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**Cross-Dressed Heroines in
Shakespearean and Ming-Qing Comedies**

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1 Abstract

It is worth a comparison between Shakespearean and Ming Qing comedies with cross-dressed female characters, for the numerous similarities shared. They came into existence contemporaneously and share some common social characteristics. Both of them represent certain level of literature achievement in regional culture, revealing ideas of female liberation that transcend the patriarchal system to some extent. Yet they are still bounded by the limitations of the times.

The paper will start from the literal and historical background of the issue, which introduces cross-dressing as a common literal phenomenon, and discusses the social conditions that were in and out of favour of women. It further investigates the similarities and differences of Shakespearean comedies and Ming Qing comedy operas. For similarities, the paper will conclude that playwrights designed cross-dressing plots for similar motivations and lead to similar consequences. At the end of the play, they both sent their females out of line back to male dominance. However, the paper also addresses some differences between the two kinds of plays. Shakespeare attributed the success of heroines to their own excellence, while Chinese writers justified female capability through external help. Also, Shakespeare revealed a more equal position of female and male identities of cross-dressed heroines. Finally, the reason why Shakespearean heroines reveal a higher level of female liberation is discussed, where the paper will look into the different influence of The Renaissance and The Adherent Movement, as the artistic inspiration of plays.

With above discussions, the paper concludes by comparison that: **In both plays, cross-dressed females demonstrate traits that transcend the limitations of the patriarchal system, but are still restricted by male dominance. Comparatively, Shakespearean heroines reveal a higher level of female liberation.**

Key Terms Cross-Dressing Shakespeare Ming Qing Operas Gender Qualities

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2 Introduction

2.1 Definition

Cross-dress Cross-dressing is the “act of wearing items of clothing and other accoutrements commonly associated with the opposite sex within a particular society” (“Cross-dress”). The cross-dressed women characters discussed in this paper refer to those heroines who put on male’s outfit for disguise, instead of mental comfort.

Masculinity and Femininity Masculinity and femininity correspond to two sets of attributes towards biological male and female. They are oppressed and regulated by social construct. According to personality theories, a personality theorist might “classify a person as masculine or feminine” if the person “thought that person to have certain P-traits [personality traits]” (Vetterling-Braggin). Although the concept of masculinity and femininity differs across time and culture, there are some shared standards between Shakespearean Europe and Ancient China around the seventeenth century, which are considered unequal.

Masculine Features	Feminine Features
Intelligence and Wit	Silence
Courage	Tenderness and Modesty
Independence and Leadership	Obedience
Assertiveness	Sensitivity
Activeness	Passiveness
Sex Drive (Virility)	Chastity and Constancy

Table 1: Masculinity and Femininity Features Shared between Shakespearean England and Ancient China (Richard; Guozhi Wu; Chen and Wang)

2.2 Backgrounds

2.2.1 Cross-dressing: A Common Literature Phenomenon

If you were a play lover, you can probably name quite a few heroines in male disguise from plays around the world, including Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Mulan in *Ci Mu Lan* [Mulan the girl Joins the Army] and Oscar in *The Rose of Versailles* from Takarazuka Revue. Though familiar with these famous characters, people are still surprised by how commonly seen cross-dressing characters are in plays around the seventeenth century. According to statistics, at least eighty plays on Shakespearean stage involved cross-dressed characters (Shapiro). Almost at the same historical period, over a hundred traditional Chinese operas with cross-dressed characters came into existence, as is recorded in *Qu Lu* (Wang). These surprising numbers reveal that disguising a character as his/her opposite gender is not a personal creativity of one writer, but rather a common literature phenomenon, particularly in Shakespearean plays and traditional Chinese operas in Ming and Qing Dynasties.

