

A Comparative Study of the Romance of West Chamber in China and the Story of Chunhyang in Korea

Xueqi Lin

Comparative Literature, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, 02450, Korea

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Abstract: The Chinese Yuan Zaju novel "The Romance of the Western Wing" and the Korean Pansori novel "The Story of Chunhyang" are classic representatives of love literature in China and North Korea. Both works are set in a patriarchal society and depict a series of events such as "encounter-love-separation-challenge-reunion" between the male and female protagonists. From the characters' emotions of joy and sorrow, their pursuit of free love, and their resistance against feudal ethics, they portray the marriage and love concepts, social hierarchy, and awakening consciousness of the people in China and North Korea in ancient times. This article comprehensively compares and analyzes the storylines, backgrounds, characters, structures, and themes of the two novels, explores the root causes of the differences and the relationship between the two works, which not only helps to understand the main purpose of the works more comprehensively and profoundly, but also is an essential part of grasping the classical culture and ideology of China and North Korea.

1. Introduction

The Chinese Yuan Dynasty novel "The Romance of West Chamber" and the Korean novel "The Story of Chunhyang" depict classical Oriental love and occupy an important position in the literary history of both countries and even the world. Wang Shifu's "The Romance of West Chamber" is based on the Tang Dynasty Yuan Zhen's "Meeting the True" and the Jin Dynasty Dong Jieyuan's "Various Tunes of the West Chamber". It tells the story of the poor scholar Zhang Junrui and the former Prime Minister's daughter Cui Yingying, who overcome the obstacles of feudal forces such as Cui's mother, Sun Feihu, and Zheng Heng with the help of the maid Hongniang, and eventually become a couple. "The Story of Chunhyang" is based on folk oral legends and was created and processed by pansori artists. It tells the story of the nobleman Lee Mongryong and the courtesan's daughter Chunhyang, who overcome setbacks and ultimately transcend their social status to marry each other. It can be seen that both works are set against the backdrop of a patriarchal society and depict the resistance of male and female protagonists with disparate social status to feudal ethics and their pursuit of free marriage, reflecting the progressive and awakening nature of people's thoughts in the old times. Although there have been many comparative analyses of the articles "The Romance of West Chamber" and "The Story of Chunhyang", there are still few articles that comprehensively and minutely analyze the commonalities and differences in the story plots, backgrounds, characters, structures, and themes of the two works from an overall framework

perspective. Therefore, based on a comprehensive analysis of the contextual framework, this article explores how keywords such as "marriage and love concept," "identity system," and "awakening consciousness" are reflected in the two works, excavates the fundamental reasons for the similarities and differences, and then sorts out the relationship of influence between the two stories, in order to have a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the two works. This is also an important aspect of grasping the classical cultures and thoughts of China and North Korea.

2. Thesis: A comparison between the Romance of West Chamber in China and the Story of Chunhyang in Korea

2.1 Plot Comparison

"The Romance of West Chamber"[1] and "The Story of Chunhyang"[2] are both literary works that celebrate the struggle of young men and women for marriage autonomy and resistance against feudal ethics. In terms of plot, the main storyline of the two works is consistent, with the protagonists experiencing the process of "meeting - falling in love - separation - test - reunion" and emotional changes of "joy - sorrow - joy". Firstly, there are many similarities in the storylines of the two works. Firstly, the male protagonists are both oppressed by the feudal patriarchal system. Zhang Junrui in "The Romance of West Chamber" faces opposition to his marriage with Cui Yingying due to his humble background. Li Menglong in "The Story of Chunhyang" faces opposition to his union with Chunxiang, a former courtesan from a lower social status. Secondly, the female protagonists are both persecuted by feudal forces. Cui Yingying in "The Romance of West Chamber" is first kidnapped by the rebel general Sun Feihu and then forced into marriage by her mother and Zheng Heng, the eldest son of Zheng Shangshu. Chunxiang in "The Tale of Chunxiang" is forcibly taken by Bian Xuedao and falsely accused, leading to her imprisonment. Thirdly, both stories have a "happy ending". Zhang Junrui in "The Romance of West Chamber" returns to his hometown after achieving the highest scholar status to marry Cui Yingying, while Li Menglong in "The Story of Chunhyang" returns to his hometown as a secret imperial official to marry Chunxiang. Secondly, there are also some differences in the plots of the two works. Firstly, the reasons for the separation of the male and female protagonists are different. Zhang Junrui in "The Romance of West Chamber" leaves Puzhou to take the imperial examination and fulfill the conditions to marry Yingying. Li Menglong in "The Story of Chunhyang" leaves Nanyuan because of his father's promotion and shows weakness in wanting to break up with Chunxiang. Secondly, the degree of persecution suffered by the female protagonists is different. Cui Yingying in "The Romance of West Chamber" was once forced by her father to marry Zheng Heng, but her refusal only led to a forced marriage. On the other hand, Chunxiang in "The Story of Chunhyang" is imprisoned and subjected to physical and mental torture after rejecting Bian Xuedao's forced marriage proposal, nearly losing her life. Thirdly, the punishments received by the oppressive forces are different. In "The Romance of West Chamber", Zheng Heng's lies are exposed, and he faces the risk of punishment from the court, choosing to end his own life. In "The Story of Chunhyang", Bian Xuedao, who has committed many evil deeds, is ultimately just dismissed from his position.

