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Fate in *Thunderstorm* by Cao Yu and *Hippolytus* by Euripides

1. Introduction to Modern Chinese Drama

It is usually regarded that traditional Chinese drama came into being during the Song dynasty and developed into a sophisticated art form during the Yuan dynasty (Luo 2011: 561). Traditional Chinese drama uses song, dance, speech, recitative, preaching, rituals, burlesque, and acrobatics as performing vehicles (Sundberg 2012: 137).

The Opium War in 1840 waged by Britain against China brought an unprecedented change in the relationship between China and the West. It is now generally believed that the year 1840 marked the start of China's modern age, and changed the whole course of Chinese civilization (Li 2012: 113). Reform-minded intellectuals and advanced students were unsatisfied with traditional Chinese drama's inability to depict social reality, and thus serve political and educational functions, so they strived to develop new forms of Chinese drama. Scholars agree that modern Chinese drama began in 1907, when the Chinese student group the Spring Willow Society staged an adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, entitled *Black Slave's Cry to Heaven* (Heinu yu tian lu), in Tokyo. After the fall of the Qing dynasty during the 1911 revolution, a new form of drama moved from Tokyo to Shanghai, where it flourished in a hybrid form known as civilized drama (*wenmingxi*), which relied heavily on scenarios and improvisation.

This kind of drama is regarded as the outset of Chinese *huaju* or "spoken drama", characterized by performers' use of ordinary speech

to convey meaning, as in Western drama. Music and song, which dominate Chinese traditional drama (*xiqu*), are either totally or nearly absent (Mackerras 2008: 2).

In the late 1910s, the New Culture Movement, known for its attack on traditional culture and its aspirations for Western science, democracy, and culture, inspired a new direction in modern Chinese theatre, known as spoken drama (*huaju*). A special issue of the movement's leading magazine *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) was dedicated to Ibsen and another to dramatic reform. Hu Shi's one-act "The Greatest Event in Life" (*Zhongshen dashi*, 1919), about the importance of love in marriage, marks the beginning of this *huaju* dramaturgy.

Influenced by modern theatrical movements in Europe, the United States, and Japan, *huaju* playwrights who had returned from those regions produced drama in a wide variety of styles during the 1920s.

This diversity of styles took a dramatic turn toward realism and political engagement in the 1930s; however, the full blossoming of modern Chinese drama did not take place until Cao Yu produced a group of successive realistic masterpieces in the 1930s and early 1940s, from *Thunderstorm* to *Peking Man* (He 2004: 166).

Many consider his powerful tragedy *Thunderstorm* (Leiyu, 1934) the greatest of all Chinese *huaju* (Mackerras 2008: 7).

Thunderstorm was influenced by ancient Greek tragedies, and the development of the plot depends largely on entanglements of consanguinity and moral principles, so fate cues the tragic ending of the play (especially the prologue and epilogue) (Chen 2008: 261).

2. The Theme of Fate in *Thunderstorm* and Comparison in *Hippolytus*

In the preface to *Thunderstorm*, Cao (2010: 498) says:

What *Thunderstorm* reveals is not the law of Karma, nor that of bao-ying (just retribution for something done or given), but the cosmic cruelty that I have sensed [...] the cruelty and inhumanity of all the struggles in the universe. Behind the struggle, there is a governing power. The prophets of the Thebes eulogize it as 'God', the Greek dramatists call it the 'fate', people in modern society have abandoned such vague ideas and call it the 'natural law'. But I do not know how to call it. Neither am I able to describe it, because it is so complicated¹.

¹ The English translation here is taken from Wang Xingping, Liu Sijiu and Lu Wenbi, as cited in He (2004: 184).

It depicts that there is “a governing power” in *Thunderstorm* to manipulate the fate of the characters which they cannot escape. For example, Shiping is always blaming fate for making people suffer. When she was young, she was abandoned by Puyuan, her younger master, who was under pressure to marry the wealthy Miss Fanyi from the Zhou family, but kept their son Ping; she was driven out with another sick, newborn son, Dahai. Shiping later married Lu Gui, and had a daughter, Sifeng. Though her life was poor and full of hardship, she strived to live a peaceful life without any relations with the Zhou family.

