

Decoding the Leading Female Character in Raise the red lantern based on Western Theory of Tragedy

Qiyue Hu^{1, a}

¹Department of Chinese language and Literature, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China

^a2502905549@qq.com

Corresponding author: Qiyue Hu

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Abstract: As one of the representative works of the new historicism novels, Raise the red lantern not only retains the shell of Chinese family story and the sad atmosphere but also exposes the tragedy of traditional Chinese family to the readers directly. The writer Su Tong based on an old Chinese story to write this novel and showed the tragedy of female personality and destiny in the traditional Chinese marriage system. This paper will focus on the personality and the destiny of the main character Lotus and base on the tragedy theories of Aristotle and Schelling to analyze the causes of Lotus's tragedy. At the same time, the paper will also analyse the exact ways to express tragedy in Raise the red lantern.

1. Introduction

The novel Raise the red lantern mainly tells the story of Lotus's life after she married Chen Zuoqian, a 50 years old male, as his fourth concubine. Time passed by, Lotus knows more about the reality of Chen's family rules. The focus of this polygamous traditional marriage system is the important reason that led to Lotus 's final ending of destruction. From my perspective, Su Tong combined the traditional Chinese story of concubines with the western theory of tragedy. This research also emphasizes that Su's writing is a symbol named "old bottles with new wine". By writing the story of a traditional Chinese family, Su adds the "new" western theory of tragedy in the story. It makes this Chinese novel works reveal the innovative features comparing with those classical novels.

There are two primary theories that this paper will apply to an analysis of Su's novel. First is Aristotle's "negligence theory" in poetics—the tragic hero must have done some wrong things, his tragic results must because he has made the mistakes. And the second is Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling's tragic concept that freedom is inevitably suppressed by destiny in Philosophy of Art. Basing on these theories, in Raise the red lantern, Lotus's ending is mainly caused by her personal choices and the oppression from the social marriage system. The use of well, wooden flute and Xici are the elements that the researcher argues to show the main character's love, imagination to be loved, and the oppression that she received in this traditional family.

2. The Combination of Old and New

Raise the red lantern was written in 1989. It is a representative work of the new historicism novel in China. In the 1980s, a lot of Chinese novels focused on writing styles rather than the content itself. However, the novel, Raise the red lantern, was different from these Chinese novels. It pays attention to historical reflection and personality exploration. Su Tong focuses on the details of the history which are hardly ever be showed before and writes them directly. He “abandoned language habits and formal traps, picked up the traditional ‘old clothes’ and draped them over the characters and trying to regenerate a traditional story and a familiar character.”(Su Tong, Zen Me Hui Shi, 307)This writing style is the expression of Chinese writers' returning to the realistic writing way. It also showed that Chinese writers in the 1980s and 1990s who realized the limitations of the writing

methods of the novel which only focus on the style of the novel and ignore the content. As an explorer and forerunner of the new historical writers, Su is the first one who returns from the novel which only focuses on the style to the reality in this novel.

However, the writing style in Su's story not only shows the plots in a traditional Chinese family but adds lots of new ideas from western especially about the tragedy. It is not similar to the style as traditional Chinese famous vernacular novels or oral novel. He added his own new concepts and unique creative thinking about destiny and the modern way to analyze the traditional Chinese stories after he is influenced by western tragic concepts. Su Tong has explained this: "When I write *Raise the red lantern*, I found that the writer should not always only pay attention to their own creation, but to follow and transform the classical content. It can be said that there is nothing new in *Raise the red lantern*. But the readers are willing to read it. The advantage of this writing way can continue the writer's creative life because it stays away from always finding things from writers' themselves. Instead, it uses the borrowism to rediscovery the old things. (Mo Yan and Li Jingze, 155) He mentioned a concept named "rediscovery of old things", which means that *Raise the red lantern* is a new creation among the contents of traditional life in a Chinese family. So when *Raise the red lantern* tried to abandoned the happy ending and combined the sad atmosphere in traditional Chinese novel with western tragedy theory, it showed the value of Su's contribution.

