

A STUDY AND AN ANNOTATED TRANSLATION  
OF  
ACT II, CH'IEN-NÜ LI-HUN BY CHENG KUANG-TSU (CA. 1330 A.D.)

by  
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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT . . . . .	v
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
A Textual Study . . . . .	1
The Origin of the Story of <u>Ch'ien-nü li-hun</u> . . . . .	3
Folk Beliefs . . . . .	3
A Translation of the Story <u>li-hun chi</u> . . . . .	5
The Transformation from Story into Drama . . . . .	9
Literary Qualities . . . . .	12
Setting of Act II . . . . .	12
Characterization . . . . .	15
Conclusion . . . . .	18
TRANSLATION . . . . .	20
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	34

## ABSTRACT

With the rise of Southern drama in mid-Ming and the contempt of classical Ching scholars for such 'marginal artistic skills of no value' as the drama and novel, Yüan drama as a literary genre suffered a sharp decline that almost ended in its extinction as a performing art. Its interest as reading literature, however, kept the scripts of dramas in circulation. Since the publication of Sung Yüan hsi-ch'ü shih by Wang Kuo-wei in 1915 and the New Cultural Movement of 1919 that aimed at popularizing vernacular literature, the historical and literary study of Yüan drama gradually flourished. Under the diligent scrutiny of modern scholars, individual manuscripts were uncovered, collated and published. These well-annotated modern editions, published in mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong have generated a growing interest among scholars as well as the general public. With its wide range of themes, encompassing the legendary, historical, religious, romantic, and fantastic and with its superb lyrics, Yüan drama provides us not only with poetry of refreshing beauty but also with an insight into the panorama of life and beliefs of the Chinese people in ancient times.

Ch'ien-nü li-hun, "Ch'ien-nü's Departed Soul" 情女離魂" by one of the four great playwrights of Yüan, Cheng Kuang-tsu 鄭光祖 (tzu Teh-hui 德輝) is a typical Yüan drama of romantic love between young people of social standing.

## INTRODUCTION

### A Textual Study

Ch'ien-nü li-hun, "Ch'ien-nü's Departed Soul," 倩女離魂 (hereafter abbreviated CNLH) by Cheng Kuang-tsu 鄭光祖 (tzu Teh-hui 德輝) must be one of the most popular and beloved plays of the Yüan-Ming period, judging from its inclusion in most of the major collections, Yüan-ch'ü-hsüan 元曲選 (hereafter abbreviated YCH), Mai-wang-kuan ch'ao-chiao-pen ku-chin tsa-chü 脈望館鈔校本古今雜劇 (hereafter abbreviated MWK), Ku-ming-chia tsa-chu 古名家雜劇 (hereafter abbreviated KMC), and Ku-chin ming-chü ho-hsüan 古今名劇合選 (hereafter abbreviated HH).

The most popular modern collection is YCH, published in 1615-16 by Tsang Mou-hsün 臧懋循 (tzu Chin-shu 晉叔). Generally considered by scholars to have undergone considerable change under Tsang's editorial hand, the texts of the one hundred dramas preserved in this collection have been rearranged to give a smoother reading of the plays, but only at the price of uneven quality. Tsang's changes have sometimes been detrimental, and he did not, in all cases, improve on the original scripts.<sup>1</sup> In the preface of YCH, Tsang stated that he based his collection on "family collections together with two hundred plays belonging to Liu Yen-po 劉延伯, which are copies

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1. Cheng Ch'ien. "Yüan Ming ch'ao k'o Yüan-jen tsa-chü chiu-chung t'i-yao", Tsing-hua Journal of Chinese Studies, new series 7:2, Aug. 1972, 153-55.

of the palace collections and differ from market-place texts." YCH has been criticized for the overly refined and smooth language Tsang introduced into the dialogues. That some of the plays were copied from palace collections could be, in addition to Tsang's own efforts and personal preference, one of the contributing factors to this refinement. Despite this adverse criticism, YCH remains the standard literary text, mainly because of its general availability and because of its traditional popularity with readers.

The largest compendium of Yüan and early Ming plays, MWK, was assembled by the Ming scholar Chao Ch'i-mei 趙琦美 (1563-1614). Chao based his collection on several sources: on two earlier Ming period (1573-1602) publications, KMC and Hsi-chi-tzu tsa-chü hsüan 息機子 雜劇選, on one hundred and seventy-three plays handcopied from materials in the Ming Imperial Archives, and also on private collections. This collection was preserved and catalogued by the famous Ching collector Ch'ien Ts'eng 錢曾 (1629-1702), who named his library Yeh-shih-yüan 也是園 and is thus also known as Yeh-shih-yüan chiu-ts'ang ku-chin tsa-chü 也是園舊藏 古今雜劇. The main source of bibliographic information on this collection is Yeh-shih-yüan ku-chin tsa-chü k'ao by Sun K'ai-ti 孫楷第, published in 1953 in Shanghai. Stylistically, the language of the plays in this collection is closer to Yüan dynasty vernacular. There are a number of plays with detailed notes in the texts that identify costumes, props, and stage directions. Even though mistakes and omissions occur rather frequently it is,

nevertheless, a most important collection for the study of Yüan drama.

