "I will take care of her." I am sorry I can't send you off!

(LIU greets FEMALE LEAD, speaks:) The master said he “will take care of you" isn't that okay? (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Jin zhan’er)

When you pick up a pen to write some words,
You are simply a literary talent without a flaw,
But in this particular examination you do not clearly understand it,
You haven't carefully analyzed it:
He said "I will take care of you", there were several things implicit in that:
When he said “kan” he wants to see you fish out that huge sea tortoise with an eight-rhymed rhapsody.\(^{60}\)

When he said “dai” he waits in expectation for you to snap off the cassia branch with a poem of five lines,\(^{61}\)

When he said “jing” he respects the will that let you endure ten years of hard work,\(^{62}\)

When he said “zhong” he meant values your becoming valedictorian in a single try.\(^{63}\)

(LIU speaks:) Sister, you are overly suspicious, I am afraid you can't let it go, I will go in again. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Qiqing, don't go! (LIU speaks:) It doesn't matter, Brother treats me especially well.

(Acts out greeting ZHANG QIAN, says) Brother Zhang, report that Liu Yong of Hangzhou has come again and has something to say. (ZHANG QIAN speaks) You still have not left! Isn't this the wrong thing to do? (LIU speaks:) Don’t worry.

\(^{60}\) Here kan 看, meaning to look after, and in this phrase he is referring to hoping that Liu will pass the exams which required him to write this specific type of poem: an eight-rhymed rhapsody.

\(^{61}\) Similar to the previous note, dai 待, meaning wait upon, and in this phrase he is also referring to a type of poetry required on the examinations. “Snap the cassia” is also a reference to passing the examinations.

\(^{62}\) This is jing 敬 meaning to respect. The rest of the line is an allusion to the proverb: 十年窗下無人問，一舉成名天下知 Ten years I studied under the window, no one showed concern for me, / But making my name on the first attempt at the examination, the whole world knows.

\(^{63}\) Zhong 重 here stands for the verbal use of zhong 中, meaning to hit the mark.
(ZHANG QIAN acts out reporting, speaks:) Liu Yong from Hangzhou has come again, and has something to say. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Bring him to me.  

(Acts out greeting, PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Qiqing, what do you have to say? (LIU speaks:) Brother, take good care of Miss Xie! (PREFECT QIAN acts out becoming angry, speaks:) Qiqing, you have planted peach flowers until they blossomed and hacked at bamboo until it broke, cutting the bamboo at its joint.  

Many thanks, Brother.

(Goes out to see FEMALE LEAD, speaks:) I persuaded him to do it. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) What did he say? (LIU speaks:) The minister said: "you have planted peach flowers until they blossomed and hacked at bamboo until it broke, cutting the bamboo at its joint." (FEMALE LEAD sings).

(Zui fu gui)

You are suddenly completely clueless,

What is so hard about understanding these two things?  

You yourself said this guy does not speak casually,

How could you not see what is inside of it?

He said you “planted peach flowers until they blossomed,

64 He uses less formality and politeness, his tone has changed and he is getting angry.

65 Here peach blossoms refer to women and bamboo refers to the integrity of the scholar-gentleman. This image essentially means, “You’ve taken good care of your woman, but you have destroyed your future as a true scholar gentleman.” Liu is oblivious to what he means, taking it at face value.

66 That is, the peach flower and bamboo branch.
And hacked at bamboo until it broke, cutting the bamboo at its joint.”

That is to say, you consider sex important and make light of being a gentleman!

(LIU speaks:) I am afraid you are overly worried, I am going to go in again and speak with him. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Qiqing, don't you go! (LIU speaks:) It doesn't matter, Brother treats me especially well.

(Greets ZHANG QIAN, speaks:) Brother Zhang, report again, Liu Yong from Hangzhou has something to say. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) There’s someone there who can’t see you! I dare not go report this. (LIU speaks:) I will go in myself.

(ZHANG QIAN acts out reporting) (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) I guess it’s that Liu Yong again! (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) It is none other than him. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) You filthy beast! You only are concerned about this one thing! Stand to the side for a moment. 68

(LIU speaks:) Zhang Qian went in. How come I don't see him coming out? It must surely be that he isn’t going to report for me. I will go in myself. (Acts out going in and greeting, speaks:) Brother....

(PREFECT QIAN speaks angrily:) Well could it be "take care of Miss Xie”? Zhang Qian, bring over the files! Qiqing, how shall we treat you? "If the scholar be not

67 He is saying that Liu Yong is only concerned about one thing, Xie.

68 The previous line is addressed to Liu Yong; this line is addressed to Zhang Qian.
grave, he will not call forth any veneration, and his learning will not be solid."

How can you be so frivolous! This place is the local officials’ yellow hall, not some courtesans’ quarter, you are only concerned with "Miss Xie", Miss Xie!

Qiqing, I am Prefect, not the one who finds musicians and singers! In the past I entertained you and not lightly, but for what reason? It is because you have talent.

The ancients said, "As for virtue surpassing talent, that will become a gentleman; as for talent surpassing virtue, that is a little man." Now in view of your behavior, it is precisely excessive talent and a lack of virtue. The Book of Rites says: As for a noble man “Notes that are evil and depraved, and sights leading to disorder, and licentiousness, are not allowed to affect his ears or eyes." Laozi said: " Color’s five hues from the eyes their sight will take; Music's five notes the ears as deaf can make." As for great men, "They worry prior to all under heaven worrying and they are happy only after all under heaven are happy." It is well said, "to be

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72 This is a famous quote from Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052), a politician during the Song Dynasty. Fan Zhongyan’s Yueyang louji 岳陽樓記 (Xianggang: Shangwu yinshuguan youxian gongsi, 2002).
above the power of riches and honors to make dissipated, of poverty and mean condition to make swerve from principle, and of power and force to make bend - these characteristics constitute the great man!?”

Now you are taking leave, I would have said, “he must have fine words and deeds,” but you did not even have one thing to say; all because of a common whore, you have gone back and forth several times. Even a mean and despicable fellow has shame to some extent; how much more so someone dressed in the hat and clothes of a scholar. Why are you not ashamed? Qiqing, rather than you spending your time in the streets of flowers and alleys of willows, for the time being go and be attentive in pursuit of becoming an official. Isn't it said, "at thirty you are established!" Now, Wang Yuanzhi was able to write at the age of seven, as for his official position he occupies the third rank, right now he is academician at the Imperial Academy; aren't you ashamed, Qiqing! (Speaks in verse:)

Your body is completely wrapped in brocade and embroidery,

Your belly stuffed with learning.

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74 I.e. the courtesans’ quarters.


76 Wang Yuanzhi, 王元之 also went by the name Wang Yucheng 王禹偁 (954-1001) and was a Song dynasty poet.
But you don't study the works of Minister Wang,\textsuperscript{77}

And only speak about Xie Tianxiang.

Zhang Qian, please come before me. (Acts out whispering in his ear, speaks:)

This is the right thing to do. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) I understand. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Servants, beat a drum as I retire from the hall, I will return to my private residence.

(Exits)

(LIU acts out greeting FEMALE LEAD) (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) What did I tell you? You simply provoked him to anger! (LIU speaks:) Sister, relax. I am going to the imperial palace in the capital. If I obtain an even a minor post, Qian Kedao, even if you are holding the position of Prefect, don't let the end of your axle rub against mine, or you will be in for it! Sister, today I will begin my long journey. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) I will send you off to the outskirts of the city to the little wine shop to give you a farewell dinner!

(ZHANG QIAN enters, speaks:) Wait for me. I, Zhang Qian, am also coming to send off Mister Liu. (LIU speaks:) This is too much trouble! Sister, before I leave, I wrote a few words, the words of the song “Ding fengbo,” this is in the mode of \textit{Shangjiao}, I am giving it to you to express my feelings.\textsuperscript{78} (Recites:)

Since it has turned spring,

\textsuperscript{77} Referring to Wang Yuanzhi, whom he just mentioned.

\textsuperscript{78} This is an actual poem of the historical poet Liu Yong.
I lament the green and sorrow over the red,
And my fragrant heart feels everything is needless and bland.

The sun rises on flowers’ tips,
The orioles warble along a belt of willows,
And I am still lying here weighed down by this fragrant quilt.

My milky warmth disappearing
My oily clouds drooping,
All day long too listless and tired to make myself up.

There is nothing I can do!
Since that heartless wretch left
There’s not been a word or a letter.
If I had known earlier it would be like this...

I regret that I did not hold back that carved saddle.
Before by that “rooster window” 79
You arranged your silken stationery and ivory writing brush
Made me match your verses.

You stayed with me all day long and did not cast me away,
I picked up my needlework and sat with you.

Now match me, 80

Do not let the days and nights of our youth to pass by with no meaning.

