

Female Images in Sino-French Cross-Cultural Adaptation: A Comparative Study from “The Orphan of Zhao” to “The Orphan of China”

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Abstract. In 1753, Voltaire, the renowned French Enlightenment philosopher, adapted the 13th-century Chinese Yuan zaju *The Orphan of Zhao* into the French play *The Orphan of China*. This paper points out that although Princess Zhuangji's suicide reflects a certain degree of female self-awareness, it still conforms to the "female virtues" advocated by Confucianism and the inheritance of family bloodline. In contrast, Idame possesses a strong sense of autonomy, embodying the combined influence of Confucianism and Enlightenment thought, with both her sensibility and rationality shaping her fate. The paper also demonstrates how Voltaire's adaptation integrates the French cultural context into traditional Chinese Confucian virtues of loyalty and sacrifice, while exploring the development of female ideological awareness.

Keywords: *The Orphan of Zhao*, *The Orphan of China*, Enlightenment, Drama, Feminism

1. Introduction

The Orphan of Zhao, written by the Yuan Dynasty playwright Ji Junxiang, is adapted from *Zuo Zhuan* (*The Zuo Commentary*). It tells the story of Tu'an Jia, a powerful minister of the State of Jin during the Spring and Autumn Period, who framed the Zhao clan, resulting in the execution of the entire family. Only Princess Zhuangji, who had just given birth to a son, survived the massacre. Her husband urged her to protect the child, so she entrusted the orphan to Cheng Ying and then committed suicide to dispel Cheng Ying's fear that she might leak the secret. Cheng Ying raised the orphan, who later killed Tu'an Jia and avenged the Zhao clan. Ji Junxiang transformed Princess Zhuangji's historical image—she was recorded to have falsely accused members of the Zhao clan to stir up family conflicts and seize the throne for her son Zhao Wu [1]—into that of a "heroic woman" who hanged herself with her skirt to preserve the only surviving bloodline of the Zhao family. In the 18th century, the play was translated and introduced to France by the French Jesuit missionary Joseph-Marie de Prémare. Despite abridged arias and some translational inaccuracies due to misunderstandings, it exerted a profound influence overseas. Voltaire adapted it into *The Orphan of China*, set during the transition between the Song and Yuan dynasties. The story follows Zang Ti, an elderly minister, who decides to substitute his own only son for the orphan—the sole surviving heir of the Song Dynasty—to escape Genghis Khan's hunt for the Zhao bloodline. However, his wife Idame exposes the plan in an attempt to save their son. Genghis Khan, who once admired Idame, coerces her into marrying him in exchange for sparing her family and the orphan. In the end, Genghis Khan is deeply moved by

Idame's patriotism, loyalty, resolve, and courage, and he spares her entire family along with the orphan.

In recent years, comparative studies of *The Orphan of Zhao* and *The Orphan of China* have gradually increased, but direct comparative research on the two female images of Princess Zhuangji and Idame remains relatively limited. Tan Jing argues that Princess Zhuangji is "righteous and unyielding in character", yet this reputation is merely a product of the moral superiority emphasized by society at that time [2]. Xiang Zhiqing holds that Princess Zhuangji's suicide for the orphan was an inescapable responsibility of mothers in the prevailing ideology. She respected her husband's wish to continue the family lineage and refused to live on alone or remarry after his death, which was advocated by the Confucian principles of benevolence and righteousness. But this was just a result of feudal ideas, so she had no right to speak at all [3]. Studies by Li Xin show that Princess Zhuangji was far less important than men in the male-dominated society. She showed very strong feudal family values and had a low social position [4]. By comparison, the image of Idame is much more complete and three-dimensional. Researchers like Zhong Xiaoxia find that Idame's inner fights and conflicts show her sense of justice, courage and high moral standards. They are a good mix of feelings and reason in art [5]. Besides her more complicated emotional conflicts, Peng Ruohan points out that Idame's identity is richer and full of dramatic conflicts. She was not limited to the simple labels of "mother" and "wife" like Princess Zhuangji. Instead, Idame had many different roles. She was a subject of the Song Dynasty, the wife of a loyal minister from the lost dynasty, the mother of a child in great danger, and the first love of the ruler of the new dynasty. Her character clearly shows Voltaire's understanding of Confucianism and Enlightenment thought. So she stood out in *The Orphan of China* and became a key part of pushing the story forward. She showed kindness, love for her country, freedom, courage, the spirit of resistance and endless love [6]. Fan Xiheng thinks Idame is a symbol of the Chinese spirit. She is a very rich female image that can even be called a "perfect archetype" [7].

Though today's research on Idame is quite deep, studies on Princess Zhuangji are still shallow. Not many studies go back to the original drama texts to compare these two female characters directly and study how female consciousness developed. This paper uses elements of traditional opera's performance analysis of Princess Zhuangji, and goes back to the original texts. It makes a deep comparison of the images and fate choices of Princess Zhuangji by Ji Junxiang and Idame by Voltaire. It can be said that Princess Zhuangji's sacrifice was not just a sign of motherly love and her devotion to morality. It even showed a break from traditional Confucian moral rules. But in fact, it was a product of the "heroic woman" model supported by a society based on Confucian morality and reason. This kind of model held back female independence to some degree. By comparison, Idame's resistance was influenced by both Confucian culture and Enlightenment thought. It came from a mix of reason and feelings. It creatively showed a big step forward in the liberation of female independence.