Twenty-seven years later, the Zhou family and Shiping family moved to the same city where Lu Gui and Sifeng were servants in the Zhou household. At first, Ping was having an affair with his stepmother Fanyi, but he became depressed by the immorality of the relationship. He then fell in love with Sifeng and committed incest unconsciously. Fanyi tried to get rid of Sifeng, so she asked to talk with Sifeng’s mother, Shiping, in the Zhou house.

The hidden truth is gradually exposed. Shiping acknowledges that Ping is her son with Puyuan, so Ping and Sifeng are half-siblings; Shiping then asks Sifeng to promise not to meet Ping again. However, Ping and Sifeng are found meeting together secretly.

Finally, Sifeng electrocutes herself on a downed wire in the garden; Chong (Puyuan and Fanyi’s son) is also killed trying to help her; Ping commits suicide; Dahai goes missing; Fanyi and Shiping both go mad with grief; and Puyuan is left alone to contemplate his misdeeds.

Because *Huaju* (Chinese modern drama) was not home-grown in China, there had to be a period of imitation in its creation. Many intellectuals and playwrights tried to write modern Chinese plays that reflected social problems.

Displeased, Cao (2010: 497) wrote in the preface to his play published in 1936:

I appreciate that many people are willing to waste their time and energy to speculate redundantly on the sources of my play. Now that this play [*Thunderstorm*] has been publicly performed many times in this country, it is quite common for people to identify me as a follower of Ibsen, or even go so far as to conjecture that part of the play is a spiritual heir to Euripides’s *Hippolytus* or Racine’s *Phedre*. This, to me, is more or less a surprise. I am who I am – a humble self. [...] For while it is true that in the past ten years or so I have read quite a number of plays and have taken part in some performances myself, I cannot, however, recall exactly which part of my play was written in intentional

imitation of which master. Possibly, in my subconscious, I have stolen the threads of golden yarn from the master's house, used them to mend my ugly coarse garments and then denied that these discolored threads (for they now become mine) originally belonged to the master².

On one hand, Cao (2010: 497) is not rejecting the western influence on his play, admitting "the threads of golden yarn from the master's house"; on the other hand, Cao (2010: 498) defends that "I was venting depressed anger and cursing Chinese family and society", or we can explain further that he used Chinese legend in traditional dramas to digest the mysterious coincidence in ancient Greek tragedies (Hu 2010: 67). This means his plays are rooted in his nation and in semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. It is commonly accepted that Cao Yu's *Thunderstorm* was not a copy of other plays; in fact, his plays initiated a new form of tragedy realistically reflecting Chinese society (Zhu 2010: 357).

Conflicts in *Thunderstorm* and *Hippolytus* have some features in common, for example, a conflict between the stepmother and the stepson under a patriarchy, women who struggle but are unable to break the limitation of the family, and the similar fates of the protagonists in the two plays, who are miserable. Furthermore, the fate of the protagonists are not controlled by themselves. Separately, there is the governing power of the playwright manipulating the eight characters in *Thunderstorm* (Cao 2010: 508); however, in *Hippolytus*, a goddess controls human beings' fates.

The mortal prince Hippolytus gives Artemis, goddess of the hunt and virginity, his worship to the exclusion of Aphrodite, Goddess of love. Aphrodite avenges her honor by causing Hippolytus' stepmother, Phaedra, to fall in love with him. After Hippolytus rejects Phaedra, she commits suicide out of shame and reputation, but not before leaving a false writ accusing her stepson of raping her. Upon reading the note, Hippolytus' father, Theseus, curses his son, which leads to Hippolytus' death. In the last scene, Artemis appears to reveal the truth to Theseus. Before she vanishes, Artemis gives her forgiveness to Theseus. It is easy to clarify that Hippolytus was cursed by Aphrodite, and Phaedra was a revenge puppet of Aphrodite, as well. Albeit there are other explanations rooted in human nature for Phaedra's action, there is no room to explore this aspect here.