79 That is, his study.

80 Referring to the rhyme and rhythm of poetry.
(ZHANG acts out transcribing, speaks:) I will go back first.

(Exits)

(FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Qiqing, you go now, but what will I do? (LIU speaks:)
Sister, please calm down, I won't be gone long. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Zhuansha)

In these offices I have had to serve,
Being summoned and dispatched at arbitrary times.
From now on I will sigh and grumble
And be as polite as possible in front of officials who burn you at the touch.
If I even so much as cough, some court case will arise.
Only after the banquet is over and I arrive back home,
Do I have a moment to recall you.
This is a result of the pure songs from my white teeth,
My very conversations about matters of love,
And dances that make me sweat until my sleeves are soaked.

(Exits)
Act Two:

The second act begins with Zhang Qian reporting to Prefect Qian the departing poem that Liu wrote. Prefect Qian requests a recitation, and Zhang Qian boldly brags of his ability to remember the poem. An interesting twist in the plot occurs here because the poem contains the Prefect’s personal name that in the Prefect’s presence no one inferior to him is allowed to speak without suffering the consequences. As soon as Zhang Qian reaches the point in the poem that contains the Prefect’s name he chokes and stops speaking. He then belittles himself and claims that he “like a child” has stupidly forgotten. Instead, he presents a manuscript of the poem to Qian. When the Prefect realizes what Liu Yong has done, he decides to try to catch Xie Tianxiang in a trap so that, in the name of friendship, Liu will not be able to take her as a wife if he returns. He has Zhang Qian summon her so that she can perform the poem for him.

When Zhang Qian goes to summon Xie, she becomes alarmed. She was accustomed to responding to the call of officials, but she knows that Qian is different. In an aria she sings: “All because [Liu] lost all sense of appropriateness? And despite the fact that I am ugly and unkempt, who told him to vaunt me in front of prefect Qian?” (只因他忒過當。據妾身貌陋殘妝，誰教他大尹行將咱過窩?)81 Xie once again mentions her fear of acting inappropriately in the presence of an official. In the next aria, she directly criticizes Prefect Qian’s

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81 Act 2, Nanlü (南呂) mode: Yizhi hua, (一枝花) 54.
misunderstanding of the fact that Liu’s “weakness” for women may actually serve to make him a better minister. She sings:

Secretly he wrinkles his brow in sorrow and curses Zhang Chang,
Could he know that the wonderful talent used in the realm of clouds and rain,
Also understands how to harmonize yin and yang?"^82

背地裡鎖著眉罵張敞，
豈知他殢雨尤雲俏智量，
剛理會得燮理陰陽。

Zhang Chang was known for painting on his wife’s eyebrows and thus was viewed as a man infatuated with his wife to the point of unseemliness. Xie understands Liu’s comparison of Liu to the man is not negative, because she argues that the role of a leader, which is to “harmonize yin and yang,” would actually benefit from understanding romantic relationships between men and women.

When Xie arrives, she already knows that she will be required to perform and states that she would give her whole family’s fortune to avoid it. Before she is asked to perform Liu’s poem she sings an aria with an allusion to an anecdote about Su Shi’s 蘇軾 (1037-1101) poem “Manting fang” 滿庭芳 that made fun of Wang Anshi’s 王安石 (1021-1086) wife, and Xie is suggesting that his banishment was because of this single lyric.^83 She is extremely afraid of making a

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^82 Act 2, Liangzhou diqi, (梁州第七) 55.

^83 A discussion of Su Shi’s and Wang Anshi’s relationship and its portrayal in literature is discussed in Idema’s article: W. L. Idema, "Poet Versus Minister and Monk: Su Shi on Stage in the Period 1250-1450," T'oung Pao 73, no. 4/5 (1987): 203-5. Idema also includes a translation of the poem.
mistake like Su Shi’s and suffering the ridicule and disastrous consequences that would certainly result. Prefect Qian immediately requests that she sing the poem that Liu had composed for her to the tune Ding fengbo. She begins singing, and just as she is about to sing the Prefect’s name “Ke,” Zhang Qian coughs, causing her to realize that she is about to step into a trap. She quickly changes the word from “ke” (可) to “yi” (己). Since this change happens with the character that should rhyme in the line, it changes the entire rhyme of the ci poem from the rhyme class ge ge (歌戈) to the rhyme class qi wei (齊微). Prefect Qian tells her she must now sing the entire song with the new rhyme rather than the original one or he will punish her. The actual changes in meaning of the poem are very subtle. The most important change is the line that used to contain the Prefect’s name. Instead of her heart feeling that everything is “needless and bland” now everything “comes to an end”. This foreshadows the moment that is actually the end of her forced career as head of the guild. Xie ingeniously changes the poem from Liu’s voice to her own voice. Her impromptu display of talent confirms that her literary skills are equal to that of Liu Yong’s.

Since she successfully sings the lyric set to the new rhyme, Prefect Qian is very impressed by her talent and experiences a change of heart. Rather than punishing her, he decides to remove her name from the Entertainment Bureau registry and makes her a concubine in his home. Her performance reinforces the characterization of her as a superior literary talent in the first act. She feels undeserving of the Prefect’s graciousness because she sees her humble status as a song girl as making her unworthy of such kindness. She knows that she is not
a suitable match for Qian Ke; and is baffled by his actions. The final two arias she sings reflect her feelings that her future as a concubine is ominous due to the expectations of this new role. Xie now knows that her one desire to “marry Liu Qiqing” and “act as a free person” is now lost (指望嫁杭州柳耆卿，做個自自在人). Seeing the freedom she had experienced as an entertainer slipping away, she realizes she has avoided one trap only to fall into another.

Prefect Qian is actually the one who controls this act. He requested that Xie perform this poem, and he decides to grant her freedom from her career, and appropriately he has the final words of the scene. After Xie exits, Qian concludes the act by revealing his intentions to the audience that he has no plan to pursue a relationship with Xie, and that he is only saving her for Liu’s return. Even though Xie sang many arias and performed magnificently, she was ultimately a prop with which Qian used to control the action of the plot and create drama. If it were not for Qian, the play would appropriately conclude here, but he reveals that he has a plan to return Xie to Liu and thus the play continues.

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84 Act 2, 61.
Act Two

(PREFECT QIAN enters, speaks:)

Don’t let things bother you,

Those things that bother you drive you crazy.

I am Prefect Qian. Yesterday I ordered Zhang Qian to do something, but I have yet to see him come back to report. Servants, go keep watch at the front gate, when he arrives come and report it to me.

(ZHANG QIAN enters, speaks:) I am Zhang Qian. I am coming back after carrying out my master's order. Now I will go see him. (Acts out greeting, PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Zhang Qian, have you completed the task I gave you? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) I received your orders, and I went with those two to the little wine shop to give him a farewell dinner. Liu Qiqing composed a lyric before he left to the pattern “Ding fengbo.” I memorized it. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) You memorized it? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) I remember it so well that I could recite it forwards and backwards. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Recite it. (ZHANG QIAN recites saying:)

"Since it has turned spring,

I lament the green and sorrow over the red,

And my fragrant heart feels everything is...

(Acts out not speaking, PREFECT QIAN speaks:) What happened? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Master, I, like a child, have forgotten. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) But that is unreasonable; I thought you remembered it forwards and backwards? (ZHANG
QIAN speaks:) I, like a child, after I saw you, became afraid, and then I forgot it.

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Do you have a written copy? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Yes.

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Bring it to me to read. (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) It’s a good thing that I have it here.

(Acts out handing it over, PREFECT QIAN acts out accepting and reading it,
speaks:)

Since it has turned spring,

I lament the green and sorrow over the red,

And my fragrant heart feels everything is needless and bland.

The sun rises on flowers’ tips,

The orioles warble along a belt of willows,

And I am still lying here weighed down by this fragrant quilt.

My milky warmth disappearing

My oily clouds drooping,

All day long too listless and tired to make myself up.

There is nothing I can do!

I am angry: since that heartless wretch left

There’s not been a word or a letter.

If I had known earlier it would be like this. . . .

I regret that I did not hold back that carved saddle.

Before by that “rooster window”

You arranged your silken stationery and ivory writing brush
Made me match your verses.
You stayed with me all day long and did not cast me away,
I picked up my needlework and sat with you.
Now match me,
Do not let the days and nights of our youth to pass by with no meaning.

Wow! Qiqing, you are really talented. Now if you applied a talent like this to five syllable poems, the eight-rhymed fu, or the ten thousand word policy, what high post could you not hold! I will read it again: "From the time of spring until now grieving over the leaves and sorrowing over the blossoms, a young woman’s heart treats everything as if it were nothing," Qiqing, you have gone and rebuked me! My surname is Qian and my name is Ke, my sobriquet is Ke Dao. This use of these two words "ke ke" is obviously a sarcastic reference to me. Just a bit ago Zhang Qian said he had completely memorized the poem, but when he recited it and got to “everything”, he pretended to forget the poem when he reached the words "ke ke." If he had actually read out these two words, then he would have violated the rule of speaking my taboo formal name, I should have punished him on the spot with forty strokes of the cane. It turns out this guy really is smart!