2. The influence of Confucianism and Enlightenment thought

2.1. Princess Zhuangji

Princess Zhuangji embodies typical Confucian ideals and traits. Both her praised virtues and the root causes of her tragic fate can be ultimately attributed to the influence of Confucian culture.

2.1.1. Loyalty and trustworthiness

The historical image of Princess Zhuangji is actually the opposite of the one depicted by Ji Junxiang. *Zuo Zhuan* records that "In the fourth year of Duke Cheng's reign, Zhao Ying had an adulterous relationship with Zhao Zhuangji". "In the spring of the fifth year, Yuan and Ping (i.e., Zhao Tong and

Zhao Kuo, both elder brothers of Zhao Ying) exiled him to Qi". "Zhao Zhuangji of Jin, resentful of Zhao Ying's exile, falsely accused Yuan and Ping to the Marquis of Jin, claiming that they were plotting a rebellion. Luan and Xi testified in support of her accusation. In the sixth month, Jin punished Zhao Tong and Zhao Kuo. Wu (Zhao Wu) was raised in the palace by his mother Zhuangji, and their fiefs were granted to Qi Xi". Historically, Zhao Ying was exiled due to his adultery with his nephew's wife Zhuangji, who then falsely accused Zhao Tong and Zhao Kuo of treason to take revenge. Thus, Princess Zhuangji was actually the culprit behind the tragedy of the Zhao clan[8]. However, Ji Junxiang reimagines her as a victim of the Zhao family's misfortune and even the sole survivor burdened with the responsibility of continuing the family bloodline, ultimately committing suicide for the sake of the clan's survival. From Ji Junxiang's adaptation of the historical Princess Zhuangji, it is evident that as the only important female character in *The Orphan of Zhao*, he intended to shape her as a woman of unyielding integrity, courage, and righteousness to promote the "ethics of loyalty and righteousness"—a core tenet of Confucian culture. Ji Junxiang's original intention was to create an ideal image of a mother and wife for later generations to learn from and emulate.

Beyond her lack of "blind loyalty" to Duke Ling of Jin, Princess Zhuangji also showed great respect for her husband and abided by the "trust between husband and wife". The courage that made Princess Zhuangji try her best even to give her life for the orphan came not only from her deep love as a mother but also from her devotion to her husband. As the wife of Zhao Shuo, she had a very close and loving relationship with him, sharing every bit of joy and sorrow in daily life. She was a princess, so she did not get killed in the cruel punishment. Without this special royal status, she would have died together with the other family members in the terrible tragedy. Princess Zhuangji just managed to stay alive by a narrow chance. She was filled with great sadness and even wished to follow her husband to the death. But Zhao Shuo's last wish before he passed away was to keep the orphan safe and take revenge for the whole Zhao clan. Because she was full of loyalty and faithfulness to Zhao Shuo, she made up her mind to protect the little child no matter what it would cost her. Cheng Ying was the only person who could save the orphan. When she heard that he feared she might tell others their secret plan, she killed herself without any hesitation to clear up his doubts. In the end, she kept her promise to her husband with her own life. Her life was no longer a meaningless existence that was confined to the imperial harem. Instead, it became a noble act of sacrifice for her husband, her son and her sincere love.

2.1.2. The patriarchal society under the virtue of submission

On the other hand, Princess Zhuangji's faithfulness to her husband can also be interpreted as adherence to the Confucian ideal that women should submit to their husbands. Mencius emphasized that "To take submission as the norm is the way of a concubine or a wife", meaning that in Mencius' view, obeying one's husband was the duty of a wife. In the eyes of Confucian thinkers of the time, obeying one's husband unconditionally, without independent thought and lacking female subjectivity, was the responsibility of women in traditional feudal society and a symbol of a virtuous and gentle woman. After establishing these moral norms for women, Mencius even expressed his disdain for this "way of a concubine or a wife", arguing that it was far inferior to the "way of a great man": "To dwell in the broadest house under heaven, to stand in the most proper position under heaven, and to walk along the greatest path under heaven"—in other words, men should uphold benevolence, abide by rituals, and act in accordance with morality. In a society inherently unequal between men and women, Princess Zhuangji's noble act of sacrificing herself to save the orphan was merely regarded as "what a woman ought to do". Furthermore, she commits suicide in the first act and does not appear again in the subsequent four acts of the play. This adaptation further flattens and simplifies Princess Zhuangji, reducing her to a mere appendage of the patriarchal society.

In addition, although Princess Zhuangji exhibits a degree of unyielding rebellious spirit beyond that of ordinary women of her time, this spirit is also an inevitable product of the era and Confucian education. Influenced by Confucian and feudal family values, preserving the orphan held additional significance for Princess Zhuangji. As the only male descendant of the entire Zhao clan, saving the orphan and preserving this "sole bloodline" ensured the continuation of the Zhao family [3]. At that time, Princess Zhuangji had married into the Zhao clan. The whole clan only had her and the tiny infant orphan left in the end. In a male-dominated society, the common moral rules had a clear demand. They said that Princess Zhuangji must do whatever it took to keep the family bloodline going on. But even though she was a royal princess with noble status, her position in feudal times was far lower than that of a newborn baby boy. So, even if it seemed that Princess Zhuangji did not have to kill herself to end her life, she really had no other way to choose. She had to give up her own life to make sure that the clan could keep existing in the world. Her great and sincere love as a mother was then turned into nothing but a simple tool for continuing the family bloodline. In the end, she had to kill herself and became a poor victim of the male-dominated social system.