This collection was discovered by the eminent contemporary Chinese Commercial Press in 1941 under the name Ku-pen Yüan-Ming tsa-chü 孤

本元明雜劇。

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In 1633, the last of the extant Ming collection of fifty-six Yüan plays Ku-chin ming-chü ho-hsüan 古今名劇合選 was published in two volumes, Liu-chih-chi 柳枝集 and Lou-chiang-chi 酌江集, by Meng Ch'eng-shun 孟稱舜 (d. 1644), a playwright-compiler. The texts of these plays differ little from YCH but the few variations which do exist are helpful in understanding the language of the plays. Meng compared the YCH text with that of KMC, weighing different texts and selecting the text he considered best. He made rather infrequent comments in the margins of his copies, remarking on literary style, pointing out the subtleties of characterization and giving correct pronunciations of characters. Due to his careful editing, and the fact that Meng was himself a dramatist, this collection is considered to be superior to YCH, although neither as inclusive nor as readily available.

CNLH appears as the first play of Meng's collection and his text is used as the basis for the translation of Act II below.

#### The Origin of the Story of Ch'ien-nü li-hun

##### Folk Beliefs

China with its long history, diversified population, regional differences and its ability to assimilate outside cultural influences

is very rich in folk tales and folk-beliefs. Many stories have been told and retold so often and so long that they become a part of the people's heritage and are accepted and believed by all. A passage in A History of the Religious Beliefs and Philosophical Opinions in China by Dr. Leo Wieger, S. J., describes best the folklore of China:<sup>1</sup>

. . . I call folk-lore, an ensemble of supernatural anecdotes, born among the people, imaginary or untrue, but which were recorded as things which had actually happened, at first in the archives of the prefectures, afterwards in special collections. I call these tales hybrid folk-lore, because generally they have not a definite doctrinal tint, but contain mixed elements of the diverse doctrines then current in China, Taoism especially, Buddhism and Confucism. There are besides elements, of popular invention, which are foreign or even contrary to the doctrines of the three sects. . . . On the other hand this hybrid folk-lore is known by all and believed everywhere alas!

The five hundred-volume T'ai-p'ing kuang chi, compiled in the early years of N. Sung (978 A. D.) is a record of "unofficial historical writings" which covers such stories of gods, female fairies, Taoist and Buddhist magic, demons, ghosts, primitive animism, animal spirits, birds, fish, and plants, etc. The sheer size of this record can testify to the extensiveness of the Chinese folklore and beliefs. The story of CNLH is only one of the thirteen similar stories under the category title shen-hun 神魂, "the superior soul."

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1. Wieger, Leo, S. J., A History of the Religious Beliefs and Philosophical Opinions in China, trans. Edward Chalmers Werner, New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1969, 613.

This "superior" soul is one of two souls, the superior (called hun 魂 or shen 神) and inferior (called p'o 魄 or kwei 鬼) that folk belief assigns to a human. The superior soul is ethereal, and can leave the body during dreams or sickness and wander about freely which the inferior soul remains to keep the corporeal body alive. As might be expected, in death the superior soul is reincarnated while the inferior disintegrates with the body. Such folk beliefs were still very much alive in the early 20th century, for the author, in youth, had kneeled by her grandfather's coffin at midnight waiting for his superior soul to return once more to partake of the sacrificial offerings of the family before he went on his final journey to the Yellow Springs and then, perhaps, toward eventual reincarnation. This reminiscence is related here to show how firmly such belief is imbedded in the daily life of a Chinese, and the continuity of such folk beliefs as 'the departed' soul in traditional society. The author of li-hun chi 離魂記 "A Record of the Departed Soul" which was used as the basis for the Yüan play CNLH, obviously plays on these beliefs to insure audience acceptance of what is truly a fictional tale.

#### A Translation of the Story li-hun chi

The play CNLH has its origin in a T'ang story li-hun chi 離魂記, "A Record of the Departed Soul," written by Ch'en Hsüan-yu 陳玄佑 (ca. 779) and collected in T'ai-p'ing kuang chi<sup>1</sup> 太平

1. T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi (978 A.D.) Vol. 358. Taipei: Hsin hsing shu-chü photo-edition, 1969, 1365.

廣記, compiled in 978 A.D. under imperial auspices. According to Ch'en, he heard the story in various versions as a youth, although some people doubted that it was true. But in the last year of Ta-li (779 A.D.) he met a Chang Chung-chien 張仲規 who was the nephew of Chang I 張鎰, the father of a girl called Ch'ien-niang 倩娘. Chang told him the story in detail. Therefore he made a record of it.<sup>1</sup>

The use of the word chi(record) in the title of the story and the claim to having heard the story first hand are both common devices that a story teller or writer uses to establish some veracity with his audience or readers for an otherwise unbelievable story. The following is a translation of the story.

