From Story to Script:
towards a Morphology of *The Peony Pavilion*—
a Dream/ Ghost Drama from Ming China

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This article is an attempt to analyze the dramatic structure of the Mudan ting 牡丹亭 *(Peony Pavilion) as a piece of fantasy which Tang Xianzu* 湯顯祖 *(1550–1616) created through the utilisation of structural devices and techniques of magic tales. The particular model adopted for the textual analysis is that formulated by Vladimir Propp in* Morphology of Russian Folktale.

 This paper starts with a comparison of Russian magic tales Propp investigated for his morphological study and Chinese zhiguai 志怪 *tales which provide the prototype for the Mudan ting with a view of justifying the application of the Proppian model. The second part of this paper is devoted to a critical review of the Proppian model and method in terms of function versus non-function, tale versus move, and character versus tale / theatrical role. Further information is also given in this part as a response to challenges and criticisms this article may incur as regards the applicability of the Proppian model in inter-cultural and inter-generic studies.*

 Part Three is a morphological analysis of the dramatic text with a focus on the main storyline revolving around the hero and heroine. In the course of textual analysis, the particular form and sequence of functions is identified, the functional scheme of each move presented, and the distribution of dramatis personae *in accordance with the sphere(s) of action of characters delineated. Finally this paper concludes with a presentation of the overall dramatic structure and strategy of this play.*

1. *Zhiguai*, *Chungqi* and magic tales: an introduction

This article aims at a functional-structural analysis of *Mudan ting* 牡丹亭 (The Peony Pavilion) by Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550–1616). Also known as *Huanhun ji* 還魂記 (The Return of the Soul), *The Peony Pavilion* has long been regarded as one of the most influential *chuanqi* 傳奇 (transmission of the marvellous) dramas.[1] In a

ground-breaking article on Tang Xianzu, C.T. Hsia calls for close attention to "every detail of dramatic structure" in order "to do justice to" his plays.[2] However, a survey of contemporary studies of *The Peony Pavilion* shows that most of them attempt a socio-psycho investigation of the dramatic text or a historical review of this play performed on stage, with relatively little attention paid to the structure of this *chuanqi* drama.

Ming–Qing dramatic treatises, as represented by Wang Jide's 王驥德 (?–1623) *Qu lü* 曲律 (Principles of Musical Drama), and Li Yu's 李漁 (1611–1680) *Xianqing ouji* 閑情偶寄 (Casual Notes in a Leisurely Mood), attach great importance to the (musical and theatrical) structure of drama. Under their influence, contemporary studies of dramatic structure among Chinese scholars tend to concentrate on *chengshi* 程式 (stylised movement), *zhunao* 主腦 (governing element), *zhenxian* 針線 (stitching), *paichang* 排場 (scene arrangement), and *guanmu* 關目 (plot arrangement) in terms of *qingjie xian* 情節線 (plotline), *dongzuo xian* 動作線 (action line), or *qingjie jiegou* 情節結構 (plot structure).[3] Whichever approach or method is employed, however, *The Peony Pavilion* is consistently interpreted as an expression of Tang's passion for love and life or as a manifestation of the structural pattern of *chuanqi* drama rather than as a piece of fantansy which Tang Xianzu created through the utilisation of structural devices and techniques of magic tales.

The genre known in the West as "magic tales" or "tales of magic," which is employed in the A–T Tale Type Index to refer to narrative items numbered 300–749 on their tale type index and covers a broad range of tales ranging from "supernatural adversaries," "supernatural or enchanted husband (wife) or other relatives," "supernatural helpers," "magic objects," "supernatural power or knowledge" to "other tales of supernatural,"[4] is closest in theme and content to the Chinese *zhiguai* 志怪,

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comments and penetrating criticisms and also anonymous reviewers of this paper for their constructive feedback. All errors that remain are my own.

[1] The term *chuanqi* was first used by the Tang writer Pei Xing 裴鉶 (825–880) as the title for a collection of his short stories, and later applied as a generic term to the Tang 唐 (618–907) marvel tales which are characterised by extraordinary happenings, flamboyant tone, elaborate narrative, rich description, ornate style, and sensuous language. This term was also employed to denote the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279) *zhugong diao* 諸宮調 (various modes), the Yuan 元 (1206–1368) drama known as *zaju* 雜劇, and the Ming 明 (1368–1644)–Qing 清 (1616–1911) full-length *nanxi* 南戲 (southern plays) drama.

[2] C.T. Hsia, "Time and the Human Condition in the Plays of T'ang Hsien-tsu," in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970, 252.

[3] For a short yet incisive summary of Ming–Qing theories of dramatic structure and their influence upon contemporary studies of traditional Chinese drama, see Guo Yingde 郭英德, *Ming–Qing chuanqi xiqu wenti yanjiu* 明清傳奇戲曲文體研究 [A Stylistic Study of Ming–Qing *Chuanqi* Drama], Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, 2004, 353–81.