2.2 Character Comparison

(1) Female protagonists

"The Romance of West Chamber" and "The Story of Chunhyang" depict two female protagonists, Cui Yingying and Cheng Chunhyang, who are only three years apart in age and appear to be virtuous and beautiful young women. However, their social status differs significantly, with Cui Yingying being the daughter of a former prime minister and Cheng Chunhyang being the daughter

of a lowly retired courtesan. This social disparity leads to different pressures in their romantic relationships, imposed by the feudal society. Cui Yingying primarily faces pressure from feudal ethics and the requirement for a match of equal social status, while Cheng Chunhyang experiences oppression from evil forces and the constraints of chastity. In "The Romance of West Chamber", Cui Yingying has a noble status and has been influenced by feudal ethics since childhood. She embodies both feudal values and resistance. When her maid brings back a letter from Zhang Junrui, she scolds her for "bringing back a letter to mock me". When Zhang Junrui comes to meet her, Yingying pretends to be reserved, which reflects her upbringing under feudal ethics. It can be seen that Yingying is influenced by both feudal ethics and class consciousness, while also pursuing the ideals of monogamous and equal marriage, reflecting the aristocratic women's reflection on their own destiny and progressive thinking on free love in feudal society.

In contrast, Cheng Chunhyang, due to her lowly background, faces even more feudal oppression than Cui Yingying, and her rebellious nature is more resolute and intense. She treats love with great caution. When Meng Long expresses his love for her, she admits her concerns about their disparate social statuses. She also reminded Menglong that there is a difference between "Gui Jie" and "Peng Men" between their two families. Only when he is sure of Menglong's true feelings will he give his heart. After falling in love, she also does not consider herself inferior. When Menglong is promoted with his father, she does not compromise, but asks Lee Menglong to write a contract promising not to abandon her after going to the capital. Later, when she was forcibly married by Bian Xuedao, she resolutely guarded her chastity: "I am already engaged to Lee for life, how can I have another husband, it is really difficult to obey." She angered Bian Xuedao and was bound and whipped, and when she was thrown into the death prison, her rebellious nature became even stronger. She demanded that her tombstone be engraved with "The Tomb of Chunxiang, who upheld her chastity and died unjustly" to protest against her own grievances. Even under more oppression, she still remained faithful and waited for Meng Long to return. It can be seen that Chunhyang not only represents the chaste and loyal women of the Chao ethnic group who uphold love and chastity, but also represents the common people who resist feudal evil forces, embodying the ideals and desires of the lower-class people to resist the rule of corrupt feudal rulers.