In the third year of T'ien-shou (692 A.D.) Chang I of Ch'ing-ho 清河, being a government official, made his home in Heng-chou 衡州. He was, by nature, a man of simple taste and quiet disposition who had few friends. He had no son but did have two daughters, the elder of whom died very young. The younger one, Ch'ien-niang was without peer in her demeanor and beauty. A nephew of Chang I, Wang Chou 王宙 of Taiyüan 太原, was a perceptive and intelligent youth. He was handsome and proper, and was greatly thought of by Chang. From time to time Chang mentioned that he would one day marry Ch'ien-niang to young Wang. Later when both were grown, Wang and Ch'ien-niang shared secret feelings and thought of each other at all

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1. Lo Chin-t'ang. Hsien-ts'un Yüan-jen tsa-chü pen-shih k'ao. Shanghai: Chung-kuo wen-hua shih-yeh kung-ssu. 1960, 255.

times, whether awake or asleep. The family knew nothing of this. The girl was later sought in marriage by a choice colleague of Chang and he consented. Ch'ien-niang, on hearing of this, became depressed and despondent and Chou was also furious and vexed.

On the pretext that he should have a change, Wang asked to go to the capital. The family tried to stop him, but to no avail. Thereupon they sent him on his way with generous gifts. Chou, hiding his vexation and crying with grief, decided to leave and boarded his boat. By evening, Chou's boat had reached a point several miles beyond the hills. Just after midnight Chou, unable to sleep, suddenly heard the sound of someone walking on the bank with great speed. In no time at all someone reached his boat. Chou asked who it was and it turned out to be Ch'ien-niang who, walking barefoot, had arrived. Although taken by surprise, Chou was crazy with joy. Taking hold of her hands, he inquired as to why she was there. In tears, Ch'ien-niang said, "Your deep love for me is so that I've become moved, too. Now that the family is going to snatch away this desire of mine, and knowing also your deep love for me is never changing, I think only of killing myself to repay you. That is why I risked my life to come elope with you." This was more than Chou could hope. Overjoyed, he hid Ch'ien-niang in the boat and fled in the night. Travelling at a forced pace, they arrived in Shu in a few months time.

After five years two sons were born to them. All this time not a single letter was sent to Chang I and Ch'ien-niang often thought

of her parents. One day, with tears in her eyes, she said to Chou, "In the past, because I could not turn my back on you, I abandoned my responsibilities to my parents and eloped with you. Now it's been five years since I left my parents. Thinking of the protection and care they gave me, what face do I, alone, have to go on living? Chou took pity on her and said, "We will return home, do not torment yourself." Thereupon the whole family returned to Heng-chou together.

On arrival at Heng-chou, Chou went alone to Chang's house to apologize first for what had happened. Chang replied, "Ch'ien-niang is sick in her chambers, why this strange explanation?"

Chou, "She is at present in the boat!"

Chang, astounded, hastily sent a man to check on her. Indeed the man saw Ch'ien-niang in the boat, well and happy. She even inquired of the man, "Is the master well?" The servant was bewildered, and left in a hurry to report to Chang. When she heard the news, the girl in the women's chamber rose happily from her bed to groom and adorn herself and to change her clothes. She smiled, but did not speak, and came out to meet the other. The two merged into a single body. Their clothes were all in double layers.

The family took this to be improper and uncanny, and kept it a secret. There were only a few relatives who secretly learned of it. Within forty years both husband and wife passed away. Their two sons were filial and chaste and passed their civil service examinations to later attained high ranks.

### The Transformation from Story into Drama

The story was first adapted into dramatic form by Chao Kung-fu 趙公輔 of P'ing-yang 平陽 in Shansi, who is listed in The Register of Ghosts<sup>1</sup> 錄鬼簿 as a playwright in the early Yüan period (ca. 1260), and his drama, in turn, served as a basis for the extant version written by Cheng Kuang-tsu, also a native of P'ing-yang.<sup>2</sup>

The play observes the standard structure of most Yüan drama, with a wedge (or "demi'act") at the beginning, followed by four acts, and it abides by all the formal elements of Yüan-ch'ü 元曲. It is a tan-pen 旦本, a script written for a female lead and all the arias were sung by the leading actress.

In Act I, Mrs. Chang, mother of Ch'ien-nü (hereafter abbreviated CN), sends for Wang Wen-chü to visit her enroute to the capital where he will sit for the imperial examination. Upon Wang's arrival at the house, CN is instructed to greet Wang as a brother instead of a fiancé (the two being betrothed to each other even before they were born) because Mrs. Chang could not have CN marry a man without rank. She desires that the couple wait until Wang has obtained an official position, so that his rank would be commensurate with the family's status. The act ends when despondently, CN, who has grown to love the young scholar, bids him farewell at the Pavillion of Breaking Willow.

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1. Chung Ssu-ch'eng. Lu-kuei pu (ca. 1330). Shanghai: Chung-hua shu chü, 1959. 16.

2. T'an Cheng-pi. Yüan-ch'ü liu ta-chia f'ueh-chuan. Shanghai: Ku-tien wen-hsüeh chu-pan-she, 1957. 268.

Act II, with its superb arias about the ethereal journey of CN's soul hastening after Wang, is generally considered to be the most well written of the four acts. Fearing Wang might be tempted by matchmakers at the capital to take another wife, and herself unable to stand the vexation of parting, CN is determined to go with him. Her soul races to catch up with his boat. After a bit of half-hearted remonstrance to return, Wang, moved by her declaration of love, finally agrees to take her with him.

