

# An Analysis of Tang Xianzu's "Theory of Supreme Feeling" in the Peony Pavilion

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**Abstract:** This paper mainly analyzes Tang Xianzu's "theory of supreme feelings" through his Peony Pavilion. First, it gives a brief overview of "theory of supreme feelings", and then analyzes "theory of supreme feelings" from three angles. They are respectively the transcendence of the "theory of supreme love" in time, space and secular life, and the thinking about human desire caused by it, and then analyze the anti feudalism in the "theory of supreme love" of extreme romanticism.

**Keywords:** "The theory of supreme love"; "The Peony Pavilion"; Transcendence; Human desire; Romanticism

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## 1. An Overview of "the Theory of Supreme Feeling" in The Peony Pavilion

"The theory of supreme love" comes from Tang Xianzu's Peony Pavilion. "Love does not know where it comes from, but goes deep. The living can die, and the dead can live. The living cannot live with the dead, and the dead cannot revive." ① Tang Xianzu believes that love can transcend life and death. Compared with life, death is not terrible. Compared with death, life is full of infinite hope. "Zhiqing Theory" is a theory of literature and art, and the creative thought of Tang Xianzu, a Ming Dynasty drama writer. Tang Xianzu put great emphasis on "emotion", the core of which is "truth". The "truth" is a true representation of the love between Du Liniang and Liu Mengsheng. In "The Peony Pavilion", Du Liniang died because of excessive love and disappointment with the long shackles. When Liu Mengmei, a scholar, went to Beijing for an exam and stayed in the Peach Blossom Nunnery, he met Du Liniang's soul and fell in love with her. He dug up Du Liniang's grave and became a real couple with Du Liniang. Du Liniang's death and rebirth well reproduce the meaning of Tang Xianzu's "theory of supreme love". Sincere love can move God, overcome many obstacles, and release the many shackles that have imprisoned Du Liniang. In the world of the Peony Pavilion, it seems that the meeting and love between Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei are predestined, but more importantly, they have a deep friendship with each other. Du Liniang has never seen Liu Mengmei, but she can't forget it when she saw her in a dream. Du Liniang whom Liu Mengmei saw is just a ghost that ordinary people can't believe, but they believe each other deeply. Love makes the shackles become nothing and the truth flows through their hearts. "Supreme love" is naturally deep in the bone marrow. From the very beginning, it has the purity of human nature and the depth of friendship, which is Tang Xianzu's love in the Peony Pavilion.

## 2. The Transcendence of "the Theory of Supreme Feeling"

The transcendence in the "theory of supreme feeling" is first embodied in time. "Supreme love" is a deep feeling like "a delicate sieve of saffron beans, and you know what you don't know when you are in love with your bones" ②. As time goes by, it doesn't lose a cent. In the love between Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei, Du Liniang never forgot about Liu Mengmei from the moment she met Liu Mengmei in her dream. Finally, she died of acacia, and her yearning lasted until the end of her life. Even if she died and came back to life later, Liu Mengmei did not shake her friendship. Their love transcends the time of life and death. Life and death are relative. They are seeking an eternity, and turning the infinity of time into an eternity for them. Secondly, the transcendence of "Zhiqing Theory" is reflected in space. When Du Liniang first saw Liu Mengmei, she was in a dream and an illusory space. When Liu Mengmei first met Du Liniang, Du Liniang was a ghost. Maybe he could hardly believe the ghost like love, but when it really happened, it was no longer important whether in hell or in the

world. Liu Mengmei digs Du Liniang's grave and turns their love from one space to another, from the unseen hell to the visible world. Both of them are trying to break the unknown brought by space, which is the embodiment of their profound friendship. The transcendence of "Zhiqing Theory" lies in its transcendence of the secular world. In feudal society, marriage was about the right family, and more about the bondage of women. Du Liniang's father is an imperial guard. If considering the marriage, it is very likely that Liu Mengmei, who is going to Beijing for an exam, will not be considered. However, Tang Xianzu intentionally puts two people with different identities together in the book, which is also a kind of transcendence of identity and status. At the same time, Liu Mengmei did not abandon Du Liniang because she was a ghost, but also helped her escape from the tomb. Although Du Liniang's father later questioned this matter, Liu Mengmei did not give up. The love between Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei was not recognized at that time. Because of this, their love was even more valuable and beyond the common sense.

