



The Crying Statue in Early Qing Drama

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Abstract Should the theatrical fantasy of a statue coming to life involve an actor performing the role of a thing, or a prop taking the place of a human? Proceeding from contests between Hong Sheng 洪昇 (1645–1704) and acting troupes over the staging of the “Crying Statue” 哭像 (Kuxiang) scene in his dramatic masterpiece *Palace of Lasting Life* (Changsheng dian 長生殿), this article examines how the figure of the living icon became a focal point in broader struggles to conceptualize the relationship between theater and rituals of mourning. Actors staged this complicated scene as an “auspicious sacrifice” (*jiji* 吉祭), one that foregrounds the transcendence of love over lifeless matter. Hong, conversely, insists on the function of the scene as an “unpropitious rite” (*xiongdian* 凶奠), a solemn meditation on mortality and the collective expression of grief. By redirecting focus from the object to the space and social dynamics of mourning, Hong questions the drive to bestow on things a life that is not their own.

Keywords theater, props, portraits, Ming–Qing transition, Tang poetry, An Lushan rebellion

This article considers the ethical significance of animate objects in Chinese theater by investigating the ambiguous figure of the living statue in early-Qing *chuanqi* 傳奇 drama. I look specifically at the complicated negotiations between a seventeenth-century playwright Hong Sheng 洪昇 (1645–1704) and late-imperial acting troupes from across China over how to stage the scene of a statue coming to life. Should such a spectacle involve a person acting as a thing, or a thing standing in for and mimicking a person? Should the living statue be cast as a mute and passive actor or as a charismatic prop? These seemingly minor issues of stagecraft assume heightened significance in theatrical responses to trauma or, in the case I examine here, the violent events of the Ming–Qing dynastic transition (1618–1683). Against such a backdrop, the resilient and curiously transcultural fantasy of a living statue broaches especially consequential questions

around the relationship of drama to ideas about death: does a statue coming to life evoke the triumph of “flexibility, liveliness, and love” over obdurate matter?¹ Or does the melancholic character of an animate statue reveal the “fact of our own decaying materiality,” intimating our being’s entanglement with the nonhuman, a “bondage to a lifelessness we inhabit or once inhabited”?²

Such questions lie at the heart of a scene titled “Crying Statue” or “Crying before the Statue” 哭像 (Kuxiang) in Hong Sheng’s masterpiece *Palace of Lasting Life* (Changsheng dian 長生殿), a work now considered one of the last two great achievements of the southern drama.³ This fifty-act play, the product of ten years of writing (1679–1688), reflects on the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 by recounting the tragedy of Li Longji 李隆基 (685–762) or the Tang emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 712–756), also known as Minghuang 明皇 (Brilliant Emperor), and his passionate love for his “prized consort,” Lady Yang (Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 or Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環), a popular legend that came to epitomize conflicts between duty and desire in the Chinese literary tradition.⁴ The play, examining the fallout from the An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion in 755, has been read as a thinly veiled allegory for the traumatic events of the mid-seventeenth century cataclysm. A performance of *Palace of Lasting Life* held in 1689 during a period of national mourning led to Hong’s imprisonment and expulsion from the Imperial Academy.⁵

To counteract unauthorized adaptations of this popular drama, Hong Sheng published his own version of the text with a commentary penned by his friend Wu Yiyi 吳儀一 (1647–?; or Wu Ren 吳人) in two volumes in 1700 and 1704.⁶ The split between the two volumes of the play can, as Judith T. Zeitlin suggests, be characterized as a split between events and memory: the first twenty-five scenes build toward the collapse of Minghuang’s court and Lady Yang’s death by suicide at a courier station;⁷ our sense is that of “history—in both its public and private dimensions—ineluctably unfolding before our eyes.”⁸ The second half of the drama, by contrast, is devoted to the “recollection, mourning, and commemoration” of the events staged in part 1.⁹ The play’s most elaborate scene of remembrance and expiation, in act 32, centers on the emperor’s consecration of an effigy statue of Lady Yang to be installed in a temple he has dedicated to her. After singing a series of mournful arias to the icon, the retired emperor and Lady Yang’s former palace attendants remark that the graven image has started to shed tears.

My article reconstructs the significance of this complicated dramatic event. Shortly after its appearance in the performance repertoire in the late seventeenth century, actors started to repurpose “Crying Statue” as an auspicious reunion scene or as a grand finale for a truncated version of the drama (called a “shortened complete play” [*xiao quanben* 小全本]), one primarily staged as a *kun* opera (*kunqu* 崑曲).¹⁰ The restaging of a somber act, which

initially seems tangential to Hong Sheng's narrative, as the happy ending for a new edition of the play speaks to both the allure and the difficulty of the scene's subject matter for late imperial audiences.¹¹ The elevation of the act in performance, to the extent that it conditions understandings of the play as a whole, rests on a fascination with, and keenly felt need to recontextualize, the meaning of Hong's sorrowful effigy. These adaptations have distorted and even partly impeded investigations into the force of *Palace of Lasting Life* as a work of mourning, a drama that reads not simply as a celebration of transcendence but as an eloquent meditation on mortality. By reconstructing Hong's innovations in the handling of both the trope of a living image and tales surrounding Lady Yang's portrait, I suggest that the affective power of the crying statue ultimately inheres in its resistance to full animation. What matters for Hong Sheng is not so much the spectacle of an image coming to life as the theatrical distance between a spectator and the emotional reactions of actors onstage weeping before a wooden prop.¹² The scene reorients attention from the object to the space of mourning, from "Crying Statue" to "Crying before the Statue."

Critical efforts to apprehend the power of stage objects to take on a life of their own in performance tend to underscore the central importance of movement, in terms of both movement across concrete stage space and movement through linear stage time.¹³ Such work frequently invokes metaphors of animation to make sense of a prop's itineraries: how props either "enliven" dramatic action in the present or "revive the dead symbols of the theatrical past."¹⁴ The Prague school theorist Jiří Veltruský (1919–1994), for instance, in an influential article on "People and Things in the Theatre" elucidates a "dialectic antinomy" between actor and prop, wherein the corollary of people becoming parts of a set or "stage figures" is the capacity of a thing to act as a subject or a "being actively performing an action."¹⁵ These formulations, in dwelling on action in terms of movement, largely overlook the dramatic significance of immobility, stillness, and silence—or how tensions between a prop's materiality and its "conventional function as a sign or tool" might test and redraw "tacit representational contracts" between performers and spectators.¹⁶

"Crying Statue" exposes the limitations of approaching theatrical objects by focusing exclusively on how they might be said to come to life. Instead, my article underscores the affective potency and critical force of scenes in which stage props resist full animation, where a playwright raises an audience's expectations (that a thing will start to act as a living being) yet thwarts or denies this prospect for dramatic effect. Such moments ask us to account for the autonomy of a theatrical object without relying on an idiom of enlivenment. What, Kenneth Gross asks, is lost or gained, "transgressed or restored in [the] abandonment of stillness or silence?"¹⁷ In responding to theatrical art that dwells at length on experiences of death, destruction, and loss, we might ask not what makes a thing

start to act like a subject but how stage props teach subjects to recognize the attributes they share with things.

I begin by considering Hong Sheng's careful engagement with, yet striking departure from, the late Ming theatrical fascination with autoeffigies and the resurrection of female ghosts. I then look to his self-conscious excavation of Tang poetic lore surrounding a posthumous Lady Yang portrait and its career in earlier Yuan dramatic adaptations of the Lady Yang legend. Finally, I investigate Hong's struggle to control the meaning of his play and its conceptual relationship to rituals of mourning described in Confucian liturgical manuals, as acting troupes replaced his charismatic prop with a living actress's body. The crying statue in *Palace of Lasting Life* sheds light on underlying factors behind the demise of the southern drama as a vital literary form at the end of the seventeenth century. In the interpretative contests prompted by and staged around Hong Sheng's recalcitrant prop, the late Ming literary drama's various voices—the poet-scriptwriter's lyricism, historiographical impulses, public-minded investment in theater's connection to ritual, musical knowledge, and dramaturgical experimentation—no longer necessarily speak in concert.¹⁸

The Living Image in Early Modern Drama

Hong Sheng's effigy of Lady Yang is, to begin with, an attempt to redeem what had become a tired trope in seventeenth-century drama. Tang Xianzu's 湯顯祖 (1550–1616) *Peony Pavilion* (Mudan ting 牡丹亭) famously treats the female lead Du Liniang's 杜麗娘 self-portrait or “autoeffigy”—an amorphous substitute for her eroticized body, painted on the eve of her passing—as a symbol that unifies the play's fifty-five scenes. As numerous critics have shown, Tang's drama elucidates the “reciprocity” between the topos of a female portrait that results in its depicted subject's death and that of a “spectral woman—painting or ghost—coming to life,” both of which might be referred to as *ying* 影, or “shadows.”¹⁹ His staging at several points wryly acknowledges these slippages: when in act 30 the Daoist nun Shi Daogu 石道姑 intrudes on the young lovers in Liu Mengmei's 柳夢梅 room at night, Du Liniang's ghost hides within the shadow cast by a “beautiful woman” (*meiren* 美人) hanging scroll on the wall.²⁰ The inscribed painting in *Peony Pavilion* is, however, not just a likeness of Du Liniang but the physical trace of her hand, or her “autograph.”²¹ Du's effigy consequently becomes her surrogate: just before she dies in act 20 she sings of the portrait as the repository of her soul (“that portrait and those brush strokes that possess my soul” 有心靈翰墨春榮);²² the scene of Liu Mengmei discovering the box containing her portrait in the ruined garden prefigures his eventual exhumation of Du's coffined body; shortly before he first encounters her ghost, he sings of how he longs to sleep with the fragile scroll (were he not “afraid of soiling its delicate hues” 怕灑的丹青亞).²³