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85 He is making a point about writing in the ci genre, which is the form of this poem. He is accusing Liu of wasting his time by writing ci, a lower form of poetry.

86 At the end of the line “treats everything as if it were nothing” the characters here are ke ke 可可 which are the same as the character that is in his name Qian Kedao 錢可道.
(ZHANG QIAN speaks:) I surely am! (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Now I will summon Xie Tianxiang to come, and have her sing this “Ding fengbo” poem,

Since it has turned spring,

I lament the green and sorrow over the red,

And my fragrant heart feels everything is needless and bland.

If she sings the two words "ke ke,” then she will have violated the rule of speaking my taboo name, then I will punish her on the spot with forty lashes. If I beat the woman Xie, then she will have violated the law and become a criminal. This will make it inconvenient for Qiqing to go to her house. Qiqing, I will carry this out because you are my friend. I will end the morning Yamen hours and retire to the rear hall, Zhang Qian, use my name to summon Miss Xie here! (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Understood.

(Acts out summoning, speaks:) Is Xie Tianxiang at home? (FEMALE LEAD enters, speaks:) Who is calling at the door? (Acts out greeting, speaks:) It turns out to be brother Zhang Qian, why did you call me? (ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Sister Xie, My lord summons you in his name! (FEMALE LEAD sings)

NANLÜ MODE: (Yizhi hua)

Normally being summoned by an official I can relax my kohl black brows in joy,

But today a throat calling me to service rings with a summons.
It turns out to be you, a ruthless head clerk,\(^{87}\)

I would have said, “who was yelling in front of me?”

I just put on a smiling face to respond—

How can I let him see my face in such a bad situation as this,

All because he\(^{88}\) lost all sense of appropriateness?

And despite the fact I am ugly and unkempt,

Who told him to vaunt me in front of Prefect Qian?

\((Liangzhou\ diqi)\)

This is not a transaction involving Xie Tianxiang sending bribes,

It was that Liu Qiqing who became negligently unrestrained after drinking.

This Lord remembers his grudges and will not let them go easily,

How can I avoid being implicated in this?

There is no way to prevent it.

When I think how inappropriately I was used,

And that you didn't do anything to help

What feeling lies behind your summons?

When I think my talented man, now gone. . . .

Stop! Stop! Stop!

\(^{87}\) She calls him a head clerk, which here is used as his pronoun. He was the top servant, or head clerk of Prefect Qian.

\(^{88}\) I.e., Liu Yong when he became drunk and repeatedly bothered Prefect Qian by asking him to take care of Miss Xie.
I must control my errant heart I can't discuss it,
He! He! He!
He originally wanted to be my advocate,
Och! Och! Och!
Who expected him to stir up this wind and frost?
This grandfather is calculating and considering,
And wants to become chancellor all in a single step—
Secretly he wrinkles his brow in sorrow and curses Zhang Chang\textsuperscript{89}
Could he know that the wonderful talent used in the realm of clouds and
rain\textsuperscript{90},
Also understands how to harmonize yin and yang?\textsuperscript{91}

\textit{(ZHANG QIAN speaks:)} Sister, don’t go right now. Wait for me to hide, and then
you can go to see him. \textit{(FEMALE LEAD acts out meeting, speaks:) That guy's face is
so cold! \textit{(Sings.)}}

\textit{(Gewei)}

I see him with his serious appearance sitting right next to the silk curtain,

\textsuperscript{89} Zhang Chang 張敞 (d. 48 BC) was known for painting his wife’s eyebrows,
which was seen as degrading to his masculine identity. Here Liu Yong is
compared to Zhang Chang.

\textsuperscript{90} Clouds and rain, here is a metaphor for romantic love between a man and
woman.

\textsuperscript{91} This is a phrase used for a great Minister. The ability of the minister to
correctly apportion yin and yang indicates his understanding of the people and
also legitimizes Liu Yong’s use of ci poetry.
How can this figure as “lovely as ethers of spring filling the painted hall!”

What I am most worried about is when I have to send out a song right at the beginning,

But if there were just one girl performing here,

Then I guarantee I would squander all my family fortune until she was rewarded.\(^{92}\)

(ZHANG QIAN speaks:) Sister, if you go in, be very respectful. (FEMALE LEAD acts out meeting, speaks:) Ascending the hall is the Head of the Guild, Xie Tianxiang. I sincerely pay my respects. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Oh, is this Xie Tianxiang of Liu Qiqing's heart? (FEMALE LEAD sings)

(He xinlang)

Ai, Thinking of the Dongpo's "Manting fang" \(^{93}\)

Just say one phrase "Incense smoke curls upward from the engraved dish,"

And already disaster descends from heaven! \(^{94}\)

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\(^{92}\) Meaning that she would do anything to not have to perform. She knows that this cannot turn out well.

\(^{93}\) This poem by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) also known as Dongpo, is called “Man Ting Fang” 滿庭芳. This refers to a spurious anecdote about Su Shi’s poem in which he criticized Wang Anshi’s wife. Xie is suggesting that this one lyric is what led to the banishment of Su Shi, and so she compares herself to him because she is worried that for singing one wrong lyric it could also lead to her demise. For the complete Chinese text see Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋 comp., \textit{Quan Song ci} 全宋詞 (Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 278. And for a translation of the poem see, W. L. Idema, "Poet Versus Minister and Monk: Su Shi on Stage in the Period 1250-1450," \textit{T'oung Pao} 73, no. 4/5 (1987): 203-5.

\(^{94}\) She may be reading this as a play on her own name: “incense with which he thanks heaven.” The implication is that talent leads to disaster.
I was being ridiculed, then and had nothing to stop it
I beg you, my lord, with resonant magnanimity
Why don’t you carefully think it over?

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) How can you stand before me attempting to bribe me?

(FEMALE LEAD sings:)

Even if I bribed you as much as I could,
How could I be taken off the tax registers, and no longer a prostitute,
Cast off this baseness and become a good person?
He was only idly making up lies while he was drinking.
If you calculate that I am originally of the class who responds to summons
at Kaifeng Prefecture,
How could I be the Xie Tianxiang in Liu Qiqing's heart?

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Zhang Qian, bring the wine so that I may drink one cup, and teach Xie Tianxiang to sing a song. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Command the mode. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) The shangjiao mode. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Command the format of the song. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) “Ding Fengbo.”

(FEMALE LEAD sings:)

Since it has turned spring,
I lament the green and sorrow over the red,
And my fragrant heart feels everything

(ZHANG acts out coughing.) (FEMALE LEAD changes her speaking:).
(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) This kind of intelligence and resolute is what is called talent, and your nature is honest and even-tempered. I had her sing the song "From the time of spring until now grieving over the leaves and sorrowing over the blossoms, a young woman’s heart treats everything as it were nothing "ke ke." If she sang "ke ke" these two words, then she would have broken the law that one cannot speak a superior official's taboo name, and I would have punished her on the spot with forty lashes. Listening to Zhang Qian when he coughed, she took the words "ke ke" and changed them to "yi yi"95. Oh but this "ke" word belongs to the rhyme class "ge ge,"96 "yi" this word has the rhyme of "qi wei". Now Xie Tianxiang, I have an ancient rhyme book in front of me, if you lose the rhyme, mistake the level and inflected tones it will be off, or mess up the modes of gong and diao97 they will be in chaos, and on the spot I will punish you with forty lashes. Now sing it in accordance with the qi and wei!! If you sing it and it is mistaken, Zhang Qian, prepare a big club!

(FEMALE LEAD sings:)

Since it has turned spring,

I lament the green and sorrow over the red,

95 She changes keke 可可 to yiyi 己已.

96 The word ke 可 belonged to the class gege 歌歌, and yi 己 belonged to the class qiwei 齊微. Because ke was the first word in the end rhyme pattern of the ci poem, this forced her to change the rest of the rhyme in order to correctly perform the poem.

97 Gong 宫 and diao 调 refer to the key and mode in which the poem would be performed.
Everything in a young woman’s heart comes to an end.

The sun rises on flowers' tips,

The orioles warble along a belt of willows,

And I am still sleeping here weighed down by this fragrant quilt.

My milky warmth disappearing

My oily clouds drooping,

All day long too listless and tired

She combs her hair and washes it.

Alas, when she thinks ever since that heartless lover left,

There have been no news and no letters.

If I had known earlier it would be like this,

Regretting at first I did not tie up the carved saddle.

At the rooster window I arrange elegant stationary and ivory brush,

I would have restrained him and sung about the flavor of this situation.

All day long stay with me; don't abandon me,

I pick up my needlework and sit across from you,

And together with me,

We could avoid causing the days and nights of our youth to be wasted emptily.

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Wow! Now I know why Liu Qiqing loves her! After I have seen this, I can't help but be moved myself. Zhang Qian, come here, you should act as a matchmaker, and I will give you a generous reward. You say to Xie Tianxiang: "I won't give you the status as the first wife of a great man, but as the second wife." Today in the registry of musicians, after I have removed her
name, give her something to wrap her hair, something to clothe her, and an embroidered handkerchief. Zhang Qian, speak with her!