2.2. Idame

2.2.1. Submission to and respect for Confucian culture

Idame grew up with Confucian thought around her. She has a deep respect and great admiration for this meaningful cultural tradition. Confucianism did not only build her moral values step by step. It also had a deep and lasting influence on how she saw the world and her life.

Idame finds that she has affection for Genghis Khan. But her thoughts do not stay only on her own personal feelings. She thinks from a wider angle about how this relationship can help with deeper cultural and ethnic mixing together. Idame believes that Chinese culture stands for a more deep and wide-ranging "civilization" [7]. This kind of civilization includes not only the usual rituals and social rules. It also has a strong moral power that can "enlighten" and "restrain" [7] male leaders from nomadic groups like Genghis Khan. In her eyes, spreading Confucian culture is not about forcing limits on nomadic peoples or weakening their own civilizations. It is about making things better and more noble through the mixing of different cultures. The use of the word "eliminate" also shows Idame's appreciation for Chinese culture. She recognizes its inclusiveness and strong ability to keep going. She also has confidence in the full mixing of different cultures. So, her feelings are not just about personal love for someone. They also include deep hopes for ethnic mixing and respect between different cultures. Though this idea did not come true through marriage in the end, it came true through her resistance. Her resistance made Genghis Khan accept many systems and ideas based on Confucian culture. It also pushed forward the mixing of different cultures. All these things are enough to show Idame's respect for Confucian culture and how she truly took this culture into her heart.

Though Idame has affection for Genghis Khan, and even tries her best to tear down the barriers between different ethnic groups, she finally agrees to the marriage arranged by her parents. She cannot be with Genghis Khan just because he is from a different ethnic group. Instead, she marries Zang Ti [7]. When we compare her with traditional Chinese women, Idame really shows a certain level of self-awareness and open thinking. But she still cannot fully get away from the limits of Confucian moral rules. This kind of moral culture focuses on the "righteousness of kinship and hierarchy" [7]. It sees women's marriages as tools to help their families gain more benefits. It totally ignores women's own wishes. Even though Idame has a spirit of rebellion in her heart, she has to give in to this "solemn and ancient" [7] cultural tradition in the end. But still, Idame shows a certain level of moral awareness during her marriage with Zang Ti. At first, she does not love Zang Ti at all. But after they get married, she slowly develops affection for him based on respect. She shows great care and loyalty to her husband. She is even ready to give up her own life for him [7]. The title "virtuous husband" [7] and

the change in Idame's feelings do not only show that she accepts the traditional female role of a "virtuous wife" in marriage. They also reflect the Confucian idea of "fidelity unto death" in marriage relationships. This fact tells us that women in marriages influenced by Confucianism lack their own independence. They can only take these feudal marriage values into their hearts. They have to make themselves believe that respecting and obeying their husbands is the highest form of morality. So, Idame's final result—getting through hard times safely together with her husband—can be seen as both a criticism of Confucian moral rules and a hidden defense of this ancient and unshakable system.

2.2.2. The focus on equality, individuality, and freedom in Enlightenment culture

Later, when Idame discovers that Zang Ti intends to sacrifice their own child by substituting him for the orphan, she expresses her anger. Idame strongly opposes the notion that people are inherently divided into "noble and humble" [7] classes, especially when such unfair hierarchical distinctions are imposed on a newborn baby—her own child. Before her child has developed subjectivity, the ability to make independent decisions, or even been exposed to Confucian thought, he is to be sacrificed for the title of another infant. She directly points out that all such titles are merely "temporary designations" [7], artificially created and inherently meaningless. As human beings, one should not abandon one's own flesh and blood for these baseless concepts. Coincidentally, at this time, the Song Dynasty has already fallen, and the traditional ruler-minister relationship of the Song no longer exists. However, Zang Ti, hiding behind Confucian rituals, intends to use their child to perpetuate the civilizational system of "ruler and minister", prompting the child-protective Idame to boldly proclaim the powerful assertion that "all people are born equal". Voltaire's Enlightenment idea of universal equality is thus voiced through the mouth of a woman. She advocates not only breaking down ethnic boundaries but also attempting to dismantle class barriers, embodying the progressive nature of her era. Her call for class equality and her opposition to determining social status based on bloodline directly echo the Enlightenment's dissatisfaction with the feudal autocracy of 18th-century France and its criticism of repressive ideological practices [9]. This criticism also happens to challenge the irrational aspects of Confucian ethics, refuting its advocacy of the hierarchical order of "ruler acts as ruler, minister acts as minister, father acts as father, son acts as son" [3].