Du Liniang's portrait, as the cause of her death and agent of her resurrection, inspired a series of derivative romantic comedies, such as Wu Bing's 吳炳 (1595–1648) *Huazhong ren* 畫中人 (The Lady in the Painting), in which the male lead paints a picture of his fantasy, who then comes to life in response to his infatuation. The infamous *ménage à trois* in Ruan Dacheng's 阮大鍼 (1587–1646) *Yanzi jian* 燕子箋 (Swallow Letter) thematizes the confusion of a courtesan's portrait (a “spring visage” [*chunrong hua* 春榮畫]) and a painting of the Bodhisattva Guanyin. An ability to properly distinguish between these two pictures becomes a prerequisite for the male lead, Huo Duliang 霍都梁, to eventually differentiate the female lead, Flying Cloud (Li Feiyun 麗飛雲, the daughter of the minister of rites), from the secondary female lead, Wandering Cloud (Hua Xingyun 華行雲, a courtesan), two identical beauties described as both “imprinted from the same woodblock” 同一付印板的.²⁴ The young gentrywoman (Li) finds an image of herself in the likeness of a courtesan (Hua), while the courtesan (Hua) pledges her devotion to a client (Huo) after identifying with an image of Guanyin. As a *chuanqi* set on the eve of the An Lushan rebellion, Ruan's play—one that haunts Kong Shangren's *Peach Blossom Fan* (Taohua shan 桃花扇)—appears to have informed aspects of Hong Sheng's dramaturgy in *Palace of Lasting Life*.²⁵ Ruan's double-portrait ploy anticipates the way Hong recasts a consort's visage as a ritual icon, perturbing clear distinctions between sacrality and seduction.²⁶

The connection between *Palace of Lasting Life* and *Peony Pavilion* has likewise been widely discussed. The commentator of Hong's play, Wu Yiyi, was also the editor and publisher of the infamous *Wu Wushan sanfu heping Mudan ting huanhun ji* 吳吳山三婦合評牡丹亭還魂記 (Wu Wushan's Three Wives' Combined Commentary on *The Peony Pavilion* or *The Soul's Return*), a version of the drama that links the premature deaths of Wu's two first wives, Chen Tong 陳同 (d. 1665) and Tan Ze 談則 (d. 1674), to the heroine of the play, Du Liniang.²⁷ Indeed, Wu was likely the source of funds that allowed Hong Sheng to print *Palace of Lasting Life*. His commentary frequently acknowledges Hong Sheng's debts to Tang Xianzu. Wu's comment on act 39 of *Palace of Lasting Life*, “Private Sacrifice” 私祭 (Si ji), acknowledges that Hong uses the same tunes for his arias as the sacrifice to Du Liniang in *Peony Pavilion* but that the offering of fading plum blossoms has been changed to an offering of peonies: “Thus, although this scene duplicates [*xiangfan* 相犯] that scene, not one word or meaning is exactly alike [*leitong* 雷同].”²⁸ More significantly, it seems that Wu's third wife, Qian Yi 錢宜 (1671–?)—the main inspiration behind the *Three Wives Commentary on Peony Pavilion*—copied this particular scene from Hong Sheng's *Palace of Lasting Life* in her own ritual act of devotion to Du Liniang.²⁹ Even as *Peony Pavilion* haunts the early Qing interpretation of *Palace of Lasting Life*, *Palace of Lasting Life* starts to reframe understandings of *Peony Pavilion*.

Hong Sheng's sandalwood icon, perhaps the last significant attempt by a playwright to rework the trope of a female portrait coming to life, alludes to Tang's prototype and its subsequent installation in a shrine. Liu Mengmei in the *Peony Pavilion*, for instance, first misrecognizes Du's autoeffigy as an image of the Nanhai Guanyin 南海觀音 (Guanyin of the South Sea) on Mount Putuo 普陀山, her likeness concealed in a coffin-like box made of sandalwood (or *can-dana* in Sanskrit), the same material used to carve Buddhist statuary; when Du's ghost returns to her burial shrine in act 27, meanwhile, a novice again misrecognizes her as a goddess.³⁰ These moments in turn allude to Scholar Zhang's 張生 infamous misrecognition of Cui Yingying 崔鶯鶯 as an apparition of Guanyin in *The Story of the Western Wing* (Xixiang ji 西廂記).³¹ And yet Hong Sheng, writing in a melancholic early Qing register, departs from his predecessors in a number of quite radical ways. Whereas Tang's drama rests on the fungibility of Du's self-portrait, her body, and her ghost, Hong's icon appears curiously detached or isolated within the play, standing as a relic that resists participating in, or directly contributing to the heroine's resurrection and transcendence.³² As Wu Yiyi notes, Lady Yang undergoes "three transformations" (*sanbian* 三變), from human to ghost to immortal; the graven image constitutes a "further transformation" (*you zuo yibian* 又作一變), one that emerges—and confuses distinctions—between these categories:

Lady Yang experiences three transformations: before Mawei, she is a person; after "Infernal Pursuit" [act 27] she is a ghost; after "Corpse Release" [act 37] she is an immortal. Appearing between the immortal, human, and ghost, a graven image mixes things up as yet a further transformation, blurring artifice and the real, inducing a muddled mindset and confused vision in the spectator.

楊妃凡三變：馬嵬以前，人也；冥追以後，鬼也；尸解以後，仙也。而神仙人鬼之中，以刻像雜之，又作一變。假假真真，使觀者神迷目亂。³³

Hong insists on the "thingness" of his icon, as a charismatic prop that cannot be conflated with the bodies onstage playing Yang's person, her ghost, or her immortal soul. My reading of "Crying Statue" proceeds from Wu Yiyi's comments to consider how the object in this act unsettles and exceeds expectations for *chuanqi* as a genre preoccupied with totality and closure. We see this tendency most clearly in the fact that Yang's wooden likeness appears onstage only once in act 32, a salient departure from earlier dramatic approaches to the living image, which in keeping with the conventions of southern drama typically exploit the mobility of the portrait to organize and structure the plot of a play.³⁴ The appearance of the statue bespeaks the comparatively aporetic quality of Hong's writing in the second half of *Palace*, the sense that different registers of his

drama—or his lyrical search for apotheosis and ironic reframing of this same ideal—might in the end fail to cohere.³⁵

Palace of Lasting Life is often read as a work of “lyrical transcendence” (one that ends with the lovers reunited on the moon), yet such a reading tends to obscure Hong’s obsession throughout the second half of the play with the stubborn materiality of relics, ruins, or physical traces—objects that appear onstage only to mark an underlying sense of absence or collective loss: Yang’s stocking becomes a focus of public commemoration in act 36 (“Viewing the Stocking” [Kan wa 看襪]); her perfume sachet is buried as a substitute for her corpse in act 37; her maids sacrifice to her spirit tablet in act 39 (“Private Sacrifice”).³⁶ After recovering the capital in act 35, Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697–781) sets up an “altar for burning incense” (*xiang an* 香案) before which extras make obeisance to a memorial (*biaowen* 表文) that permits the exiled emperor to make sacrifices at his ancestral temples.³⁷ The sandalwood icon gathers and bodies forth fugitive emotions that accrue around these remnant things, as a recalcitrant prop that awkwardly resists incorporation into the romantic tale of a heroine’s resurrection. In his prologue to the play, Hong Sheng writes of how true love (*qing* 情) “should move metal and stone, and can turn the earth and heavens” 感金石，回天地。³⁸ The wooden effigy’s emotional reaction to the grief of its intercessors in one sense reads as a straightforward affirmation of this point. And yet, Hong’s divergence from predecessors like Tang Xianzu and his investment in Tang poetic accounts of Minghuang viewing a Lady Yang portrait, together with Wu Yiyi’s nuanced commentary on the scene, instead elucidate how fictions of animation often entail a simultaneous objectification of the human.³⁹

The Literary Life of Lady Yang’s Portrait

Hong Sheng’s decision to depict Minghuang’s creation of an effigy statue to stand in for his lover in act 32 of *Palace of Lasting Life* might also be construed as a nuanced response to Tang poetic sources that mention a portrait of the deceased consort. Hong’s multilayered references to Tang poetry within *Palace of Lasting Life* are well documented. His earliest draft of the drama was titled *Chenxiang ting* 沉香亭 (Chenxiang Pavilion), an allusion to the site where the emperor had famously instructed Li Bai 李白 (701–762) to compose the poem “To the Tune of Qingping” (Qingping diao 清平調).⁴⁰ An adherent of Wang Shizhen’s 王士禛 (1634–1711) poetic theory of “spirit resonance” (*shenyun* 神韻) and Zhao Zhishen’s 趙執信 (1662–1744) technical approach to prosody, Hong Sheng won acclaim for his own *shi* 詩 poetry.⁴¹ Wang Zhuo 王晔 (1636–1705), for instance, praised Hong’s departure from staid conventions in his adherence to Tang models: “Although following the poetic style of the three Tang periods, it [Hong Sheng’s *shi*] has transcended the current trends” 其詩宗法三唐，矯然出流俗之外。⁴² Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716–1797) elsewhere claimed

that Hong's poetic talents not just informed his dramatic compositions but surpassed those of Tang Xianzu: "People only know that the script *Lasting Life* can be transmitted together with *Peony*, what they do not know is that his [Hong Sheng's] poetic endowment stands above that of Tang Ruoshi [Xianzu]" 人但知其《長生》曲本，與《牡丹》並傳，而不知其詩才在湯若士之上。⁴³

Palace of Lasting Life's scenes conclude with short "verses for exiting the stage" (*xiachang shi* 下場詩) constructed in the form of "collecting Tang [poetry]" (*jitang* 集唐), whereby Hong selects and rearranges four Tang poetic lines to create a new two-couplet poem.⁴⁴ Many of these *jitang* poems are directly linked to aspects of Lady Yang's legend. Indeed, *Palace of Lasting Life* can be read not simply as a play about the An Lushan rebellion but also as a play about the Tang poetic interpretation of the fallout from that rebellion. Because Hong Sheng, as Zeitlin notes, does not privilege official works of history over unofficial or private records, such as poems and tales, there is no distinction in *Palace of Lasting Life* between the historical and the poetic: "In effect, all past treatments occupy the same position in the textual universe as potential source material."⁴⁵

