

Lu Opera "The Little Farewell Inn": Love and Sorrow in the Many Facets of Life

LIU, Qingju^{1*}

¹ Anhui University, China

* LIU, Qingju is the corresponding author, E-mail: dhlhh001010@163.com

Abstract: As one of China's traditional operas, Lu Opera has a long history and rich artistic content. "The Little Farewell Inn," a classic among Lu Opera plays, is beloved by audiences for its simple language, profound character portrayals, captivating stories, and deeply moving performances that vividly present the various facets of life. Also known as "Cai Mingfeng's Farewell Inn" and "The Rice-Selling Woman," the play is a part of the full-length "Kitchen Knife Chronicles." It depicts the complex relationships between Hubei Xishui merchant Cai Mingfeng, his wife Zhu Lian, the rice-selling woman Hu Fengying, and the butcher Chen Dalei, portraying themes of love, betrayal, and the unpredictability of fate. This paper will delve into the plot, themes, characters, and cultural significance of "The Little Farewell Inn" in Lu Opera and traditional Chinese drama.

Keywords: Lu Opera "The Little Farewell Inn", Plot and Themes, Character Portrayal, Thematic Value, Tragic Essence

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10073672>

1 Introduction

The main characters in the play revolve around the expression and pursuit of love. Hu Fengying's deep affection for Cai Mingfeng shows a sincere love. She seeks no status, remains faithful unto death, and desires only Cai Mingfeng's companionship, reflecting her selfless pursuit and sacrificial spirit for love. Wei Dasuan, in a critical moment, upholds justice, compensating for past wrongs, and Zhu Maoqing adopts him as his foster son, concluding the drama with themes of justice and goodness triumphing over evil. However, Cai Mingfeng's decision to leave Hu Fengying also embodies the helplessness and pain in love. The plot of "The Little Farewell Inn" reveals the cruelty and tragic nature of fate. Hu Fengying's unfortunate marriage and oppressed life represent the plight of the socially disadvantaged, while themes of separation and sorrow in life are highlighted by scenarios like Zhu's murder of her husband and Fengying's love suicide. According to Lu Xun's classic assertion, "Tragedy shows the destruction of what is valuable in life." In "The Little Farewell Inn," the valuable aspect is the love between Hu and Cai. Hu Yueying valued Cai Mingfeng's honesty and reliability, seeing him as a support. However, Cai Mingfeng, out of filial piety, firmly refused Yueying's request to return home together, even resorting to deceit to leave sooner. Through its tragic narrative, the play evokes the audience's empathy and reflection on life's tragedies.

2 Plot

Lu Opera's "The Little Farewell Inn" can be divided into nine plot segments: The Farewell at the Inn, Encounter with a Thief, Meeting the Father-in-Law, Murder of Cai, Trial of Wei, Slander of the Father, Visiting the Prison, Exposing the Injustice, and Love Suicide. The plot summary is as follows: After leaving home, the businessman Cai Mingfeng secretly marries the rice-selling woman Hu Fengying in Sanhe Street. Having been away for three years, guilt-ridden Cai decides to return home, heartlessly abandoning Hu Fengying despite her efforts to keep him. On his way home, Cai encounters the thief Wei Dasuan, who attempts to steal from him but fails. When visiting his father-in-law Zhu Maoqing, he accidentally leaves his umbrella. Upon reaching home, Cai is murdered by his wife Zhu Lian and her lover Chen Dalei after being intoxicated. The next day, Zhu Maoqing visits with the umbrella and inquires about Cai's whereabouts, which Zhu Lian uses as an opportunity to falsely accuse her father of murder for wealth. During a prison visit, Zhu's mother encounters Wei Dasuan fighting for food. Later, Wei Dasuan reveals the truth about the case, leading to a re-examination by the authorities and the exoneration of the wrongful accusation. Under the county official's arrangement, Wei Dasuan reforms, and Zhu Maoqing adopts him as his foster son. Hu Fengying travels through hardships to find Cai Mingfeng, worships at his grave, and ultimately commits suicide.