[4] The A–T Tale Type Index is acronymically named after Aarne and Thompson. See Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. and enl. Stith Thompson, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961.

which literarily means "records of the strange."[5] Due to their common interest in the strange and supernatural and their folktale nature of having been orally transmitted before being recorded and refined by men of letters, a large number of *zhiguai* items are categorised by Nai-tung Ting as "tales of magic" in his A–T-modelled Chinese folktale type index.[6]

The close generic relationship between traditional Chinese stories and dramas can never be overestimated. "A striking feature of the Chinese situation," as Cyril Birch observes, "is the sharing of materials and methods between three genres superficially discrete: the vernacular story, the classical-style tale, and the theatre piece."[7] A case in point is *The Peony Pavilion*, which is adapted from a Ming 明 (1368–1644) *ni huaben* 擬話本 (imitation *huaben*) story entitled "Bridal Du Longing for Love Returns in Spirit Form" (*Du Liniang mu se huan hun* 杜麗娘慕色還魂), the origin of which is traceable to the Six Dynasties *zhiguai* tradition. Significantly, Tang also transplanted into this drama key plot elements of three *zhiguai* tales, "Tan sheng" 談生 (Scholar Tan), "Li Zhongwen nü" 李仲文女 (Li Zhongwen's Daughter), and "Feng Xiaojiang zi" 馮孝將子 (Feng Xiaojiang's Son), as acknowledged in the author's preface to *The Peony Pavilion*.[8] Although Tang borrows elements from other forms of literature to use in this play, they appear with a far less frequency than those derived from tales of the strange and supernatural.

Since this study aims at a structural-functional examination of the use of magic tales in this dream/ ghost drama, I will employ the model formulated by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Russian Folktale* to describe the structure of *Mudan ting* and to show how Tang draws on the devices and techniques of tales of magic and adapts them into the overall structure of this *chuanqi* drama.[9] Propp did not claim that his model

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[5] *Zhiguai* writing arose in the Six Dynasties 六朝 (220–618), continued to be recorded and read during the Tang 唐 (618–907)–Song 宋 (960–1279) period, and reached its zenith with the appearance of *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齊志異 [Stories of the Strange from the Studio of Leisure] by the great Qing 清 (1616–1911) storyteller Pu Songlin 蒲松麟 (1640–1715).

[6] See Nai-Tung Ting, *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales*, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1978, 47–120.

[7] Birch, "Forward," in *Chinese Narrative: Critical and Theoretical Essays*, ed. Andrew H. Plaks, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977, xi.

[8] Tang Xianzu, *Tang Xianzu quanji* 湯顯祖全集 [Complete Works of Tang Xianzu], ed. & annot. Xu Shuofang 徐朔方, Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe 北京古籍出版社, 1999, 2: 1153–4. For an extremely inspiring study of the textual and thematic relationship between this imitation *huaben* story and the "Lady in the Painting" (*hua zhong ren* 畫中人) *zhiguai* tale series, see Zhang Jing'er 張靜二 in *Ming–Qing xiqu guoji yantaohui lunwenji* 明清戲曲國際研討會論文集 [Proceedings of the International Conference on Ming–Qing Drama], ed. Hua Wei 華瑋 and Wang Ailing 王瓊玲, Taipei: Zhongyan yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo choubeichu 中央研究院中國文哲研究所籌備處, 1998, 485–511.

[9] The title *Morphology of the Folktale* is misleading in that tales selected for morphological analysis in it are only one kind of folktale, that is, magic tales numbered 300–749 on the A–T Tale Type Index. As noted by Propp, this book had been originally entitled *Morphology of the Wondertale*,

was applicable to non-European tales of magic, but since the 1960s, there has been a great interest in putting his theory to a wider application.[10] With appropriate adaptation and adjustment, this model proves to be very effective in analysing the structure of a variety of narratives—novels, plays, epics, films, TV dramas, and fictional or non-fictional biographies.

2. The Proppian model and method: function, move, and tale roles

Propp is generally considered to belong to the formalist-structuralist school of linguistics and literary criticism. He believes that there exist rules governing narrative structures and strategies, just as there are grammatical rules of sentence construction. From this analogous relationship between syntax and narrative, he develops his own theory to work out a universal grammar underlying folk narratives. Propp treats a tale text as a self-contained structured system of language, without reference to extra-textual elements such as historical or cultural backgrounds against which this text was produced. This static and synchronic approach to literature distinguishes Propp from socio-psychological schools of literary critics.

His influence actually extends beyond folklore into literature, anthropology and mythology and makes itself most strongly felt in the French school of structuralism, although his morphological theory and applications of his theory to study other genres of literature or forms of art have never been short of criticisms and challenges. Critics of this research might question my application of Propp's morphological model on the following grounds:

1. The Proppian model is generated from Russian fairytales which are basically orally transmitted folklore texts.
2. *Chuanqi* dramas, as the artistic work of highly self-conscious and literate authors, are written in a densely allusive language, in highly embellished and complicated language mixes and are loaded with political and topical references as well.
3. *Chuanqi* dramas are so widely separated in history, culture, style, and provenance from orally transmitted folktales that an intercultural application of

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which was changed by the editor into the present title for marketing purposes. For this note, see Propp, *Theory and History of Folktale*, ed. Anatoly Liberman, trans. A.Y. Martin and R.P. Marin, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, 70.

[10] The first to apply the Proppian model to the study of Chinese literature, to the best of my knowledge, was Han-liang Chang in his structural analysis of the *Yang Lin* 楊林 story series. Recently, there has been a revival of interest in studying Chinese literature under the Proppian framework, as represented by Li Yang 李揚, Xu Zidong 許子東 and Xiaohuan Zhao.

the Proppian model will not be of much help to our understanding of the deep structure of this play.