(ZHANG QIAN acts out meeting with the FEMALE LEAD, speaks:) Sister, the master said: "You will not have the status as wife of a great man, but as a concubine. Today in the registry of musicians your name will be removed, here is something to wrap your hair, something to clothe you, and an embroidered handkerchief.”

What do you think of this? (FEMALE LEAD sings.)

(Muyang guan)
My lord, your reputation is spread to all the empire,
My status is singer in the Entertainment Bureau;
Consider that I am just a singsong girl who performs.
You are a famous Confucian of these times,
And I just entertain some guests, and sing them a few songs.
I am a golden floss willow that faces the road,
You are a golden pillar that spans the ocean;
I feel your mind is not seeing correctly
Your heart covets the wrong things—
How can it be a match of equals,
A pair of peers?

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Zhang Qian, have Tianxiang sent here to my residence.

(FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Hangzhou's Liu Qiqing, you had better stop thinking of me! (Sings)
(Er sha)

Your little student candidate’s future is like “a fish tossed in the waves,”
The future of great men is like a “dog testing the water.”
When we who are concubines in service enter the bedchamber,
It is for nothing more than giving him a washcloth,
Where we can show off a bit.
When I put on the pinafore is when I will draw near him,
But when I comb his hair my breasts will barely touch his spine,
When will this ever be: “a girl and a boy become a pair”?

(Speaks:) All I wanted was to marry that Liu Qiqing of Hangzhou, and act as a
free person, but now how is it possible? (Sings:)

(Reprise)

Stop, stop, stop,
I just escaped a blow from his club but not from his cudgel,
I got out of the bamboo basket but went into a hamper—
He’s caught me in a silky net.
Don’t try to get out,
Don’t hold out hope—
It’s just like a hundred foot door of stone,

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98 This is a metaphor meaning the future is dangerous.

99 This means that she escaped being beaten for the lyric, but now she has to serve as Prefect Qian’s second wife. It is roughly equivalent to “going from bad to worse.”
There’s no way I can think to move it.

Even if I used up every bit of cleverness,

It would do no more than break my heart.

I can't find any “golden cicada escaping its cocoon,” — that is an outright lie.\textsuperscript{100}

\begin{flushright}
(Exits.)
\end{flushright}

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Zhang Qian, take Xie Tianxiang to my private residence.

(Recites:) I have a matter on my heart, and have not dared to clearly speak it. Wait for Liu Qiqing, he will explain the central issues.

\begin{flushright}
(Exits.)
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{100} Essentially she is saying that there will be no trick to escape, the saying is a complete lie.
Act Three:

Three years pass between the end of the second act and the beginning of the third. In Xie’s opening lines she indicates that she has “completely erased her singsong girl’s heart.” In the first two arias of the act, she expresses her feelings of loneliness and her grief because she lacks companionship. These arias appropriately set the erotic theme that is played with throughout this act. In her previous life, she was always being watched and scrutinized as a singsong girl and now as a concubine she is being completely ignored in Qian’s home. She expresses her loneliness and indirectly a need for greater intimacy. It is understandable that a person who went from a career as a prostitute to being an ignored concubine would experience withdrawal symptoms.

Two other concubines enter the scene and question her about her acts of intimacy with Qian. She replies that she has never been intimate with him and blames it on her humble and lowly background that makes her a poor match for him. The other concubines encourage her to vie for the Prefect’s attention and she explains that she has a profound fear of saying anything that might offend him. The girls reassure her that she has not yet done anything wrong. She repeats the fear of having the old facts of her life resurface: “I have to measure the tempo and pace of the situation. . .all those old ‘rights and wrongs’ will be carried to the Prefect’s ears” (我則是斟量著緊慢遲疾. . .相公的耳朵裡風聞那舊是非).

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101 Act 3, 68.
102 Act 3, Gun xiuqiu (遊繡球) and Tang xiucai, (徜秀才) 69-71.
She remains careful and hesitant. Even though she has been removed from the list of entertainers, she is still terrified of offending Qian or of embarrassing herself. There is significant tension within her that builds to the climax of the play as she tries to cope with her fears and her desires.

One of the concubines then suggests they should go to a pavilion to gamble. They agree and begin a discussion on gambling. Gambling was certainly one of the most vulgar hobbies of Yuan society.\textsuperscript{103} Gambling was a release of tension for Xie in the same way that having intercourse was a release of tension. The fact that the girls regularly gamble is likely representative of their sexual frustrations. As the scene unfolds and Xie Tianxiang competes against the other concubines, the gambling also takes on the metaphorical guise that parallels competition among the concubines for Qian’s affection. Xie wins each time. This is a pivotal scene in the drama since Xie, who has considered her life as a prostitute then a concubine unlucky, now has unexpected turns of good fortune. The girls gamble with dice or \textit{shai\[zi\]} （ Şu ) which can also mean erotic or lewd, further strengthening the erotic undertones of the act. As they are gambling, Prefect Qian enters the pavilion unbeknownst to Xie. He then rather maliciously teases her by placing his cane on her shoulder, but she mistakes it for the concubines and curses them. When she realizes it is the Prefect putting his cane on her shoulder and not the women, she is mortified by her behavior. This is the realization of her greatest fear: she has embarrassed herself and offended Qian and must now suffer the consequences. She sings:

\begin{quote}
“Yuan zaju zhong de dudou youxi xisu,” 1-2.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{103}
Frightening me so much I promptly fall to my knees,
Unconsciously rain tears in torrents,
He came slipping stealthily up behind me;
Standing there without a word.
I see those two have craftily and cleverly crept away to avoid him,
My lord teased me with his walking stick,
I should never have lost proper form of address in that searingly sarcastic
mouth of mine.
This is Tianxiang’s offense.104

唬的我連忙的跪膝，
不由我淚雨似扒推；
可又早七留七力來到我跟底，
不言語立地；
我見他出留出律兩個都回避。
相公將必留不剌杖杖相調戲，
我不該必 丟不搭口內失尊卑，
這的是天香犯罪。

Qian, recognizing her fear, asks her if she wants to be spared by performing for
him, and he picks the topic of “dice” on which she must create a song. He is not
truly demonstrating sympathy for her in this action. Instead he creates a form of
courtship between them and by choosing such an erotic topic he is certainly
taking the opportunity to tease her and taking advantage of his superiority in their
relationship. She cleverly constructs an appropriate poem in which she compares
herself to the dice, the “lowly bones,” (低微骨) which are placed in Qian’s hands
and left to his whims. She articulates her submissiveness and he controls this
erotic encounter. The dice also serve as an excellent metaphor for her life, in that
they represent luck and for Xie she is totally helpless when it comes to controlling
her own fate. Qian recites a poem to match the one she has just recited. He also

104 Act 3, Zui taiping, (醉太平) 74.
uses the metaphor and says, “The color of the dice has a significant meaning”\textsuperscript{105} (色缘有深意). Again the term here for dice can also be translated beauty or desire for a woman. This line could also be read “There was originally a deep intention in the fate of this beauty.” Her talent once again saves her, but it is clear that she is not only talented, but is also quite fortunate.

Prefect Qian displays “moral” disinterest in Xie in order to respect his friendship with Liu Yong, but it is clear that the emotional and sexual tension in their exchange of poems represents the climax of the play. Qian informs Xie that he will select an auspicious day to make her a second wife. She assumes that he means he will take her for himself as a second wife. This once again could represent a resolution to the play if it were not for the scheme that Qian has planned. Once again, this demonstrates the authority of Qian in the play as the character who creates drama and ultimately determines the narrative of the play.

Xie is very skeptical about his promise and therefore tests him. Her anxiety about the match between her lowly status and his high position continues to plague her. In three separate arias, she expresses a concern about the certainty of his promises. She is secure in the strength of her own analytical abilities and cannot accept Qian’s inappropriate promise without question. She is convinced of her ability to read others and sings in the final aria:

\begin{quote}
You are not being sincere and you take me to be inexperienced,
And this is not in the flower lanes and willow alleys,
And those “hollow branches”,
And “broken down bridges in the fog,”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{105} Act 3, 75.
It is me who can recognize you! 106

你不委心為自家沒見識，
又不是花街中、柳陌裡，
那一個微梢虛、霧塌橋，
渾身我可也認的你！

The two images are metaphors for customers who feign sincerity. On the outside, a branch seems sound, but it turns out to be hollow, or a bridge that is seemingly intact inside the fog turns out to be broken as one loses one’s footing. She fears that although Qian makes these promises, he will ultimately rescind his words. Incorrectly guessing that Prefect Qian does not have good intentions, she is nevertheless right in seeing through to the fact that he is not intending to keep her around. Once knowing that no matter how pleased Qian was with her talent, it did not lead to any sexual relationship, she assumes that her ability to improvise a poem on the spot cannot possibly mean that they are going to become a true husband and wife. From this point on, her life changes and she is ultimately able to attain her greatest desire, but it is only as a result of acting in a way that was her greatest fear.