Pressured by societal norms and ethical dilemmas, Cai Mingfeng decides to return home. The scene at the inn, narrated by Hu Fengying, recounts their first meeting: a love-struck Hu Fengying, lacking affection in her life, falls

for the lodging Cai Mingfeng at first sight. Their pleasant conversation leads to mutual affection, forming a clandestine relationship, secretly united in matrimony. When Cai Mingfeng reveals the truth to Hu Fengying, she struggles to accept it, feeling a profound sense of loss. Her emotions are reflected in her song: "Hearing of my beloved brother leaving for home, my whole body aches, my heart numb, the fan falls from my grasp, as if a blacksmith chisels at my heart." Hu Fengying fears neighborhood gossip might make Cai uncomfortable. "But curse those from Sanhe Street, wanting fish yet fearing the smell, keeping a man to themselves, pretending innocence. How dare they judge me, a rice-selling woman, for my single affair? They're like half-open doors in the back alleys, men coming and going, depending on men to pass their time." She lashes out at the men, grandmothers, sisters-in-law, and young women of the neighborhood, berating everyone in a desperate attempt to keep Cai. Ultimately, she cannot prevent his departure. Her words, "I'll keep none of the gold and silver, shoes or socks, just these two garments to cherish his memory," touch the heart, showing her profound yet unattainable love. This highlights the depth and sincerity of Fengying's love. Cai's reluctance and dependency on Hu are evident: "Sister, your kindness is immeasurable. I find it hard to leave you, your skilled hands, our shared drinks, your dressing and undressing, our playful intimacies. Hard to leave, but I must." This illustrates the pain and rationality of Cai's choice. Their farewell is filled with reluctance and hesitation, stepping forward and back, often portrayed with the "hurried journey" tune in later performances, endlessly expressing their deep feelings. Particularly notable is the "wine, women, wealth, and wrath" segment, with Hu Fengying still worried, listing numerous examples from both positive and negative perspectives to make Cai remember them well. Her advice starts with care and persuasion, gradually turning to anger and pain, and eventually accepting Cai's departure. The dual variation of love and sorrow in the farewell at the inn is outstanding, deeply moving, and captivating with its profound theme.

3 Themes

In the play, the author deeply reflects on the philosophical theme of love through diversity, complexity, conflict and choice, awakening, and growth. The varying attitudes and choices of different characters towards love demonstrate the diversity and complexity of love, also triggering the audience's reflection on the conflict between moral norms and personal choices. Through the awakening and growth in love, characters experience personal development and inner transformation.

The theme resonates with the philosophical theme of love, with the playwright using extramarital love as the subject matter, prompting the audience to ponder the intertwining and conflict between extramarital love and the philosophical theme of love. Extramarital love, a

phenomenon of social concern, in dialogue with the philosophical discussion of love, further deepens the audience's understanding of love. The playwright, through depicting the emotional trajectories of characters, reveals the impact of extramarital love on individuals and family relations, thereby exploring the essence and significance of love. The play portrays Cai Mingfeng's emotional deviation after separating from his wife due to livelihood pressures, reflecting the impact of extramarital love on these relationships. This theme has broad social relevance and closely relates to people's lives. The playwright does not encourage extramarital love but warns people to handle love, marriage, and family relationships correctly through the tragedy experienced by Cai Mingfeng and his wife due to extramarital love. Essentially, the play raises a deeper question, exploring the art and philosophy of "love."

Extramarital love exists not only in ancient times but also in modern society. Ancient writers bravely faced this issue, while modern people often avoid discussing extramarital love, considering it taboo. Regardless of whether we confront or reflect upon this issue, extramarital love exists in real life. Many family breakups often stem from extramarital love. This issue is complex, involving the knowledge of love and should not be ignored, but rather recognized and studied. "The Little Farewell Inn" depicts two typical cases of extramarital love: a three-year unconventional marriage between Cai Mingfeng and the rice-selling woman, and the relationship between Cai Mingfeng's wife Zhu Lian and Chen Dalei, based on greed and emotional manipulation. The former ends midway due to concerns about losing face, while the latter undergoes a significant emotional shift, leading to the tragedy of murdering the husband. These two cases of extramarital love reveal the subtleties of emotional changes and the trajectory of tragic development.

From the script's perspective, the author does not simply oppose extramarital love but describes emotional divergence and convergence from the viewpoint of sexual relations between people. For instance, the rice-selling woman, young and beautiful with talent, has a husband addicted to gambling who often neglects her, disregarding marital affection. Unable to find love in her husband, she seeks what she lacks, falling in love with Cai Mingfeng. Audiences may sympathize with her character, but also view her actions as not commendable. The plot, following the natural psychological development, portrays extramarital love as temporary, with Cai Mingfeng eventually realizing his moral transgressions and worrying about societal judgment, painfully parting with the rice-selling woman. However, this separation is not entirely clean-cut, as emotions and relationships remain entangled. The portrayal of extramarital love in the play resonates strongly with audiences, precisely because it is a real issue: what preserves love's freshness? The rice-selling woman's husband likely failed in this aspect, leading to a rift in their emotional connection.