I cannot agree any more with my critics on the first two arguments. If one likes, she/ he may give an even longer list of differences between Chinese *chuanqi* drama and Russian folktale, but the differences listed above should never be considered as a reason for the rejection of such a cross-cultural and cross-generic comparison. Semiotics, for example, was first developed and studied within the area of structural linguistics without any reference to any structures or systems outside of language, but has been widely applied in the studies of aesthetical, anthropological and sociological issues and has ever since greatly enhanced our understanding of primitive and modern arts, cultures, and societies.

It is true that a *chuanqi* drama is in general a highly artistic work deliberately created by scholars for performance on stage, but it is equally true that in terms of subject matter and storyline, a *chuanqi* drama is genetically related to a *zhiguai* or *chuanqi* story. A case in point is *Mudan ting*, which, as mentioned above, is adapted from an imitation *huaben* story with its key plot elements borrowed from *zhiguai* literature, a genre of strange writing which Leo Tak-hung Chan believes "would yield itself most readily to the kind of formal analyses first utilised by Vladimir Propp to explore the folktale."[11]

2.1. Function versus non-function

The basic components in Propp's morphological model are the functions of the *dramatis personae* which are described by Propp "as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action."[12] Propp believes that the number of the functions known to the fairytale is limited and can be reduced to 31. For each of the 31 functions Propp gives a brief summary of its morphological significance and a one-word definition followed by a conventional sign, lists all the particular forms identified from one hundred Russian folktales, and arranges them logically and chronologically into five sequential sections. Propp observes that a fairy tale usually starts with an initial situation in which "the members of the family are enumerated and the future hero/ heroine is introduced in some manner."[13] The initial situation designated as α by Propp is recognised as an important morphological element but not counted as a function since it involves no actions of *dramatis personae*, although a fairy tale cannot be without it.

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[11] Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-Century Literati Storytelling*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998, 247.

[12] Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd rev. English ed., ed. L.A. Wagner, trans. Laurence Scott, Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1968, 21.

[13] Ibid., 24.

2.2. Tale and Move

Propp defines a tale (*skázka*) as "any development proceeding from villainy (A) or a lack (*a*), through intermediary functions to marriage (W*), or to other functions employed as a dénouement," such as transference of a magical agent (F), liquidation of misfortune or lack (K), or rescue from pursuit (Rs.),[14] and he devises a new unit and terms it *move* (*khod*) to refer to the course of action developing from the function *villainy* and/ or *lack* to any one of the terminal functions. A move is a narrative unit which can stand by itself as an independent tale, and is also capable of being combined with one or more moves to form a larger whole, hence a more sophisticated multi-move tale.

2.3. Characters and Tale Roles

Like functions, tale roles, or *dramatis personae*, have no real existence outside tale texts. A tale role does not refer to any specific character in a tale. Rather, it is an abstract category generated from actual fairytale characters. The actual number and variety of characters in a fairy tale can be very large, but the number of tale roles is very limited and fixed. Propp lists a total of seven tale roles, namely, *hero*, *villain*, *dispatcher*, *donor*, *helper, sought-for person*, and *false hero*, and presents them in the context of the sphere(s) of action they involve in a tale.[15]

Like the Proppian concept of "tale roles," roles in traditional Chinese drama are also an abstract category which should not be identified but associated with a specific type of character. The classification of roles first occurred with the structured four-act Yuan drama and was later developed into a relatively fixed role system mainly consisting of *sheng* 生 (hero), *dan* 旦 (heroine), *laodan* 老旦 (dame), *jing* 淨 (heavy), *mo* 末 (elder), *chou* 醜 (buffoon), *wai* 外 (support), *tie* 貼 (soubrette), and *za* 雜 (extra).[16] Although they share some common features as mentioned above, there is a fundamental difference between Proppian tale roles and Chinese theatrical roles in that the former is a functional category defined in terms of the sphere(s) of actions of characters in a story and the latter is generally considered to be a symbolic category characterized by highly stylized costumes, make-ups, gestures, movements and vocal expressions associating with a particular role type.

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[14] Ibid., 91–2.

[15] Ibid., 79–80.

[16] For the English translation of the role categories, see Birch, "The Architecture of the *Peony Pavilion*," *Tamkang Review* 10, 3–4 (1980): 609–40. For general discussions about role categories and their stage performance, see William Dolby, "Yuan Drama," in *Chinese Theatre from Its Origins to the Present Day*, ed. Colin Mackerras, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988, 50–7. For "Systems of Roles for *Chuanqi* Drama and *Kun* Opera," see Catherine Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*: *Four Centuries in the Career of a Chinese Drama*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Centre for Chinese Studies, 2002, 257–60.

3. Form and function:
a morphological analysis of *The Peony Pavilion*

The Peony Pavilion is a full-length *chuanqi* drama consisting of 55 scenes and involving more than 30 characters. A full presentation of morphological analysis of every single scene and every single character would go well beyond the length of a journal article, nor would it be necessary. In the course of textual analysis, I will therefore concentrate on the main storyline of *The Peony Pavilion* and proceed in both its form and content under the Proppian headings: the Initial Situation, the Preparatory Section, the Complication Section, the Donor/ Helper Section, and the First, Second (and so on) Moves, with non-structural and non-narrative elements such as music, performance, and allusive and metaphorical use of language in arias, envoi, and recited verses excluded from consideration.