Act III starts with Wang, now a successful top-ranked candidate, writing a letter to Mrs. Chang informing her of the good news and assuring her that he will be coming home with his wife as soon as he is assigned an official position. The messenger arrives at a time when CN is sick abed, languishing away because her 'superior' soul has fled to be with Wang. One moment she is herself, lamenting about her fate as a rejected lover and blaming her mother for it; another moment, her soul joins Wang, leaving her original self in a fantasy world. On reading Wang's letter, she thinks that her fiancé has taken another wife and faints.

In the last act three years have gone by, and Wang is finally given an official position in his home district, and is on his way home with his soul-wife. On reaching Heng-chou, Wang goes first to greet Mrs. Chang and begs her forgiveness for taking CN with him to the capital. Mrs. Chang, knowing that her daughter is sick in bed, thinks the soul-wife is a demon impersonating her daughter. In order to test the soul, Mrs. Chang has her led into CN's chamber and she is

asked to identify which of the serving girls is her personal maid. On entering the chamber, the soul embraces the sick CN and re-enters the body. The girl awakes completely well and tells her mother it was her soul that had followed Wang to the capital. The play ends with the promise of a feast to celebrate the belated wedding.

The drama differs slightly from the story. Instead of trying to keep the uncanny happening of the soul leaving the body a secret, as in the story, the drama enlarges upon it as one of its main themes. The employment of the spirit motif as a solution to the lovers' ordeal gives a new dimension to the play. But, in the end the drama is unable to free itself from the conventional chia-jen 佳人, ts'ai-tzu 才子 love theme of so many romantic Yüan dramas. It is, in fact, in its use of this conventional topos, reminiscent of the celebrated play by Wang Shih-fu 王實甫, The Romance of the Western Chamber 西廂記.

In such stories, the beautiful maiden and the talented but impoverished scholar meet and fall in love. They are kept apart by an inconsiderate parent who cares more for status than the happiness of the young couple and insists that they wait until the student obtains an official position before they wed. A heart-rending scene of separation usually follows. This farewell scene in CNLH is the element most reminiscent of The Romance of the Western Chamber. The western wind, the willow branches, the cart of the girl going one way while the horse of the student goes another, the girl's tender concern for the traveller and her fear that her lover might take another wife, as if on cue, appear one after another in the lyrics of

of both plays. The use of a dream sequence to allow a tender meeting between the paramours happens in both dramas. Eventually the student passes the examination and returns in triumph to be married to his beloved, and a happy ending is assured for all the characters in the play -- as well as for the viewers who expect such a conventional *finis*.

### Literary Qualities

#### Setting of Act II

The repeated descriptions of scenery are the most important part of Act II and also the most beautifully written. They are effectively used to accentuate the mood and character of CN, and setting and characterization are mutually supportive. Take for instance, the first aria in Act II; the night scene is fit for the ethereal travels of her soul and complements the mood of CN. With sorrow over parting in her heart, she is worried that she may never see Wang again. Her own uncertainty and isolation are echoed by the sinister and unfamiliar surroundings in which she finds herself. The eerie and watery world intensifies both her plight and her desperation to resolve her feelings. It is in such descriptive verses that the vigor of Yüan drama best manifests itself.

In the third aria, the setting is a closer look at the river scenery of desolate autumn, when living things -- past their prime -- begin to die. The only sound is that of the rushing river and the souging water-grasses. This sere natural landscape prolongs and

accentuates CN's mood of the second aria where she confesses to exhaustion, with hair dishevelled, profusely perspiring (quite different from the stereotyped beautiful maiden). She is now a mixture of hope and sorrow, thinking that Wang's boat is somewhere nearby, but still carrying with her the heartache of parting.

A contrast of setting comes in the fourth aria to heighten the effect of the drama by suddenly introducing the cacophony of humans, horses and fishing boats. Here again, through the setting, the reader is given a glimpse of another side of CN's character. Although she loves too deeply, worries too much, and is rather bold in her actions, she can also be frightened. This reminds the viewers that she is, after all, a young girl, and evokes in them a strong sympathy for the feelings that drove her to such uncharacteristic action. In the next aria, t'iao-hsiao-ling, the setting intensifies the feeling of sympathy by invoking a mood of self-pity, and elaborates on the hardships she undergoes. Later in the same aria, already near Wang's boat, the panorama of scenes -- up, down, and beyond -- as seen through the eyes of CN, reveals to readers that by now she can appreciate the beauty of the desolate landscape under the radiance of the moon, in its icy splendor and must, presumably, be calmer in mood. The song of long flute raises her hopes, coupled with the sound of oars, further assures her. The author thus ends her journey and leads her and the audience alike to Wang and his short raft, which is not moored by a pleasure spot, as she originally fears, but in a very quiet and serene setting of river homes caged in

moonlight and mist. A moment of calm falls on both the setting and the girl. The lyrics in yao-sheng-wang had been picked out especially by both Ming and Ching critics as 'most elegantly beautiful, smooth, and give the true characters of such a setting.'<sup>1</sup> and they are. The words and metrically short lines in staccatto give the scene by the river bank both a visual and an auditory beauty which brings it to life.