4 Characters

"Lu Opera's "The Little Farewell Inn" displays the multifaceted nature of human characters, bringing them to life with unique personalities and fates. Cai Mingfeng's heartrending decision to leave, Hu Fengying's relentless pursuit of unrequited love, Zhu Lian's mercenary betrayal, and Chen Dalei's cunning lack of integrity are all vividly portrayed. Wei Dasuan, despite his thievery, retains his conscience, while Zhu Maoqing is portrayed as upright and magnanimous. These character portrayals in the play highlight their distinct traits and fates, prompting the audience to deeply contemplate their actions and motivations.

Each character has unique personality traits and inner worlds, making the figures in the play more three-dimensional and realistic. As a protagonist, Hu Fengying demonstrates qualities of strength, bravery, and optimism. Even in difficult circumstances, she does not give up, striving for love and happiness. Her character embodies the resilience and dignity of a woman, while also expressing a yearning for love and life. Cai Mingfeng represents an internally conflicted character. He desires both freedom and the warmth of family but faces pressure from society and responsibilities. His choice to leave showcases the complexity of human nature and internal struggles, as well as the influence of the social environment on individual destiny, revealing the rich diversity of life through his experiences. Hu Fengying's transformation from an unhappy marriage to a secret union with Cai Mingfeng, and finally his decision to leave, displays a range of emotions and life attitudes.

Hu Fengying's unhappy marriage and suffering demonstrate the tragic aspects of life. Before her union with Cai Mingfeng, Hu Fengying endured a miserable marriage, suffering abuse and oppression. However, she didn't completely succumb to sorrow but gradually emerged from the shadows of her unhappy marriage through strength and courage. This resilience showcases an active and optimistic approach to facing adversity in life.

The love and separation between Hu Fengying and Cai Mingfeng highlight love and sorrow in life. Hu Fengying's affection and selfless devotion in love are evident. Despite Cai Mingfeng's eventual departure, Hu Fengying still wishes to accompany him, seeking nothing but his company. Her love and care exemplify the genuine emotional bonds between people. The tragic aspect of Hu Fengying's love story is partly due to her own subjectivity and blind devotion. She chose Cai Mingfeng as her secret lover and, for his sake, disregarded everything else, pleading with him not to leave or to take her with him. We can understand why she was so deeply in love with Cai Mingfeng; in that historical period, women had no power to choose divorce, and once they chose to defy social morals, they would face unbearable consequences. In the end, Cai Mingfeng leaves, becoming a lifelong scar for Hu Fengying. Their separation

also reveals the tragic nature of life, as their differing fates prevent them from being together, causing deep pain.

(A) Expression of Emotions: Hu Fengying's lyrics are filled with emotional expressions. She shows concern and love for Cai Mingfeng, trying to help him overcome difficulties and providing support. She speculates about the problems Cai Mingfeng might face and uses this to persuade him. This emotional expression helps the audience better understand her tender heart and sincere feelings for Cai Mingfeng.

(B) Dialectical Philosophy: Hu Fengying's lyrics incorporate some dialectical philosophy to express her views on life and interpersonal relationships. For example, she mentions avoiding greed and conflicts and adopting a positive attitude towards problems, teaching the importance of avoiding disputes and maintaining a positive outlook. These philosophical lyrics not only enrich the character's image but also convey wisdom and life experience to the audience.

"The first-class people I'll tell you about: The top tier doesn't indulge in wine, while the second tier, though fond of wine, leaves others a share. The lowest tier gets drunk senselessly, creating chaos in the streets, attracting scorn from neighbors for such disgraceful behavior. I'll briefly mention lovers of wine, and now listen about lovers of beauty..." Hu Fengying uses the classification of people to elaborate on the topics of wine, women, wealth, and anger, demonstrating her care and concern through extensive advice and warnings.

(C) Emotional Shifts: Hu Fengying's lyrics showcase shifts and complexities in emotions. She starts with concern and persuasion, gradually moving towards anger and pain, and eventually accepts Cai Mingfeng's departure. This emotional transition makes her character more three-dimensional and real, allowing the audience to feel her inner struggle and pain.

"Holding a white paper fan, I sway it to and fro, urging my brother to share his worries." Hu, attentive and caring, notices Cai's restlessness and inquires about the reasons. "Bending to pick up the fan, I have words for this betrayer..." Upon hearing his plans, Hu cannot accept it and begins to find fault, resulting in a tirade to keep Cai from leaving. "Severing the ties of love and affection in this world," she reluctantly accepts the reality of Cai's departure, filled with helplessness and sorrow.