The value of *Raise the red lantern* mainly lies in the re-innovation of the basic mode of Chinese traditional stories. In my opinion, Su Tong applies new concepts of western theories to the traditional Chinese family story. Before Chinese traditional novels were influenced by western theories, many Chinese tragic stories would have a happy ending. Lu Xun once explained the reason why this situation exists. "Chinese people are very fond of reunion. Chinese also know about the defects of life reality, but they are not willing to speak out. Because once it is said, the problem of 'how to make up for this shortcoming of no reunion' will arise. And when the problem is spoken out, it is inevitable to worry how to improve, the original stuffs will become more troublesome. Chinese people do not like worries and troubles. Thus, if the defects of life are mentioned in the novel, readers will feel unhappy. Therefore, those who are not reunited in history are often reunited in novels, those who are not retribution are often retribution in novels. Chinese people always cheat each other in order to maintain the apparent peace." (Lu Xun, *Complete Works of Lu Xun* (Volume 9), 316) Although this explanation is rather extreme, it still reflects the characteristics of Chinese people and Chinese traditional literary tries to meet the readers' reading expectation by ending with reunion after tragic plots.

However, behind the reunion or happy ending, there is often a sad atmosphere behind these Chinese stories. What sad atmosphere contains is that although the characters can finally have a reunion ending, their past experience is often miserable and desolate. The purpose of a happy ending for the characters is to reduce the sense of sadness of readers.

The breakthrough of Su Tong's *Raise the red lantern* is that this book lies in the removal of the inherent pattern of cheerful endings in traditional Chinese works. Lotus, who is the primary female character in this novel, falling into the frame of the traditional Chinese family and looking forward to meeting the family expectation to a concubine. From my perspective, it could be the main reason that causes Lotus's depressions and craziness at the end of the story. With his writing influenced by the west, Su puts his effort into breaking the traditional ways of writing in the story. Su has his apparent attempt to present the tragedy to the readers, which is different from many Chinese writers who choose reunions at the end of novels. In other words, there is no satisfactory ending in *Raise the red lantern*. Su points out the fact that women cannot leave the bondage of family in family stories because she does not have the financial source and the consciousness of living independently. Many family members such as Coral and Lotus get crazy or die in the end because of the rule like that. Based on this showing way, the tragic feeling can be carried out and the strong tragic effect of the whole story can be directly displayed.

At the same time, in order to know the relationship between the sad atmosphere and western tragedy theory in *Raise the red lantern*, the first thing that needs to be introduced and analyzed is theories of tragedy.

The western theories of tragedy first appeared in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In *Poetics*, a form of tragedy theory, which is about the behaviours that the main characters have down led to his tragic ending, is discussed. The main argument of this theory is that the main character in the tragedy is not the best man but is a man between the perfect and imperfect. The reason of his tragic ending is because he has some mistakes and doing something wrong, but not because of his evil deeds.

After Aristotle, Schelling, a German classical aesthetician, also proposed that tragedy is based on the conflict between freedom and necessity. He believes that tragedy is caused by the control of necessity, which is closely related to destiny. Specifically, Schelling believes that although human beings are free in their behaviours, the final outcome of their actions depends on a necessity that overrides human beings and even controls their free actions. It means that on top of people's free choice and struggle, there is a force named destiny, which always control people's action. The destiny is hard to be changed by people's actions. So, characters' behaviours are always effective and extremely difficult to demonstrate due to the inevitability of their destiny.

In the following, based on the main character Lotus in *Raise the red lantern*, the sad atmosphere and tragedy showed in the novel will be discussed.

3. The tragic ending in *Raise the red lantern*: the destiny of traditional family women

First of all, there is no doubt that Lotus's tragic ending is closely related to her own concepts and behaviours of being controlled by the male. The tragic ending that happens to Lotus is connective to Aristotle's tragic theory. The character's bad fortune comes from their choices. Lotus's "bad fortune" is the result of her personalities. Su Tong once provides his thoughts about tragic destiny of Lotus and many Chinese traditional family females who are similar to Lotus. "If people want to know what damages these women, it can be the male-dominated society, the state machine or the traditional culture. However, when people talk about these factors, they often ignore the damage that women do to themselves. In many cases, they have done some behaviours which do harm themselves."(Wang Hongtu, 63) As for Lotus's behaviours, her ending mostly depends on her consciousness.