The next eight songs are more in the nature of characterization and are treated under the following topic. The arias before the coda repeats once more the autumn scenery through CN's eyes as if she is giving a final farewell to the scene which marks a decisive and poignant moment in her life. Her one last glance of the setting reveals a mixture of sadness in leaving her home district, of relief in being able to accompany Wang, and of fear that someone from her family might at any instant appear over the horizon to capture her. In some fifty very simply put words, the author describes vividly and in detail the mixed feelings of CN, the scenery and at the same time makes a smooth transition into the coda which ends the second act. The author, though criticized for 'overly sculpturing his verses' by the author of A Register of Ghosts, Chung Ssu-cheng, must be accredited a real master in his craft in so far as this act of CNLH is concerned.

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1. T'an Cheng-pi. Yüan-ch'ü liu ta-chia lüeh-chuan  
Shanghai: Ku-tien wen-hsüeh chu-pan-she, 1957, 289-90.

## Characterization

Chinese traditional stories are criticized for their generalized character types who seldom change physically or psychologically throughout the whole story and who are one dimensional and monolithic.<sup>1</sup> The characterization of CN in the adapted drama form, under the pen of the master playwright, Cheng Kuang-tsu, however, does have psychological dimensions, all developing from the basis of her stereotyped description in the wedge as just another young girl of an aristocratic family. The protagonist's inner feelings are revealed mainly in the arias she sings, and at times, in dialogue and interior monologue. Yuan dramatists are skilled in characterizing their heroes or heroines through the device of vivid poetic verse, and when necessary they use a detailed repetition of the same situation to give emphasize to a character's inner feelings. A step-by-step development of the inner turmoil of CN that eventually results in her soul leaving the body unfolds throughout Act I. In the second aria she complains of being "dream broken, soul weary" and in the coda laments, "My love and soul seem to be far and distant, they will be near him even after he is gone."

An analysis of the arias in the wedge and the four acts reveals that CN is a complex, though ill-developed, character. The two arias in the wedge inform the reader that she has fallen in love with Wang at first sight, that she is angry with her mother for not consenting to an immediate marriage. With the verses at the end of

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1. Ballad of Hidden Dragon. trans. M. Dolezelove-Velingerova and J. I. Crump. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, 20.

the second aria, "The more you want to separate us, the more I think of him.", the author gives a preview to the eventual development of CN's character from a stereotyped young girl in love to a rebellious female who defines tradition in an attempt to determine her own fate.

The first eight arias of Act I can be said to be a detailed repetition of the situation which CN is in, and serve to emphasize and enlarge on her inner feelings in the form of a long (eight songs) interior monologue. The reader learns from it of her pining, her pride in her talented and handsome fiancé, and her worry that he might marry someone else once he succeeds in the imperial examination. The arias are necessary to develop the dialogue and to clarify the plot and character of Scholar Wang as well. The reader learns from this interior monologue that Scholar Wang's inner feelings complement those of CN: he is in love with her, resentful of the mother's decision, and that he longs to send her love notes so he can confide his feelings to her. Moreover, when the young scholar questions the mother about her plans for her daughter and himself in the dialogue at the Pavillion of Breaking Willow, it serves to clarify the plot even further and adds another facet to Wang's character: a fool in love, he is no fool in his ability to read her intentions.

In this justly famous scene, the heart-rending arias of separation describe in detail a conventional scene of lovers parting. The season (autumn), natural phenomenon (rain), and the frequent references to heaven (the 33rd heaven of separation) in these arias

form a suitable setting for the moment and lend dimension to the inner feelings of CN. They lay bare her heart in all its tenderness and affection and set the stage for the powerful contrast in Act II and her drastic resolution to violate traditional behavior by running after wang.

The characterization in Act II was partially treated above. In the last eight arias (from ma-lang-erh on), the comparison of Wang to Po Ya, Chia I, and Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju and the comparison of CN to a wife at the end of her road, Lady Cho and Meng Kuang, are a declaration of both her love for Wang and her willingness to share with him whatever life should bring, CN invokes sympathy in Wang and at the same time also flatters him. Here, CN is characterized as a very shrewd girl well versed in the human weakness of vanity. Her own words, "Be bold in what you do" are a most apt description of her own character. Typically she is shown to be far stronger and bolder in character than Wang, who would abide tradition at the expense of his own happiness.

CN in Act III is portrayed as a girl sick in bed with her superior soul gone. She lives between dreams and reality. She is happy in her dreams because she is with her beloved but indulges in self-pity and complaints against her mother when she is awake. In presenting a contrast between the life of the soul and the real CN, the author thus heightens the dramatic effect of the play.

Act IV also introduces a contrast, in scenery as well as in mood. The spring setting with birds and butterflies in pairs is

very different from the autumn scene of parting. It supports CN's mood of triumphant and joyous return. The return, however, seems to be more motivated by revenge than by filial piety. The rebellious girl who is the violator of tradition and who stands up for her own rights is once again portrayed in the aria ku-shui-hsien-tzu, in which she describes her mother's decision to delay their marriage as "separating the entwined necks of mandarin ducks, smashing the diamond-shaped mirror on paving stones, or throwing the silver vase into the bottom of a well." When the mother accuses her of being a demon, she utters a string of accusations in return. The characterization of the soul ends upon its re-entering the body. The 'whole' CN is once again her stereotyped self and patiently explains to her mother that the adventure was undertaken by her soul only.