(2) Male protagonists

The male protagonists of "The Romance of West Chamber" and "The Story of Chunhyang" are Zhang Junrui and Lee Menglong respectively. In terms of age, one is 23 years old and the other is 16 years old, with an age difference of 7 years. Zhang Junrui's setting as an older character and his poor family background actually reflects the Yuan Dynasty period in which Wang Shifu lived. Due to the invasion of the Mongols and political chaos, Han Chinese civil officials declined and found themselves in a state of frustration. In terms of appearance, Zhang Junrui has a scholarly and elegant temperament, while Lee Menglong is handsome and elegant, but both are outstanding and talented, and they embody the image of a husband who is loyal to love. In terms of status, the two characters, like the female protagonist, also have a difference in status, with one being higher and the other lower. Zhang Junrui is a poor scholar, while Li Menglong is a member of the gentry (the son of a prefect). This results in Zhang Junrui facing greater pressure in terms of marriage. In order to marry Cui Yingying, Zhang Junrui overcame three major difficulties: first, rescuing Cui Yingying from the hands of the rebel army leader Sun Feihu, only to be rejected by Cui's mother. Second, he submitted to feudal ethics and participated in the imperial examination in the capital, and became the top scholar. Third, he exposed Zheng Heng's lies and explained the truth to Cui Yingying. These three difficulties were not easy to overcome, indicating the great pressure Zhang Junrui endured and the determination he had to marry Cui Yingying. On the other hand, Lee Menglong has a somewhat weak side. Although he promised to spend his life with Chunhyang, at the crucial moment of parting from Nanyuan, he actually believed in feudal family rules and said, "Marrying the daughter

of a courtesan as a concubine not only tarnishes the family... but also ruins my future". He also told Chunhyang, "We cannot be together anymore". These are all manifestations of Lee Menglong succumbing to feudal traditional concepts.

(3) Comparison of surrounding characters

The development of the story cannot be separated from the surrounding characters. Both works have three main types of surrounding characters. The first type is feudal parents who oppose marriage. In "The Romance of West Chamber", Yingying's mother is portrayed as a representative of old feudal thinking in China. She values social status and forcefully interferes in Yingying's marriage. She not only prevents Yingying from marrying Zhang Junrui, who comes from a lower-class family, but also forces her to marry Zheng Heng, the son of the Minister Zheng, who is considered a suitable match. In "The Story of Chunhyang", Menglong's father is ordered to move to the capital city of Hanyang, and he commands Menglong to accompany his mother immediately. Menglong cannot bear to leave Chunhyang, so he informs his mother about his long-standing relationship with Chunxiang. However, Menglong's mother considers this act to be rebellious and disgraceful, and believes it will threaten her son's future. She does everything she can to obstruct the union between Li Menglong and Chunxiang. It is evident that they both adhere to feudal thinking and institutions, oppose the love between the male and female protagonists, and try every means to separate them.

The second type of character is the evil forces. In "The Romance of West Chamber", there are two such characters: Sun Feihu, a rebel soldier, and Zheng Heng, the eldest son of Minister Zheng. Sun Feihu surrounds Pujiusi with the intention of forcibly marrying Cui Yingying, but is eventually repelled by Zhang Junrui's friend, General Baima, Du Que. Zheng Heng deceives Cui Yingying by saying that Zhang Junrui has already married someone else in the capital city, but his lie is exposed, and he is ashamed and commits suicide. In "The Story of Chunhyang", Bian Xuedao is described as someone who has more literary talent than moral integrity, is cunning and eccentric, and is knowledgeable about romantic affairs. He is a corrupt person who often judges mercilessly. As a typical feudal bureaucrat of the late Li Dynasty, he stands in opposition to the majority of the people represented by Chunxiang and Menglong. His greed and tyranny symbolize the decay and downfall of the feudal society of the Joseon Dynasty, which is on the verge of collapse.

The third type of character is the servant. Hongniang is the maid of Cui Yingying in "The Romance of West Chamber", and Fangzi is the servant of Lee Menglong in "The Story of Chunhyang". They both play a role in facilitating the love process of the main characters, but the motivations of the two servants in helping the main characters are different. Although Hongniang initially follows the orders of the old lady to "monitor and guard" Yingying, she sees Zhang Junrui's genuine efforts to rescue Yingying and Cui's mother's broken promise to cancel the marriage, and decides to support their free love. Hongniang strategizes for Zhang and delivers letters to Yingying. Especially in the fourth act of "The Romance of West Chamber" reflects Hongniang's progressive spirit as a servant who dares to fight against feudal forces. On the other hand, Fangzi, the servant of Li Menglong in "The Story of Chunhyang", helps the main characters more out of absolute obedience to superiors and self-interest. On one hand, Lee Menglong is his master, so he dare not disobey orders. On the other hand, he only brought Chunxiang because he received money from Lee Menglong, facilitating their first meeting. Therefore, his loyalty is based on money and personal interests, and it is a manifestation of obedience to superiors in a strong hierarchical society. In addition to the servants of the two main characters, Du Que, a friend of the male protagonist in "The Romance of West Chamber", appears as a supporting character. He helps Zhang Junrui rescue Cui Yingying by defeating the rebel army led by Sun Feihu at Pujiusi, making him a true defender of their love. This similar character does not appear in "The Story of Chunhyang" and can be seen as the Tang Dynasty's admiration for celebrities, where having respected and virtuous friends holds

greater value than one's own knowledge and wealth.