Subsequently, Idame clashes with Zang Ti over protecting their child. Zang Ti scolds her, claiming that her actions are "intent on having Genghis Khan behead me", destroying "our moral principles", and endangering "the heir of your sovereign" [7]. He gradually escalates Idame's loving act of saving their child into accusations of plotting to murder her husband, severing the imperial bloodline, and undermining thousands of years of Confucian ethical norms, revealing his aggressive intimidation of Idame. Yet Idame merely wishes to protect her only biological son, to ensure that his life is not dictated by power and "blind loyalty". She is simply fulfilling her fundamental duty as a mother. Furthermore, she deeply respects Zang Ti and even repeatedly intercedes for him in front of Genghis Khan. Yet Zang Ti hurts Idame deeply with cold words such as "By doing this, you will surely get what you desire" and "Your unrighteous hands will be stained with your husband's blood" [7]. Idame is clearly striving to protect everyone—her husband, her child, and the imperial heir—never once considering her own life or death. After years of marriage, this respectful and loyal wife is falsely accused of the most heinous crimes of "killing her husband and sovereign" simply because she refuses to comply with her husband's wishes and the Confucian ethics upheld by men. However, Idame's actions reveal the awakening of female subjectivity; she is no longer an appendage of male authority but a brave and resolute fighter against the established rules of the world. Although her resistance may still be constrained by the limitations of her era, it represents a precursor to the awakening of female consciousness over thousands of years.

Most women would have succumbed to fear and handed over their child in such a situation, but Idame is not like most women. When Idame realizes that her love for her husband and son has only

been met with increasingly abusive insults from her husband, she begins to fight back firmly. Even when being grievously wronged, she refuses to be bound by those baseless moral codes. She possesses a strong sense of free will and subjectivity, directly asserting that these meaningless titles are not worth the truly felt, loving identities of "husband and father" [7]. She argues that such identities are the fundamental bonds and ethical principles between people, as well as the key to national continuity. After Zang Ti hurls such heartless words at her, Idame still tries to understand his perspective. She "pities him", recognizing that he is an "unfortunate father" [7] who is deeply sorrowful about sacrificing their child. She even "kneels down to beg you" [7] to ease his pain. All these actions demonstrate Idame's focus on "individual" emotions, or more precisely, on the emotions of every individual. She thinks about the well-being of her child, the imperial orphan of royal blood, her husband, and herself. And she firmly refuses to let anyone around her suffer unfair and unreasonable treatment. This fact fully shows the Enlightenment's great respect for and focus on the "individual". So it also displays Idame's strong sense of self and free choice. Women can also have their own say in such important decisions and events. They can try their best to change the fixed rules and people's views of the world for themselves and other people. Idame's greatness is totally different from Zang Ti's conservative thoughts and even his rude words to his wife. This contrast makes fun of the male dominance and unreasonableness of the feudal society.

3. A comparison of fates and views on destiny

3.1. Princess Zhuangji

After her clan was killed in the terrible massacre, Princess Zhuangji survived because of her noble status as a princess. But she could only stand by and watch helplessly. She saw her husband and relatives get killed cruelly in this political persecution. Her royal title had no power at all to save her loved ones from being executed [3]. Traditional Confucian ideas teach people a well-known rule: "Before marriage, a woman obeys her father; after marriage, she obeys her husband; when her husband dies, she obeys her son". Even though she was a royal princess with noble birth, she could not protect her own child. She had to tie her own fate to a little infant. The infant had no self-awareness at all and was always in great danger. Facing this fixed fate that she could not change, she wanted to make her personal value as great as possible. She had to try her best to finish her moral mission. She also needed to keep her moral goals, even with many uncertain things around her [10]. Princess Zhuangji understood this fate completely and accepted it without any complaint. In her opinion about destiny, the only thing she could do was to entrust the child to Cheng Ying. This action could make the infant have the best possible chance to survive. She could not control what would happen to the child later on. She could only do all she could and then submit to the will of heaven.

When Princess Zhuangji gave the orphan to Cheng Ying, Cheng Ying said only two short sentences. These sentences showed his worry that Princess Zhuangji might leak the secret. As soon as she heard these words, Princess Zhuangji killed herself at once. She did this to dispel Cheng Ying's doubts and make sure the orphan could stay safe. She cried out "Alas, alas, alas!" many times [2]. This repeated exclamation showed her great sorrow and deep lamentation. The three cries of "alas" highlighted that her tragic end was something she could not avoid. But before she made this important decision about her own fate, she just noticed Cheng Ying's hesitation and worry. Then she said right away, "His father met his death by the blade" and "As his mother, I shall follow him to the grave" [2]. While Cheng Ying is still fretting over the lives of his "nine generations of relatives", she resolutely hangs herself. Though a woman, her courage and resolve surpass even those of a loyal and righteous man. At the same time, it also indicates that although she chooses to take her own life, her life and death are always tied to the orphan's fate—her decision to die is determined by what will best ensure the orphan's safety. Notably, at this moment, Princess Zhuangji refers to her husband as "his father"

and to herself as "this mother" [2], never using the pronoun "I". She has long since subordinated her own fate to that of the child, and her self-awareness has been completely eroded. Her noble spirit of sacrifice and sense of family responsibility are, in fact, a disguised reinforcement of the patriarchal society under the veneer of morality. Despite her status being far higher than that of Cheng Ying, she consolidates Cheng Ying's moral authority through her suicide, becoming a stepping stone to the victory of men. Cheng Ying's suspicion of Princess Zhuangji also implicitly reflects the male perspective that "women are inherently weak"—he cannot believe that a woman, especially the child's mother, can keep the secret of the orphan safe.