From the wedge and the four acts we have a portrait of CN going through, with varied degrees of intensity, the whole gamut of human emotions: love, anger, weariness, despair, rebellion, determination, hope, relief, fear, shrewdness, self-pity and joy. The characterization of CN, can neither be said to be monolithic nor one-dimensional. Yet, in the end, though multi-faceted, her character does remain static, that is undeveloped in the modern western sense of psychological development of character.

### Conclusion

The literary quality of CNLH is imbedded in the beauty and vigor of the musical verses. Besides having an auditory beauty of their own, the images of the verses are used effectively to create

visual settings that intensify both moods of the characters and the overall themes of the play. The characterization of the heroine while non-developmental, is nevertheless, multi-dimensional and revealed subtly through the use of lyrical verse, poetic interior monologues, and dialogues.

TRANSLATION

Cheng Kuang-tsu (ca. 1300)

Ch'ien-nü li-hun [Ch'ien-nü's Departed Soul]

Act II

(Mistress Chang, in a dither, enters.)

MRS. CHANG (recites): Before happiness has run its course,  
Worry returns again.

(speaks): When my child Ch'ien-nü came home from bidding  
scholar Wang farewell and sending him on his way  
at Breaking the Willow Pavillion,<sup>1</sup> she became ill  
and once abed did not get up. Though doctors  
were asked to look after her, they were unable to  
cure her. She is critically ill. What is to be  
done? The child might want to take some broth or  
water and I had better go round personally to her  
chamber to visit her. [exit]

(The mo<sup>2</sup> [costumed as Wang Wen-chü] enters.)

WANG (speaks): I am Wang Wen-chü. Ever since I parted from missy

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1. On seeing a loved one or a friend off on a journey, ancient Chinese used to break a branch of willow on the roadside and give it to the traveller as a symbol of their unwillingness to part, and of their hopes to be reunited, as the two halves, put back together form a whole branch.

2. mo is the name for male lead in Yüan tsa-chü, music-drama.

at the Pavillion of Breaking the Willow, I've been so deeply, deeply concerned that I cannot put my heart at ease. Tonight my boat is moored by the river bank. I shall place the zither across my lap and play a tune in order to dispell my anxiety.

(pantomines strumming the zither)

(cheng-tan<sup>3</sup> [costumed as departed soul of Ch'ien-nü] enters.)

SOUL (speaks): I am Ch'ien-nü. Ever since parting from student Wang, I have pined for him so much that there is nothing I can do but to turn my back on my mother and hasten straight after him. Oh! Student Wang, you care only for going, how could you know how I passed the days!

(mode: yüeh-tiao, tune: tou-an-ch'un)

(sings): Lovers depart from the Sunny Terrace;<sup>4</sup>  
 Clouds return to gorges of Chu.  
 If he has not moored his boat by the  
 river's edge,

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3. cheng-tan is the name for the female lead in Yüan music-drama.

4. Sunny Terrace (yang-t'ai) is the name of a mountain in the ancient state of Chu. In a poem written by Sung Yü, a writer of the third century B.C., who served at the court of the state of Chu, it was mentioned that King Hsiang of Chu dreamed that he had a sexual liaison with the Shamaness of Wu Mountain at the Sunny Terrace. In later literature yang-t'ai is used as a standard metaphor for a place where lovers meet. Together with the next line, it refers to parting after a joyous union.

When will his horse ever pass my gate again?

Silently, dimly,

Ethereally, freely,

Here I step on the sands of the bank,

Tread in the splendor of the moon,

And pass these myriads of rivers and

thousands of hills

All in an instant, all in a half a wink.

(tune: tz'u-hua-erh-hsü)

(sings):

Think of Ch'ien-nü, heart filled with

parting vexation,

Hastening after Wang's magnolia boat

beyond the willow.

So like longing for Chang Ch'ien's raft,

floating in heaven!<sup>5</sup>

Profusely, profusely perspiring,

Precious pearls shine on my face,

Disordered, loose, lax, my cloud-like

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5. Chang Ch'ien was the famed envoy of Emperor Wu-ti (r. 140-87 B.C.) of the Han dynasty. Ancient legend says that Chang had travelled to the point where the Yangtze River merges with the Milky Way, and then floated in the heavens, meeting the Cowherd who lodges in Altair and the Weaving Maid who lodges in Vega.

hairknot is shaped in

'piled up raven'.<sup>6</sup>

I've walked until my strength is gone  
and I'm worn out.

Oh, you must moor for the night by  
the taverns of Chinhuai River.<sup>7</sup>

I walk to west of the broken bridge.

Su-la-la,<sup>8</sup> splashing, soughing, the sounds  
of autumn river and water-grasses.

Clear, clear cold, the bright moon and  
the reed flowers.

(speaks): After half a day's walking, I've come to the  
edge of the river and hear the hubbub of human  
voices. Let me take a look.