106 Act 3 Shawei, (煞尾) 77-8.
Act Three

(FEMALE LEAD enters and speaks:) I am Xie Tianxiang. It has already been three years since I entered into the home of the great Prefect Qian, and I have completely erased my singsong girl’s heart. (Sings:)

ZHENGONG MODE: (Duanzheng hao)

I was always in a world of wind and dust, acting the singsong girl,
But I’ve only seen a few banquets,
And coming home I have to be a free ghost;
Now I have been placed in a cage with no bottom!

(Gun xiuqiu)

When I rise in the morning I deliver water for him to wash his face,
When night comes I have to spread out the bed and pile up the duvet,
Everything I do in service is all inside the gauze curtain, 107
I just now unfolded my bedding
Just like a lonely ghost,
And can't help but sleep in the fetal position.
For three whole years I have “had the name but not the reality.” 108
Originally I was a companion to Liu Yong, having sex and a romantic affair,

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107 She is referring to a bed. Chinese beds were very large with curtains around the perimeter.

108 This is an idiom meaning that she has had the name “wife,” but that has not been her reality. She has had virtually no relationship with Prefect Qian.
Now I am the wife of Prefect Qian, receiving his care but held at a
distance—

Who could have guessed?

(Two FEMALES, dressed as beautiful concubines enter; one speaks:) We are two concubines of Prefect Qian. Today we have nothing to do, and we are off to see our older sister, Miss Xie. (Acts out greeting FEMALE LEAD, speaks:) Sister, we have come straightaway to see you today. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) My two sisters, please sit. (Two FEMALES speak:) Sister, you have been inside this house for three years, has our master ever been intimate with you? (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Tang xiucai)

If ever spent the night,

Only the heavens and the earth would know—

Who knows whether he sleeps crossways or longways in his bed!

Compared to when I was first summoned here,

He makes himself even more scarce.

I think that my original background

Was just too low and insignificant,

He was afraid of I would besmirch his magnificent form.

(Two FEMALES speak:) Sister, although it is like this, you should try to be more intimate. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Gun xiuqiu)
You older sisters are willing to instruct me,

But isn’t it out of malice?

But, in front of our lord, would I dare say anything that would offend him?

(Two FEMALES speak:) Sister, you’ve done nothing wrong. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

You say “I have done nothing wrong,”

Putting it that way,

Can you sisters do such a thing or not?

I have to measure the tempo and pace of the situation,

I pressure He Yan with all my charm, but he won’t apply any powder

And besiege that fierce Zhang Chang, but he isn’t willing to blacken my brows.

I have to recognize my proper station.

(Two FEMALES speak:) I venture to ask you sister, have you collected all of master Liu the Seventh’s "Collection of Musical Poems" yet? (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Tang xiucai)

Don't bring up that dashing Liu the Seventh,

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109 He Yan (190-249) was married to the Princess of Wei and was known to wear women’s clothes and put white powder on his face. This term refers to men who enjoy wearing embellished clothing and take care of their looks like a woman.

110 This means that she does not deserve to be the wife of the Prefect, and that her proper station was as a singsong girl.
If he hears here is there,
All those old “rights and wrongs” will be carried to the Prefect’s ears.
Don't just be concerned about those lines,
The stench of rotten yellow pickles I remember too well. ¹¹¹

(TWO FEMALES speak:) Sister, but which lines are they? Recite them so we may listen. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Qiong hexi)
Sisters, who dares speak of that “Collection of Musical Poems” I have tucked inside my sleeve,
And which has ruined my whole life.
But just remember, when meeting in front of others
What we speak of now, never speak of again.

(Two FEMALES speak:) Let’s all go to the Pavilion of Bamboo Clouds to gamble.
(FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Alright, sisters, let’s go. (Sings:)

(Gun xiuqiu)
Thinking of those days when we played elephant chess,
We reached an agreement that we would gamble for a handkerchief,
You took that jade decorated rattan chest of mine but didn't put anything in it and returned it empty.

¹¹¹ Scholars stank because they were given a stipend for food, but it only consisted of pickled vegetables.
And just recently,

On a day it rained, you lost a pair of embroidered shoes to me, \(^{112}\)

But whenever we talked again, you never raised the issue.

Why would you break trust for just a little betting game?

And turn an ugly face over just a bit of profit or loss,

And think I am not smart enough to catch on.

(Two FEMALES speak:) Sister I threw a few dice, I lost. Sister, you should have a throw. (FEMALE LEAD acts out taking the dice) (Sings:)

(Tang xiucai)

One, four, five are cast together as a “pinched ten;”

Two, three, two make a “bookended seven;”

Casting it one more time,

I should get, one, two, and three, a “rat’s tail.” \(^{113}\)

The one gambling for money isn’t happy about this.

Sister, you cast again.

(Two FEMALES speak:) Wait, I will cast again. . . . I lost again. Your turn to roll the dice. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Dai guduo)

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\(^{112}\) One sister gambled for a handkerchief, and the other one for the shoes.

\(^{113}\) These were names of specific combinations of numbers on the dice usually representing the image that the numbers evoked, just like in gambling rolling two die with the outcome of one pip on each is called, “snake eyes”.
I take these dice and set them down gently in the dice cup,
Two, three, and a five I rolled a “raven-black ten,”
Gambling without betting money, I beat you twice.
It’s all really clear from what just happened,
We don’t need to bring up the dice I’m throwing now—
Look, sister, I’ve got a “full house,” three fives!
What do you have to say now that I have won today?

(PREFECT QIAN enters leaning on a cane) (Two FEMALES surprised, exit.) (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Tang xiucai)
Don’t be impolite and begin creating a stir,
I will never ever wrangle with you,
Set your stinking corpse down
And sit quietly by the side.

(QIAN acts out taking his cane and setting it on the FEMALE LEAD’S right shoulder)
(FEMALE LEAD acts out moving it, sings:) Stop fooling around!

(QIAN acts out taking his cane and setting it on the FEMALE LEAD’S left shoulder)
(FEMALE LEAD acts out moving it, sings:) Stinky donkey’s hoof! (QIAN again acts out placing the cane on the FEMALE LEAD’S right shoulder) (FEMALE LEAD acts out grasping it firmly and turning her head, sings:) Who are you? (PREFECT QIAN
scares:) Tianxiang, who are you scolding? (FEMALE LEAD acts out crouching in fear) (Sings:)

(Zui taiping)
Frightening me so much I promptly fall to my knees,
Unconsciously rain tears in torrents,
He came slipping stealthily up behind me;
Standing there without a word.
I see those two have craftily and cleverly crept away to avoid him,
My lord teased me with his walking stick,
I should never have lost proper form of address in that searingly sarcastic mouth of mine.
This is Xie Tianxiang’s offense.

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Tianxiang, are you afraid? (FEMALE LEAD speaks:)

Obviously, I am afraid. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Do you want to be spared?
(FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Of course I want to be spared. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:)
Since you want to be spared, give me a verse—poem or lyric—to look at, and I will spare you. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Please choose a topic. (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Simply take these dice from the cup as a topic. (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) I have a poem. (Recites a poem:)

Once I take these lowly bones,114
And placed them in the hands of the Prefect,

114 She is actually referring to her own body as well as the dice.
I anticipated he would hate their being besmirched,
And cast them away, leaving them to the eastern wind.

(PREFECT QIAN acts out laughing, speaks:) A sage said: "The affections are stirred within and take on form in words. If words alone are inadequate, we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, we sing them. If singing them is inadequate, unconsciously our hands dance them and our feet tap them."\(^{115}\)

The general intent of her four lines of poetry is that I took her as my concubine, and she’s been in my house for three years but I have paid no attention to her. How could she know my intention? Tianxiang, I will match these four lines of poetry. I will recite them; you listen. (Recites a poem:)

Just because you get four and six,\(^{116}\)
I temporarily lifted you in my hands.

The color of the dice has a significant meaning, \(^{117}\)
Who speaks of “horse and cow on the wind”?\(^{118}\)

\(^{115}\) This is a quotation from the Great Preface 大序 of the Book of Poetry 詩經 and the translation is quoted from Stephen Owen, Readings in Chinese Literary Thought, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series, Vol. 30. (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), 41.

\(^{116}\) Referring to types of poetry, meaning he knows how to write poetry.

\(^{117}\) The term se 色, used for “dice” also means “beauty,” so the last two lines could be understood as “There was originally a deep intention in the fate of this beauty, who says that I don’t care?”

\(^{118}\) This reference is from “Duke Xi’s Fourth Year” 僖公四年 in the Spring and Autumn Zuo Chronicles 春秋左傳 and is a metaphor meaning “who says there is nothing between us.” That is, there is a reason why he has kept her from harm.
Tianxiang, you have been in my house three years. Stop worrying, I will select a special day and hour, and within two days I will establish you as a second wife. What do you think? (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Ersha)

Normally he never paid attention to me, it was all no interest,
Today he has changed his mind, and there’s no hint of delay.
I fear my lord's words are not quite right,
And as he spoke them to me, I begin little by little to worry about them.
My lord is not laughing and playing,
And is not drunk,
And is not deluded;
I want to say these are crazy words spoken while asleep—
Are you not a pure and just judge?