2.3 Background of the Work

(1) Creation background

The background of the creation of both works lies in an era of sharp ethnic and class contradictions. "The Romance of the Western Chamber" was approximately created during the Yuan Dynasty, between the years of Yuan Zhen and Da De (1295-1307). The Mongol rulers invaded the Central Plains, oppressing and massacring the Han Chinese and establishing their dynasty. The early rulers of the Yuan Dynasty did not value Confucianism, and the imperial examination system was inconsistent. For a long time, ordinary Han literati and scholars had their path to success blocked, and their talents and abilities had no outlet, leading to frustration and unfulfilled ambitions. "In the social hierarchy of the Yuan Dynasty, Confucian scholars were at the bottom. Xie Bangde's "Dieshanji: Farewell to Fang Bozai Returning to the Three Mountains" and Zheng Sixiao's "Suonanji: Heart History" both mention the "ten ranks," with the "first official," "second supervisor", "ninth Confucian", and "tenth scribe" being the same. This broadly reflects the social reality and the status of Confucian scholars in the Yuan Dynasty". Some intellectuals of the Yuan Dynasty inevitably fell into the predicament of being associated with "nine Confucians and ten losses" and consorting with courtesans. Wang Shifu, as an oppressed Han intellectual of the Yuan Dynasty, suffered from the oppression of feudal ethics and ethnic discrimination. He was dissatisfied with the rulers' injustice but was powerless to change the situation. Therefore, in "The Romance of the Western Chamber," he expressed his criticism of the feudal ethics and social hierarchy of the time, reflecting the spirit of the era.

"The Story of Chunhyang" had been circulating among the people as early as the 16th century. "Around the mid-18th century, it was performed in the form of narrative scripts and finally formally developed into a novel in the late 18th century to the early 19th century"[3]. Therefore, the background of the creation of "The Story of Chunhyang" can generally be located in the late Lee dynasty, when the signs of the collapse of the feudal society in Korea were already apparent. During this period, Korean society was in a new transitional phase, with the aristocracy indulging in extravagance and corruption, and the common people suffering from persecution and exploitation. Social contradictions intensified, and peasant uprisings and civic struggles were frequent. The Korean dynasty was on the brink of collapse. Meanwhile, with the development of handicrafts, there emerged a trend of "practical learning" and the idea of "gender equality," greatly improving the status of women and promoting the development of free love and marriage ideals. "The Story of Chunhyang" reached its perfection under these historical conditions. Therefore, compared to "The Romance of the Western Chamber", "The Story of Chunhyang" has a deeper social significance and a thorough anti-feudal consciousness.

It is worth noting that many scholars believe that under the influence of the Chinese drama "The Romance of the Western Chamber", ancient Korean literati created and refined "The Story of Chunhyang". The earliest known introduction of "The Romance of the Western Chamber" to Korea dates back to the 16th century, and there are some records of Korea's reception of the play in various collections, notes, and historical records. The Annals of the Joseon Dynasty mentioned in the 12th year of King Yeonsangun (1505): "On this day, 'Cutting the Lantern: New Stories,' 'Cutting the Lantern: Additional Stories', 'Xiaoping Collection,' 'Jiaohong Ji,' 'The Romance of the Western Chamber', etc., were ordered to be purchased from the envoy Xie En.". In Lee Gye-jing's "Miscellaneous Writings of the Five Continents", it is mentioned: "In the year of Yibwei in the English Temple, Vice Lieutenant Shen, the first translator, traded one book of Li Chen for one tael of silver, a total of twenty finely printed volumes, including 'The Romance of the Western Chamber',