Despite Hong's extensive engagement with Tang poetry on the events of the Kaiyuan 開元 (713–740) and Tianbao 天寶 (741–756) eras, it remains unclear how the playwright interpreted what is perhaps the major Tang literary source on a portrait of Lady Yang: an "encomium" (*zan* 贊) composed by the retired emperor for a painting by the artist Wang Wenyu 王文鬱 (n.d.). This encomium dwells at length on themes of evanescence and the ephemerality of worldly attachment. Its tone suggests a degree of philosophical resignation to Yang's fate, rather than any bitterness or anguish, perhaps because of Li Longji's desire to assuage the suspicions of the new emperor and his government officials:

An Encomium on a Portrait of the Precious
Consort Painted by Wang Wenyu

王文鬱畫貴妃像贊

	The myriad things come and go,	萬物去來，
2	shade and light reverse.	陰陽反覆。
	One's allotted span of a hundred years	百歲光陰，
4	passes like the wheels of a cart.	宛如轉轂。
	Sorrow and joy, hardship and suffering,	悲樂疾苦，
6	life and death proceed.	橫天相續。
	Splendor and decline,	盛衰榮悴，
8	all are deemed insufficient.	俱為不足。
	I remember of old in the palace,	憶昔宮中，
10	your face like jade.	爾顏類玉。
	Assisting in the ritual of bowing to silkworms,	助內躬蠶，

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| 12 | deep feeling in plain clothes. | 傾輸素服。 |
| | You possessed a virtuous beauty, | 有是德美， |
| 14 | yet no “fifth blessing.” | 獨無五福。 |
| | In life, an elegant visage, | 生平雅容， |
| 16 | now half a scroll of clear silk. | 清縑半幅。 ⁴⁶ |

The penultimate line comes closest to hinting at Yang’s death at Mawei—a “fifth blessing” (*wufu* 五福) ought to refer to a “fortunate end” (*shanzhong* 善終)—but refrains from expounding any emotional reaction to these events, pivoting instead to a muted account of the artwork’s materiality. It is again difficult to ascertain the extent to which Hong drew direct inspiration from Li’s encomium, yet his later treatment of the recalcitrant statue in act 32 of *Palace of Lasting Life* resonates with Li’s clear statement on the inadequacy of likenesses, with a sense that mute images of the dead hold something back. Minghuang’s postrebellion reminiscences express what cannot be fully expressed (“all are deemed insufficient” 俱為不足). Intimations of inexpressibility in this cryptic line at once hint at the viewer’s loss of words in the wake of recent trauma and yet outwardly renounce any grievances (“Sorrow and joy, hardship and suffering”) that might prove unsettling for the current authorities. Li’s “half a scroll of clear silk” instead evokes an enduring lack, inviting the reader to infer repressed emotions behind the male viewer’s austere apostrophe. Later writers appear drawn not to what Li’s encomium says but to what his inscribed poem does not say. They look within these gaps and silences to reconstruct the tortured psychology of a failed sovereign who cannot name the cause or consequences of his grief.

Whereas Hong Sheng remains reticent in reflecting on the significance of the emperor’s own encomium, he explicitly engages with the other major Tang poetic source to describe a portrait of Lady Yang—Wu Rong’s 吳融 (*jinshi* 889) lyrical sequence on the “Huaqing Palace” (Huaqing gong 華清宮). Wu’s sixth and final quatrain reflects on the emperor’s emotional response to a painting of his dead consort:⁴⁷

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|---|---|------------------------|
| | Huaqing Palace, no. 4 | 華清宮 四首 |
| | An outer palace amid clouds, enclosed in halcyon haze, | 別殿和雲鎖翠微， |
| 2 | The true one’s remnant portrait lingers in dream. | 太真遺像夢依依。 |
| | The jade emperor covers his tears again in bitter regret, | 玉皇掩淚頻惆悵， |
| 4 | Gasping at the flight of [Zhang] Sengyou’s brilliant brush. | 應嘆僧繇彩筆飛。 ⁴⁸ |

Wu Rong's poetic topography of the Huaqing Palace, an imperial pleasure lodge adjacent to the thermal springs on Mount Li to the east of Chang'an, suggestively concludes with Minghuang crying before a portrait. The scene suggests that the emotional trauma of Yang's death at Mawei can now be mediated and managed through art: the spectator's bitter regret gives way to astonishment at the painter's consummate brushwork. This sense of a lyrical transition from trauma to transcendence is compounded by a final stock allusion to Liang dynasty painter Zhang Sengyou 張僧繇 (ca. 490–540) painting dragons. When the painter later dotted the pupils in these creatures' eyes, they came alive and took flight for the heavens. Wu Rong's final image of the portrait becomes a synecdoche for his own poem as a finely wrought aesthetic artifact, one that as the ultimate conclusion to a six-quatrain poetic recapitulation of the An Lushan rebellion works to reconcile its reader to the events that precipitated Yang's death. While Hong Sheng does not directly cite Wu Rong's line on the portrait, he recycles sections of this same poem for his *jitang* verse at pivotal moments in *Palace of Lasting Life*, suggesting his investment in Wu's version of the Lady Yang tale.⁴⁹ That Hong was clearly familiar with, and yet chose not to explicitly name, Wu Rong's final scene of Minghuang viewing a portrait invites later readers to evaluate the effigy statue in *Palace of Lasting Life* by measuring its divergence from the poetic model of Lady Yang's painted likeness in "Huaqing Palace."⁵⁰

Wu Rong's depiction of Minghuang standing overwhelmed with emotion before a portrait resurfaced in later prose narratives. Yue Shi's 樂史 (930–1007) "Unofficial Biography of Yang the True One" 楊太真外傳 (Yang Taizhen waizhuan), for instance, embellishes Wu's grand finale:

At the time of the transfer of her body for reburial, her flesh had decomposed and only the brocade perfume sachet remained on her chest. After the reburial, the eunuchs presented the sachet to the Emperor Emeritus who put it in his sleeve. He also ordered a painter to sketch a portrait of the late Precious Consort and hang it on the wall inside an outer palace. There he gazed at the portrait day and night, sighing in tears.⁵¹

及移葬，肌膚已消釋矣。胸前猶有錦香囊在焉。中官葬畢以獻，上皇置之懷袖。又令畫工寫妃形於別殿，朝夕視之而歎歔焉。⁵²

Yue Shi's narrative implicitly presents the creation of the portrait as a response to the reburial of Lady Yang's remains. This uncomfortable juxtaposition between Yang's dead body and the emperor's fixation on a painting of his lover in turn prefigures a key theme in Hong Sheng's treatment of his statue, namely, that the effigy serves to manage and mitigate a mourner's relationship to the unsettling idea of a disintegrating corpse. Li Longji's reticent encomium tacitly raised the question of whether his commissioned portrait of Lady Yang offers closure

from or redirects attention back to the unfinished work of grappling with grief. Later writers—whether Wu Rong in “Huaqing Palace” or Yue Shi in his unofficial biography of Yang—return to the painting as a multivalent object, asking whether it proffers transcendence from or persists as a traumatic symptom of loss.

The Precious Consort’s Portrait Onstage

Hong Sheng’s approach to Tang-period literary sources on Lady Yang’s portrait was at the same time mediated through his engagement with earlier dramas. There was by the seventeenth century already a long history of depicting Minghuang and Lady Yang’s romance onstage.⁵³ In the prefaces and paratexts to *Palace of Lasting Life*, Hong Sheng casts a critical gaze over these earlier dramatic renditions of his source material; he was, for instance, especially dismissive of Wu Shimei’s 吳世美 (ca. 1573) *chuanqi*, *Jinghong ji* 驚鴻記 (The Startled Swan).⁵⁴ Xu Lin’s 徐麟 (n.d.) preface to the play also critiques Tu Long’s 屠隆 (1543–1605) well-known *chuanqi*, *Caihao ji* 彩毫記 (Brush of Stylistic Brilliance), as a precursor.⁵⁵ Instead, Hong Sheng turned back to Yuan *zaju* 雜劇 (variety plays) on the Li-Yang romance.⁵⁶ The scene of an emperor “crying” before a material memento of his dead consort, for instance, may have been indebted to fragments (five arias) of a drama, no longer extant, attributed to Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 (1241–1320), *Tang Minghuang ku xiangnang* 唐明皇哭香囊 (Tang Minghuang Crying over the Fragrant Pouch).⁵⁷ The principal source of dramatic inspiration for *Palace of Lasting Life*, however, was Bai Pu’s 白朴 (1226–after 1307) *Tang Minghuang qiuye: Wutong yu* 唐明皇秋夜梧桐雨 (The Autumn Nights of the Lustrous Emperor of Tang: Rain on the Wutong Tree; hereafter *Rain on the Wutong Tree*).⁵⁸

Perhaps due to Bai Pu’s own reputation as a loyalist poet who lived through the fall of the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) and refused to serve Kublai Khan (1215–1294) when recommended for service in 1261, *Rain on the Wutong Tree* has been read as a political commentary on both the destruction of the Jin and the bleak outlook of life under the Yuan.⁵⁹ Critics remain divided on the extent to which Bai’s drama in its focus on Lady Yang’s fate constitutes a “sentimental celebration of love” or a critique of imperial decadence and neglect.⁶⁰ Hong Sheng appears to have been especially drawn to how Bai Pu presents Minghuang’s psychology in dealing with loss in act 4 of *Rain on the Wutong Tree*, a somber scene in the Northern mode that follows the former emperor in search of Lady Yang in dreams.⁶¹ Critics typically claim that Hong Sheng based two scenes, “Hearing Bells” (Wenling 聞鈴; act 29) and “Dreaming in the Rain” (Yumeng 雨夢; act 45), on Bai Pu’s drama. “Crying Statue,” however, might also be read as a nuanced response to central themes in act 4 of *Rain on the Wutong Tree*.