It is the most commonly the case to put the heroines in male disguise in comedies. Cross-dressing creates fun by “dislocation of identity and gender”, which “lays an amusing tone for the development of the plot” (Liu 9). Therefore, cases are rare where disguised male figures appear in a tragedy. Meanwhile, Zhenpei Bao believes that play writers around the world had a clear preference of disguising a woman than a man before the 20th century (1). Among the seven Shakespearean comedies involving cross-dressing, female characters choose to disguise themselves as young men. Portia, the intelligent, beautiful and wealthy heroine of *The Merchant of Venice*, dresses herself in male outfit in order to travel to Venice and falsify an identity of a lawyer called Balthazar to save Antonio in court (*The Merchant of Venice*). The case is similar for cross-dressing comedies in Ming Qing operas, which usually feature a female warrior or a female official as heroine, probably inspired by the legend of Hua Mulan and Huang Guxia¹. Lou Jinhua, the heroine of *The Legend of Jinhua*, disguises herself as male to travel to the capital in search of her lost husband, but accidentally scores *Zhuang Yuan*² (*Jin Hua Ji*). These disguised females play a crucial role in the development of plot and the reflection of the theme, and usually end up happily with an expected marriage. Therefore, in this paper, the object of research is limited to cross-dressed female characters in comedies.

2.2.2 Social Circumstance: Improving but Still Tough for Women

Influenced by the deeply rooted medieval culture and Confucianism, the culture of Renaissance England and Ming, Qing Dynasties were both male dominated, taking on a typical patriarchal society. However, around the 1600s, woman’s position in both cultures underwent an elevation. In Shakespearean England, the Renaissance brought about a group of humanists who started to acknowledge female consciousness and consider women as an equal component of society. English women “enjoyed more freedom than their continental sisters”, and the “wit and learning in women” was started to be appreciated by men (Dreher 30). Humanists also encouraged female education. Sir Thomas More, a well-known humanist, was the first a few people to educate his daughters (Pitt 17). Consequently, some noble women were given the chance of education, and further formed a circle of noblewomen, centering round Elizabeth (Dusinberre 209). At the same time, on the other side of the world, the talented-women culture sprang up in the transition of Ming and Qing Dynasties. Contradictory to the old Chinese proverb “A woman without talent is virtuous”, women with literal talents start to win men’s appreciation. On one hand, famous prostitutes won acclaim from the society, as they became bosom friends of scholars (Song). On the other hand, Boudoir culture became popular, where noble talented girls gathered into literal societies, including the famous *Jiaoyuan Poetry Society*. Noble girls

¹A woman from the Five Dynasties of ancient China, who dressed in male disguise and won the admiration of the prime minister for her literal talents. However, after her female identity exposed, she lost her official position and returned home (qtd. in Renchen Wu).

²The first place in the imperial civil examination in ancient China, which only accepted male examinees.

were therefore given the chance to get out from home and perform social intercourse between families (Song).

Although the social norms that women bore was ameliorated, the social circumstances in Shakespearean England and Ming-Qing Dynasties were not tolerant towards errant behaviors of women, including cross-dressing. The prohibition of cross-dressing in England could date back to *Old Testament*, and after *Tudor Royal Proclamations* in 1574, women's clothing depended only on her husband's social status (qtd. in Sandra Clark 158; Liu 17). In *Description of Elizabethan England*, there is further a direct connection of women's cross-dressing with licentious conducts and infidelity: "I have met with some of these trulls³ in London so disguised that it hath passed my skill to discern whether they were men or women" (Harrison 30-31). The controversy later reached its peak with the publication of *Hic Mulier [The Manlike Women]*, which criticized intransigently and abusively that transvestitism was an affront to nature, religion and society (qtd. in Sandra Clark 158). In late Ming and early Qing Dynasty, cross-dressing is considered as challenging the traditional etiquettes, and similar restrictions were established on women's clothing regarding her family's status (Bao 1). What's worse, they had to wear shoes with upturned end to bind the feet, which catered for men's appreciation (Guozhi Wu). Therefore, these cross-dressed women could only stay on the stage, and any trial off stage accompanies huge social pressure.

2.2.3 Summary

Numerous similarities in literal and historical background are shared by Shakespearean comedies and Ming Qing Comedy Operas. They came into existence contemporaneously and share some common social characteristics, revealing ideas of female liberation that transcend, yet are still bounded by the patriarchal system of the times. By comparison, the paper concludes that, in both plays, cross-dressed females demonstrate traits that transcend the limitations of the patriarchal system, but are still restricted by male dominance. Comparatively, Shakespearean heroines reveal a higher level of female liberation.

In the following sections, the paper will present the literal and historical background of the issue, investigate the similarities and differences of Shakespearean comedies and Ming Qing comedy operas, and compare to reach, and justify the conclusion.

³**Trull**, n. whore; slut: Now will I hence to seek my lovely Moor, / And let my spleenful sons this trull deflower. *T Andr*, II, iii, 190191 (Shewmaker).