3.2. Idame

3.2.1. Taking control of one's own destiny

In the face of inevitable death, Idame also emphasizes taking control of her own destiny. She boldly proclaims that "All heroes and noble men master their own lives" [3]. In Idame's view, those truly worthy of being called heroes are those who can control their own fates, refusing to be dictated to by anyone, even a ruler. The use of the word "all" [3] directly highlights that Idame already identifies herself with the role of heroic men throughout history, rather than being a weak woman who is passively subjected to the whims of fate. With this era-transcending and accurate self-positioning, she directly challenges Zang Ti's view of destiny, which is one of "compliance and passivity" [3]. Individuals should take the initiative to fight against fate, opposing any form of oppression or threat to personal destiny by others and refusing to submit to their will. As a woman, she is no longer a weakling passively accepting the arrangements of fate but a strong individual actively striving for freedom and dignity. Her final assertion that "To live, one must have freedom; to die, one must do so willingly" embodies her profound pursuit of selfhood and free will—whether living or dying, the decision should be her own, not that of others or heaven.

When Genghis Khan issues an edict stating that he will spare her child, the sovereign's child, and her husband only if Idame marries him, she resolutely refuses. Even her husband urges her to sacrifice herself to save the three lives, which seems to be the optimal solution that everyone can think of at that time. However, she defies the societal expectations imposed by traditional ethics, firmly adhering to her own choice of destiny. She refuses to tie her fate to those of the three men and refuses to easily become a victim of male power struggles. This proves that women's wisdom is fully capable of contending with male authority. In the process of resistance, she can even influence the traditional male view of destiny, persuading Zang Ti to join her in upholding free will.

4. The harmonization of rationality and sensibility

4.1. Princess Zhuangji

In the Confucian philosophy of the pre-Qin period, rationality is defined as "nothing more than a calm and perceptive state of mind" [11]. It is described as being "clear, peaceful, and harmonious", with "foolish, biased emotions" and "violent, impulsive passions" considered contrary to rationality [11]. In essence, rationality means facing all matters in life with calmness and objectivity, and exercising restraint when confronted with complex inner emotions. Princess Zhuangji fully embodies Confucian rationality in her final moments before entrusting the orphan to Cheng Ying.

Since there are no surviving film or television recordings of the Yuan zaju version of *The Orphan of Zhao*, this paper will analyze the aria in which Princess Zhuangji entrusts her child to Cheng Ying, as performed by Wang Huifang in the Peking Opera adaptation:

I gaze eagerly, waiting for you to come and rescue the orphan from the palace.

Woe is me, my entire family has met their demise; my newborn child must soon be parted from his mother.

Mother and you, you and mother—forever separated by heaven and earth [12].

Firstly, the aria employs a structural variation of Erhuang free rhythm—original rhythm—free rhythm, expressing the profound grief of mother and child being separated [12]. The four characters "I gaze eagerly" are sung in a slow way. They use a low and stable pitch all the time. This slow and steady singing shows Princess Zhuangji's heavy heart. It also reflects the long time she spends waiting for Cheng Ying and her painful feelings inside. The next line "rescue the orphan from the palace quickly" is totally different from "I gaze eagerly". Its speed suddenly becomes faster. Each character in the first half of this line is sung with two different musical notes. This kind of singing shows that Princess Zhuangji's feelings are changing quickly. It also shows a strong sense of urgency. It expresses her wish that Cheng Ying can take the orphan away as soon as possible. But the melody does not have too many fancy decorations. That is because Princess Zhuangji is full of deep sorrow. She controls her feelings by thinking carefully about the plan to send the orphan out of the palace secretly. It also suggests that she has thought about all the good and bad sides of the plan. She lets reason guide her actions and her decision to leave the child with Cheng Ying. This part is performed in Erhuang free rhythm. This rhythm has no fixed structure. It is very good at showing strong feelings and always puts emotions first. When Princess Zhuangji sees Cheng Ying at last, her feelings burst out all at once. Her heart is filled with the sad love of a mother who has to leave her child. It is also filled with hope because Cheng Ying has come. Her feelings are very strong and full of conflict.

After a short spoken part in the opera, the aria changes from Erhuang free rhythm to Erhuang standard rhythm. Erhuang standard rhythm is steady and has a clear structure. It mainly plays a role in telling the story of the opera. It creates a serious and deep tone for the performance. This tone shows Princess Zhuangji's sadness and her feeling of having no way out. The line "Woe is me, my entire family has met their demise" is sung in a relatively low pitch. This low-pitched singing reflects her deep and great pain. The phrase "has met their demise" is sung for a long time. It has many turns in the melody. It makes people feel like the singer is choking up while singing. This special way of singing shows the pain and hopelessness of talking about the tragedy that her whole family was killed. Words like "woe" and "demise" carry a strong sense of sadness. They show how helpless Princess Zhuangji is at that moment. The line "my newborn child must soon be parted from his mother" has more changes in the melody than the last line. Its pitch is also higher. This higher pitch shows that her sad feelings are rising up inside. It also shows her uncontrollable hatred for Tu'an Jia. The overall speed of this line becomes faster. It uses a quick rhythmic pattern when being sung. The word "mother" at the end of the line is held for a long time. This long vocalization shows the heart-breaking pain of a mother's love. It marks the highest point of Princess Zhuangji's emotional outburst. It is the sadness of having to leave her child and her overwhelming grief. Facing the great misfortune of her family, Princess Zhuangji is just a woman. She can only ease her sorrow through her great love as a mother and her sense of duty to her family.