The final act of Bai Pu’s drama begins with the emperor addressing a portrait he has recently commissioned of Yang’s likeness. The painting becomes

the stimulus for his haunting dream encounter with Yang, one that dissolves upon the cusp of their romantic reunion into the desolate sounds of wind and rain in the Wutong trees. The scene in this respect effectively restages Wu Rong's line: "The True One's remnant portrait lingers in dream." In his first aria, the emperor sings of how he finds in the portrait of his dead lover an image of his own gaunt and emaciated face. The picture first emerges within the scene as a reflective screen for the projection of its viewer's sorrow and anxiety:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| I had a painter paint her likeness, so that | 教畫工畫了一軸真容供養著， |
| I may offer sacrifices to it. But to face | 每日相對，越著煩惱也呵！ |
| this every day only makes me more | （做哭科，唱） |
| and more vexed. (<i>Acts out crying, sings.</i>) | |
| 2 ([Zhenggong mode:] <i>Duanzheng hao</i> .) | 【正宮】【端正好】 |
| From the time | 自從幸西川還京兆， |
| I fled to Xichuan, and then returned | |
| to the capital region, | |
| 4 There have been no nights of moonlight | 甚的是月夜花朝！ |
| or mornings of flowers. | |
| This | 這半年來白髮添多少， |
| Last half year, I've turned more | |
| white-haired. | |
| 6 How | 怎打疊愁容貌！ |
| Can I put away this sorrowing face? | |
| (<i>Reprise</i>) | 【麼篇】 |
| 8 Gaunt, gaunt, emaciated, I can't avoid | 瘦岩岩不避群臣笑， |
| provoking the laughter of all those | |
| officials. . . | |
| Her jade likeness—raised high on the | 玉叉兒將畫軸高挑。 |
| scroll, | |
| 10 The litchi—flower and fruit are redolent | 荔枝花果香檀卓， |
| on the sandalwood table. | |
| I stare at them and then feel the pain | 目覷了傷懷抱。 ⁶³ |
| in my chest. ⁶² | |

Bai Pu dwells in the emperor's second aria on the insufficiency of the painting as a means of fully capturing Yang's theatrical presence. The emperor's praise for Yang's talents as a dancer—"He could never paint her dance of circling simurghs"—recall the extended dance sequences Bai stages for his lead actress in act 2. There may also be a darker irony in these lines, given the earliest extant

editions of Bai's drama depict an affair between Yang and her "adopted son," the villain An Lushan.⁶⁴

- | | | |
|----|---|----------------------|
| | (Acts out looking at the portrait.) | (做看真容科, 唱) |
| 2 | (<i>Gun xiuqiu</i>) | 【滾繡球】 |
| | It almost | 險些把我氣沖倒, |
| | Keels me over with heartache, | |
| 4 | I struggle to lean on something, | 身謾靠, |
| | I call out, call out for the Most Perfected. | 把太真妃放聲高叫。 |
| 6 | But my cries are not answered so I weep tears and wail. | 叫不應, 雨淚濛眊。 |
| | This Painter-in-Waiting was a man of high talent, | 這待詔手段高, |
| 8 | Painting a likeness no different from life, | 畫的來沒半星兒差錯。 |
| | But even though a skilled colorist, a capable painter, | 雖然是快染能描, |
| 10 | He could never paint | 畫不出沉香亭畔回鸞舞, |
| | Her dance of circling simurghs beside Aloeswood Pavilion, | |
| | Or her charms ascending the horse in front of Calyx Loft— | 花萼樓前上馬嬌, |
| 12 | All her bewitching features. ⁶⁵ | 一段兒妖嬈。 ⁶⁶ |

Just as the portrait prefigures the emperor's erotic dream of Yang, so too his recognition of the painting's insufficiency as a substitute anticipates the sense of emptiness he feels when he eventually wakes to the sound of wind and rain. This meditation expresses the pathos that no matter how great a likeness, it can never replace an original, a sentiment that again recalls the terms of Li Longji's initial encomium. Hong Sheng marks the opening of his "Crying Statue" scene as a reprise of the emperor's soliloquy to the portrait in *Rain on the Wutong Tree*. The tune titles of the first two arias in "Crying Statue" echo the two arias at the beginning of act 4 in Bai Pu's play, the very lines in which Minghuang describes the painting: first, [Zhenggong Mode:] *Duanzheng hao* 正宮端正好; and second, *Gun xiuqiu* 滾繡球.

While drawn to the mood and music of act 4 from *Rain on the Wutong Tree* in "Crying Statue," Hong Sheng critically reimagines the occasion and setting of Minghuang's encounter with an image of Yang. In the most obvious respect, Hong replaces a painted scroll with a carved sandalwood statue. This change, however, should be understood in terms of perhaps the more significant amendment Hong makes: the relocation of the encounter from the private quarters of the Western Palaces to the semipublic ritual space of a newly built temple in Sichuan. This spatiotemporal relocation can be read as a response to the expression of an

unfulfilled wish in Bai Pu's play. In *Rain on the Wutong Tree*, the emperor's encounter with the portrait leads to an exclamation of remorse at his failure to properly commemorate Yang:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| | (<i>Dai gudu</i>) | 【呆骨朵】 |
| 2 | With my whole heart I wanted to build
a temple to Consort Yang.
But, alas,
I have no power, have quit the throne,
have left the court. | 寡人有心待蓋一座楊妃廟，
爭奈無權柄謝位辭朝。 |
| 4 | I can scarce endure this life as a lonely asterism,
For the Heaven of Parting's Regret is the
highest of all. | 則俺這孤辰限難熬，
更打著離恨天最高。 |
| 6 | "Alive, let us share the same quilt and pillow,
Dead, let us share the same casket and coffin." | 在生時同衾枕，
不能勾死後也同棺槨。 |
| 8 | I never thought, instead,
There, in the dust on Mawei Slope,
My crabapple flower would wither and die. ⁶⁷ | 誰承望馬嵬坡塵土中，
可惜把一朵海棠花零落了。 ⁶⁸ |

Hong Sheng in *Palace of Lasting Life* constructs onstage the temple that exists only as a failed wish in Bai Pu's play. In doing so, he denies the possibility of a dream meeting between the lovers, a decision that resonates with his depiction of how Yang's ghosthood erects an "unbreachable barrier" with the emperor, "rather than facilitating posthumous contact with him as it ordinarily does in a ghost romance."⁶⁹ Whereas act 4 in *Rain on the Wutong Tree* moves from the eunuch Gao Lishi's 高力士 (684–782) summary of recent events to the retired emperor's solipsistic account of what he sees in the portrait alone in his chamber at night, "Crying Statue" begins with the emperor waiting for Gao Lishi to escort him out of his residence to this new temple to install the effigy. In a radical departure from prior literary accounts of Lady Yang's portrait—from Wu Rong and Yue Shi to Bai Pu—Hong reimagines Yang's likeness not as an object of private cathexis but as a focal point for collective rituals of mourning. He is explicit in both his stage instructions and "list of editorial principles" (liyan 例言), for instance, that the emperor and Gao are joined onstage by a retinue of at least two palace ladies (Gongnü 宮女), two representatives from the Directorate of Palace Eunuchs (Neiguanjian 內官監), and an unspecified number of extras cast as attendants holding an assortment of various props.⁷⁰ For Hong, the reactions of the palace ladies, in particular, modulate the emotional tenor of the scene.

The emperor in *Palace of Lasting Life* begins act 32 by reflecting on the circumstances surrounding the construction of the temple: “I only recall the consort who gave her life for the state, there was no way to express this clearly, so I asked the authorities to build a temple in Chengdu” 只念妃子為國捐軀，無可表白，特敕成都府建廟一座。⁷¹ Whereas earlier treatments of Yang’s portrait focus on its installation in a “rest palace” upon Minghuang’s return to the capital, the location of Hong Sheng’s shrine for Yang in Sichuan casts the statue as a monument in exile (one nevertheless sanctioned by the powers that be). The “Crying Statue” scene appears after Guo Ziyi’s suppression of the rebel commanders Shi Siming 史思明 (702–761) and He Qiannian 何千年 (d. 756) in act 31 but before the assassination of An Lushan in act 33 and Guo’s ceremony to permit the emperor’s return to honor his ancestors following the recovery of Chang’an in act 35. The fugitive rituals in act 32 thus evoke the temporal aporias of interdynastic war, where a sense of irredeemable loss coincides with an absence of emotional closure and an uncertain apprehension of what comes next.

Hong’s striking reference to Yang—often regarded as a toppler of kingdoms or an arch femme fatale in the literary imagination—as a consort who died as a martyr for a lost state resonates beyond the Tang setting of the plot to address a postconquest Qing audience.⁷² By relocating Yang’s likeness to a temple, Hong sets the stage for his idiosyncratic decision to recast the deceased consort in the mold of a late Ming martyr (the emperor sings of a nameless “palace lady” 妃子 rather than Yang *per se*), reimagining her suicide as a romantic expression of political loyalism.⁷³ Wu Yiyi remarks on Hong’s radical reinterpretation of Yang’s death in his first eyebrow-raising comment on the scene: “Consort Yang toppled the state, and so to construct a temple for her is for matters to be based on that which is not named” 楊妃傾國，而又為之建廟，事屬無名。⁷⁴ Wu underscores the critical significance of the emperor’s comments on the temple: “Now as for the saying ‘she gave her life for the state, there was no way to express this clearly,’ this is why this act was indispensable” 今以為國捐軀無可表白為言，便覺此舉原不可少。⁷⁵ Hong’s construction of a shrine for the statue of a martyred consort in this respect resonates with the thematic concerns and staging of certain “plays on contemporary events” (*shishi ju* 時事劇).⁷⁶ Shen Shouhong’s 沈受宏 (1645–1722) *Hai Liefu chuanqi* 海烈婦傳奇 (Chaste Lady Hai), for instance, commemorates Lady Hai’s suicide after suffering sexual harassment from soldiers in the canal transport of the Fengyang 鳳陽 garrison by depicting the efforts of a local community to build a shrine for the installation of a statue with a replica of her face and stitched dress.⁷⁷ Hong’s effigy at once prefigures and participates in a contemporaneous shift in dramatic attention from Tang Xianzu’s romantic portrait to the statue as a public monument.⁷⁸

Wu Yiyi returns to the fraught topic of political loyalism throughout his commentary on the “Crying Statue” scene, reading the male lead’s changing mind state as if the failed emperor were a “remnant subject” (*yimin* 遺民) left to contemplate his compromised integrity in the wake of his lover’s martyrdom. Following Minghuang’s lament—“(he weeps) ‘Ah, my consort, whether on earth or in heaven, how can I requite such remorse’” [哭科]我那妃子呵，人間天上，此恨怎能償—Wu comments: “All along, those who can’t die for loyalty or righteousness, when they reach the fated moment of separation, all have this thought” 從來不能死忠死義者，到命絕時，皆有此念.⁷⁹ Wu’s exegesis of Hong’s decision to cast Yang as a “consort who gave her life for the state” redirects critical attention from the Tang dynasty events presented onstage to the interpretation and contemporary significance of such events for an early Qing audience. These subtle shifts in spatial setting overlay diegetic and extradiegetic temporalities, creating conditions for Hong’s revaluation of an animate portrait not as an expression of apotheosis but as a vehicle for reflection on the question of what humans look for in the fiction of an animate object—not as a once dependable dramatic conceit but as a fresh interpretative problem. The male lead’s northern arias in act 32, culminating in the seven-part *Shua hai’er* 耍孩兒 song suite (a commonly used tune for narrative *sanqu* 散曲) within which he performs his three libations to the effigy, recount the tragic events of the drama up until this moment in the vein of a miniature play-within-a-play.⁸⁰ His performance in this sense thematizes the activity of spectatorship.