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6. 'Raven' is used frequently as a color word which means 'shiningly black' as the color of raven. Here it refers to the hair of Ch'ien-nü.

7. Chinhuai River is the name of a river near present-day city of Nanking in Kiangsu province. It was a place frequented by pleasure seekers from Yüan times even until the early part of this century.

8. Su-la-la is the sound of river water hitting against the bank or river reeds and rushes rubbing against each other. Sound words are used profusely in Yüan t<sub>s</sub>a-chü.

(tune: hsiao-t'ao-hung)

(sings):

Suddenly, I hear horses neighing, and the  
hubbub of human voices.

Half hidden under the weeping willows,  
I am so startled and scared that my heart  
goes pitter-patter.

Oh! It was only the clickety-clickety  
clacking of clappers for the catching  
of fish and shrimp.

Following the westerly wind here I silently  
and quietly listen and the sound  
subsides and is gone.

Treading on these drenching, drenching dew  
drops,

Standing under the clear, clear moonlight,  
I startle a winter goose so it flutters off  
the sand flat, honking ya-ya-ya.

(tune: t'iao-hsiao-ling)

Slowly I step toward the sandy dike.

The sedges slippery with frost

Brush against and moisten my gossamer skirt  
of emerald green,

The glaucous moss wets, penetrates my  
'wave-crossing'<sup>9</sup> stockings.

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9. 'Wave-crossing' describes the stockings that are so light that they can float on waves.

Look! The evening comes across the river:  
 worth painting.

The radiance of a precious ice pot overflows  
 in the sky above and below,  
 Like a piece of flawless green jade in the  
 void of the desolate autumn.

(tune: tu-ssu-erh)

(sings):

You look at the distant cattails, the lone  
 wild duck, the clouds of sunset,  
 The withered vine, the ancient trees and  
 dusking ravens.

Listen to the single sound of the long flute,  
 where does it come from?

It is but the song of oars, creaking ao-ai  
 and i-ya.

(speaks):

There, the sound of a zither from the prow of a  
 boat. Could it be Student Wang? Let me try  
 and listen.

(tune: yao-sheng-wang)

(sings):

Draw near the hollows of the knot-weeds,  
 Gaze over the water-clover flowers,  
 There are snapped reeds, withered willows  
 and old rushes.

By the watery hollow, a short raft moored.  
 I glimpse mist caging the cold river and

the moon caging the sand.

With two or three homes of thatch.

WANG (speaks): So late at night as this, yet I hear the voice of a woman on the bank that sounds like my Miss Ch'ien-nü talking. Let me ask and see.

(pantomines inquiring)

Over there, aren't you Miss Ch'ien-nü? What are you doing coming here this late?

(soul pantomines greeting Wang)

SOUL (speaks): Student Wang, I turned my back on my mother and hastened straight after you. Let me go with you to the capital.

WANG (speaks): Miss, how did you hasten straight here?

(tune: ma-lang-erh)

SOUL (sings): You are indeed a "Po Ya<sup>10</sup> unburdening your heart,"  
And I'm a "wife at the end of her road."  
You ask why I secretly left my embroidered couch --

It is only because I want to wander with you to the Heaven's edge.

WANG (speaks): Did Miss come by carriage or by horse?

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10. Po Ya was an expert zither player of Spring and Autumn period (770-745 B.C.)

(tune: yao)

SOUL (sings):

I well-nigh walked to exhaustion.

If I had waited until you had gone far away  
to the capital

Then I, this person of little fortune, would  
be worried about you

And, when could this pining heart have ever  
been put aside?

(tune: lo-ssu-niang)

(sings):

You fling me away.

By the time you would have seen me again, if I  
had not wasted away to death,

Then most probably I would have perished by  
pining.

WANG (speaks):

If the old mistress has learned of this, what will  
we do?

SOUL (continues singing): If she should catch up with us, what could

she do?

Oft' it's said, "Be bold in what you do."

WANG (angrily speaks):

The ancients said: "A marriage with gifts,  
then you will be a wife, elope, then you will be a  
concubine." The old mistress has already assented  
to the marriage, and was waiting only for me to  
return after obtaining an official position, and  
then she would have conjoined the auspicious affair

of the two families. Wouldn't this way be more correct in name and proper in words? Now your secret flight has blemished customs and teachings, and for what reason?

SOUL (speaks): Student Wang!

(tune: hsüeh-li-mei)

(sings):

Your color rises, your anger mounts.

I fix my sight and am resolved not to  
return home.

My feelings are genuine, and not meant  
to frighten you.

I am determined, unlike the gibbons [fidgety]  
in heart and the horses [uncontrollable]  
in will.<sup>11</sup>

WANG (speaks): Miss, you hurry back home.

(tune: t'zu-hua-erh-hsü)

SOUL (sings):

Swelling up the sails the wind means to send  
the travellers on,

But you, entwined with melancholy, heart  
troubled, lean over the zither book.

My tears and grief I commit to the p'i-p'a.

What heart do I have to shape my misty temple  
locks lightly encaged as cicada's wings?

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11. 'Heart of gibbon and will of horse' (hsin-yüan i-ma)  
is a common description for someone who cannot make up his mind.

Or to lightly brush my eyebrows with palace  
raven-black?