In the line "Mother and you, you and mother" that comes after this aria, the words "you" and "mother" are both stressed. The stress is put on the first consonants of these two words. This kind of stress shows the deep and strong bond between a mother and her child. The first and last "mother" in this line are sung at the same pitch. The notes of the words in between have very small changes. This steady way of singing reflects that Princess Zhuangji is controlling her very complex and strong emotions. She is keeping her feelings from bursting out. If the melody had too many changes, her emotions would seem too obvious. She would lose her calm manner in front of Cheng Ying, who is just a servant in the family. The phrase "forever separated by heaven and earth" uses vibrato and a weeping tone. It pushes the aria to its emotional climax. The word "separated" has a sudden high note. This high note surprises the listeners. It breaks the calm and controlled melody that came before. It

pushes the emotion of the aria to the top. This sudden outburst of high note is like a heart-rending cry against her cruel fate. Besides, this vibrato makes the tragedy of Princess Zhuangji's situation even deeper. It also makes the misfortune of the Zhao clan's extermination feel more sorrowful. The sudden high note and the low pitch before it form a sharp contrast. This contrast mirrors the sad separation between mother and child under Tu'an Jia's cruel rule. It shows Princess Zhuangji's deep hatred for Tu'an Jia. The final note of this phrase slowly fades away. It sounds like a sigh of sadness about the unfairness of fate. This word is sung in a layered way. It shows the great turmoil in Princess Zhuangji's heart. It also conveys a deeper sense of sorrow to the audience. The fading tail note of the word "earth" expresses her helplessness in the face of an uncontrollable fate. It also shows that her grief will last for a long time.

Princess Zhuangji's aria mixes sadness and self-control together. It shows the two sides of her character—emotion and reason—through the changing rhythmic patterns of Peking Opera. Her grief is not expressed through non-stop weeping. Instead, it is shown through the self-control that is typical of Eastern aesthetics. Under this kind of balance between emotion and reason, female subjectivity does not come from fighting against the fate. It comes from bearing hardship bravely and finally protecting the continuation of life in her family.

4.2. Idame

From Voltaire's point of view, rationality means "not blindly submitting to irrational authority, not loathing the world, and not humiliating oneself" [13]. It shows a strong sense of what is right and wrong. Idame has four roles: "a subject of the Song Dynasty, the wife of a loyal minister of the fallen dynasty, the mother of a child in peril, and the first love of the ruler of the new dynasty" [6]. She is caught in many conflicting situations. So every choice she makes has a direct effect on herself, her family and even Genghis Khan. When she faces the hard problems brought by these choices, she always balances reason and feelings in a smart way. She solves these conflicts successfully with her strong moral standards.

When a servant tells Genghis Khan about Idame's situation, he describes her actions: "running", "spreading her arms wide", and "shouting frantically" [7]. These quick, continuous actions show the urgency from her natural love as a mother. They even look like she is driven by wild emotion. They are a sudden outburst of her strong feelings. The surprise on the faces of people around her helps to show how powerful her desperate wish to save her child is. She uses short, forceful orders with exclamation marks many times: "Stop!" and "Do not carry out the execution!" [7]. These words show that she has lost control of her feelings at that moment. They also show her great sense of urgency. "That agonized screaming, that frantic despair", along with "tears streaming down her face" [7], touches the hearts of Genghis Khan's men. This is a full expression of her true feelings. It shows her intense inner struggle and the outburst of feelings she can no longer control. She keeps crying out "my son" and "my treasure" [7] when things seem hopeless. This is the highest point of her strong love as a mother. But under this strong display of feelings, there is a hidden challenge to the irrational authority. It is a sign that her rational sense of self is waking up. She firmly believes that "this cannot be real" because of her pure love as a mother. This feeling goes straight to the hearts of the invaders. It even makes them use their reason to see how true Idame's feelings are. This strong show of feelings surprises the invaders and makes them feel sorry for her. It even makes them ask Genghis Khan to forgive her. The feelings shown through her tears and cries give power to her reason. This reason is what drives her to stand up against the authority of both the ruler and her husband. The nice mix of warm feelings and calm reason is what makes Idame so great.

When Idame begs Genghis Khan for help, she says with a strong outburst of feelings, "All hatred, all blame—let them fall upon me alone" [7]. These words show that she is ready to take all the responsibility. This is a powerful sign that her sense of self is waking up, driven by her deep feelings.

She uses short, strong shouts: "You cruel man!" and "How dare you!" [7]. These words strongly show how much she hates Genghis Khan at that moment. She asks him, "Can your heart not be stirred by even a trace of mercy?" She says this when she faces and begs the cruel invader, who has a much higher status than her. She is not just begging for herself. She is begging for her whole family. Her strong sense of duty to her family makes her say this touching question. The greatness of Idame is that even in this hopeless situation, even when she says things full of strong feelings, she never forgets to hold on to reason. She refuses to follow Genghis Khan's orders without thinking. She also does not give up on her life in despair. Instead, she uses moral standards to understand her husband. She uses reason to persuade Genghis Khan. She makes him show his kindness and care for others.