3.1. The initial situation

A magic tale usually starts with an enumeration of family members or a brief introduction to the setting or to future heroes. Since a *chuanqi* or *zhiguai* story takes the prose form, this particular element is often achieved through the presentation of a few declarative and/ or descriptive sentences. A *chuanqi* drama, on the other hand, relies upon action and monologue and/ or dialogue to present its characters and their story. If, as in *The Peony Pavilion*, the structure of the magic tale is incorporated into the dramatic form, the initial situation must be altered in order to accommodate that adopted form.

In creating a particular initial situation, Tang Xianzu staggers the appearance of characters on the stage. In line with the theatrical convention of *chuanqi* drama, the play opens with "The Prologue" (*Biao mu* 標目) in which a minor role of *chuanqi* drama known as *mo* assumes the voice of the author to brief the main storyline of the play to the audience. Each character's first appearance entails a particular individual action of speech, which helps to establish his/ her personality and determines the eventual interaction with other characters in the play. One may also note that with the introduction of a major character, the monologue and dialogue ascribed to him/her increases in proportion to the importance which that character will have for the unfolding structure of the drama.

Following the *mo*, Liu Mengmei 柳夢梅 who is played by the role of *sheng* comes on the stage. As suggested by the title of Scene 2, "Declaring Ambition" (*Yan huai* 言懷), Liu reveals his desire for love as ignited by his dream that a girl stands beneath a plum tree, saying to him: "I am the one you must meet to set foot on your road to love

and to high office."[17] That is why he has renamed himself Liu Mengmei, which means literally "Willow Dreams of Plum."

Although it is a brief scene, the first appearance of the hero Mengmei quickly establishes the personality of the scholar through monologue. He is talented, but his talent has not yet been officially recognised, and in him are embodied two dreams: a dream of fame and a dream of love. Through this character with two dreams to fulfil in his life, Tang Xianzu thrusts the dramatic structure of *chuanqi* to the forefront of *The Peony Pavilion*.

Scene Three, "Admonishing the Daughter" (*Xun nü* 訓女), introduces Du Liniang 杜麗娘, Du Bao 杜寶, Madam Du, and Liniang's maidservant Chunxiang 春香. After Du Bao, Prefect of Nan'an 南安, learns from Chunxiang that his daughter dozes away during the day while doing embroidery in her bedchamber, he decides to appoint Zuiliang 陳最良, a pedantic Confucian scholar (Scene 4, "Pedant's Lament" [*Fu tan* 腐嘆]), to teach her Confucian classics and rites so that she can be a proper wife for her future husband (Scene 5, "Engaging the Tutor" [*Yan shi* 延師]).

Up to this point, all the major characters have made their appearance on stage. In these scenes, especially in his gathering of the family, Tang achieves the goal of the initial situation and at the same time forges a link between the hero and heroine through the dream. Even before Liniang and Mengmei have begun their interaction with each other, the playwright has established their particular personalities. The introduction of each character in his/ her most habitual mode of action and the announcement of the misfortune or lack through the mouth of the character concerned not only determine the manner in which each one will react to the others' behaviour, but also predict a tangled relationship between them.

3.2. The Preparatory Section

According to Propp, "the preparatory section" provides the means by which an act of villainy or a lack is able to occur in a magic tale.[18] The first seven functions of *dramatis personae* create this section: *absence* (β), *interdiction–violation* (γ-δ), *reconnaissance–delivery* (ε-ζ), and *trickery–complicity* (η-θ). The facilitation of a villainy or lack can be evoked by several means. Although *absence* and *reconnaissance–delivery* are almost constant functions, a fairytale usually employs the function pair of either *interdiction–violation* or *trickery–complicity*. As both pairs achieve the same end, it is usually unnecessary for a tale to utilise them together.

Although the thirty-one functions serve as the basic component of a fairy tale's structure, two other elements, i.e. *connective* (§) and *motivation* (mot.), also contribute

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[17] The English version of this drama from which quotations are made hereafter for discussion is the 2nd edition of *The Peony Pavilion* translated by Cyril Birch (2002).

[18] Propp, *Morphology*, 31.

to the structure and often make their first appearance in the preparatory section. In *The Peony Pavilion*, the preparatory section employs the function of *absence*, the function pairs of *interdiction–violation* and *reconnaissance–delivery*, and the non-functional elements of *motivation* and *connective*.

In a magic tale, the *reconnaissance–delivery* function pair concerns the reconnoitring and reception of pertinent information by the villain. Although not the true antagonist of *The Peony Pavilion*, Prefect Du is destined to be a primary agent in Liniang's departure from this world. He must perform some act to facilitate her journey to her dreamland. The employment of a Confucian scholar as a tutor for Liniang and its ramifications for the heroine are initiated and intensified by the completion of the *reconnaissance–delivery* function pair. As exemplified in Scene 3, he asks Chunxiang about her daughter's activities (ε^3: reconnaissance by other persons to obtain information about the hero/ heroine), and is very upset to learn that she "idles away her time" (ζ^3: information received).

Dramatically, Tang achieves a threefold purpose in his utilisation of the *reconnaissance–delivery* function pair. The twin functions continue the Initial Situation through verbal action and interaction among family members, reveal a past event that will motivate the engagement of a tutor for Liniang, and foreshadow the eventual escape of Liniang from Confucian classics into her wonderland of dream and love. As the completion of the *reconnaissance–delivery* function pair has revealed Liniang's tedious, boring life in the inner chamber and her indulgence in reverie, an action is required that will effectively help the heroine walk out of her secluded boudoir into the dreamland. Tang thus creates a situation employing *absence* and the twin functions of *interdiction–violation*.