'Wu County's Virtuous Mu', 'Southern Hero's Poetry Stories', 'Recent Northern Lyrics', with 'The Romance of the Western Chamber' as the first...". This indicates that "The Romance of the Western Chamber" was already acquired and introduced to Korea around 1505 by diplomatic envoys visiting China. By the 18th century, in the 51st year of King Yeongjo's reign (1775), works like "The Romance of the Western Chamber" were already popular among the ruling class in Korea and spread to the literati, receiving high praise. The modern version of "The Story of Chunhyang" that we see today bears many similarities to "The Romance of the Western Chamber". Korean literary scholar Kim Si-ye proposes in his book "History of Korean Literature" that the author of "The Story of Chunhyang" should be a knowledgeable literati who is well-versed in Chinese poetry and books and has a taste for elegance. Therefore, many famous lines in "The Story of Chunhyang" are taken from "The Romance of the Western Chamber", and some plot elements can also be seen as imitations of "The Romance of the Western Chamber". In the script of "The Story of Chunhyang", many phrases are quoted from "The Romance of the Western Chamber", "Records of the Grand Historian," "Zhuangzi," "Tai Ping Guang Ji," etc[4].

(2) Historical background (Temporal background)

In terms of the historical background, "The Romance of the Western Chamber" is set in the Tang Dynasty, which existed from the 7th to the 10th century, while "The Story of Chunhyang" is set in the Joseon Dynasty. The story of "The Romance of the Western Chamber" takes place during the middle of the Tang Dynasty (785-805 AD), while the story of "The Story of Chunhyang" takes place during the reign of King Injo of the Joseon Dynasty, around the 17th century. Therefore, in terms of the timeline, the story of "The Romance of the Western Chamber" takes place earlier, and as a result, the progressive anti-feudal awakening thoughts of the Tang Dynasty did not reach the Joseon Dynasty.

(3) Geographical background

From a geographical perspective, both works involve specific spatial movements during the process of separation, with the space moving from south to north, thus unfolding the events. From the perspective of geographical movement, both works involve the male protagonists' spatial movements in order to gain power and status. In "The Romance of the Western Chamber", the male and female protagonists meet in Puzhou, and in order to pass the imperial examinations, Zhang Junrui can only go to the capital city, and after becoming the top scholar, he returns to Puzhou to marry Yingying. Therefore, the spatial movement in "The Romance of the Western Chamber" is "Puzhou-Beijing-Puzhou," with a "south-north-south" spatial movement. In "The Story of Chunhyang", the initial spatial background is in Namwon, where Lee Mongryong and Chunhyang meet at the Gwanhanru Pavilion. Later, Lee Mongryong goes to Hanyang due to his father's promotion, becomes a censor, and then returns to Namwon to marry Chunhyang, finally bringing Chunhyang and her mother back to Hanyang. Therefore, the spatial movement in "The Story of Chunhyang" is "Namwon-Hanyang-Namwon-Hanyang," with a "south-north-south-north" spatial movement. In China's "The Romance of the Western Chamber", due to the complex narrative relationships, there are relatively more spatial backgrounds, mainly including the Pujiu Temple, Yingying's home, the inn, the garden, Yingying's bedroom, and the capital city. In contrast, the Korean "The Story of Chunhyang" has a simpler narrative structure, with relatively fewer spatial backgrounds, mainly including the Gwanhanru Pavilion, Chunhyang's home, the yamen, and the prison. The locations where the male and female protagonists meet, fall in love, are tested, and even reunited are all different, greatly enhancing the breadth of the novel's conception and lengthening the sense of time and space in the story. It is worth noting that in Korea, the place where the two men and women meet is the Gwanhanru Pavilion, while in China's "The Romance of the Western Chamber", the place where the two male and female protagonists meet is a Buddhist temple, indicating that Buddhism had an important influence in China at that time.

2.4 Structure of “The Romance of West Chamber” and “The Story of Chunhyang”

"The Romance of the Western Chamber" and "The Story of Chunhyang" both took place during the feudal era, when most marriages had to adhere to feudal ethics, clan concepts, and hierarchical systems. In the long history of feudal society in China and Korea, the marriage system centered around "obeying parental orders and following the matchmaker's words" lasted for thousands of years. This lack of freedom in the feudal marriage system resulted in numerous tragedies, leading to a widespread desire for a "happy ending" in people's hearts. Both China's "The Romance of the Western Chamber" and Korea's "The Story of Chunhyang" have the common framework of "meeting, falling in love, parting, being tested, and reuniting", and the protagonists in both works experience "happiness-hardship-happiness-hardship-happiness" before finally becoming a couple. From the framework, it can be seen that feudal ethics often cruelly strangle the pure love between men and women, but people always hope for a turning point and firmly believe that they can obtain the opportunity for free love through struggle. This "one joy, one sorrow, one joy" love depiction technique not only portrays the twists and turns of young men and women in rebelling against traditional marriage systems, but also reflects their longing for a happy ending. Of course, this perfect ending of love has the romantic characteristics of classical Eastern culture. It is the fantasy of love that ordinary people have under the oppression of the Eastern feudal system, which is reflected in the romantic descriptions in literature.