### **3. Reflections on Human Desire in the "Theory of Supreme Feelings"**

In Tang Xianzu's era, the feudal autocracy nearly reached a peak, and the Confucian culture became the main culture of the ruling class. Under this background, the philosophy of Cheng and Zhu flourished. The most important point of Cheng Zhu's philosophy is to "preserve the principles of nature and eliminate human desires" ③. "Human desires" are desires that go beyond maintaining human life and behaviors that violate etiquette norms. Contrary to the principles of nature, reason is the fundamental law of all things in nature and human society, and its specific manifestations are the three cardinal principles and five constancy. Tang Xianzu's theory of "supreme feeling" obviously pays attention to "feeling" rather than "reason", that is, he should have a negative attitude towards the view of human desire in Cheng Zhu's Neo Confucianism. There is a sentence in *The Peony Pavilion*: "It seems that all the flowers and roses are in ruins. The beautiful scenery can't be better on a good day than in the courtyard." ④ Du Liniang in the book has lived in a boudoir for a long time, and occasionally found such beautiful scenery in her home. Her first reaction was that she was sad and helpless when she was trapped in the boudoir, rather than praising the beautiful scenery, she was more sympathetic to herself, There is also grief and indignation over the shackles that this era has placed on her. In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, Daiyu also felt that she was "as beautiful as a flower and as beautiful as a family member." ⑤ She also felt that women were trapped in purdah and could not see the world. After Du Liniang died and came back to life, her father even took her to court because he didn't believe her daughter. Such a move is undoubtedly a defiance of love and an affirmation of reason. The father of Du Liniang in Tang Xianzu's works is a typical executor and follower of the "reason" in the feudal era, and the author also denied his ending. This also reflects Tang Xianzu's disapproval of "reason" and his admiration for Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei's sincere "love". The concept of human desire in Cheng Zhu's philosophy suppressed the normal human desire and restrained the human desire. At the same time, it is also the imprisonment of human freedom. Du Liniang's death is a metaphor of the oppression of women's freedom at that time.

### **4. Anti feudal Romantic Traits of the "Theory of the Supreme Feeling"**

"The theory of supreme feeling" is the implementation of "feeling", is also the rebellion against "reason", and is a rebellious spirit holding high the romantic feelings. In the *Peony Pavilion*, the plot of Du Liniang's death and rebirth is a trial to "reason", which pushes "emotion" to a commanding height. Under the effect of "emotion", the dead can also be reborn. At the same time, the love that comes back from the dead is also very romantic, highlighting the greatness of sincere love, and covering the feudal ruins in the glory of love, so that the ruins cannot grow. Du Liniang's father's way of fighting against Du Liniang's marriage with Liu Mengmei was to carry on the resistance of "reason" to the end, and finally he ended up with Liu Mengmei's failure to win the first prize. Tang Xianzu wrote the love between Du Liniang and Liu Mengmei in the way of reunion, which is not only an extreme romanticism, but also a rebellion against "reason" and feudal society. "Acacia does not show up, because it is in the bone." ⑥ is the acme of Acacia; "Dreams are short and dreams are long. What year will come and go?" ⑦ is the time limit for Acacia; "The day wears away the heartbreaking sentence, and there is only love in the world that is difficult to tell" ⑧ is the bitterness of Acacia. "Zhiqing" should be accompanied by the word "Zhiqing", the sentence "Zhiqing", and the meaning of "Zhiqing", which is more profound and immeasurable. "Supreme love" has also created the ultimate romanticism. The ultimate romanticism is not a kind of ultimate internal resistance, a resistance to the "reason" of "eliminating human desire", a strong condemnation of the feudal society of "eliminating freedom and human desire", and an infinite yearning for freedom and love. The extreme romanticism itself is an ideal world of Tang Xianzu, which gets rid of the prison of feudalism and runs towards the ideal country of freedom and love.

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