The function of *absence* (β^1: absence of elders) entails the departure of one or more members of the family from home. In *The Peony Pavilion*, Tang initiates this function with an inspection tour made by Prefect Du in the countryside (Scene 8, "Speed the Plough" [*Quan nong* 勸農]), and through his *absence* (β), he prompts a further action of the heroine to make a secret visit to the "Forbidden Garden," hence the function pair of *interdiction–violation* ($\gamma^1\delta^1$).

3.3. The Complication Section

The second sequential section comprises the complication of the tale, where the villain and the hero are brought from the background to the centre of the stage. However, a considerable number of them, as Propp observes, start the Complication Section with a certain situation of *lack* or *insufficiency* rather than with the affliction of *misfortune* caused by a villain.[19] This is also true of Chinese *zhiguai* tales which "tend

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[19] Ibid., 34.

to have the hero situated in a conflict with himself in an attempt to overcome a kind of lack or misfortune arising from *within* rather than imposed on him from *without*."[20] "With its basic motives drawn from a few pre-Tang tales,"[21] *The Peony Pavilion* shows that the hero/ heroine's lack and pursuit of love result from human nature rather than a villainous act against them. As this situation gives rise to quests analogous to those in the case of *villainy*, Propp treats *lack* (*a*) as the morphological equivalent of *villainy* (A).

The majority of characters' acts are motivated by the course of action. *Villainy* or *lack*, however, as the first basic function of the fairytale, is usually in need of some kind of supplementary *motivation*, which is defined by Propp as "both the reasons and aims of personages which cause them to commit various acts."[22] The most immediate cause for the lack Liniang the heroine feels of life and love arises from her first class under the tutorship of Chen Zuiliang on Confucian classics (Scene 7, "The Schoolroom" [*Gui shu* 閨塾]) with the first stanza of the first song from the *Shijing* 詩經 (The Classic of Songs):

> *Guanguan* cry the ospreys
> On the islet in the river.
> So delicate the virtuous maiden,
> A fit mate for our Prince.

This is a love lyric, but ironically, it is the *Classic of Songs*, the overall significance of which the pedantic Confucian scholar sums up as "free of evil thoughts" (*wuxie* 無邪) and stirs her "heart of spring" (*chunxin* 春心). With her sexual consciousness awakened, Liniang feels even more bored with her secluded inner chamber life and yearns for an outlet for her pent-up passion. With great economy of words and actions, Tang presents her restless melancholy and desire for love (a^1: lack of man/ love).

Next to the function A and/ or *a* is the function of *connective incident* designated as B, which brings the hero/ heroine into the centre stage by revealing or being revealed to him/ her the *villainy* or *lack*. The hero/ heroine is approached with a request or command or is allowed to go or she/ he is dispatched. His/ her decision to take actions or counteractions (C) follows the function of his/ her departure from home in search of a person or an object (↑), as exemplified in Scene 10, "The Interrupted Dream" (*Jing meng* 驚夢), which sees Liniang the heroine sneaking out of her bedchamber (B^3: release or departure) into the garden for a secret walk (C↑).

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[20] Xiaohuan Zhao, *Classical Chinese Supernatural Fiction*: *A Morphological History*, Lampeter, Wales and Lewiston, NY: the Edwin Mellen Press, 2005, 276.

[21] Hsia, "Time and the Human Condition," 273.

[22] Propp, *Morphology*, 71.

3.3. Donor/ helper section

Tang places the Donor/ Helper Section immediately after the Complication Section since his heroine is destined to find a donor/ helper in her attempt to liquidate her lack. The donor/ helper must appear after the lack is made known to her. After the class, Liniang reveals her thoughts of spring to her maidservant Chunxiang (D^2E^2: greeting/ interrogation–response), who, out of sympathy (F^9: the agent offers its services, places itself at someone's disposal), sends for a young gardener to give the garden a thorough cleaning for her visit.

3.4. Move One: Romantic union in dream

On a propitious day, Liniang, accompanied by Chunxiang, steals into the garden for a walk (G^3: the hero/ heroine is led). When she comes back ($\downarrow$: return of the hero/ heroine) she feels tired, falls asleep, and dreams of a handsome young scholar by the name of Liu Mengmei carrying her in his arms beyond the peony-lined railing and making love to her by a mound of weathered rocks.

At this moment appears unnoticed the flower god "to watch over her and to ensure that the "play of clouds and rain" (*yunyu zhi huan* 雲雨之歡) will be a joyful experience for her (F^{vi}: the agent appears to offer service). This magical agent, although a minor character credited with few words and actions in this drama, contributes greatly to the liquidation of the initial situation of Liniang's lack of man/ love in this move. He will make his appearance again later in this drama to give testimony in support of Liniang's claim when her soul stands trial in the underworld tribunal after her death, and will help with the return of her soul to the world of the living.

So far the first move comes to an end with a romantic encounter and union of the heroine with her lover in her dream (K^5: lack or misfortune is done away with through the use of a magic agent).

3.5. Move Two: Dream interrupted and recalled in vain

A single-move tale ends with the liquidation of the initial situation of *lack* or *misfortune*, but this is not always the case with a sophisticated multi-move tale with moves interwoven with each other. In a multi-move tale, an initial situation of *lack* or *misfortune* is repeated either in the same form as in the beginning or in a different form.[23] With the introduction of a new lack, a new move commences and everything begins anew.