3 Similarities

3.1 Purpose: A Door to Men's Status of Social Power

By disguising a woman character as man, playwrights allow heroines a temporary male identity. This enables them into men's status of social power to function as a major decision maker, and to show their capability.

In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia assumes the role of a lawyer in Venice court and gets into judicial power. With a lawyer's garment and a recommendation letter, Portia, in male disguise, is easily accepted by the Venice court without further doubt on her authority. Soon after the letter is read, Duke of Venice welcomes her with respect and says: "Give me your hand" and "You are welcome. Take your place", which validates her judicial power (*The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.170,172). Given this temporary power, Portia solves the case successfully with her outstanding rhetoric technicalities.

A similar example can be found in *The Legend of Jinhua*, where cross-dressed Jinhua accidentally starts her official career. In search of her husband who is out of contact, Jinhua disguises herself as an examinee in imperial examination and accidentally wins the first place. She is highly praised and then offered surprising military power, as is described in the imperial edict, "Cheng [Jinhua's name as a man] may control over the border affairs and dispatch troops around the country" and "has the right to kill any dissenters before reporting to the imperial court." (*Jin Hua Ji* 19.3.7-12). It turns out that Jinhua performs the duty well.

In a patriarchal system, women are inferior to men, which results in men's dominant activity in some occupations, especially those power elites of major social powers and involve major decisions. However, cross-dressed heroines in Shakespearean and Ming Qing comedies are allowed a temporary male identity. This enables them access into men's status of social power, and shows that women have the capability in making major decisions as well.

3.2 Consequence: Female Masculinity Got Demonstrated

Cross-dressing provides heroines with access to the male dominant world, and in order to survive and succeed, they consequently liberate their oppressed masculinity in contrast to the feminine expectations of society.

The discourse of Portia on the court shows apparent masculinity. One of the most famous speeches in Shakespeare, "The Quality of Mercy", is given by Portia in male disguise. She first compares the quality of mercy to "the gentle rain" and "crown" of a king, to show the well-being and nobleness of mercy (*The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.191-98). She then applies strong ethos by referring mercy as "attribute to God Himself", and finally reveals her purpose by "I have spoke thus much / To mitigate the justice of thy plea" (*The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.201,208-9).

She begs for mercy for Shylock in a tongue neither humble nor pushy, which demonstrate her extraordinary rhetoric and eloquence. Portia also remains a high level of assertiveness, as she applies the word “must” 5 times on the court (*The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.171-418). Without strong masculinity, Portia could have won her case.

Female masculinity is also revealed in Ming Qing operas. Lin Tiansu, the cross-dressed heroine of *The Intended Lovers*, also demonstrates strong masculinity. She even explains to her lover about the masculine temperament she puts on. She says proudly that “It is all about the spirit. If I see myself as a woman, I would feel afraid if I step into the crowds. I must see myself as a courageous man, and see those men as chicks . . . Who is Huang and Who is Feng⁴? When spirit is on, Huang can be Feng!” (Li 13.2.36-39). Tiansu’s speech is out of social expectations, but it clearly breaks the solid boundary of gender qualities, which indicates the idea of liberation of the oppressed masculinity in female.

In conclusion, cross-dressing is just an external form. By setting the heroines in male disguise, Shakespeare and ancient Chinese play writers enabled female characters to demonstrated their oppressed masculine qualities.

3.3 Ending: Initiative Return to Male Dominance

Although heroines are allowed a chance into the outer world and to liberate some oppressed masculinity, eventually they return initiatively to male control at the end of the comedies.

This applies even to Portia, the most improper behaved heroine of Shakespeare. Portia pursues freedom of marriage, as she claims outrageously against her father’s will that “[s]o is the will of a living daughter curbed by / the will of a dead father” (*The Merchant of Venice* 1.2.24-5). However, in front of her future husband, Portia professes her devotion as a submissive wife by saying: “[h]appiest of all, is that her gentle spirit / Commits itself to yours to be directed / As from her lord, her governor, her king. / Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours / Is now converted” (*The Merchant of Venice* 3.2.168-71). Portia transcends the times in many ways, yet she still initiatively requires herself to be obedient to her husband.