3. Themes and Ideas

Both works are classic works in Eastern literature that depict love and use the model of talented scholars and beautiful women novels to compose enduring love songs. The two works mainly reflect three major themes.

Firstly, the concept of love and chastity. Both works reflect the pursuit of freedom in love and praise the courage of young men and women in pursuing love. They "praise the great attempt of young men and women to resist the concept of social class and break through the feudal hierarchical system". In "The Romance of the Western Chamber", Cui Yingying's view of love is very pure and sincere. After developing feelings for Zhang Junrui, she can let go of her high status and actively approach him, regardless of whether he can achieve fame. The love of Cui Yingying in "The Romance of the Western Chamber" is very pure and sincere. After developing feelings for Zhang Junrui, she can put aside her high status and actively approach him, not caring whether he can achieve fame. She believes that "as long as we have each other, it doesn't matter if you become a top scholar". She only hopes for his early return after completing the examination. Similarly, Zhang Junrui also made great efforts to marry Yingying. Starting from saving her at the Pujiu Temple, he risked his life several times for love. Even after becoming the top scholar, he still couldn't forget about Yingying. Their love is a sincere spiritual connection, pure and sincere, without any material temptations. This depiction of love demonstrates the progressive thinking of Wang Shifu. In "The Story of Yingying", Spring Fragrance faces torment from evil forces like Bian Xuedao but can still sacrifice her life to protect her chastity. She is willing to remain faithful to Menglong and vows, "In this lifetime, I will not marry anyone else". Even if Menglong were to marry another woman in the future, she would willingly become his concubine. Similarly, Menglong's love for Spring Fragrance is also sincere and unwavering. He writes a love poem called "Never Forget" for Spring Fragrance. Even when he goes to Hanyang and is separated from her, he always keeps her in mind. He works hard to become an imperial censor and gain power. In the end, they overcome the social gap between them and unite.

Secondly, there is resistance against feudal ethics and awakening consciousness. Cui Yingying, the daughter of a former prime minister, has been bound by feudal ethics since childhood. Even

when she develops feelings for the poor scholar Zhang Junrui, she initially shows a sense of distance and hesitation, which is a limitation inherent in her identity as a feudal woman. However, when her mother regrets the marriage, her resistance consciousness is aroused. She visits Zhang Junrui under the pretext of visiting him while he is sick and privately agrees to marry him, rejecting the arranged marriage with Zheng Heng's family and pursuing personal marriage freedom. This action was a defiance against feudal ethics and the concept of family alliances at that time. It signifies Yingying's awakening consciousness and resistance against the constraints of feudal ethics. However, the anti-feudal ideas in "The Romance of the Western Chamber" are still insufficient. Although the two characters from different social classes eventually marry, it is only after Zhang Junrui participates in the imperial examination and gains recognition from the upper class. This limitation shows that Wang Shifu was unable to touch upon the deeper social essence. In comparison, the resistance and awakening consciousness in "The Story of Yingying" are more prominent. Although Spring Fragrance is a woman from the lower class in feudal society, she has a conscious awakening. When Menglong intends to leave her, she angrily scolds him for his heartlessness, saying, "Don't think of Spring Fragrance as a cheap woman, so you can abandon her at will". She further criticizes the unjust hierarchical system, saying, "The nobles and gentry are all ruthless! I hate it! I hate it! The distinction between high and low, noble and commoner is truly hateful! Everyone wishes for lovers to be together, but I never expected such ruthless distinctions in the world!" This expresses her frustration and dissatisfaction with the unfair hierarchy she has experienced. Meanwhile, she was imprisoned in a death cell for refusing to be the concubine of Bian Xuedao. With her strong fighting spirit, she relentlessly resisted the feudal bureaucrat Bian Xuedao. This struggle not only represented her commitment to love and chastity but also symbolized the class conflict between the ruling class, the oppressed, and the oppressors. It epitomized the unfair treatment suffered by the lower class at that time. In her poem "The Song of the Ten Canes", she boldly exposed Bian Xuedao's crimes, criticizing him for ignoring the suffering of the common people and bending the law for personal gain. She shouted, "I wish to have a seven-foot sword to kill the treacherous slanderers" and proclaimed that "the innocent will have their day of redemption". The accusations and protests of Chunhyang, filled with grief and anger, expressed the deep-seated resentment and hatred of the Korean people towards the feudal system at that time. This conflict greatly enhanced the social significance of Chunhyang's character and made her the voice of the thoughts, emotions, will, and desires of the Korean people at that time[5].