The main storyline in *The Peony Pavilion* can be morphologically analysed into six moves with each move having one *lack* or *misfortune* in store for the hero/ heroine. The

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[23] Ibid., 8.

second move of *The Peony Pavilion* starts towards the end of Scene 10 with the function pair of *reconnaissance–delivery* and ends in Scene 12 ("Pursuing the Dream" [*Xun meng* 尋夢]) with the heroine making a vain attempt to recall her lost dream in the garden. Madam Du performs the function pair of *reconnaissance–delivery* when she tries in vain to find out what has happened to her daughter. Her intrusion and inquisition startle the heroine out of her romantic union with her lover in the dream. With her dream interrupted, Liniang is plunged into her former state of lack, and finds herself lost again in the real world. The newly established state of equilibrium thus comes to a sudden end, and from this disequilibrium a new situation of lack arises (a^1).

In tales of magic there are two forms for the liquidation of a lack or misfortune: one positive and the other negative. In the case of the villain, his failure to extinguish his insufficiency usually comes as a punishment for his villainy against the hero. However, it is also possible for a negative result to come out of the attempt on the part of the hero to liquidate his lack or misfortune if he violates an interdiction, as is the case with Liniang in this move.

Regardless of Madam Du's warning (Scene 11, "Well-meant Warning" [*Ci jie* 慈戒]) ($\gamma^1\delta^1$), Liniang steals into the garden to relive her dream (C↑) only to find no sign of human presence around ($K_{eng.}$: negative form of the function K) except a flowering plum tree (sc. 12). With her heart lost in the dream, she returns home (↓). Through "The Interrupted Dream" and "Pursuing the Dream," Tang presents a cyclical move revolving from vision to illusion and from illusion to disillusion.

3.6. Move Three: Death of liniang from lovesickness

Through the negative form of *lack liquidation*, Tang prepares a new situation of lack for the next move of *The Peony Pavilion*. Morphologically, the violation of an interdiction will usually incur a punishment to the violator. The punishment can come in various forms, say, in the form of loss of life in the case of Liniang. As implied by her secret wish to be buried under the plum tree after her death, Liniang is struck down by lovesickness upon return from her second visit to the garden. With this new situation of misfortune or lack (a^1), Tang directs the love story into Move Three.

Liniang is very ill now, and she decides to paint her self-portrait as her testament (Scene 14, "The Portrait" [*Xie zhen* 寫真]). After having it mounted, she inscribes at the top of the picture scroll a verse that refers to the name of her lover in her dream and his success in the civil service examination. Through the picture and poem, Tang artistically establishes a link between the hero and heroine in their pursuit of life and love by allegorical reference to her predetermined marriage with a *zhuangyuan* 狀元 (prize candidate) scholar. At the same time, he accomplishes a particular form of the first function of donor (D^1: test of hero), as the allusion hidden between lines of the poem actually constitutes a riddle for the hero Mengmei to guess.

As previously stated, both the function of *villainy* (A) and that of *interdiction violated* (δ) can lead to the negative form of *lack liquidation* (K). As shown in Move Three, the heroine is doomed to die upon her entry into the "Forbidden Garden." This garden was once the only place in this world where she could pursue her dream of love and life. With the gate of the garden closed to her, there seems to be nothing left in this world she finds worth living for, so she dies on the night of Mid-autumn Festival, an auspicious time for family reunion ($K_{eng.}$).

3.7. Move Four: Joyful union of the ghostly liniang with mengmei

The structural pattern of *chuanqi* drama is typically manifested as being composed of a main plotline centring on the *sheng* and the *dan* complemented by branch lines of minor roles.[24] In line with this *chuanqi* convention, Tang designs for *The Peony Pavilion* a dramatic structure revolving around Liniang and Mengmei. These two major storylines first run parallel to each other with different spheres of action ascribed to the *sheng* and the *dan*, and embedded inbetween with a branch line involving conflicts between Du Bao and Li Quan 李全, chief of a rebel army. This branch storyline, which is characterised by "acrobatic fighting and farce" (*wunao* 武鬧), is introduced as plot elaborations to support the overall structure, and eventually joined with the main storyline centring on the hero and heroine.

Before the storyline of the *sheng* is joined with that of the *dan*, Tang inserts an embedded move which actually starts where Move Three ends with the heroine dying from lovesickness (a^1) and develops along the course of action of her soul being summoned by Infernal Judge Hu 胡判官 to the Tenth Tribunal of Hell for trial (D^2E^2) and being released from the City of the Wrongfully Dead (G^3) to seek reunion with her lover (Scene 23, "Infernal Judgement" [*Ming pan* 冥判]). Through the intermediary series of (test–response–reward) functions, Tang achieves for his heroine a spatial translocation from the world of the living to the world of the dead.

The meeting point of the two (*sheng* and *dan*) storylines comes when Mengmei finds Liniang's self-portrait while taking a stroll in the garden (Scene 24, "The Portrait Recovered" [*Shi hua* 拾畫]) (d^7E^7). After a close study of this portrait (Scene 26, "The Portrait Examined" [*Wan zhen* 玩真]), he decides (E^7) that the lady in the picture is a mortal girl who painted a self-portrait (F^5: the agent is found). The further study of the poem inscribed at the top of the picture (D^1) brings to light the metaphoric references to Liu Mengmei as the future mate and prize candidate (E^1). With the riddle solved, the test-reaction function pair comes to a positive end. Responding to his calls, the ghostly

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[24] For this comment, see Lin, Heyi 林鶴宜, "Lun Ming-Qing *chuanqi* xushi de chengshixing"論明清傳奇敘事的程式性 [On the Stylized Narrative Pattern of Ming–Qing *Chuanqi* Drama], in *Nanxi yu chuanqi yanjiu* 南戲與傳奇研究 (Researches on *Nanxi* and *Chuanqi* Drama), ed. Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 and Sun Qiuke 孫秋克, Wuhan 武漢: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe 湖北教育出版社, 2004, 466–7.