Comparatively, the ending of *The Legend of Jinhua* is even more unacceptable for modern women. Before Jinhua takes off her male disguise, the prime minister betroths his daughter Biyun to her as a bestowed marriage⁵. However, when Jinhua’s female identity exposes, to bring everyone back to the normal track, the king removes Jinhua’s official position and bestowed marriage, and transfers them to her husband. She ends up serving the same husband with Biyun and everyone is happy about this (*The Legend of Jinhua* 29.5.2-15). It turns out that a marriage that is expected by patriarchy is the greatest favour to the cross-dressed heroines.

⁴Feng and Huang: Male phoenix and female phoenix in Chinese legends.

⁵In ancient China, a king often matches a young couple for political purpose. It is often the case that he betroths a princess or a daughter from a noble family to a examinee who did well in imperial examinations. Bestowed marriage is considered as great honor and it is extremely offensive to turn down the offer.

To sum up, although heroines have temporary access to the male power and reflect some oppressed masculine qualities, they initiatively return to the male dominant families and accept this happily as their final destinations.

4 Differences

4.1 Attribution: Personal Excellence versus External Help

In both Shakespearean and Ming Qing comedies, cross-dressed females demonstrate female capability in the male dominated social system. However, Shakespeare attributed female success to their own personal excellence, while Ming Qing opera writers attributed female success to men's help or supernatural powers.

Portia's success is a consequence of her individual ability. As is believed by Yali Guo, Portia is the central character of *The Merchant of Venice* with "overwhelming and independent wisdom", who is "more eye-catching than all the other male characters" (1). Her wit, courage, assertiveness are all her own personal qualities, which are not borrowed from external help. By building such heroine, Shakespeare led readers to attribute female capability to her own excellence, and made people believe that woman can function a crucial role in society.

However, Ming Qing operas attributed women's extraordinary to external reasons. In *The Legend of Jinhua*, Jinhua has no military skills at all before. However, the playwright solved this problem and justified her success on the battlefield by supernatural powers. The night before Jinhua goes on battlefield, the Empyrean Fairy appeared in her dream and taught her about the arrangement of arms and embattle (*The Legend of Jinhua* 21.2.4-20). On the battlefield, the playwright allowed even no direct description of Jinhua's role, but rather focused on how brave and mighty Jinhua's husband Zilong is, which foreshadows their later reunion, and justifies Jinhua's success over the battle.

To sum up, although in both kinds of comedy cross-dressed females were allowed to display their wisdom and capability, only Shakespeare admitted their success to their own personal excellence. In Ming Qing operas, female success is still justified by men's help or supernatural powers, and the wisdom of women themselves is brutally ignored.

4.2 Identities: Male Identity versus Female Identity

In both Shakespeare's and ancient Chinese comedies, playwrights constantly remind readers of the dual identity of cross-dressed females. However, Shakespeare reflected a more equally powered relationship of the two identities, while ancient Chinese opera writers indicated a despising attitude to their original female identity.

Shakespearean cross-dressed heroines defend their female identity in male disguise. In *The*

Merchant of Venice, when Bassanio expresses passionately how he wished he could save Antonio, he says “[b]ut life itself, my wife, and all the world / Are not with me esteemed above thy life. / I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all / Here to this devil, to deliver you” (*The Merchant of Venice* 5.1.282-5). On hearing that Bassanio would send her to devil in exchange of Antonio, she defends herself by satirizing: “[y]our wife would give you little thanks for that, / If she were by to hear you make the offer” (*The Merchant of Venice* 5.1.286-7). Similarly, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, When Julia is asked by Proteus to send her ring to Sylvia, she defends her female identity in bitterness: “It seems you loved not her, to leave her token. / She is dead, belike?” (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* 5.5.74-5). With a male disguise, heroines are enabled to express their being displeased and to make comments on men’s behaviors at an equal social position of her husband, and therefore to defend themselves.