Overall, Hu Fengying's character is richly portrayed. Initially suffering domestic abuse, she couldn't resist but lamented like a wronged woman, desiring to be a 'virtuous' wife deep down. After repeated cries, she loses hope in her husband, especially after starting the inn, focusing her energy on business. It was Cai Mingfeng's arrival that awakened her pursuit of love, embodying a woman who dares to love, hate, and even die for love. Upon learning of Cai's marital status and intention to return home, she undergoes a rapid mental transition: shock, disbelief,

indignation at being deceived, reluctance to let go, and longing for him to take her along. These buildups make her arduous journey to Xishui, crying at the grave, and suicide at the monument feel natural and not abrupt, with the plot developing logically. Hu Fengying's lyrics, through emotional expression, dialectical philosophy, and emotional shifts, portray a woman of sentiment and righteousness. Her lyrics are rich in emotion and wisdom, conveying not only the development of the plot but also reflections on life and human nature to the audience.

5 Theme

"The Little Farewell Inn" integrates tragic elements into a comedic context, creating a unique artistic effect. Despite the presence of tragic elements such as Cai Mingfeng's pursuit, Hu Fengying's heartache, and their separation, the inclusion of comedic elements like Wei Dasuan's monologues and humorous interjections lightens the mood, allowing the audience to contemplate the realities and complexities of life amidst laughter.

The play explores several important themes, including love, betrayal, family relationships, and social ethics. Love is one of the most prominent themes. The secret affection between Cai Mingfeng and Hu Fengying and their selfless devotion showcase profound love. However, this love also faces constraints from family and social morals, leading to a tragic ending.

Betrayal is another theme that runs through the plot. Zhu Lian's betrayal of Cai Mingfeng and her affair with Chen Dalei reveal deception and disloyalty in human nature. This betrayal not only disrupts marriage and family but also exposes human frailties and susceptibility to temptation. The pain and consequences of betrayal are fully explored in the play, prompting the audience to think about the importance of ethics and responsibility.

Family relationships are also a significant theme in "The Little Farewell Inn." Cai Mingfeng's marriage to Zhu Lian was arranged by their parents, not based on true love. This lack of genuine affection and Zhu Lian's betrayal highlight the complexity of family relationships and conflicts in family values. Characters in the play face pressure and expectations within the family, and their choices and actions influence the fate and harmony of the family.

Moreover, social ethics permeate the entire narrative. The play portrays societal expectations and norms regarding marriage, morality, and responsibility. Characters' actions and decisions are influenced by public opinion and ethical standards, while also questioning societal values. Through the characters' destinies and choices, the audience reflects on the value and limitations of social ethics.

"The Little Farewell Inn," with its intricate plot, vivid character portrayals, and profound themes, stands out as a notable work in traditional Chinese opera. The interplay of

elements such as love, betrayal, family relationships, and social ethics reveals the complexity of human nature and the unpredictability of fate. The tragic ending leads the audience to ponder human nature, ethics, and societal values. The play's position and influence in Lu Opera and traditional Chinese drama cannot be underestimated, as it profoundly touches the audience with its unique artistic expression.

6 Value

"The Little Farewell Inn," as a classic work in Lu Opera, holds significant influence and meaning. Firstly, it showcases the unique style and charm of Lu Opera within the realm of theatrical arts. Known for its delicate performance, melodious singing, and exquisite dance, "The Little Farewell Inn" serves as a prime example of this art form. The integration of lyrics and tunes, tunes and plot, plot and characters, characters and emotions, achieves a harmonious and perfect unity, exemplifying the ideal of the lyrics generating emotions, the music composed by emotions, and the singing driven by emotions. Through nuanced performance and vivid expression, actors convey the characters' emotions and inner worlds to the audience, eliciting empathy and reflection.

Secondly, the play, by portraying the complexity of human nature and the unpredictability of fate, profoundly reveals the various facets of human life and the conflicts in moral concepts. As audiences watch the characters' choices and the twists in their fates, they are led to contemplate the good and evil in human nature, the boundaries of morality, and the relationship between free will and fate. "The Little Farewell Inn," through dramatic conflict and a tragic ending, provokes reflection on ethics and societal norms, as well as on love, family, and individual freedom.

Furthermore, "The Little Farewell Inn" reflects the traditional Chinese societal views on marriage, family ethics, and social morality. The choices made by the characters under family and social pressure not only affect their own destinies but also mirror societal expectations of marriage and morals. Through the experiences and decisions of the characters, the audience gains a deeper understanding of the values and moral standards in traditional Chinese culture.