Liniang appears with a puff of wind, and offers herself to Mengmei (KF^9) after he vows as requested not to "disdain her love" (D^{7}E^7). With Scene 28, "Union in the Shades" (*You gou* 幽媾), Tang achieves a function of double morphological significance and brings a common ending to the course of actions of the hero and heroine. To the former, the joyful union comes as a reward for his positive response to the request of the ghost of Liniang (F^9), but to the latter, it means the fulfilment of her dream of reunion with her lover (K).

3.7. Move Five: Rise from the dead and rescue from the pursuit

This move starts with a *connective* element which takes the form of Sister Stone, a Daoist nun, overhearing a female voice coming from the young scholar's study at night (Scene 29, "Gossip" [*Pang yi* 旁疑]). With all onstage kept in darkness about their "joyful union in the shades," Tang builds up a dramatic irony and tension between spectators and actors. In order to intensify the dramatic tension, Tang presents Scene 30, "Disrupted Joy" (*Huan nao* 歡撓), through the function pair of *reconnaissance–delivery* executed by Sister Stone who forces her way into Mengmei's room one night after hearing a female voice coming again from it (ε^3), but finds only a portrait of a girl hung on the wall, the ghost having already made her escape (ζ$_{neg.}$).

In a magic tale, *reconnaissance–delivery* usually occurs before a villainous act is committed or a lack is felt or created, and the execution of this function tends to result in the destruction of equilibrium, as exemplified in the first two moves of this drama (scs 3 & 10). This is also the case with this move, which demonstrates evidence of trebling—a common structural device in tales of magic—in its creation of the function pair *reconnaissance–delivery*. Through a trebling of this function pair, which arises successively out of the natures of the different *dramatis personae*, Tang achieves his goal of unifying moves of this love story under the general framework of the magic tale.

Tang presents the *connective* incident (B) as equally composed of dialogue and action (Scene 32, "Spectral Vows" [*Ming shi* 冥誓]). After the ghost reveals that she is now halfway between ghost and mortal (B^1: call for help), Mengmei turns to Sister Stone for help (C↑) (Scene 33, "Confidential Plans" [*Mi yi* 秘議]), but the Daoist nun finds it hard to believe (D^1) until she sees Mengmei moving Liniang's tablet at the Plum Blossom Shrine by inking a dot on it (E^1). After cheating of Chen Zuiliang (Scene 34, "Consultation" [*Xiong yao* [詗藥]]) some medicine with the magic power to settle the soul returning to the dead body (F^3: the agent is prepared), Sister Stone leads Mengmei to Liniang's grave (G^3) (Scene 35, "Resurrection" [*Hui sheng* 回生]). He opens her coffin, finding much to his delight Liniang rising from the dead after she takes the magic medicine (KF^7: resuscitation in form F^7 that the agent is drunk or eaten).

They hurry away for fear of being caught robbing the grave, a crime worthy of death penalty (Pr^2: demand for the guilty person). In magic tales, the function of *pursuit* (Pr) is an alternative form of that of return (↓) of the hero/ine after the liquidation of a lack or misfortune, but "sometimes return has the nature of fleeing."[25] This function is paired to that of *rescue* (Rs) when the hero/ine escapes from the pursuit and is saved or saves him/ herself from a dangerous situation. In *The Peony Pavilion*, this function pair is not presented in its full sense in that the first member of this pair, i. e. *pursuit,* is not a real one performed by a villain. The hero and the heroine only feels the danger of being pursued (Scene 36, "Elopement" [*Hun zou* 婚走]), so they hastily get on board a boat and set off for Lin'an (Scene 39, "Hangzhou" [*Ru Hang* 如杭]) (Rs^1: he is carried through the air or runs quickly).

Through the revival of Liniang and her reunion with her lover, Tang achieves for his heroine the function of liquidating the lack of life and love. The focus of this drama from this point on is shifted to the hero Mengmei who still has two wishes to fulfil—to gain fame and power through the civil service examination and to attain parental permission and blessing to marry Liniang. In order for the dramatic focus to shift smoothly from Liniang to Mengmei, Tang utilises the function pair of *pursuit–rescue* to facilitate the spatial translocation of the hero and heroine from Nan'an to Lin'an.

3.8. Move Six: Dream fulfilment and family reunion

In accordance with the shift of the dramatic focus on Mengmei, Liniang has her tale role of "heroine" changed into that of "dispatcher." Out of her concern for the safety of her parents, Liniang sends Mengmei away to Huai'an for news of them (C↑).