At the beginning of the *Raise the red lantern*, Lotus seems to be different from traditional Chinese women since she had higher education and received modern knowledge from school. "The servants were washing some old yarn by the side of the well when they saw the sedan chair slip quietly in through the moon gate and a young college girl, dressed in a white blouse and black skirt, step down from it.It was a female student, her face covered with dust and looking unbearably exhausted."(Su Tong 1) In the novel, the biggest difference between Lotus and the other wives and concubines is the identity of her is a schoolgirl. She is not a thoroughly old-fashioned woman, but a modern woman with a higher education. In many cases, it can be said that a person with modern education has some ideas. So, she has a figure of the progressive era women before entering the Chen's family.

However, she finally chooses to abandon her prior female status and returns to the old family. A large part of the reason for Lotus's return is that her old-fashioned thought is different from the thought that female students have. In the novel, it showed that "She was very practical. As soon as her father died, she had to be responsible for herself.it was her way of calmly planning for her future. Thus, when her stepmother came right to the point and asked her to choose between going to work and getting married, she answered dryly-I will get married, of course"(18)

So it is obvious that despite her once has had new education, Lotus is still traditional and conservative, especially her thoughts and her marriage concepts. At the same time, she is not a person who pursues progress or leaves the family to seek freedom and liberation. The notion of liberty and justice in the new education should have made Lotus, a female student, realize that she should actively pursue freedom and equality. But it is not fit her concept. She is in an area between the old and the new. She still regards her husband as the masters of destiny and wills to do anything to be a pet of Chen.

Lotus, a character between the old and the new, is uncommon in modern Chinese novels. For example, Zhou Fanyi in Cao Yu's *Thunderstorm* (Lei Yu) and Zijun in Lu Xun's *Sad for death*

(shang shi) are both women between tradition and progress. These women all displayed the image after the May 4th Movement. They showed the hazy consciousness that people want to find themselves and get out of their families after being influenced by western thoughts. But the self-awareness of these three people is quite different. After receiving the new education, Zhou Fanyi expressed his independent consciousness of "My heart and myself belong to me"(Cao Yu, 25). This shows that she knows that she is not only a wife and a mother, but also a person with the right to choose what she wants. And Zijun once said, "I belong to myself, and none of the others has the rights to control me."(Lu Xun, Shang Shi 247) It is also a complaint that the male should not completely control the female.

However, this independent consciousness and desire for change have not been shown in Lotus. Therefore, compared with Zhou Fanyi and Zijun, the main reason for the tragic ending of Lotus is that she gives up her student's identity and chooses to stay in the traditional Chinese family and always relies on men. So, she gives up her act of becoming an independent and free person, but wills to become a male accessory. To compete for the favour, Lotus wants to consolidate her status by pregnancy without any love for Chen. Thus, rather than being an innocent victim swallowed up by China's polygamous system of wives and concubines, it can be said that her personal choices forced her to approach the tragic ending.

At the same time, the influence of traditional Chinese family system should not be ignored. Under this Chinese marriage system, women cannot make decision by themselves. They have to obey man's status. It is a manipulation power which higher than the story of a single wife, concubine or a single family. In the traditional Chinese society, the male-centred social system determines that women are subordinate to the "three principles and five permanent as specified in the Confucian ethical code" (three principles and five permanent: The three principles refer to the emperor is the discipline of his officials, the father is the discipline of his son, and the husband is the discipline of his wife. The five permanent members refer to benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and trust. This idiom is a set of moral standards in China's ancient society. It is also an important thought in China's Confucian ethical culture). Women are attached to the existence of men, are passive, affiliated people. This is because they all have a higher owner in the family who can control their life and death. Only by relying on the male power can the female have the chance to live. The destiny of Chen's wife and millions of women at that time depended on this power.