The Crying Statue

Whereas earlier poets, in Wu Rong’s wake, had written of a painted portrait of Yang, Hong Sheng appears to have been the first major writer in the Chinese literary tradition to focus on a statue. Takemura Noriyuki, however, has pointed to nonliterary evidence that suggests the fungibility of Lady Yang’s posthumous likeness with carved statues of Guanyin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, in premodern East Asian devotional contexts.⁸¹ The Sennyu-ji Temple in Kyoto, for example, holds a Song dynasty Chinese Buddhist statue, brought to Japan from Ningbo in the thirteenth century, that was subsequently taken to be a depiction of Lady Yang (or Yokihi in Japanese) as a manifestation of Guanyin (Kannon).⁸² Despite its identification with Lady Yang, the Yokihi Kannon 楊貴妃觀音 (measuring only 114.8 cm in height) retains distinctly masculine traits, with a thin mustache and a flat, exposed chest, in keeping with Song Buddhist iconographic conventions for depicting Avalokiteśvara. While there is no reliable documentation surrounding the creation of the statue, popular temple lore from Sennyu-ji still maintains that this object was commissioned by the Tang emperor to mourn his lover.⁸³ The *Sennyu-ji yoshu* suggests the Yokihi Kannon

was obtained by the Japanese monk Tankai 湛海 (1181–ca. 1255) with a collection of Buddhist relics and statues from a “White Lotus Temple” (Bailian si 白蓮寺)—likely based in Lishui, Zhejiang—in 1230.⁸⁴ Given the veneration of Lady Yang as both a heavenly maiden and an indigenous Shinto deity named Atsuta Myōjin in the Muromachi-Edo periods, however, it seems likely that the Sennyu-ji statue became Yang Guifei Guanyin/Yokihi Kannon after its arrival in Japan.⁸⁵

The extent to which Hong Sheng was aware of any popular belief in the deification of Lady Yang remains unclear. He instead seems drawn to a more general literary interest in the animation of Buddhist statues through *ganying* 感應 (sympathetic response), whereby an image of the Buddha or a bodhisattva reacts to repeated acts of devotion.⁸⁶ Such images, endowed with *dharmakaya* (the power of the law), were understood to be “independent, living entities with distinct personalities.”⁸⁷ A Buddhist statue was supposedly invested with sacred power through the “opening” of its eyes. Ceremonies with roots in Indian Buddhism were held to “establish” (*pratistha*) new images by dotting or otherwise completing the icon’s eyes—this final step marks the birth of an image as a “living presence.”⁸⁸ Buddhist “miracle tales” from the late Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420) to the Tang for the most part use animate statues to explore karmic bonds between deities and devotees, with the sculpture “making tangible the unseen realm of spiritual response and predestination.”⁸⁹ Tales about unfinished statues responding to their intercessors, however, at the same time raise the question of whether a consecration ceremony invests an inanimate object with “divine spirit” or whether it simply “awakens a force within an object that is already considered sacred.”⁹⁰ The empowerment of certain statues in Buddhist miracle tales, as Glen Dudbridge notes, derives not from elaborate rites performed by initiated priests but from the object’s own “social obligation” to support its generous sponsor: “These Buddhas are positively not alternative manifestations of the immaterial beings to whom the images were dedicated,” he writes; “they are the very images themselves.”⁹¹

Hong Sheng’s “Crying Statue” scene begins with the emperor waiting for Gao Lishi to help escort the icon to a newly constructed temple, suggesting that an “eye-opening” (*kaiguang* 開光) ritual has yet to occur. Whereas Scholar Zhang in *Western Wing* and Liu Mengmei in *Peony Pavilion* initially misrecognize Cui Yingying and Du Liniang as manifestations of Guanyin, Minghuang first misidentifies this “divine image” (*shen xiang* 神像) carved from sandalwood as Lady Yang in the flesh. The male lead similarly evokes the reduction of persons to things in his *Mantingfang* 滿庭芳 aria when he sings of how Yang’s former maids from the “gilded chambers” (*jin wu* 金屋) of the “southern compounds and the western palaces” (*xigong nanyuan* 西宮南苑) have been replaced by earthenware figurines in her shrine.⁹² After singing a

series of increasingly mournful arias to the effigy—described in Hong’s stage instructions as a prop escorted onstage by a retinue of extras (*za 雜*)—the emperor claims that the icon has started to shed tears:

[The clown, palace ladies, and chamberlain all cry] [the male lead looks at the statue in astonishment]: Ya! Gao Lishi, look at the lady’s face, are those not tears? [the clown and palace ladies look]: Ya! Tracks of tears are streaming down the divine image’s face, how strange, how strange! [the male lead]: Aiya! That is my consort!

[丑，宮女，內侍俱哭科][生看像驚科]呀，高力士，你看娘娘臉上，兀的不流出淚來了。
[丑同宮女看科]呀，神像之上，果然滿面泪痕，奇怪，奇怪！[生哭科]哎呀，我那妃子呀！⁹³

Lady Yang’s weeping thus obviates the need for an “eye-opening” ceremony in act 32 of *Palace of Lasting Life*, ostensibly proving the image’s autoconsecration. At the same time, the statue’s tears suggest the absence of any human creator or ritual practitioner who might be responsible for the image’s animation within the world of the play. Hong’s elaborate directions, however, underscore the prop’s lack of autonomy by repeatedly stressing how palace ladies and extras handle the statue: “act out carrying in the image, before the emperor, palace ladies kneel, and make the image bow its head” 做抬像進，對生，宮女跪，扶像略俯科; “light music [i.e., without drums] offstage, palace ladies carry forward the image to the male lead, making [it] bow its head as before” 內細樂，宮女扶像對生，如前略俯科; “male lead stands up, and drums sound again offstage as the assembly bears the image to the throne” 生起立，內鼓樂，眾扶像上座科; “act out lowering the spirit curtain and then from offstage secretly remove the divine image” 做下神幔，內暗抬神像下科. Hong’s stage instructions underscore the physical manipulation of the prop, resituating the icon as one more artifact in act 32’s elaborate *mise-en-scène*, alongside canopies and pennants, censers and sticks of incense, libation cups, curtains, and paper money—an object among objects.

Given the scope and detail of Wu Yiyi’s comments on act 32, it is perhaps surprising that he makes no reference to either the religious significance of an animate sandalwood statue or any latent associations between Lady Yang’s effigy and a bodhisattva.⁹⁴ His sanctioned commentary is less interested in the spectacle of the living image than it is in the complicated meaning of this image for its assembled devotees. Wu’s focus on the collective expression of grief within the scene suggests that the fantasy of the statue’s coming to life is bound to a contrasting idea “that the statue is really a once-living thing” whose life has been “interrupted,” stilled, or emptied out.⁹⁵ As the emperor’s arias and commentator Wu Yiyi’s interlinear notes repeatedly stress, the statue’s primary function is to

stand in as both a ritual device and an emotional supplement for Yang's hastily buried and misplaced corpse, wrapped in a silk quilt rather than a wooden coffin. It is as if, to quote Kenneth Gross, "what [the statue] both conceals and fixes in place, is the dying, entropic, and violable human body."⁹⁶ Wu, for instance, identifies the emperor's "greatest heartache" 最傷心事 as the improper burial of Lady Yang at Mawei. The male lead's reflections on the handling of Yang's remains, Wu implies, concurrently broach the fraught question of whether Minghuang's own future interment in the imperial tombs will be possible:

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|----|--|------------------------------------|
| | (<i>Shua hai'er</i>) | 【耍孩兒】 |
| 2 | A libation cup set forth in the hope you will come to partake of this offering,
Bristling pain at your demise by that old post station. | 一杯望汝遙來享，
痛煞煞古驛身亡。 |
| 4 | Only cupped hands of earth to bury you amid the chaos of war,
No way then to pour out as libation half a bowl of cold wine. | 亂軍中抔土便埋藏，
並不曾灑半碗涼漿。 |
| 6 | Ah, and today,
How I long to smite those three lawless regiments of rebels. | 今日呵，
恨不誅他肆逆三軍眾， |
| 8 | To sacrifice in bitterness to you, the one martyred for our state.
Facing this wispy portrait of you, | 祭汝含酸一國殤。
對著這雲幃像， |
| 10 | Desolately empty, your likeness as before,
I grieve all the more that your souls have flown away. | 空落得儀容如往，
越痛你魂魄飛揚。 ⁹⁷ |

Minghuang's somber offering of wine in this scene represents a remarkable reinterpretation of the cliché of offering wine to a portrait of a woman who then comes to life in the Tang tale of Zhenzhen 真真, perhaps the prototypical animate image in Chinese fiction. For Tang Xianzu, Liu Mengmei's presentation of wine to Du Liniang's portrait (his very own Zhenzhen) is both an "inspiriting and inseminating gesture" (Tang identifies the "life-restoring potion" as wine mixed with "the ashes of the burnt crotch section of a virile man's trousers").⁹⁸ The emperor's libations in *Palace of Lasting Life* overwrite and yet oddly recall these earlier scenes of libidinous yearning. The terms with which Minghuang offers a cup of wine in act 32, as Wu reminds readers, echo the moment when the former emperor raised a gold flagon to toast Yang following her iconic

performance of the “rainbow skirts” dance at the end of act 16, “The Circle for Dance” (Wu pan 舞盤).