Before Mengmei has his two wishes to realise, there is a series of difficult tasks in store for him to solve, as is often the case with the hero in a magic tale. The function of *difficult task* (M), which usually arises from a false claim or charge, is paired to the function of *solution* (N). A solution to a difficult problem or task may lead to the terminal function of marriage (W*) and/ or accession to throne (W). Propp describes the function of *difficult task* as "one of the tale's favourite elements."[26]

With great expectation, Mengmei departs from Lin'an for Huai'an 淮安 for news of her parents-in-law (o: unrecognised arrival), but his journey turns out to be a nightmare (Scene 49, "Moored before Huai'an [*Huai bo* 淮泊]). Ironically, he is detained as an impostor (L: unfounded claim of a false hero or charge against the hero) by Du Bao who has just been promoted to Chief Minister (*pingzhang* 平章) by the emperor as a reward for his successfully appeasing the rebel army (Scene 50, "Uproar at the Banquet" [*Nao yan* 鬧宴]). Even more ironically, the self-portrait of Liniang that

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[25] Propp, *Morphology*, 56.
[26] Ibid., 60.

Mengmei produces as evidence to prove his identity and innocence (M) is considered as evidence of his involvement in robbing the grave by his father-in-law ($N_{neg.}$) who refuses to set Mengmei free until he is declared to be *zhuangyuan* (Scene 51, "The Lists Proclaimed" [*Bang xia* 榜下], Scene 52, "The Search for the Candidate" [*Suo yuan* 索元], Scene 53, "Interrogation under the Rod" [*Ying kao* 硬拷]) and changed into a crimson "palace robe" (*gongpao* 宮袍) (T^4: transfiguration, new garments).

This dramatic confrontation between the hero and the false hero reaches its climax when the emperor summons all parties to court for cross-questioning (Scene 54, "Glad News" [*Wen xi* 聞喜]). After Liniang shows her exact image in a magic mirror and casts a shadow and leaves footprints on the flower tracks, the emperor is convinced that Liniang has been raised from the dead by Mengmei (Q: recognition of the hero; Ex: exposure of the false hero). The happiest moment arrives when the emperor fulfils Mengmei's two wishes by arranging a formal wedding ceremony for this young couple (W*) and appointing Mengmei "Scholar of the Imperial Hanlin Academy" (*hanlin yuan xueshi* 翰林院學士). With Scene 55, "Reunion" (*Yuan jia* 圓駕), Tang achieves a total reconciliation for the realms between vision and illusion, dream and reality, and life and death.

4. Conclusion

As illustrated above, *The Peony Pavilion* shows a high level of sophistication in structure with a world within a world, a dream within a dream, and a story within a story. In line with the *chuanqi* dramatic convention, Tang designs a double-storyline to revolve around the hero Mengmei and the heroine Liniang with a branch line arsing from the conflict between Du Bao and Li Quan inserted in between to give motivation for the separation of the family members. In this double-storyline structure, the main story, as implied by the alternative title of this drama, *The Return of the Soul*, is concentrated on Liniang's dying for love, dying from love and being raised from the dead by love. Running parallel to it is a story about Mengmei's pursuing his dream of love and fame. These two storylines first go side by side with each other, then cut across, and finally join up with a branch storyline. With one storyline interwoven with another and each further embedded with one or more sub-storylines, Tang creates a crisscrossed network structure as often seen in traditional Chinese narratives. With scenes shifting with exquisite naturalness between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and between reality and dream, Tang achieves an organic union of romanticism with realism in this *chuanqi* drama, and a perfect harmony of time, space and action as well.

Tang cultivates fantastic elements within this ghost/ dream drama and adopts the structure from tales of magic to knit a dense organisation of plot and maintain the suspense of the story. The structure of the magic tale incorporated into this *chuanqi*

drama not only fosters the development of its plot, but also invests the very air of enchantment which is so vital to the fantasy that *The Peony Pavilion* is. In order to link the reality of love with the fantasy of dream, Tang echoes the interactions of his human characters in those among his supernatural ones. He also introduces certain fantastic devices into "the real world" of Mengmei in order to facilitate his entry into the dreamland of Liniang. He suspends the laws of nature; allows his hero to easily accept the fantastic nature of the she-ghost, the flower god, and the infernal judge; enables the heroine to die from love and to be raised from the dead by love, and the hero to dream of his predetermined marriage with Liniang and enter her dream to satisfy her sexual desire; and most importantly, introduces the fantasy love as a realised dream.

Regardless of where his characters live out their drama, whether in the real world, in the fantasy (dream or nether) world, or, as is often the case, in both, Tang unifies the diverse spheres of his play through the utilisation of one predominant structure: the structure of the magic tale.

In "Yihuang xian xishen Qingyuan shi miao ji" 宜黃縣戲神清源師廟記 [Epigraph for the Theatre God Master Qingyuan in the Yihuang County Temple], Tang gives a vivid account of the function of theatre and the art of performance:[27]

> Theatre can create heaven and earth, ghosts and deities. Theatre can present ten thousand ways of human life and a thousand changes in human history. Several actors on a stage […] may show spectators the illusions of people a thousand years from now or scenes from any dream, and can delight or depress all people under the heaven with these illusions created on the stage.

Maybe nowhere else in Chinese history of drama is this function of theatre as described above more powerfully manifested than in *The Peony Pavilion*, in which Tang crosses different realms and spheres of time and space, creates life and love, destruction and resurrection, and visions and illusions. He demonstrates his great courage and dramatic talent to present the impossible in life and to make the impossible possible in theatre.

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[27] Tang Xianzu, *Complete Works*, 2: 1188–90. In translation, I consult Faye Chunfang Fei (ed. and trans.), *Chinese Theories of Theatre and Performance from Confucius to the Present*, Ann Arbor, MI: the University of Michigan Press, 1999, 55.

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