Four wives and concubines are all largely influenced by the system of wives and concubines. Joy is the wife, who would have been the most important woman to Chen's family because of her position. But in the family, she does not get the attention and respect she should have. The second mistress Cloud is ruthless, but under her vicious personality, she hides extreme flattery and deep-rooted inferiority for her husband. Third wife Coral is willful and arrogant and even carries has affair with a doctor; she still could not avoid being killed by other concubines because she is weak and helpless. Lotus is unable to get love, exhausted by the struggle for family and the status of playthings, which finally makes her crazy. The four wives have different personalities and positions, but the final madness and death seem to be predestined. All of these have a common source in Chen's family, that is Chen, a functional representation of male power in all families. It is said that in Chinese society, women are dependent on men and have no personal freedom and status in the wife and concubine system. This kind of social system that women cannot control their own lives and only obey man's power existed widely and profoundly in traditional China, which had an essential impact on the tragic life of thousands of wives and concubines.

In summary, the tragic ending of Lotus not only has the inevitable influence of the system and social situation, but also is the result of Lotus's behaviors and choices. Using two sides to shape the tragedy plays a vital role in showing the tragic effect.

4. Well, wooden flute and Xici: woman's oppression and resistance in traditional Chinese families

This research discovers that Su Tong applies specific writing styles, for example, the symbolism

to express the tragic plots and characters in this novel. There is no possibility to show the importance of Raise the red lantern without mentioned personal choices of characters and traditional culture in the Chinese family that affects women in modern days. Guo Moruo, who is a renowned Chinese author and critic, expresses his thoughts on how crucial that emotion plays in the novel. On the one hand, he explains that emotions are vital to trigger the resonance of readers. On the other hand, he provides his concepts on how emotions in the novel influence the reader to read in diverse perspectives. According to Guo, he says "The essence of novel begins with emotion and ends with emotion. Writers try to express their feelings and purposes consciously or unconsciously. They always cause the same emotional effect in readers' hearts. Then the stronger and more common the writer's feelings are, the stronger and more common the effect of the work is."(33) In my opinion, it is an essential factor that writers can convey their thoughts to the readers via the main characters. At this point, this research found that Su Tong did successfully uses the symbolism in different styles to convey his thoughts by describing the character's emotions with symbols in the novel. If the writer wants the value of novel to be properly expressed, he must rely on some images. When cultural sustenance is combined with more specific images and cultural symbols, the theme that the novel wants to show can be shown more appropriately.

In Raise the red lantern, the use of the well, wooden flute and drama words play a key role in the novel. It not only suggests the destiny of the characters, but also expresses the theme of the novel and transmits the thoughts of writers at the same time.

4.1 Well

In Raise the red lantern, the well can be said to be the most important image which shows Lotus destiny. It is not only the clue of Lotus life in Chen's family, which pushes the plot forward, but also represents Lotus ultimate destiny.

In Chen's family, well is a crucial image in the novel since it metaphors Lotus's thoughts. At first, Lotus came to the Chen family, washed her face at the well after getting off the sedan chair and then took off her student uniforms. Later, she accepts that she was the fourth wife of the family which means Lotus would never come back to school and be the concubine in a traditional family. It means she had to give up many things, such as her freedom and right to receive the education. This series of actions also represented her transformation from a promising student to a humble concubine in the traditional Chinese family. This also implied the change of her identity and the beginning of her tragic destiny.

At last, she finally learned the secrets of the women previous in this family, which made her move step by step towards the destined crazy ending. After knowing the secret that all the women died in the well were drowned because of having affair with a man, Lotus linked the woman who died in the well with herself. So, in Raise the red lantern, Lotus laughed and said: "I saw myself. I walked over to the side of that well and immediately saw two women floating on the bottom; one of them looked like me, and the other one also looked like me."(36) This is exactly the fear she had after she felt the insignificance of her power and the mysterious power of destiny. After Coral was found that she had affair with a doctor and thrown into the bottom of the well, the fear of Lotus expanding to the top. Lotus's constant chant of "I will not jump into the well"(99) is a manifestation of her fear of the well. The fear of the well is Lotus's fear of the struggle between people in the traditional Chinese family and the final death.