Wu Yiyi’s interlinear commentary dwells on the causes and consequences of Minghuang’s grievous aria, explicitly linking the emperor’s distress at Yang’s improper burial to the apostrophe he directs to her portrait:

Wu’s commentary reads: “As the troops left in haste, she was buried in a brocade quilt. This is Minghuang’s greatest heartache, and so the following aria turns to the reinterment of her corpse [to the royal tombs]. [He] seeks ‘white silk’ in yellow springs. Clutching clothing asking to die, clinging and unable to let go. And so, he returns to her likeness to limn [his feelings].”

吳評：軍行倉卒，錦褥裹理，是明皇最傷心處，故下曲便想到山陵改葬，又追溯白練黃泉，牽衣請死，纏綿不已也。仍歸到像上寫發。⁹⁹

Wu Yiyi’s focus on the relationship between the statue and corpse draws attention to one of Hong Sheng’s most significant revisions to earlier versions of the Lady Yang legend. Just as he relocates the scene of Minghuang’s encounter with a likeness of Yang from the private quarters of an outer palace to the semipublic space of a temple, he resituates the creation of the image at an earlier point than what we see in standard versions of the portrait plot. In prior versions of the story (whether in poetry, unofficial history, or drama), the portrait is commissioned as a memento *after* the relocation of Lady Yang’s remains. In *Palace of Lasting Life*, however, the statue is installed beforehand and becomes the impetus for the unsuccessful exhumation of her corpse (which we later learn has disappeared) and the eventual reinterment of her perfume sachet as a substitute for the heroine’s vanished body. The sandalwood icon in Hong Sheng’s drama thus ultimately prefigures the impossibility of a proper burial. The provisional fiction of a living presence stands as the reminder of a permanent absence.¹⁰⁰ Hong at the same time underscores the statue’s elusiveness by asking offstage extras at the end of the act to “secretly” remove the prop from behind a curtain as the former emperor retires to his residence to sleep—the object never returns to the stage.

As soon as Lady Yang’s effigy starts to weep, Minghuang begins to sing of a crying statue in a manner that recalls his initial observation of his consort’s palace ladies becoming earthenware figurines. The terms he uses to describe the image, as Wu’s commentary suggests, nevertheless draw attention back to the speaker himself. In contrast to Hong’s prefatory statement on the capacity of emotion to “move metal and stone,” Wu dwells on the power of grief to render a person thinglike. Rather than read the statue’s tears as evidence of its animacy,

Wu's commentary focuses on the emotional paralysis and petrification of the statue's weeping intercessors:

- “Has there ever been a comparable [visage] of grief? 這傷心真無兩，
 2 Not only has the clay figure started to shed tears, 休說是泥人墮淚，
 but even that iron man, so distraught!” 便教那鐵漢也腸荒！¹⁰¹

[Wu's comment:] “. . . The statue is carved from sandalwood. ‘Clay figure’ and ‘iron man’ are both borrowed descriptions. It's not that the ‘clay figure’ refers to Yang, the iron man is [Minghuang's] self-reference.”

像是香木雕成者。泥人鐵漢，皆傍借形容語，非以泥人指楊，鐵漢自指也。¹⁰²

Wu glosses the aria as implying that the effigy led the sorrowful emperor to see his own fate in its form. The “Kuxiang” of the title, then, designates the weeping statue of Lady Yang *and* the diminished aspect of her votary. The dramatic interest of the scene lies not so much in the spectacle of an animated statue as in how Hong's arias illuminate the concealments and substitutions behind this fantasy. The playwright is interested not so much in how the image comes to life as in how this object tries to govern its viewer's relation to the corpse and to the idea of death. What the scene ultimately offers is not some transcendent release from grief but a heightened awareness of both the psychic and the material mechanisms mourners depend on to manage or mitigate it.

The dramatic force of the “Crying Statue” scene inheres in Hong Sheng's nuanced rewriting of earlier dramatic, poetic, and historiographical sources. He reads the theatrical cliché of a living image (*Peony Pavilion*) against historical poems that dwell on a viewer's fractured psychology in confronting mute likenesses (from Li Longji's encomium to Wu Rong's “Huaqing Palace”); he relocates a scene of private romance (*Rain on the Wutong Tree*) to the semipublic space of a newly built temple, recasting a portrait intended to commemorate a reburial (Yue Shi's unofficial biography) as an effigy that prefigures the uncomfortable discovery of a missing corpse. Hong's multilayered citations in concert with Wu's commentarial interventions preclude the possibility of approaching the animate image as a cogent spectacle. Critical attention is redirected instead to the hopes and anxieties that Lady Yang's assembled intercessors—not just the failed emperor but Gao Lishi and her former palace attendants—project upon a silent and insentient prop.

An awareness that the fantasy of a living image is an illusion dovetails with Hong's latent insinuation that events depicted onstage—the mourning of a consort who “sacrificed her life for the state”—refer less to the Tang than to the fallout from recent political vicissitudes. The audience is thus at once removed

from and yet invited to join with this makeshift congregation of mourners. Hong Sheng's arias—as presented in Wu Yiyi's sanctioned commentary on the ambiguous meaning of Hong's references to Yang's martyrdom for the state, the underlying absence of Yang's corpse, and the emperor's apprehension of his own objectification before the statue—waver between lyrical absorption and critical self-reflection, unsettling clear-cut distinctions between inside and outside, then and now. A story about the animation of an image may evoke the power of art to enchant us, yet it might also evoke our “awakening *from* art,” an understanding of “art's eloquent but objectified versions of our dreams and needs.”¹⁰³ Hong's audience bears witness to a collective expression of grief and yet starts to obtain the perspective necessary to make sense of the social dynamics behind collective acts of grieving. They see the stubborn allure of fantasy, even as they begin to apprehend the psychic work that fantasies conceal or displace.

An Auspicious Ritual

Hong Sheng uses his list of editorial principles to explain how the “Crying Statue” scene should be staged. He reminds his readers that this act, which takes “crying” as its titular theme, must be one of sorrowful lament. Rather than attend to any implicit associations between Lady Yang's likeness and Buddhist miracle tales of animate Guanyin statuary, Hong squarely frames his discussion of the scene in terms of classical Confucian ritual theory:

The “Crying Statue” act takes crying as its title, [it should be performed as] an unpropitious rite not an auspicious sacrifice. Nowadays, performances are full of [actors] wearing red clothes, thus throwing the emotional affairs of the play into disorder—not only is Minghuang unable to properly express his feelings, but the tears of [Lady Yang's] palace maids are rendered indistinct.

其《哭像》折，以哭題名，如禮之凶奠，非吉祭也。今滿場皆用紅衣，則情事乖違，不但明皇鍾情不能寫出，而阿監宮娥泣涕皆不稱矣。¹⁰⁴

To explain his dramatic intent, Hong invokes a distinction between “unpropitious rites” (*xiongdian* 凶奠) and “auspicious sacrifices” (*jiji* 吉祭), the former referring to extreme expressions of grief and sadness at the moment when the deceased has left the world of the living, and the latter referring to sacrificial rituals to an ancestral tablet. The “Tan gong” 檀弓 chapter of the *Book of Rites* presents the shift from “unpropitious rites” to “auspicious sacrifices” as a turn, at the “end of wailing,” from making offerings to the deceased corpse as if it were alive to making sacrifices to the spirit:

The end of wailing is called “completing the event.” On this day, auspicious sacrifices replace sacrifices of mourning. The next day, [the tablet] is enshrined with the grandfather. Changing to auspicious sacrifices, and on the succeeding day to the enshrining of the tablet, must necessarily occur very close to this day. He [the survivor] cannot bear one day without a place [for the spirit] to return.¹⁰⁵

卒哭曰成事，是日也，以吉祭易喪祭，明日，祔于祖父。其變而之吉祭也，比至於祔，必於是日也接，不忍一日末有所歸也。¹⁰⁶

“Crying Statue,” a scene squarely set in the space and time of exile, constitutes an “unpropitious rite,” one that denies the resolution of an “auspicious sacrifice.” Hong’s terminology succinctly affirms his argument that the mourning ritual of *Palace of Lasting Life*, unlike the portrait-viewing scenes in earlier versions of the Lady Yang legend, forestalls rather than commemorates a moment of closure.

Hong Sheng’s critical comments on the staging of “Crying Statue” afford rare insight into early adaptations of *Palace of Lasting Life* within the performance repertoire and the playwright’s subsequent efforts to regulate the production of his work. His prefatory reflections on the “Crying Statue” scene take issue with how actors “all dress in red clothes” to perform the ritual, as if this were a celebration or happy reunion.¹⁰⁷ And indeed, as Lu Eting has demonstrated, late Qing records of costumes for Suzhou *kunqu* troupes stipulate that Minghuang, the Lady Yang “statue,” the two maids, and Gao Lishi should all wear red garments.¹⁰⁸ For Hong, such adaptations distort the mood of the scene, diminishing the pathos of Minghuang’s soliloquy and the grief of Lady Yang’s palace maids. Such evidence suggests that Hong’s prescriptions were ultimately ineffective. Unwilling to stage such a sorrowful scene at the banquets or celebratory gatherings for which *kun* opera performances might be requested, troupes envisioned “Crying Statue” as an “auspicious sacrifice.”

Hong Sheng’s concern with the staging of “Crying Statue” betrays the scene’s surprising popularity in the *kun* opera repertoire.¹⁰⁹ While Hong’s full-length play runs to fifty acts, versions of the script intended for the stage reduce the drama to around seven acts (an increasingly widespread practice during the Qianlong era [1736–1795])—a sequence that now concludes with a new scene titled “Welcoming and Crying” 迎哭 (Yingku), a combination of “Receiving the Statue” 迎像 (Yingxiang) and “Crying Statue” (Kuxiang).¹¹⁰ Whereas Hong’s play ends with the “grand reunion” (*da tuanyuan* 大團圓) of the ill-fated lovers as immortals on the moon, performing troupes chose to conclude with the scene of Minghuang recognizing traces of life in the effigy of his dead consort. Hong Sheng’s somber mourning ritual became a happy ending, one built around the fantasy of a responsive image.