On contrary, cross-dressed heroines in Ming Qing operas look down on their female identity themselves in male disguise. In act 19, Jinhua comes clean with her bestowed wife Biyun and wins Biyun’s understanding. As Biyun reminds Jinhua not to forget her male identity, she complains to Biyun in fear that: “I am just a modest woman, how could I possibly handle the battle affairs?” (*The Legend of Jinhua* 19.7.3). Even in male identity, Jinhua still refers herself to her original female identity and doubts her own ability in her temporary male identity. After Jinhua returns to her female identity, the prime minister once mentions to her male identity and praises her: “Madame, at home you are a chaste wife, and to country you are a famous vassal” (*The Legend of Jinhua* 29.3.4). On hearing this, Jinhua immediately reaffirm her female identity: “[y]ou flattered me. Considering the fact that I am merely a weak woman, if it weren’t for your daughter’s magnanimity, I won’t have managed to render tiny service to the king” (*The Legend of Jinhua* 29.3.5-6). Even in male disguise, heroines in Ming Qing comedies demonstrate a built-in sense of inferiority. Therefore, given that there are indications that ancient Chinese opera writers started to reexamine women’s social status, they still held an underlying despising attitude to female identity.

To sum up, after a textual comparison, it is concluded that female and male identities are of equal position in Shakespeare, heroine’s original female identity is under inferiority to their temporary male identity.

5 Analysis

5.1 Progressiveness

In both plays, cross-dressed females demonstrate traits that transcend the limitations of the patriarchal system. Judith Butler put forward the idea that it is the role of women in the social construct that makes a woman “woman”, and cross-dressing set them free from this (5). In both Shakespearean England and Ancient China, housework is considered as one of the most important social roles of women. In ancient China, the gender division of labor of “men farming and women weaving” pattern restricts women to “textile producing and housework in families and courtyards”, and the limited contents of women’s work “restrict women at home and lead to a morbid appreciation of delicate beauty of female” (Guozhi Wu 2). Similar standard is found in Shakespearean England, where [an] average Renaissance woman found her vocation in marriage, a life of cooking, cleaning, bearing children, assisting her husband, and managing a busy household (Dreher 17). In *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Launce lists the merits of his ideal woman, that she can “milk, brews good ale, sew, knit, wash, scour and spin” (3.1.296-354). However, cross-dressing in the comedy sets women free from this housework, and allows them to take part in other part of the society like women do today. Consequently, cross-dressing liberates the masculine attributes oppressed by the patriarchal system. In Shakespearean and Ming Qing comedies, cross-dressed heroines demonstrate admirable male traits, including intelligence, wit, courage, independence, leadership and assertiveness. The development of these characters breaks the solid stereotypes of sexual qualities regulated by the patriarchal system, and therefore, paces a step toward modern female.

5.2 Limitations

However, heroines of both plays are still restricted by male dominant society. The seemingly happy ending for everyone is based on women’s compromise towards the inequality of patriarchal system. Eventually, cross-dressed heroines give up their temporary access to the male power from the disguise and hide their masculine qualities again. They initiatively return to the male dominant families and accept her role as a submissive wife to her husband. Moreover, as is pointed out by Liu, cross-dressing strengthens male’s subjectivity in society (44). Portia solves the case successfully with her outstanding rhetoric technicalities, but audiences were left to think. Without a male identity, a girl as smart as Portia may have no access to judicial power, while a “man” that lacks legal training may be allowed to judge the case simply with an outfit and recommendation letter. When female characters put on male disguise, speak the way men speak and walk the way they walk, they unconsciously accept the stereotype that male should be more powerful and subjective. Therefore, fundamentally, the cross-dressed heroines are still

under supervision of patriarchal system.

5.3 Comparison

Although both plays indicate certain but limited level of women liberation, comparatively, Shakespearean heroines reveal a higher level of liberation.

First and foremost, Shakespeare admitted the fact that female can be capable by themselves. Liberation of women is based on the identification of women's capability in other institutions of society, which playwrights of Ming Qing operas refused to accept. They ascribed the success of female to men's help or supernatural powers, and ignored the independent wisdom of women characters. If Portia is written in China, Daniel would probably send her a dream to give her a lesson about laws and rhetoric so that Portia can win the case.