The destiny of women who were thrown into the well showed that every woman in the traditional Chinese family cannot escape from the terrible ending. This was performance in which women try to escape from their family and have the equal rights as men. The well in the family is like the destiny. Although it is not noticeable, it appears all the time and always associated with the death. According to the experience of those women who had affair with others and were thrown into the well in Chen family, it showed that the final result like these women might happen to Lotus any time. It also showed a strong sense of desolation and hopelessness, which makes reader feel a greater melancholy. Su Tong used the well as the most concrete symbol to link it with the tragedy in a traditional family. Because of that, readers can feel the women who were sacrificed under the old

system as soon as they read the well as a symbol. As Schelling's view of tragedy intervention in Art Philosophy, his opinion is that although the character tries their best have a better future, it is useless, since the destiny always appears and controls people's life. This means that the power of destiny always beats people's will. As for the reason about this, it is because that people's will is too weak comparing with the power of destiny. So, the inevitable power leads Lotus to the tragic ending.

In *Raise the red lantern*, the relationship between the well and Lotus can be defined as the relationship between the inevitable power destiny and individual's free will and action. The symbolic meaning of the well and the values of the three cardinal principles and five cardinal principles in China links together. It shows the ending of the women are caused by the custom. Although women try to find the happiness, most of them are failed in the end.

The fear of destiny that projected on Lotus is the fear of the well. Well is a symbolic image, which represents the scary and profound images and keeps showing in every plot of the story. Well also represents the destiny of Lotus. It shows that as long as she stays in Chen's family, her destiny of being suppressed and trapped in the traditional Chinese family's principles cannot be moved.

The well is also like the irresistible force that deviates from the will of Lotus. Although Lotus tried her best to escape from the destiny, she could not success and be surrounded by fear all the time. There is no doubt that Lotus is a traditional woman who did not change higher education. Since Lotus did not change by her higher education, on the contrary, she falls into the trap of a big family and follows their tradition of being a concubine. Lotus's mind of escaping from the limitations had died. The well not only represents the profound fear of Lotus, in other case, from my discovery, also shows the great hopelessness and helplessness of Lotus.

4.2 Wooden flute

The wooden flute has always been a symbol related to noble morality in Chinese discourse system, which contains romantic and beautiful imagination. Both the establishment and disillusionment of this kind of beautiful images are shown in *Raise the red lantern*. As Aristotle emphasized in poetics, tragedy can be enhanced by destroying the hope and beauty of the character to destroy the character herself. In *Raise the red lantern*, the wooden flute represents the appear and disappear of Lotus's love and hope. Feipu is the man who brings Lotus hope in her life. And the wooden flute witnesses this change. Meanwhile, the promise of teaching Lotus to play the wooden flute also shows the hope and delighted. When this promise cannot come true, Feipu no longer appeared with wooden flute, the hope and delighted towards the end as well. And the tragic feeling can be shown. So, the wooden flute is also an important factor for the expression of the tragic theme successfully.

The wooden flute is not only a metaphor for Feipu's image of a junzi, (junzi is the person with noble personality and good moral character. They are often the people who is loved by traditional Chinese women.) but also a main sustenance of feelings between Lotus and Feipu. In traditional Chinese culture, the wooden flute has the significance of connecting with the image of gentleman. Su Tong used the traditional meaning of wooden flute in *Raise the red lantern*. While Lotus could not fulfill her desire to be loved by her husband, she turns into a relationship with Feipu. She believed that, with this relationship, she might be able to escape the reality she had in this family. The wooden flute, in other words, became one of the things that could remind her of this happiness with Feipu.

However, when Lotus put all hope on the relationship with Feipu, the tragic story was started. Falling in love with other man who is not concubine's husband is illegal behaviour. Not to say, the relationship with Lotus and Feipu is like the aunt and the nephew. But the fell into love. This is similar to incest. In summary, the love between Lotus and Feipu is definitely not allowed. This is the rebellion situation that against the three principles and the five virtues. Even though they knew this love was forbidden, both Lotus and Feipu still tried to struggle and fight for their freedom under the rule of patriarchy.

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with Feipu. She believed that, with this relationship, she might be able to escape the reality she had in this family. The wooden flute, in other words, became one of the things that could remind her of this happiness with Feipu.