7 Conclusion

As a classic in traditional Chinese opera, Lu Opera's "The Little Farewell Inn" stands out with its rich plot, distinctive themes, vivid character portrayals, and profound themes. The play, through its portrayal of extramarital love leading to family tragedies, guides the audience to scrutinize family and marital relationships seriously. It shapes the image of a woman of integrity and affection, reflects specific life customs and social realities of the grassroots society, and presents many credible and amusing scenarios. Although artistically somewhat crude, it possesses an irreplaceable folk character and vitality that scholarly

dramas lack. By depicting elements such as love, betrayal, family relations, and social ethics, the play prompts the audience to reflect on human nature and societal values. Additionally, "The Little Farewell Inn" showcases the unique artistic allure and performance style of Lu Opera, offering both a visual and intellectual feast to the audience. Its position and impact in the culture of traditional Chinese opera are significant. With its deep character development, touching plot, and artistic expression, the play resonates with a wide audience, enriching the repertoire of Lu Opera and the connotations of traditional Chinese opera.

Furthermore, Lu Opera's "The Little Farewell Inn" provides rich creative material and artistic inspiration for modern drama and literature. Its unique plot design, character portrayal, and thematic exploration offer references and inspiration for contemporary playwrights, directors, and actors. Many modern theatrical works have been created drawing inspiration from "The Little Farewell Inn," ensuring its spirit continues to be passed down and developed.

In summary, Lu Opera's "The Little Farewell Inn" as a classic in traditional Chinese opera, through its intricate plot, vivid character depiction, and deep exploration of themes, showcases the myriad aspects of life marked by love and sorrow. It not only possesses unique artistic charm and performance style but also stimulates the audience's reflection on human nature, ethics, and societal values. The play's position and influence in the culture of traditional Chinese opera are profound, providing significant reference and insights for future theatrical creations and cultural heritage.

8 Research Limitations and Prospects

(A) Research Limitations This paper primarily discusses the plot, themes, characters, and themes of Lu Opera's "The Little Farewell Inn," but the research is limited to the text and video materials of the 1958 Anhui Province Traditional Opera Collection, Lu Opera, (Volume 8). Studies on Lu Opera's version of "The Little Farewell Inn" are not extensive and are mainly combined with related literature on the Huangmei Opera version for analysis. There is a lack of in-depth research on other versions and adaptations of the main character Hu Fengying and the evolution of her storyline.

(B) Prospects Currently, research on Lu Opera's "The Little Farewell Inn" is relatively limited, while there is more on the Huangmei Opera version. In future research, I plan to focus on the origins and comparisons between the Lu Opera and Huangmei Opera versions, delving into aspects such as the melody, lyrics, and main themes. Additionally, the widespread popularity of Lu Opera's "The Little Farewell Inn" in the Anhui region, and its appeal to audiences, are also worthy of study. Adaptations and improvements in the plot structure could positively contribute to the widespread

popularity of this opera genre.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the editor and anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and valuable suggestions.

Funding

Not applicable.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher..

Author Contributions

This study was led by and led by LIU, Qingju.

About the Authors

LIU, Qingju

Male, postgraduate student of Anhui University, research direction: Folk Drama and Regional culture.

References

- [1] Anhui Province Traditional Opera Collection, Lu Opera, (Volume 8), November 1958.
- [2] Sun Yajun. Issues in the Compilation of the 1982 Version of Lu Opera's "The Little Farewell Inn" [J]. Yi Hai, 2019(09): 20-23.
- [3] Wang Kui. Narrative of Literati and the Stance of the Folk: A Comparison between "The Eye on the Beam" and "The Little Farewell Inn" [J]. Journal of Zhejiang Vocational Academy of Art, 2011, 9(04): 9-13.
- [4] An Bei. Reflections on Watching "Cai Mingfeng's Farewell Inn" [J]. Huangmei Opera Art, 1988(03): 112-114.
- [5] Juan Lanzhi. The Impact of the Character Liu Fengying in Huangmei Opera "The Little Farewell Inn" on the Development of Huangmei Opera [J]. Home of Drama (First Half of the Month), 2013(11): 84-86.
- [6] Yu Peilan. A Masterpiece Integrating Lyrics, Music, and Emotion - A Brief Analysis of the Core of Huangmei Opera "Cai Mingfeng's Farewell Inn" [J]. Huangmei Opera Art, 2004(04): 24.
- [7] Wang Kui. Narrative of Literati and the Stance of the Folk: A Comparison between "The Eye on the Beam" and "The Little Farewell Inn" [J]. Journal of Zhejiang Vocational Academy of Art, 2011, 9(04): 9-13.