Moreover, Shakespeare indicated a fair attitude the male identity and the female identity possessed by cross-dressed female figures heroines, which creates a harmonic flow of masculinity and femininity, namely androgyny. Androgyny is "a variety of impulses" between masculine and feminine that "healthy men and women naturally display" (qtd. in Dreher 116). A typical example of androgyny in Shakespearean cross-dressed female is Viola in *Twelfth Night*. Dusinberre believes that Viola possesses "the preservation of feminine character under masculine attire", with "delicacy, modesty, timidity" that is held by admirable woman, and with "the same perfect consistency and unconscious grace" held by admirable man (264). Androgyny is closely related to liberation of female. Compared to those Shakespearean women without male disguise, they are "liberated from the traditional expectations that so oppress Ophelia and Hero" with the help of androgyny, for androgyny enables them freedom of "travel", to "discover new possibilities" and to "confront men on their own terms" (Dreher 124). In contrast, throughout *The Legend of Jinhua*, audience are given a constant hint that Lou Jinhua is essentially a woman, who is weak and irresolute inside. Even though Lou Cheng, the male identity of Jinhua, walks tall in the army, makes commands and is flattered by people, whenever "he" thinks about the fact that "he" is a "she", Jinhua's masculine qualities vanish and her femininity gets her over again, which sets her in self-denial. Therefore, in Ming Qing opera, masculinity and femininity are considered separated, opposite, and masculinity is overwhelmingly superior to the femininity.

In conclusion, though admitting women's personal capability and demonstrating androgyny, Shakespearean heroines reveal a higher level of liberation.

5.4 Artistic inspiration

Shakespeare's creative works are influenced by humanism in terms of plot and character archetype. Although the Renaissance is still limited by Medieval culture, the existence and movement of humanism is considered as the main theme. As is described by Dreher, the time was

“ripe for discovery and experiment” for progressive humanists, which is a part of an “all-round emancipation of the individual” and “a community enlivened by free choice and opportunity” (29). Shakespeare was sensitive to the social changes and reacted quickly in response, highly likely with the purpose of maintaining popularity. Many ideas in the Elizabeth time affected Shakespeare’s plot design, including woman in male disguise and freedom of marriage. In his comedies like *The Merchant of Venice*, audiences can find similar plot reflecting the social atmosphere then. Apart from the plot, it is also believed that many of Shakespearean heroines are borrowed from reality. It is argued that character archetypes may include lively society women of the time, like Lady Sidney, Lady Rich, and Lady Warwick, and even Queen Elizabeth herself for the figure of Portia (qtd. in Dreher 31; E.L. Turner Clark). The influence of humanism could be the prime reason why Shakespearean heroines reveal a higher level of female liberation.

At the same historical period, the Adherent Movement is started in China, affecting Ming Qing operas. After the fall of Ming Dynasty, a group of “adherent literati” became active on the literature history, who dared not to die for the fallen Ming Dynasty and chose to live in disgrace (Bao 78). They were ashamed of the fact that they remained alive while the great Ming Dynasty fell, and would like to prove their loyalty to the previous kingdom by literature compositions. In ancient Chinese literature, “women’s chasteness to her husband” is often compared to “men’s loyalty to the king” (Bao 76). With this tradition, they developed cross-dressed female characters in operas, who protect their chasteness by male disguise and go on journeys looking for their lost husbands. The metaphor of cross-dressing became their way of expressing loyalty: They consider “living in the kingdom of Qing similar to women in male disguise”, and “the protection of chasteness” is considered as “their way of maintenance of their loyalty” (Bao 78). Eventually, they believed that they will return to the Ming Dynasty, just like the disguised heroines returning to their husbands. Therefore, cross-dressing in Ming Qing comedies had a stronger political purpose than Shakespearean comedies, and playwrights were indifferent about women’s social status.

6 Conclusion

Similarities between the literal and historical background of Shakespearean and Ming Qing comedies made them comparable. To conclude, in both plays, cross-dressed females demonstrate traits that transcend the limitations of the patriarchal system, because both plays enable cross-dressed heroines into male power, and wake up the sleeping masculinity of female. However, they are at the same time still restricted by male dominance, as heroines return initiatively back to male dominance at the end of the play. Comparatively, Shakespearean heroines reveal a higher level of female liberation, for his identification of female capability and fair attitude towards male and female identities. The progressiveness of Shakespeare can be explained by the

different influences caused by the Renaissance and the Adherent Movement in Elizabeth England and ancient China, where Shakespeare was inspired by the humanism and Chinese playwrights developed cross-dressed females merely to prove their political loyalty.

Nowadays, it is common to come across a woman wearing unisex, or male clothes on the street. In modern society, cross-dressing is no longer considered as an affront of social norms, but merely a consequence of personal aesthetic. However, when cross-dressed female went on the stage at the seventeenth century, every movement they made, every line they spoke, could be powerful, as they indicated a liberation of the human nature that is constrained brutally for centuries.

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