But at the same time, Feipu's fear of women is an important inducement to the end of the tragedy.

“Feipu raised his arms slowly and bowed slightly. ‘It’s no good. I am still afraid of women. Women are too frightening.’

Lotus said ‘I don’t understand what you mean.’

Feipu just rubbed his face and said. ‘Lotus, I like you, I am not kidding.’

‘You like me, but you treat me this way.’

Feipu was nearly choking; he shook his head, and his eyes constantly avoided Lotus’s gaze as he spoke. ‘I can’t change. Heaven is punishing me; generations of Chen men have always lusted after women, but when it came to me ,I just couldn’t do it. Even since I was little, I thought women are frightening. I am afraid of women. I am especially afraid of the women in our family. You are the only one I am not afraid of, but I still can’t do anything. Now do you understand?’”(Su Tong, 90)

Feipu and Lotus met again and talked about the wooden flute."Feipu sits down and looks at Lotus warmly. " It can be seen that the memory based on wooden flute between Lotus and Feipu is delighted, which makes Lotus always keep the expectation and hope to Feipu. Feipu's fear and deep-rooted dislike of women is difficult to be changed. This kind of fear and disgust cannot be overcome by the love between him and Lotus. Because of Feipu’s issue of afraid of women and his position in Chen’s family, the tragic story happened to them.

Lotus experienced a series of accidents including being rejected by Feipu, seeing Coral jumped into the well, as well as finally being out of favour and going mad. After these things happened, the image of the wooden flute, at the same time, was not showed up in the novel anymore.

The wooden flute represents the lovely time Lotus spent with Feipu. This was the time that cherished by Lotus because it is the only warmth that Lotus had in this family. This time with Feipu did not last longer since Chen’s family is the extremely traditional Chinese family. So, when the real inner desire of Lotus is revealed, the impractical expectation of leaving the family and getting the future that can be controlled by herself disappeared immediately.

The occurrence of these uncontrollable accidents could be analyzed by Schelling's theory of tragedy. He said that the life of the character in tragedy cannot be control by the character themselves, but always decided by the destiny. It just like the life of female in Chen’s family, which shows the ineffectiveness of Lotus's personal will for her life and the strong power of the destiny.

4.3 Xici

Opera is an important part of Chinese traditional culture and Xici, which is the main part of Chinese opera, having the most important meaning of showing the emotions of characters in the novels. Xici is the lyrics and libretto in traditional Chinese opera. The renowned Chinese opera includes *The lute(pipaji)*, *Injustice to Dou'e(Dou’e Yuan)* are all focus on the tragic life of women. Most of the traditional Chinese opera I found are stories with a happy ending; for example, people get together and make peace in the end like *lute(Pi Pa Ji)*. Even though lots of Chinese operas are with positive endings, however, many female characters in the dramas experienced the tragedy in their lives like the main character Dou’e died because she is wronged by a judge in *Dou’e yuan*. As the main carrier of Chinese traditional drama, Xici has naturally become the main carrier to express this sad atmosphere and to express the real female life. It can be seen in *Raise the red lantern*.

In *Raise the red lantern*, Coral is another representative role of concubine except Lotus. Comparing with Lotus, she was bolder and more indulgent bases on her personality. But she still has the similar situation as Lotus-dead by thrown into the well. As for the reason about the tragic ending, it mainly because Lotus and Coral have same family situation. What she has done and experienced all shows the situation like Lotus is not special for the women at that time.

The use of Xici sings by Coral in *Raise the red lantern* is similar to the common function of Xici. It shows Coral’s personal feelings and emotions. It is not only to keep the traditional Chinese family

story, but also to connect with western tragic thoughts by the literariness and suggestive words. Based on these words, Xici shows the sufferings of female characters in Chinese families. At the same time, the most important feature of Coral is expressed by the Xici she sings. Xici is an important part of traditional Chinese drama. It is also an inheritance of Chinese tradition, because Xici using the literariness language which always contains the typical people's real-life experience and the real inner desire. And because of Xici, people can get close to the real situation of women at that time.