5. Comparison

Within the social background of male-dominated culture, the similarities and differences between the images of Princess Zhuangji and Idame show an important change. That is the transformation of female independence and sense of self from a traditional literary symbol to a real independent individual. Princess Zhuangji chooses to obey the strict rules of feudal society. She finally completes her great sacrifice for feudal moral standards in this way. But Idame keeps fighting bravely against all kinds of unfair oppression around her. She does all these things with a strong wish to pursue the freedom of her spirit and the true independence of herself as a person.

5.1. Similarities

5.1.1. Neither practices blind loyalty

First of all, neither Princess Zhuangji nor Idame shows blind loyalty to anyone or anything at all. Princess Zhuangji does not just follow the orders of the highest ruler in a passive way. Her brave act of giving up her own life to save the little orphan shows her deep love for her family and their bloodline. It also stands for a small but brave act of resistance that a woman could make in a male-dominated society. When she is faced with the hard choice between the country and her family, and between the emperor's orders and her love as a mother, she refuses to be beaten down by the unchallengeable imperial decrees of feudal moral rules. Instead, she stays true to her two important roles. She is the mother of a newborn baby and the widow of a dead husband. She tries her best to keep her child safe and sound.

In the same way, Idame does not give blind loyalty to her husband or just accept the unfair pressure from traditional culture. Even though she lives in a social environment that stresses the need for sacrifice and putting others first, Idame refuses to accept the so-called loyalty that asks women to sacrifice their own children for the sake of the imperial bloodline. On the contrary, as a brave woman, she takes the initiative to break free from the limits of the traditional idea of "being loyal to the ruler". She tries to save the orphan in two main ways. First, she talks to Genghis Khan directly, using both reason and warm feelings to move him. Second, she makes a plan to run away with the orphan and join other military forces for protection. She turns down the old-fashioned idea of "blind loyalty". Instead, she uses a way that mixes reason and emotion together to bring about changes. She tries hard to find a good balance. This balance can both uphold her family's honor and keep her child alive at the same time.

The images of these two great women show us an important theme. Even when they are in an environment full of unfair pressure and strict limits, women still have their own thoughts and wisdom. Although their acts of resistance may not be very obvious or strong, their choices are very meaningful. These choices are not only strong ways to fight back against the outside authority. They are also deep promises that the two women make to their families, their bloodlines and their own lives. It is clear to see that in extremely hard situations, women can do more than we think. They can not only try

their best to take control of their own lives. They can also stand up bravely and make changes for the sake of their families, their loved ones, their ideals and their better future.

5.2. Differences

5.2.1. The essence of protecting their children differs

Although Princess Zhuangji takes an active stand against the imperial edict, her choice does not just come from personal feelings or loyal love as a mother for the orphan. It comes from her acceptance of the male-dominated society and her sense of duty to keep the family bloodline going. In the end, she gives in to the moral rules of Confucianism. These rules require women to obey their husbands and act as tools to carry on the family bloodline. In Princess Zhuangji's eyes, keeping the clan alive and passing on the Zhao family bloodline are the most important things. Although she shows deep motherly love when protecting the child, this love is limited by what society expects of her. It even turns into a tool of the male-dominated society. This sad story shows how the social system oppresses women. It also shows their feelings of being helpless when facing hard times and their willingness to give in to reality.

By comparison, the real meaning behind Idame's efforts to protect her child is her attention to "being an independent person" and "being equal to others". She not only refuses to follow her husband's orders, but also strongly disagrees with his unfair choice to control their child's life. She stresses that her own choices and feelings matter a lot. She directly argues against her husband's idea that the two babies are "noble" or "humble". She is firmly against sacrificing her own child just for a short-lived title of ruler and minister. Her effort to protect her child is not just about keeping the family bloodline going. It comes from her respect for the child's right to live and her wish to gain personal dignity and equality. She thinks that every child should have the right to decide his own future, instead of letting others take control of his life. She does not accept the thought that "loyalty and sacrificing one's life" are good qualities for women. Instead, she tries to get rid of the limits set by traditional ideas of fate. She wants to find a better way that respects each person's dignity, and this is a clear sign that women's sense of self is waking up.

The different fates and choices of Princess Zhuangji and Idame show two very different images of women. They tell us how the two women react to traditional society and their family duties. Although Princess Zhuangji has deep motherly love in her heart, her choices show how women give in and make sacrifices in feudal society. This reflects how deeply feudal culture affects women's thoughts. On the other hand, Idame's words and deeds help her get rid of the limits of traditional society. They show her spirit of fighting back and going beyond the old rules. She cares not only about whether her child lives or dies, but also about his independence and freedom, as well as her own wishes and feelings. Comparing these two women helps us see how social rules and expectations affect women's actions in different cultural backgrounds. It shows the limits and helplessness of women under traditional Confucian culture. It also shows the resistance and wish for equality and freedom of women who are influenced by the new Enlightenment ideas. This reflects the different senses of female independence in different cultural environments.