This search for closure not on the moon but in the collective recognition of an iconic presence as the haunting trace and charismatic “stand-in” for a felt absence nevertheless affirms the significance of *Palace of Lasting Life* as a play about aesthetic mediation.¹¹¹ To accentuate the dramatic power of this moment, opera troupes asked the actress playing the *dan* role type (the actress who would have played the living Lady Yang) to pose as the statue by sitting on an armchair that would then be carried by two bearers. This performance of silence constitutes, as Joseph Lam reminds us, a virtuosic “stunt” in and of itself; “audiences find it thrilling,” he continues, “to watch out for moments when the actor might blink or twitch.”¹¹² Opera troupes revivify the effigy by replacing Hong Sheng’s prop with a living actress, one who performs her own resurrection in response to Minghuang’s extended soliloquy.¹¹³ To stage Yang’s rebirth as a reaction to the male lead’s grief would, in any event, overlook the meaning of Hong’s ghost scenes, which as Zeitlin notes, underscore Yang’s “inner process of self-redemption” as a transformation carried out “from her viewpoint and within her subjectivity,” irrespective of rituals “performed by the living on her behalf.”¹¹⁴ The elevation of “Crying Statue” in performance reinscribes Hong’s weeping likeness of Yang as a figure of redemption and release. These later revisions nevertheless disclose the extent to which the questions initially posed by Hong’s “Crying Statue”—how constructed images mark and work to restore an ineluctable sense of lack—had come to shape understandings of *Palace of Lasting Life* as a whole.

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“Crying Statue” became an auspicious scene of romantic reunion and apotheosis on the late imperial stage. This happy ending nevertheless rests on the expurgation of Hong’s concern with the burdens of historical commemoration in the late seventeenth century, with the ethics of mourning rituals (or the “unpropitious rites” Hong invokes to conceptualize the performance of the scene), and with the lessons for managing loss that might yet be found in mute wooden props. Hong’s scene asks us to apprehend the power of theatrical things to affect and move us without resorting to metaphors of enlivenment. His effigy prompts consideration of a prop’s autonomy in terms of its recessive agency, or a capacity to reconfigure dramatic action and the expectations of an audience through estrangement and withdrawal. By invoking and then withholding the prospect of coming to life through sympathetic resonance, his recalcitrant statue—one that resists participation in the symbolic economy of the play as whole—illuminates the fantasies of its intercessors. In this respect, it embodies a critical impulse latent in Hong’s *Palace of Lasting Life*, a turn from the depiction of a romance

against the backdrop of historical upheavals to the interpretation of such events in collective memory.



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Notes

1. Barkan, “Living Sculptures,” 664.
2. Gross, *Dream of the Moving Statue*, 21.
3. The other would be Kong Shangren’s 孔尚任 (1648–1718) *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 (Peach Blossom Fan). On the pivotal place of these two dramatists in Chinese theater (“Hong of the South and Kong of the North” 南洪北孔), see Guo, *Ming Qing chuanqi shi*, 520–70.
4. For an overview of the play’s reception in Chinese literary history, see A. Wang, “Artistry of Hong Sheng’s *Changshengdian*.”
5. For sources on the fallout from the scandal, see Y. Wang, *Changsheng dian ziliao huibian kaoshi*, 426–45.
6. On this commentary, which reads as a sophisticated work of literary prose in and of itself, see A. Wang, “Pingdian, quanshi yu jieshou.”
7. Hong Sheng rewrites Yang’s forced execution as a suicide. On historical accounts of the emperor’s flight from Chang’an, see Kroll, “Flight from the Capital and the Death of Precious Consort Yang.”
8. Zeitlin, *Phantom Heroine*, 182.
9. Ibid. Various critics claim that the second half of the play is superfluous and lacks the quality of the first half (even though it contains some of the “most inventive writing and imagery staging”). For a survey of these views, see Q. Li, *Transmutations of Desire*, 154.
10. On the trend of *xiao quanben* in general and the *xiao quanben Changsheng dian* 小全本長生殿 (Short Complete Play of Palace of Lasting Life) in particular, see Luo, “Guanyu Kunban yanchuben,” 59.
11. Early records of the play in performance do not mention “Kuxiang” as a significant or stand-out scene. Chen Pengnian’s 陳鵬年 (1663–1723) sixteen *jueju* 絕句 on key scenes, for instance, does not include “Kuxiang.” Y. Wang, *Changsheng dian ziliao huibian kaoshi*, 64–67.
12. We might read this shift in terms of Roman Jakobson’s point in “Statue in Pushkin’s Poetic Mythology” (1937) that the fantasy of a statue’s animation is fundamentally relational or spatial: “The fantasy is not a projection of perfected mimetic illusion. Rather, it is

- generated by the real or imaginary situation of a living person standing before the statue. Belonging properly to neither, the idea of animation translates the relational life that emerges in the space between the two." Quoted in Gross, *Dream of the Moving Statue*, 125.
13. Sofer, *Stage Life of Props*, 2.
 14. Ibid., 3.
 15. Veltruský, "People and Things in the Theatre," 155.
 16. Sofer, *Stage Life of Props*, 25. Veltruský, for instance, is primarily concerned with how people act as things onstage, rather than with the thing's insistence on remaining a thing.
 17. Gross, *Dream of the Moving Statue*, 7.
 18. Hong, for instance, requires two commentators to explain both the technical aspects of his musical drama (Xu Lin 徐麟 [n.d.], an expert on *kunqu* from Suzhou) and its literary concerns (Wu Yiyi). On Wu's involvement with Hong Sheng's drama, see Liu, "Lun Wu Shufu." Hong's own list of editorial guidelines, as I discuss here, dwells explicitly on the playwright's inability to control the interpretation of his play.
 19. Zeitlin, "Life and Death of an Image," 229–30. See also Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, 84–94; T. Lu, *Persons, Roles, and Minds*, 28–62; and Burkus-Chasson, "Like Not Like."
 20. Burkus-Chasson, "Like Not Like," 161.
 21. Zeitlin, "Life and Death of an Image," 250.
 22. Tang, *Mudan ting*, 103; Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, 86.
 23. Tang, *Mudan ting*, 152. Liu's language here recalls Du Linian's address to her portrait in scene 14 and the description of Liu's semen in scene 24. Tang, *Mudan ting*, 73, 135. On the erotic connotations of staining and defilement, see Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, 86.
 24. Ruan, *Ruan Dacheng xiqu sizhong*, 485.
 25. See Xu Shuofang's introduction to Hong, *Changsheng dian*, 23–24.
 26. Courtesans in the late imperial period could be referred to as "living Guanyin" (*huo Guanyin* 活觀音), as in popular stories around the Fish-basket Guanyin. See Y. Li, *Becoming Guanyin*, 30–31.
 27. Wu likely completed his commentary on *Changsheng dian* before the publication of the Three Wives' edition. Zeitlin, "Shared Dreams."
 28. Ibid., 156.
 29. Ibid.
 30. Burkus-Chasson, "Like Not Like," 158.
 31. Wang, *Story of the Western Wing*, 121–22; Wang, *Jiping jiaozhu Xixiang ji*, 8.
 32. The Buddhist associations of the animated icon and the Confucian terms that Hong uses to describe the scene as a mourning ritual diverge from and recontextualize the predominantly Daoist themes of Yang the "Perfected One's" 楊太真 "corpse release" 尸解 and eventual apotheosis as an immortal on the moon. The Daoist themes of the Lady Yang story are placed front and center in Tu Long's 屠隆 (1543–1605) *chuanqi*, *Caihao ji* 彩毫記 (Brush of Stylistic Brilliance).
 33. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 79.
 34. See Catherine C. Swatek on Du Linian's portrait: "It is a material symbol that 'threads the fabric of the play' like the shuttle of a loom, helping to create a sense of unity in the sprawling work" (*Peony Pavilion Onstage*, 84).
 35. On this dynamic in Qing literature (and *Changsheng dian* in particular), see Owen, "Salvaging Poetry."

36. On Hong Sheng's play as a "lyrical solution" to the problem of *qing* 情 in late Ming culture, see W. Li, *Enchantment and Disenchantment*, 77–81. Zeitlin reads the play as an extended meditation on musical experience in "Music and Performance." Qiancheng Li suggests the play explores the paradox of transcendence to the Trāyastriṃśa (Daoli 忉利) heaven through desire (rather than its renunciation) in *Transmutations of Desire*, 147–68.
37. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 89.
38. *Ibid.*, 1.
39. Gross, *Dream of the Moving Statue*, 9.
40. Critics subsequently inferred that the plot at this stage likely centered on Li Bai's career. In 1679, Hong Sheng deleted Li Bai's part altogether. Instead he added a plot about Li Mi's 李泌 (722–789) assistance of Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (711–762) in the post-An Lushan reconstruction. A. Wang, "Music and Dramatic Lyricism," 240.
41. *Ibid.*, 235–37. See also You, *Hong Sheng jiqi shige yanjiu*.
42. W. Chen, *Hong Sheng yanjiu*, 169; Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 133.
43. Yuan, *Suiyuan shihua*, 1.28.
44. Ko, "Changsheng dian jítang xiachangshi."
45. Zeitlin, *Phantom Heroine*, 248.
46. Zhou, *Quan Tangwen xinbian*, 41.520.
47. The six quatrains were later broken into two sequences, one two-quatrain poem and one four-quatrain poem. The quatrain on the painting appears at the end of the four-quatrain sequence (and end of what would initially have been the six-quatrain sequence).
48. Huang, Hua, and Tieyan, *Quan Tang shi*, 685.304.
49. Specifically, at the end of scene 24 (the halfway mark in the drama) and at the end of scene 50, the grand finale.
50. Hong, *Changsheng dian jianzhu*, 232.
51. Mair and Zhang, *Anthology of Tang and Song Tales*, 652–53.
52. X. Lu, *Tang Song chuanqi ji*, 7.270.
53. For an overview, see F. P. Chen, "Many Faces of Yang Guifei in Chinese Drama."
54. Zeitlin, *Phantom Heroine*, 183.
55. Zeitlin, "Music and Performance," 465.
56. Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629–1709) identifies the importance of Yuan drama for Hong Sheng in his preface for *Palace of Lasting Life*. Zhu lists seven Yuan *zaju* about the Li-Yang romance: *Xingyue gong* 幸月宮 (Moon Palace) and *Wutong yu* 梧桐雨 (Rain on the Wutong Tree) both attributed to Bai Pu 白朴 (1226–after 1307); *Huaqing gong* 華清宮 (Huaqing Palace) and *Nishang yuan* 霓裳怨 (Grief of Rainbow Skirts) both attributed to Yu Tianfu 庾天福 (n.d.); *Ku xiangnang* 哭香囊 (Crying over the Fragrant Pouch) attributed to Guan Hanqing 關漢卿 (1241–1320); *Niannu jiaoyue* 念奴教樂 (Niannu Teaches Music) attributed to Li Zhifu 李直夫 (n.d.); and *Mengduan Guifei* 夢斷貴妃 (Broken Dream of the Precious Consort) attributed to Yue Baichuan 岳百川 (n.d.). Y. Wang, *Changsheng dian ziliao huibian kaoshi*, 266.
57. *Ibid.*, 22. Xu Shuofang, by contrast, identifies a model for "Kuxiang" in the scene "On a Birthday, Thinking of My Wife" (Shouri siqi 壽日思妻) from the Ming play *Story of a Parakeet* (Yingwu ji 鸚鵡記). Hong, *Changsheng dian*, 27n16. The song-suite for "Kuxiang" largely copies the suite for act 3 of play 4 in *Western Wing* (the parting scene between Yingying and Zhang).
58. For a full-length study of the relationship between these two plays, see J. Huang, *Wutong yu yu Changsheng dian bijiao yanjiu*.