(Speaks:) My lord, could it be a lie? (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) I have never once drunk wine, how could I have lied? I simply cherish your intelligence and talent and feel sympathy for your vexation and grievous crying. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Yisha)

My Lord, once you have uttered these words, how can you regret them?
A four-in-hand of galloping horses cannot chase them down.
I will come and go from this orchid hall,

For the complete Chinese passage see Yang, Bojun, 楊伯峻(1909-1992), Chun qiu Zuo zhu zuo zheng 春秋左传注 (Beijing Shi: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 289.
Reside in a decorated hall,
Have a fragrant cart to travel in,
Sleep within gauze curtains.
My lord, it has been three whole years,
I have been well instructed,
And there has been waxing or waning,
I never thought that this morning you would wrongly love this foul prostitute
I weep because of your kindness to me.

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Tianxiang, Go to the rear hall to change clothes. (Exits.)

(FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Shawei)
This time I have elegantly applied my talented skills,
Before I trembled with lack of energy.
My lord, even if you put your words up on a stele,
I still would not dare trust them completely.
You are such a great official,
With such an important position—
You gave out your promise all too quickly.
You are not being sincere and you take me to be inexperienced,
And this is not in the flower lanes and willow alleys,
And those “hollow branches”,

77
And “broken down bridges in the fog,”\textsuperscript{119}

It is me who can recognize you!

(Exits.)

\textsuperscript{119} These two lines are used for customers who feign sincerity. They are like branches that seem to be sound, but are hollow, or like broken down bridges in the fog on which one can easily lose one’s footing. The implicit meaning is that because she can recognize the shows and shifts of customers and will not be taken in, she also recognizes or hopes that he is not that kind of person.
Act Four:

The final act begins with Prefect Qian telling Zhang Qian that Liu Yong has passed the examinations as head of the list and has returned. He instructs Zhang Qian to insist that Liu Yong come for a banquet to celebrate his accomplishment. Zhang Qian goes to find Liu Yong, who has been participating in the traditional three-day parade of the top scholar in the examinations through the streets of Hangzhou. Upon his return to the stage, Liu recites a poem about his wasted youth and his transformation into a person of good character and reputation demonstrated by his success in the examinations. He immediately moves from discussing this success to the fact that he believes his old friend Qian has betrayed him. He goes only grudgingly to the banquet.

In the opening scenes, Liu was so besotted with wine and women that he caused Qian to become irate, and in his scene of return, he refuses to drink, “I am not the same man today compared to who I was in the past. There are restrictions that come with my post, what I think about now are success and honor, how could I dare drink wine?” (小官今非昔比，官守所拘，功名在念，豈敢饮酒?)

Even though Liu believes that he is a changed person, he is still foolish. He has just expressed his fury that Prefect Qian has presumably stolen his girlfriend, but rather than confront the issue at hand, he simply squirms under the pressure that Qian puts on him to drink. Qian continues to mock and tease Liu about not drinking wine in order to arouse and aggravate him, which Liu does not address but instead is manipulated by Qian. Although it appears that Liu has learned a

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120 Act 4, 86.
degree of responsibility from his experience at the examinations, he is still a very weak and humorous character. Prefect Qian then whispers to Zhang Qian to summon Xie Tianxiang to come and greet his guest.

We then see Xie Tianxiang in her boudoir at peace, brewing up an ointment for her skin. It is clear that, once Xie Tianxiang became the Prefect’s second wife, she found the contentment that she has desired the entire play. Her tone and confidence have completely changed. It is here, in Qian’s home where she has the greatest mental freedom and the least amount of responsibility. As she turns her attention toward making lotions she realizes:

Compared to when I was that person waiting for the Music Procurer from the Yamen gate,
Today I am no longer so filthy.
Although I am not some house or mansion’s main wife,
I am still a concubine of a great person,
Which is better than being Head of the Guild at that brothel.  

比俺們前樂探等著官身，
我今日個不醜醜。
雖不是宅院裡夫人，
也是那大人家姬妾，
強似那上廳的祇候。

As a singsong girl she would have been constantly interrupted and called upon to perform at any time. She has finally abandoned her low status, trading it for a life of leisure and quietude in Qian’s house. She does not appear lonely, but satisfied to live within this guarded space where she can act and think for herself. She has accepted a life that no longer includes Liu Yong. Even though her physical space

121 Act 4 Zui chunfeng (醉春風), 87-8.
is not as free as when she was a singsong girl, because she is now confined to one home, her mental space has blossomed in the daily routine of her life: she no longer has the anxiety of being scrutinized by men nor the fear of acting improperly. As she takes joy in the fact that she is now free, she is called into the front room of Qian Ke’s estate.

Xie decides to peer into the front chambers to see who is the special guest that Prefect Qian is entertaining. She immediately recognizes that it is Liu who has returned from the examinations. Her reaction to him is more of a resentment that he abandoned her, and she reverts to her old fear thinking that this is Qian’s plan to embarrass her in front of him. Once she enters the room, she acts properly and does not show any favor or emotion toward Liu. She reasserts her loyalty to Qian, because she assumes that he has planned to make her his wife. Qian tells her to encourage Liu to drink, which she misunderstands because she thinks Qian is just trying to assuage Liu’s anger and rekindle their friendship. In her discomfort, she begins singing and tells Qian to not blame her if this plan does not turn out well. She compares her feelings of discomfort to her days as the head of the guild and all of the freedom that she has just experienced is instantly taken away, “I have no freedom of movement now.” (我如今在這裡不自由). Qian finally interrupts the scene and explains his original motive.

Qian explains his whole plan from the beginning of the play. He recalls his disapproval of Liu because of the time Liu spent with Xie as well as Liu’s neglect

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122 Act 4, *Shang xiaolou* (上小楼) reprise, (幺篇) 90.
of the pursuit of success. He then describes the scene with the recitation of the *ci* lyric and that Xie was tested while reciting it because it contained his taboo name. After her performance and his change of heart, Qian decided at that moment to protect Xie by taking her as a concubine. He assures Liu that he has never laid a hand on her. In doing this, he restores the friendship between the two of them that was previously destroyed. It is unclear as to whether the purpose of restoring their friendship was to illustrate a Confucian philosophical understanding of a true friendship, or whether it was simply a byproduct of Qian Ke’s scheme. The stronger argument seems to be that it was Xie’s talent that caused Qian Ke to have a change of heart, which was unrelated to his friendship with Liu Yong.  

Qian also lives up to his reputation that he touted at the beginning of the play because of his concern for Liu Yong in his new position. Qian alludes to one of Xie’s early arias in the wedge in which she hoped that the mythological “simurgh glue” would once again bring the two back together and repair the metaphorical string that was broken once she and Liu were separated (鸞膠續斷弦).  

Qian ends his monologue with the line that gives the play its title: this scheme was the favor bestowed upon Xie Tianxiang.  

Xie sings three arias reflecting on the events of the past three years and her excitement in being reunited with Liu. Her character has changed significantly


\[124\] Act 4, 93.
from the beginning of the play; she has become completely tame and
domesticated at this point and believes that she is no longer a lowly singsong girl.
Her unconventional role as a singsong girl transforms into a normative role as a
domestic wife, which is what she desired at the beginning. It is in this role
reversal that scholars suggest Guan Hanqing is criticizing society, but this is
simply the reality of gender roles in a strict hierarchical society. The final aria of
the play illustrates Xie’s complete shock that her life could have been so
fortunate. Even though on the surface she thinks of her life as unlucky, she is
actually fortunate throughout the entire play.

Although the fourth act resolves Prefect Qian’s scheme, it does not
completely resolve all tensions in the play. The more important discussion
regarding this final act is understanding why there are issues left unresolved and
unaddressed. At the beginning of the play, Xie indicates that her ultimate desire is
to be free of her career as a prostitute, but once this is granted to her, she realizes
that she is still unfulfilled; she lacks intimacy with and attention from a man.
Once Prefect Qian decides to make her a second wife, it is clear that she has
completely moved on from her relationship with Liu Yong. In fact, when she sees
Liu again, she resents him for abandoning her. Consequently, once Qian reveals
his original motive, her arias about her excitement that they are reunited seem to
be forced. It is difficult to understand her songs as expressing genuine happiness,
and thus she obfuscates the sense of true resolution in the play. Their reuniting is
not one of two people madly in love but instead Xie is forced to be with the man
whom she feels abandoned her. Liu never once expresses his feelings of love to
Xie, but only his gratitude to Qian, further giving the impression of unresolved tension. Since Liu has not proven himself to be a scholar worthy of respect or a man of conviction, he still appears as weak, and it almost seems as though he is the one who is unworthy of Xie and undeserving of his good fortune. The fact that the play actually concludes with the resolution of Qian’s scheme is further evidence that his actions control the narrative, and he is the one who occupies the most important role in the play.
Act Four

(PREFECT QIAN leading ZHANG QIAN enters, speaks:) I am Prefect Qian. Who ever expected Liu Qiqing to pass as “head of the list” in a single try, he has been on the streets parading for three days.\(^{125}\) Zhang Qian, prepare to lay out a banquet. You go out on the street, and block him. Tell him Prefect Qian invites him to dine; if he is not willing to come at that time, you simply take his horse's saddle, and don't let him go on, make sure you invite him to come. If he comes, report it to me so I may know.