5.2.2. Attitudes toward protecting their children differ

In the Peking Opera version of *The Orphan of Zhao*, Princess Zhuangji's efforts to protect her child are largely limited by Confucian moral rules. Her acts are marked by deep reason and strong self-control. She faces the great pain of losing her husband and the fear of her whole clan being killed. Even though she is filled with deep sadness inside, she stays quite calm to find the only way to save her child's life. She is a royal princess, but she is a female character with no real influence in the play. She can only hide her true feelings quietly. She refuses to let her personal emotions get in the way of

continuing the family bloodline. This kind of controlled motherly love also helps to show the greatness of male heroes like Cheng Ying. At the very start of the play, Princess Zhuangji has to keep silent. She is a great woman who gives up everything for her child, husband, family and moral rules. Only in this way can people fully see Cheng Ying's courage in rescuing the orphan. They can also notice his wisdom in protecting the little child and all the hardships he goes through to raise him. In the end, Zhao Wu takes revenge for his family. He only remembers the misfortune of his father and clan, as well as all the difficulties Cheng Ying has faced. But his mother, who sacrificed everything for him, is totally forgotten by the male-dominated society.

In contrast, Idame's efforts to protect her child are marked by various ways of showing her feelings. She mixes deep, unstoppable motherly love with clear and logical thinking. When she faces Genghis Khan's orders, Idame does not choose to hold back her emotional outburst. Instead, she combines her feelings with reason. She uses words full of strong emotions to persuade Genghis Khan. On one hand, she directly speaks out against Genghis Khan, who is the winning invader, by showing her true feelings. On the other hand, she begs for the lives of the two most important men to her. Only she dares to stand up against Genghis Khan's cruel rule. She tries to use clear logic to save the three lives that Genghis Khan has decided to end. In the end, she talks to him with reason and touches his heart with her true feelings. She stays brave and unyielding but still shows proper respect. She even changes the cruel ruler's mind and makes the invader think about his own actions. She offers a compromise plan: she will sacrifice herself to take the infant's place. This clever strategy itself shows her wisdom. She uses rational persuasion to win a chance for her child to survive.

The comparison between these two women shows two different images of women and their life directions. Princess Zhuangji stands for the control and suppression of women's feelings under Confucian moral rules. Idame, however, shows the combined power of reason and emotion in the Enlightenment era. Although their ways of acting are very different in form and method, both women try their best to make sure their children can survive in hard times. Their stories show the difficult choices that women have to make in traditional cultural environments.

5.2.3. Fates and views on destiny differ

When faced with their children's fates, Princess Zhuangji makes every effort to change her child's destiny. Not only does she courageously and resourcefully find a way to save him when Tu'an Jia is violently searching for the Zhao heir, but she also attempts to exchange her own life—as a royal princess—for the life of the infant whose future remains uncertain. Her view of destiny is to "do her utmost and submit to the will of heaven", showing that while she strives to the best of her ability, she also accepts the arrangements of fate. Interestingly, she did not have to die—yet she commits suicide hastily upon hearing Cheng Ying's fear that she might leak the secret. However, according to the high moral standards of Confucianism, she cannot live on alone after her husband's death and must follow him in death. Therefore, her fate seems to have inevitably led to death. Yet from the perspective of upholding the male authority of Cheng Ying, the orphan, and her husband, her sacrifice is undoubtedly inevitable. Her choice to commit suicide is the inevitable result of her powerlessness to resist the shackles imposed on women by her era, representing the helplessness and insurmountable constraints of women's fate during that time.

In contrast, Idame's view of destiny is far more independent and conscious. The "autonomy over fate" demonstrated by Idame far surpasses Princess Zhuangji's attitude of "submitting to the will of heaven". In challenging her fate, she exhibits a strong sense of self-awareness and an unyielding spirit [5]. When her husband Zang Ti ultimately gives up hope and accepts Genghis Khan's order to execute their family, she boldly asserts that a ruler cannot dictate her fate—only she has the right to decide her own destiny. Her death is a choice made by herself, never defined or constrained by external forces. From initially refusing to decide her child's fate and send him to his death, to negotiating with

Genghis Khan to sacrifice herself in exchange for the safety of her entire family—her fate is not entirely controlled by external forces but is instead a choice she makes to embrace her end, embodying a far more modern and independent view of destiny. In the end, great changes take place in her own fate and the fates of the three people she tries to keep safe.

Princess Zhuangji and Idame stand for two totally different ideas about fate and ways of looking at life. Princess Zhuangji's life seems full of weakness and helplessness. She tries her best to change her situation, but she still cannot get away from the fixed fate of women in her time. By comparison, Idame shows a much more independent and active idea about fate. She fights bravely against her own fate through her own choices, and she becomes a brave challenger who stands up to traditional moral rules. As things turn out, even though there are great differences between their fates, both of these women succeed in protecting their children with the deep love as mothers, and they achieve their most basic and important purpose.

6. Conclusion

In short, the choices that Princess Zhuangji and Idame make about their own fates show how women's roles have changed in different cultural backgrounds. Princess Zhuangji's choices are mostly influenced and limited by traditional Confucian ideas. Idame, by contrast, stands for the waking-up and freedom of women's sense of self under the influence of Enlightenment thought. This comparison does not only show how women lived in different historical times. It also proves how culture can have an effect on the choices each person makes. Besides, to free women's sense of self, people need to do more than just break away from the limits of traditional moral rules. They also need to find a way to realize their own values by mixing reason and warm feelings together. The image of Idame offers us a good example for freeing women's sense of self in the mix of different cultures. It has great academic meaning and practical value for people today.

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