59. West and Idema, *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals*, 110.
60. Ibid.
61. On the significance of act 4 (in the senses both that “nobody actually does anything” and that the “dazzling imagery” creates a kind of “virtuoso passagework”), see Panish, “Trembling Pearls,” 367.
62. West and Idema, *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals*, 146.
63. Zang, *Yuanqu xuan*, 1:361.
64. As West and Idema note, this detail is removed from Zang Maoxun’s edited version of the play in *Yuanqu xuan* yet may still explain the contradictory interpretations of Yang’s character in later responses to Bai Pu’s drama (*Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals*, 110).
65. Ibid., 146.
66. Zang, *Yuanqu xuan*, 1:361.
67. West and Idema, *Monks, Bandits, Lovers, and Immortals*, 147.
68. Zang, *Yuanqu xuan*, 1:361.
69. Zeitlin, *Phantom Heroine*, 186.
70. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 79.
71. Ibid., 78.
72. This tendency becomes especially pronounced in the wake of Sima Guang’s 司馬光 (1019–1086) indictment of Yang as an adulteress in *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government). Bai Pu ostensibly follows Sima Guang’s judgment. See F. B. L. Chen, “Problems in Chinese Historiography.”
73. On these themes in late imperial literature, see W. Li, *Women and National Trauma*, 201–94.
74. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 78.
75. Ibid., 78. The claim that Yang was a martyr can be traced back to the Tang dynasty, as in Xu Yin’s 徐寅 (849–938) poem “Mawei” 馬嵬. See Hong, *Changsheng dian jianzhu*, 234n27.
76. Paize Keulemans has identified the significance of effigies, animate statues, and dumb puppets as vehicles for the expression of collective anger in plays associated with writers in the Suzhou circle. Zhou Shunchang 周順昌 (1584–1626) curses a statue of Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢 (1568–1627) in *Qingzhong pu* 清忠譜 (Registers of the Pure and Loyal); Mao Wenlong 毛文龍 (1576–1629) whips a silent grass effigy of Wei Zhongxian in Qingxiaosheng’s 清嘯生 (n.d.) *Xifeng chun* 喜逢春 (Joyously Meeting Spring). In act 29 of this play, a statue of Guan Yu 關羽 comes to life to beat Wei Zhongxian. Qingxiaosheng, *Xifeng chun*, 25b–26a. I am indebted to Keulemans for drawing my attention to these materials and sharing his unpublished research on these scenes.
77. For a detailed analysis, see G. Wang, *Staging Personhood*, 144–50.
78. Such concerns persist into the High Qing: Jiang Shiquan 蔣士銓 (1725–1784), for instance, composed a pair of Northern dramas *Yipian shi* 一片石 (The First Stone Slab) and *Di’er bei* 第二碑 (The Second Stele) on his real-life experiences participating in the excavation and reconstruction of the tomb of Lady Lou 婁妃, the loyalist concubine of Prince Ning, Zhu Chenhao 朱宸濠 (1476–1521). In these paired dramas, Jiang replaces the theatrical trope of a female effigy with an epitaphic monument. Jiang also composed a “poetic preface” (*tici* 題詞) on *Palace of Lasting Life*. See Y. Wang, *Changsheng dian ziliao huibian kaoshi*, 292.
79. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 79.

80. The scene, as Takemura Noriyuki shows, displays a self-reflexive awareness of earlier narrative songs on the Li-Yang romance. *Chao tianzi* 朝天子, for instance, closely resembles a song to the tune of *Gun xiuqiu* 滾繡球 in the suite “Xuanzong’s Flight to Shu” (Xuanzong xing Shu 玄宗幸蜀) in the third volume of *Yongxi yuefu* 雍熙樂府 (Songs of Harmonious Resplendence). Hong, *Changsheng dian jianzhu*, 234n22.
81. For Takemura Noriyuki’s annotations, see *ibid.*, 232.
82. For a study of the statue, see Machnik, “Deified Beauty.”
83. Teiro, *Sennyu-ji*, 70.
84. Shinji, “Sofu chokoku zakkan,” 4; Machnik, “Deified Beauty,” 4.
85. Graham, *Yang Kuei-Fei Legend*; Ng, “Images of Yang Guifei in Tokugawa Texts.”
86. M. C. Wang, “Early Chinese Buddhist Sculptures,” 18.
87. Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, 68.
88. *Ibid.*, 63.
89. M. C. Wang, “Early Chinese Buddhist Sculptures,” 20.
90. Dudbridge, “Buddhist Images in Action,” 385–87.
91. *Ibid.*, 386.
92. The aria invokes the imagery of Bai Juyi’s 白居易 (772–846) “Song of Everlasting Regret” (Changhen ge 長恨歌); see Hong, *Changsheng dian jianzhu*, 233n17.
93. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 81.
94. The associations of Yang with Guanyin nevertheless persist in performances where troupes restage Yang’s virtuosic “dance on a disc” in act 16 as a dance on a lotus flower. I am grateful to Mengxiao Wang for sharing her thoughts on this tendency.
95. Gross, *Dream of the Moving Statue*, 15.
96. *Ibid.*, 21.
97. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 81.
98. Swatek, *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, 91–92, 320n78.
99. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 81.
100. Hong Sheng’s writing, here, might be said to elucidate what Hans Belting identifies as a paradox that characterizes images in general: the extent to which “images make a physical (a body’s) *absence* visible by transforming it into iconic presence” (*Anthropology of Images*, 3).
101. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 81.
102. *Ibid.*
103. Gross, *Dream of the Moving Statue*, 9.
104. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 78.
105. Puett, “Ritual and Ritual Obligations,” 545.
106. Zheng and Kong, *Liji zhengyi*, 12.363.
107. Hong, *Wu Ren pingdian Changsheng dian*, 13.
108. Lu E., *Kunju yanchu shigao*, 110.
109. Nor was the “shortened complete play” of *Palace of Lasting Life* the only popular stage adaptation of Hong’s drama: writing in 1944, Zheng Liao 鄭料 remembers watching a wooden-puppet play of *Palace of Lasting Life* at the Lanxin Theater 蘭心戲院 in Shanghai. Zheng spends much of his review insisting that puppet plays are not just for children and comparing the Shanghai performance to scenes from Japanese Bunraku. Zheng did have one critique: he found it difficult to distinguish between the wooden puppet of Yang Guifei and the puppets playing her maids, to the extent that he was unable to detect differences in the way they expressed emotions. Y. Wang, *Changsheng dian ziliao huibian kaoshi*, 603–4.

110. Luo, "Guanyu Kunban yanchuben," 59.
111. Effigy and performance, in this respect, find images of themselves in each other: "Effigy's similarity to *performance* should be clear enough: it fills by means of surrogation a vacancy created by the absence of an original." Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 36.
112. See Lam, *Kunqu*, 33: "The procession is also theatrical: the statue is enacted by a female performer, who remains expressionless and motionless throughout the scene. Her 'silent' act intrigues audiences and underscores the nature of performance virtuosity in kunqu. A living person enacting a lifeless wooden statue for thirty-some minutes is a performance stunt in itself! A wooden statue can be used in the scene, but there is no art or entertainment in that." Lam's analysis is based on the popular and widely discussed 2007 ShangKun (Shanghai Kun Opera Troupe) production of *Changsheng dian* (a staging of forty-three of the fifty acts). On the significance of this production for research on the play, see the essays in Ye, *Changsheng dian*. The Suzhou Kun Opera company also staged a three-night version of the play (twenty-eight of the fifty acts) at the New Theater in Taipei in 2004.
113. Contemporary *kunqu* masters still speak of the unique challenges involved in performing this scene. Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁 (b. 1941) of the Shanghai Troupe, one of the most celebrated performers of the *sheng* role type in general, and the portrayal of the *daguan-sheng* 大官生 role in particular, claims that "Instating the Statue, Lamenting the Statue" is "probably the most challenging scene" for the *daguansheng* role in the *kunqu* repertoire. In part this is due to the actor in the role of Tang Minghuang singing sixteen lengthy arias. Cai recalled that when he learned the scene with his teacher Shen Chuanzhi 沈傳芷 (1906–1994) as an eighteen-year-old student, they studied only fourteen arias. "Later, when I started to perform [the scene]," Cai recalled, "we felt that even so the scene was a bit long, especially for such a singing-intensive scene." Quoted in Yip and Stenberg, *Kunqu Masters on Chinese Theatrical Performance*, 191–92.
114. Zeitlin, *Phantom Heroine*, 188.

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