There are two paragraphs of drama words in *Raise the red lantern*. The first one is as follow:

It's the fourth watch in the morning,
All along the river,
Human voices are silent.
A body clinging to a shadow,
A shadow chained to a body—
I'm doubly sick at heart
As I think back carefully,
I was only a beautiful face,
With an unlucky fate,
Pity me, bearing my shame and tears all these years,
But now there's no escaping, backward or forward,
I might as well throw my waning life to the fishes,
Oh Tenth Sister Du, I am ready:
Let my fragrance vanish, my jade body perish—
Since I have to die anyway,
I may as well die a bright clear death.(71-72)

The first part of drama words is full of sincere and strong emotions, which showed the pursuit of love and the persistence of women in traditional Chinese culture. In the drama, prostitutes are always unable to obtain the love, and eventually die with injustice. Although Coral and Lotus are eager to pursue love, they can't escape being found by others and thrown into the well or getting mad. Xici is an important element that links Coral, Lotus and the tenth sister Du together. It not only showed the women in China have no choice but feel sad and unfair about the destiny, but also showed the situation of women in Chen's family. This kind of demand for love is extremely difficult to achieve in ancient Chinese society because the family roles makes the female has not allow to fight for their rights. Therefore, when Coral sang the Xici and listened by Lotus, it was easy to associate their own lonely and helpless situations. Xici enhance the readers' sympathy and pity for them, which helped to show the tragic theme in the story.

The second part is Coral's last performance before she is thrown into the well:

.....A heartless lover sends no news,
Crying on the flowers and weeping to the moon,
Only increase my dark sadness,
Tears on my pillow accompany the rain on the steps,
Falling ceaselessly on the other side of the window.
Beyond the mountains are still more mountains;
When will his great sword return?
I want to be a stone sentinel watching for my man;
I long to send a message, but it is much too hard.
I still have this pillow of horn and our brocade quilt ,
Bright as white silk,
But I'm afraid sleeping alone there's no cure
For a half-cold bed. (96)

The drama is about her unsuccessful marriage, sad heart and loneliness. Coral's second performance is not only to re-emphasize her identity as a playwright, but also to show the combination of her two personalities: she is a humble and inferior actor, and also a concubine who

has low status in the family. The atmosphere of sadness in Chinese dramas connects the most features of traditional Chinese stories. The western theories of tragic give hints to understand Chinese novels, especially Su Tong's *Raise the red lantern*. The features of dramatic in *Raise the red lantern*, from my perspective, could be linked with the western theories of tragic. As I mentioned early in this paper, most of the classic Chinese literature tends to show positive endings in the stories. However, Su applies the western concepts of tragic to show the disastrous end in *Raise the red lantern* directly. The writing is unique and different from the previous classic Chinese novels. Without using the happy endings in the book, Su Tong choose the tragic and memorable finish. With this writing style, Su started the new way of writing, which includes western theories in Chinese novels. It not only impresses the readers but also shows the progress of Chinese literature.

These two-part of *Xici* have robust traditional and tragic features. They describe female miserable and helpless personal situations in their family. Comparing the history with the present, *Xici* reminds readers about the unfortunate situation and destiny of the wives and concubines in the traditional Chinese society. In this way, the tragic theme of the novel can be shown directly, which can arouse the readers' sympathy.

Well, wooden flute and *Xici* create the tragic atmosphere of "drifted between disappointment and sorrow."(Su Tong, 18) The tragic situation and destiny of women in Chen's family, led by Lotus, make the tragic ending and the theme of the novel more vivid and lasting. This also shows the new writing attempt of combining the Chinese traditional sad atmosphere with the western tragic thoughts.

5. Conclusion

In *Raise the red lantern*, well, which represents the death; wooden flute, which represents hope; and drama, which represents the traditional sad atmosphere of China, run through the whole story together. It shows the tragic ending caused by the character's personal choices and social environment. Su Tong combines the traditional Chinese story with Aristotle's and Schelling's theory of destiny in the west. The novel shows a strong sense of tragedy, which is a Chinese story contains western approaches. This way of writing broadens the definition of "Sadness" in novel. It is also an effective method for Chinese writers to integrate Chinese stories into the world literature system.

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