I wish only to be like falling catkins or  
flying blossoms.

Who will ask if travelling is as good as  
staying home?

No more talking.

I desire the autumn wind to drive before  
it the hundred-foot sail,

And leave to Spring to provide a treeful of  
ceruse and adornment.

(speaks): Scholar Wang, I hasten after you for nothing else  
but to guard you against one thing.

WANG (speaks): What is it that Miss wants to guard me against?  
(tune: tung-yüan-lo)

SOUL (sings): If after you attend the Imperial Feast in  
the jewelled forests,  
Should the matchmakers block your horse  
And hoist high the vermillion and bice  
portraits of painted beautiful girls,  
Boasting that they were born in the homes of  
prime ministers, dukes or kings,  
You might grow attached to such luxury and  
extravagance,  
And become a happy newly-wed

Under the patronage of her family.

WANG (speaks): How would I forget you even if, after this  
journey, I were raised to rank at the first try?

SOUL (speaks): If you were raised to rank.

(tune: mien-ta-hsü)

(sings): After you've become the pampered guest<sup>12</sup>  
of a noble family,  
You would be as conceited and boasting as they,  
With the prosperity and riches in the home of  
a prime minister,  
The brocades and embroideries piled on and  
weighing you down,  
How would you ever think of flying again into  
the home of the common folk?  
By then you would be like the fish which  
leapt the Dragon Gate,<sup>13</sup> stirring  
up waves to the edges of the sea  
Drinking wines of the Emperor,  
Wearing palace flowers.<sup>14</sup>

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12. Pampered guest (chiao-ke) is a more poetic name for son-in-law.

13. 'Leapt the Dragon Gate' is a standard metaphor for succeeding in the Imperial Examination.

14. Golden flowers are bestowed on highest-ranked scholars who passed the Imperial Examination by the emperor to wear on their caps to show honor.

At that time you would be 'standing on the  
tortoise's head'

Occupying the highest position,

And be first on the first list.

WANG (speaks): If I should fail, what then?

SOUL (speaks): If you should fail, in hairpin of thorns and skirt  
of cotton, I am willing to share [what life would  
bring], be it sweetness or bitterness.

(tune: cho-lu-su)

SOUL (sings): If you were like Chia I<sup>15</sup> stranded at Changsha,  
I would dare to be like Meng Kuang<sup>16</sup> in  
manifesting my worthiness and cleverness.  
Don't even think I am 'half a spark' mistaken,  
or the slightest bit ungracious.  
I desire to raise the tray level with my eye-  
brow, to be close to your books and couch,  
To endure coarse and rough grains or a  
flavorless spartan life;

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15. Chia I (201-169 B.C.) was a brilliant scholar of Western Han. Emperor Han Wen-ti recognized his talent, but he was unpopular among court officials and was eventually sent off to Changsha. He was unhappy there and died young.

16. Men Kuang was the wife of Liang Hung of the Eastern Han (25-220 A.D.). She showed her respect and love to her husband by bringing in the dinner tray raised high to her eyebrows. In later literature, especially in Yuan plays, this story is used often to describe a wife who is both correct and gracious.

Nor would I mind wearing hairpins of thorn,  
cotton or flax.

WANG (speaks): If Missy were so sincere and determined, then go  
with me to the capital. How's that?

SOUL (speaks): You are willing to take me with you!

(tune: yao)

(sings): Captain, quickly call me on board,  
I fear my family may come and capture me.  
I can see distant trees, winter crows,  
Grass on the bank, and sand on the shoal.  
My eyes filled with yellow flowers, and  
Strands of fading sunset clouds,  
Quickly, first hoist high the cloud-like sail,  
Go straight down into the moonlight,  
Even if the east wind blows.  
Stop not for a moment, but go forward  
with haste.

WANG (speaks): You are now going with me to the capital to sit  
for the royal examination. You would be the  
First Lady of the District if I should gain an  
official position.

(coda)

SOUL (sings): You are at last on your way to Ch'ang-an,  
the capital.

I would even dare ride in a cart that

travels among the commanderies  
of Shu.<sup>17</sup>

I simply wish you, a member in the  
Garden of Letters,<sup>18</sup> would make  
use of the time and work hard,  
Then I, the wine-selling Lady Wen of  
Lin-ch'ung City, would willingly  
wait on the Han Ssu-ma who wrote  
on the bridge at the Silk-rinsing  
River.<sup>19</sup> [exit]

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17. Shu refers to present-day Szechuan where the terrain makes it a hardship on travellers.

18. A member in the Garden of Letters means a scholar.

19. Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju of Western Han wrote on the bridge at Silk-rinsing River that he would not pass this bridge again until he had become prosperous, riding in a carriage pulled by four horses. While a guest at the house of the wealthy Cho Wang-sun, Ssu-ma played the lute so well that the newly widowed daughter of Cho, Lady Cho Wen-chün, fell in love and eloped with him. Cho was so angry that he would not give them anything to live on. Lady Cho, to humiliate her father, opened a wine shop and personally served the customers while Ssu-ma did errands. Ssu-ma's scholarship was eventually recognized by Emperor Wu-ti, and he did, indeed, become rich and prosperous.

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