(Exits.)

(LIU riding a horse leading attendants enters, recites a poem:)

In former days so befouled with her, nothing to brag about,

Today completely unrestrained and free, no bounds to my thoughts.

Completely satisfied in the spring winds, my horse’s hooves are quick,

“In one day I see all of the flowers\(^ {126}\) in Chang'an.”\(^ {127}\)

I am Liu Yong. After Xie Tianxiang and I separated, I went to the imperial capital and, in one try I scored highest on the exams. I borrowed the prime minister’s entourage and have been celebrating on the street for three days as top graduate. I

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\(^{125}\) Liu passed the imperial examinations with the highest score, and it was customary to parade in the streets for three days afterward.

\(^{126}\) These flowers also refer to women.

\(^{127}\) Chang’an 長安 is modern day Xi’an 西安.
heard that Prefect Qian married Xie Tianxiang. Qian Kedao, you knew perfectly well that Miss Xie was the person in my heart. How could I bear to see you? Servants, clear the road, slowly go on.

(ZHANG QIAN enters *speaks:* Head-of-the-list, Prefect Qian has an invitation for you! (LIU *speaks:* I won't go. (ZHANG QIAN pulls on the horse, *speaks:*) No matter what, “I am inviting” you to go see Prefect Qian. Come!

(All Exit.)

(PREFECT QIAN enters, *speaks:* This morning Zhang Qian invited Liu Qiqing to come, how come I don't see him? (ZHANG QIAN and LIU enter together, [ZHANG QIAN] *speaks:*) Top Scholar, wait one moment; I will go report that you are here.

(Acts out reporting, *speaks:*) The Head-of-the-list you wanted is here. (PREFECT QIAN *speaks:*) Tell him to come in.

(Acts out greeting LIU) (PREFECT QIAN *speaks:*) Brother, there is a day to have luster, and there is a day to have success; isn’t this great! Bring the wine, today I offer my brother congratulations. (Acts out taking the wine, *speaks*) Drink a full cup. (LIU *speaks:*) I don’t have much capacity; I won’t drink it! (PREFECT QIAN *speaks:*) In the past all you thought about was wine and women, so why won’t you drink today? (LIU *speaks*) I am not the same man today compared to who I was in the past. There are restrictions that come with my post, what I think about now are success and honor, how could I dare drink wine? (PREFECT QIAN, *speaks:*) In such a case your success will be a short time in coming. You have really
achieved great scholarly honor at this time. You really won't drink wine, could it be that you have a grudge against me? Zhang Qian, come here. *(Acts out whispering in his ear, speaks:)* It must be this way... *(ZHANG QIAN speaks:)* I understand.

*(Acts out summoning, speaks:)* Madame Xie, my lord has a guest in his front chambers, please come Madame!

*(FEMALE LEAD speaks:)* How could I ever think I would be so well off! *(Sings:)*

**ZHONG LŪ MODE: (Fendie’er)**

Before I take off this apron,

I’ll first use up that sweet smelling soap made out of wheat husk liquor,

I will warm up just enough to smooth it on the surface of my hand;

I will mix it with some powder,

And add to it the dew from a hedge rose;

I’ll break open the fragrant oil of the liquid ambar tree,

I am afraid the tip of the jujube branch will scorch it and make the oil stink.

*(Zui chunfeng)*

How would I dare deeply dip a finger into it to spread on?

I should use a cotton fluff to twirl in it,

Compared to when I was that person waiting for the Music Procurer from the Yamen gate,
Today I am no longer so filthy.

Although I am not some house or mansion’s main wife,

I am still a concubine of a great person,

Which is better than being Head of the Guild at that brothel.

(Speaks) My lord, the front hall has guests, I am not about to go in, I will just try to peek inside. (Sings:)

(Shiliuhua)

I'd say that the one sitting there is that handsome Confucian type,\(^{128}\)

Here I inspect him intently and concentrate my gaze—

Turns out it’s that guy who was unwilling to go to Hangzhou for three years,

Discarding me, making me less than others,

Having a state to which I cannot return!

Could it be that he’s just enticing me?\(^{129}\)

To particularly make me do something ugly and embarrass myself?

See how those guys dressed in fine official clothing are so loyal and true to each other,

Never ever asking for any reason.

(Dou anchun)

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\(^{128}\) She is talking about Liu Yong.

\(^{129}\) This refers to Qian Ke.
Moreover, there is no public revenge for a private affair,
And instead you have spread a banquet for me.

(Continues in speech:) If I go over, what is the right thing to say?

(Sings:) All I can do is pretend not to acknowledge him,
Dare I say, “I’ve come to extend my compliments?”

(Acts out greeting) (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Tianxiang, please pay honor to Qiqing. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)
Here I finish extending my courtesies
And deeply bow my head in front of these officials.

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Tianxiang, come closer. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)
Who dares say “I am leaving your side?”
I had better wait upon you here at a side,
I had better hasten to the front and then hurry to the back.¹³⁰

(PREFECT QIAN speaks) Tianxiang, you and Qiqing take a cup of wine! (FEMALE LEAD speaks:) Understood. (Sings:)

(Shang xiaolou)
I want to begin my performance now,
But don’t know if he is possibly laying some snare for me—

¹³⁰ She means run back and forth as she waits on him.
It would be better of I feign befuddlement
And urge on the goblets for this Lord of Spring, ¹³¹
But if he gets drunk ¹³²
Don’t even think about cursing me.

(LIU speaks:) Tianxiang, come here. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

How can this not compare to when I was Head of the Guild?

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Tianxiang, raise your cup, make this scholar to drink these full cups. (Acts out making him drink.) (LIU speaks) I won't drink. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

(Reprise)
Over there he simply raises his hand,
Here, I restrain these weepy eyes;
Dare one call this “Asking how one another are,”
“Have anything to do with each other,”
Or “embracing or giving each other love taps—”
I have no freedom of movement now.

(LIU speaks) Sister, why did you get so thin. (FEMALE LEAD sings:)

¹³¹ She does this on Qian Ke’s behalf, he is “Lord of the Spring” in order to urge Liu Yong to drink.

¹³² She is referring to Liu Yong because he got drunk the last time he was with Prefect Qian.
You see how the flesh has been sucked out of my skin,
Don’t you ask me why my bones are jutting out and my face is a haggard yellow.

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Qiqing, why aren’t you drinking? (LIU speaks:) I can’t drink! (PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Enough! Enough! “If a word is unspoken it remains unknown; if no awl tests the tree it will never be bored through; if ice is never rubbed the hands never get cool.” “A gentleman takes advantage of the opportunity when it comes, he does not wait until the day is over.”

Qiqing why did you come to this so late! Back then I saw you were interested only in Xie and you indulged yourself in the Alley of Tinkling Chimes, sunken in the pleasures of the eyes and ears, neglecting your ambition for success and fame. This is why I spoke so candidly then and made you march off sulking and depressed. When you left, I sent someone to keep track of you and he reported that you had written a poem to the tune "Ding fengbo" as you were getting ready to leave. I sent Zhang Qian to summon Miss Xie, Zhang Qian set out the wine, and Miss Xie got ready to sing and I ordered her to sing that "Ding Fengbo" poem. I thought she was going to violate my taboo name and never thought she would change the rhyming words. I really love her talent, soon after that I removed her name from the music bureau’s tax records; I took her as a concubine

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133 This quote is from the *Rectification of the Book of Changes* 周易正義 in the second part of “Commentary on the Appended Statements” 繫辭. See Li Xueqin 李學勤 *Zhouyi zhengyi: Shisan jing zhushu zhengli ben* 周易正義十三經注疏 整理本 (Taipei: Taiwan shufang chuban youxian gongsi, 2001), 346.

134 Here he means, why are you just now coming to this understanding.
in my home. I deliberately did not avoid what other people might think about this, but did it all for my friendship with you, my younger brother. If we were to have let her continue “welcoming in the new and sending off the old,” wouldn’t you have besmirched your reputation as a great talent?