Thirdly, the themes of both works reflect the issue of "social mobility" within the system of social hierarchy. The characters in "The Romance of the Western Chamber" and "The Story of Chunhyang" depict bold young men and women who pursue love despite their disparate social statuses. In "The Romance of the Western Chamber", Cui Yingying and Zhang Junrui come from different social backgrounds: Cui is the daughter of a former prime minister, while Zhang is a poor scholar. In "The Story of Chunhyang", Lee Mongryong is the son of a prestigious magistrate, while Chunhyang is the daughter of a former courtesan, belonging to a lower social class. This "high-low" setting of the characters reflects the feudal class system of the time and deepens the conflicts within the stories. During the Tang Dynasty, the ideology of social hierarchy dominated, and He Zhongli argued in his article "An Analysis of the Origin of the Imperial Examination System - Discussing the Tang Dynasty's Pioneering of the Jinshi Examination" that the examination system in feudal society began to take shape during the Tang Dynasty. Scholars from humble backgrounds had little chance of marrying into higher-class families unless they achieved success in the imperial examination. Therefore, the imperial examination became an important means for scholars from humble backgrounds to change their lives, and this concept also applied to the idea of marriage based on social class. In "The Romance of the Western Chamber", Zhang Junrui, as a poor scholar, can only marry Cui Yingying by achieving success in the examination, which is the most secure

way to change his social class. In the social background of "The Story of Chunhyang", the class divisions were exceptionally clear in a dark era. After the 18th century, peasant uprisings in Korea surged, and anti-feudal sentiments were on the rise. The Lee dynasty, in its late feudal stage, was on the verge of collapse. During this period, the feudal class system was strict and influenced by the ancient Chinese feudal class system, dividing society into four classes: nobles, middle-class, commoners, and lowly people. The nobles always enjoyed absolute privileges in politics, society, economy, and culture, while courtesans belonged to the lowly class and had to obey without question, unable to surpass their social status. Even though Chunhyang is the daughter of the retired courtesan Yumae, whose father was a former vice governor of Namyang, and has noble blood flowing through her veins, she cannot enjoy the social status and honor that the nobles should have. Instead, she has to endure the humiliation and suffering that come with her courtesan identity. However, later on, Chunhyang marries Lee Mongryong and becomes the wife of a royal envoy, which has a realistic basis. In the 18th century, during the reign of King Sukjong, external invasions and internal turmoil disrupted the original order of the feudal society, leading to the breakdown of the social hierarchy. This resulted in rewards such as buying official positions and military achievements, which provided opportunities for lowly people to escape their social status and achieve social mobility. Therefore, "The Story of Chunhyang", with a courtesan as the protagonist, depicts the unfair treatment and suffering of lowly people, expressing the desire to break free from the constraints of the social hierarchy and achieve equality through social mobility.

4. Conclusion

The Chinese Yuanzaju novel "The Romance of the Western Chamber" and the Korean Pansori novel "The Story of Chunhyang" both carry the concepts of love and marriage, social hierarchy, and awakening consciousness in ancient Chinese and Korean societies, making them worthy national treasures. This article compares the storylines, backgrounds, characters, structures, and themes of the two works, from detailed analysis to comprehensive understanding, grasping the three major themes of love and chastity, resistance against feudal ethics and awakening consciousness, and the issue of social status. These progressive themes are not only reflected in the ancient novels of the two countries, but also have been passed down through generations with the spread of the works. With the development of literature and theatrical performances, cultural dissemination has long been popular among the common people. The theme of "lovers finally being together" and the strong anti-feudal ethics sentiment in the story not only influenced the people of the feudal era, but also continue to spread on the world's classic stages. These two works still have an impact on people's thoughts and artistic enjoyment to this day.

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