I have ruled here three years, and have “taken neither water nor rice”\textsuperscript{135} from the common citizens, and have not touched the slightest hair on Tianxiang. Wanting to trim back that willow of yours that was “near the road,” and lopping off “those flowers that stuck out beyond the wall,” was so that the two of you would be a match. It was all because of that one song, “Stilling the Windy Waves,” because she could fill in the lyrics to match the tune, and could skillfully change the modes and notes, it made me “think of a match when I saw a worthy,”\textsuperscript{136} turned my anger to joy. So I had her emulate the palace style adornment and put on that golden phoenix headdress, and had her quit performing with that jade tinkling simurgh at her belt. I bore unimaginable suffering to bring to a conclusion your lifetime wish. If you were unwilling “To part long from the misty moonlight for the golden halls of the palace,” I was just worried that “This fine flower would be shipped off to the son of a rich family.” All because of this, I nourished this peony

\textsuperscript{135} This is a metonymy to mean that he has acted uprightly and not accepted gifts from commoners.

\textsuperscript{136} This saying is from the \textit{Analects} in chapter seventeen of the section called “Dwelling among Benevolence”. For the original Chinese and an English translation see \textit{The four books: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, and The Works of Mencius}, 45.
for three years, just waiting for you to rise first to the plaque of tigers and dragons with a single try.

Brother, think about this! How could a singsong girl become the concubine of a great official? I thought, if you fulfilled your ambition, but then I was worried that officials within the official ranking system are not allowed to take a prostitute as a wife, and so I locked away this mandarin duck and made a nest for this kingfisher, in order to bind the lovers in harmony like the qin and se. You might say, “I have vainly locked away the mirror on the phoenix terrace,” but I “fixed the broken string with simurgh glue.” Why would I separate two birds with paired wings, except to have you reunited as a single lotus with a double head? I falsely made her my little wife, solely to wait for my true friend’s realization of his ambition. I am not going to waste words. Tianxiang, lay out your feelings face to face and say what you are going to do! (Recites saying:)

I have selected this rouge-faced woman in brocade and embroidery,
To hand over to you, a white faced gentleman on a silver saddle.
Liu Qiqing, feel no more enmity to the lord of Kaifeng,
This is “Prefect Qian Wisely Bestows Favor on Xie Tianxiang.”

(LIU speaks) Wow! Many thanks brother, for showing me so much concern!
Sister, how did you get to the lord's mansion after I left? Explain as I listen.
(FEMALE LEAD sings)

137 The qin and se are two types of zithers.
(Shao pian)

From the time my talented man left,
A fragrant wind blew through the Lord’s window curtains.
There were neither wine tallies lying scattered about,
Nor a single client to drink with on his leisure roamings,
From the Yamen court he urgently called me there,
And the Music Procuer hurried to summon me,
Frightening me so much I could not control myself, help myself,
All I could do was to go to serve him the public hall.
He did not ask me to dance and twirl,
But simply ordered me to sing.
I poured wine in the Phoenix cup to give him,
Filled in the lyric pattern to the shangjiao mode, searched for the rhymes.
And when I reached, “—Since it has turned spring,
I lament the green and sorrow over the red,
And my fragrant heart feels everything is needless and bland—”
I immediately shut my mouth.

(Shua hai'er)

It had the Lord’s complete name,
So I lightly cadged another rhyme to use;
In no time at all, my name was removed from the music bureau,
And he let it be known that we would be a couple, tightly bound.
For three years, did I ever occupy his bedding?
For a thousand days, did I ever rest on his pillow?

My lord's intention

Was difficult to understand.

I was originally a piece of flying floss stained with mud,

And then an orphan boat without a mooring.  

(Er sha)

Seeing my spirit compared to apricots and peaches bursting with energy,

How could I be together with this lord?

Seeing Tianxiang's face like the color of spring at its full,

Viewing the flowers is not the equal of viewing my fair charms,

And if one drinks it must be a giant flagon.

But who was there to sniff this pure fragrance?

I was deeply enclosed at the base of the fence,

And no other blossom was ever stuck in!

(PREFECT QIAN speaks:) Zhang Qian, quickly get the horses and cart in order, and send off Madame Xie to her top scholar's home!

(LIU with the FEMALE LEAD act out formal gratitude, speaks:) I am deeply grateful for your kindness, my lord! (FEMALE LEAD sings)

(Reprise)

\[138\] This is a metaphor for herself, because as a singsong girl she lived an unrestrained life like an unanchored boat.
This Tianxiang never thought that sunny weather would come,
I would have said “It’s without passion, let it go and be done”!
Who ever thought this peony blossom would be plucked and put into the
hands to the Lord of the East,\(^{139}\)
Today to be shared with a Mr. Willow beside the road to Zhangtai.\(^{140}\)

Title: Liu Qiqing mistakenly resents the leader of Kaifeng.
Name: Prefect Qian bestows favor on Xie Tianxiang.

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\(^{139}\) Also God of the Spring, Prefect Qian.

\(^{140}\) Zhangtai 章台 is the courtesan’s quarters, and this is referring to Liu Yong whose name means willow.
Conclusion:

After a close reading of the play, it is clear that Prefect Qian’s authority over the plot illuminates why this play is not included in discussions about women in Guan Hanqing’s plays. *Jiu Fengchen, Jinxian chi* and *Dou E Yuan* each illustrate Guan Hanqing’s ability to value women in a society where they were mistreated and often humiliated.¹⁴¹ Xie Tianxiang is an impressive literary talent and, like other women in Guan Hanqing’s plays, she too struggles with issues such as constantly being under the scrutiny of males, but ultimately the resolution of the play does not address all of Xie’s concerns. The play is Prefect Qian’s story to tell. Because of these unresolved issues and Qian’s authority, the play does not lend itself to the same classification as Guan’s other plays about women.

Ning Zongyi 宁宗一 offers an argument regarding the play’s forced resolution. He suggests that Guan Hanqing was under pressure from other authors to write plays with happy endings in order to please the audience. The fourth act in most Yuan plays is intent on restoring social and familial harmony, and in this play the same is true; Xie Tianxiang and Liu Yong are unexpectedly reunited. Ning argues, however, that it was not truly a happy ending because it was not a blissful reuniting of lovers who were madly in love, but instead only a pair who wind up together as a result of Prefect Qian’s scheming. For Ning, this reveals a

dark and gloomy side of the society at the time, but only because an outcome as happy as this one was very unlikely for a prostitute.\footnote{142}

Although Ning believes Xie is truly happy, I argue instead that her happiness is bittersweet. She is truly grateful for her emancipation from her career as a prostitute, but her relationship with Liu is more complex. There are no stage directions or text to indicate that Xie is either sad or resentful, but because of her initial reaction to seeing Liu, it is clear that she has mixed emotions about seeing him. It is possible that Guan Hanqing was not purposely trying to criticize society, but instead illustrate the reality of the world for women in his time.

Patricia Sieber argues that the second half of the play may have undergone radical editing during the Ming.\footnote{143} Many Yuan dramas did undergo a significant amount of revision before republication and, as a result, the ideology of the Ming was also written into the plays.\footnote{144} Yuan writers were disenfranchised and this was reflected in their writing. Because of these circumstances, Sieber argues that Ming editors, specifically Zang Maoxun, would not have agreed with the idea of a woman surpassing men in literary talent or to have the freedom that Xie Tianxiang seemingly had. While it seems likely that this play was edited, it is very difficult to know exactly what was changed. The second half of the play does not contain common features of Ming editing, such as fewer arias or arias performed by actors other than the lead, and the language seems no different from

\footnote{142}“Ling yizhong jingshen shijie de toushi,” 86.

\footnote{143}“Rhetoric, Romance, and Intertextuality,” 261.

\footnote{144}“Text and Ideology,” 237–83.
that of the first two acts. Also there are no other examples of plays where editors only edited one half of the play. Xie Tianxiang remains superior to Liu in literary talent even at the end of the play, and Liu still acts as a stupid fool. Because of these reasons, it seems Sieber’s argument is overly speculative.

Each of the play has a sequence of events to thrill the audience and make the play popular. The linguistic games, Xie’s talent, and Liu’s stupidity would have both impressed and amuse the audience. Xie’s escape from the trap that Qian created as well as the rewriting of a Song dynasty *ci* poem is the highlight of the second act. The audience would have certainly been engrossed in the erotic tension and continued playing with language from act three and the reunion of Liu and Xie as the culmination of Qian’s scheme and of the play. It is only the story’s emotional content that would have left the audience feeling dissatisfied. Xie Tianxiang sings about her emotions in arias throughout the play and she is the protagonist to whom the audience or reader is drawn closest. But her emotions are not addressed in the plot of the play, and ultimately Prefect Qian emerges as the storyteller and the greatest authority both in the world of the play and its narrative. There is tension both between Xie and Liu and between Xie and Qian that is never confronted. Thus the seemingly abrupt ending complicates the sense of resolution and this is likely the reason that the play survived the stage but has been avoided by scholars.

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*Journal of Xuchang University* 3 (2007) 1-5.

*Works in English*


APPENDIX A

PREFECT QIAN WISELY BESTOWS FAVOR UPON XIE TIANXIANG:

CHINESE TEXT
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