² The English translation here is for the most part taken from Wang Xingping, Liu Sijiu and Lu Wenbi, as cited in He (2004: 198-99).

It is certain that Cao's *Thunderstorm* was not influenced by a playwright such as Euripides, Racine, or Ibsen, so it is unwise to make a simple comparison between them. It may well be found that comparative research between two great plays is more valuable in disproving rather than proving how similar or different they are, regardless of whether Cao borrowed something from Euripides. By comparison, Fate in these two great plays is one of the most important factors, a mysterious factor pushing the play to its climax and leading to the inevitable end, resulting in two great tragedies in world literature.

3. Fate in the Progress of the Plot in Two Plays

The ancient Greeks had the concept of *moira*, while before them the Chinese spoke of *ming*, and before them early Indian philosophers speculated about karma. "It's God's will" became the standard explanation for tragedy and disaster for the ancient Hebrews, and later for Christians and Muslims (Solomon 2003: 437). In philosophy, fate is not the same as fatalism, naturalism, theism, atheism, and so on; however, we treat it as a theatrical element and design the plot in plays to control characters' destiny, leading to the final resolution in the play. The same word "fate" is chosen in plays, but the meanings embedded in fate are different when we read plays carefully.

In *Thunderstorm*, at the beginning of the play, we can see some small problems existing in the Lu and Zhou families through a conversation between the father, Lu Gui and the daughter, Sifeng. The father reveals that the haunting ghosts were Ping and his stepmother, Fanyi, who committed adultery. But the Zhou family appears peaceful on the surface.

Later, Sifeng's mother arrives at the Zhou house and feels that she had seen a room there somewhere before. When Puyuan finds Sifeng's mother, the present Mrs. Lu is Shiping, who is the woman he abandoned twenty-seven years ago.

ZHOU (suddenly stern): What did you come here for?

SHIPING: I didn't ask to come.

ZHOU: Who sent you here, then?

SHIPING (bitterly): Fate! Unjust fate* brought me here!

ZHOU (coldly): So you've found me, after more than twenty years.

SHIPING (indignantly): But I haven't, I haven't been looking for you. I thought you were dead long ago. I never expected to find myself here today. It's fate that meant us to meet again (Cao 2001:157-159).

In such a situation, we have to say that it is “fate” that leads them to meet each other again. Gradually, the hidden truth is exposed. Shiping acknowledges that Ping is her son with Puyuan, so Ping and Sifeng are half-siblings, and then Shiping asks Sifeng to promise not to meet Ping again. However, Ping and Sifeng are found meeting together secretly.

FENG: Oh, mother!

MA (stoking Sifeng’s head): My child, my poor, poor child.

FENG (sobbing quietly): Oh, Mother, forgive me, forgive me.

MA: Why didn’t you tell me earlier?

FENG (hanging her head): I was afraid. I was afraid you might be angry with me, and despise me, and tune me out. I just didn’t dare tell you.

MA (sorrowfully): It’s my fault for being so stupid. I should have thought of it before. (Bitterly.) But who could have expected anything like this? And to think that it should have happened to my own child of all people! My own fate’s been hard enough, but you— (Cao 2001: 305-307).

The mother tries her best to prevent some of the miserable things that happened to her from happening again to her daughter. She knows the only way to avoid a hard fate like her own experience is to keep away from the wealthy family; in the end, her daughter encounters a harder situation than hers.

At the end of the play, everyone realizes that Sifeng’s mother is also Ping’s mother; Fanyi was “gradually becoming aware that a far greater tragedy than her own is unfolding before her eyes.” Zhou Puyuan says despondently, “forgive me, Ping. This was the only real mistake I ever made. I never imagined for one moment that she was still alive and that one day she’d find us here. I can only put it down to divine justice” (Cao 2001: 325).

We cannot explain exactly what fate is in the play; maybe it is like what Cao complains about two years after the publication of the play: “Originally in *Thunderstorm* there was a ninth character, who is the principal one among all the rest. But I did not write him in. That is the hero called ‘thunderstorm’” (Cao 2010: 508).

In the Chinese tradition, a crash of thunder can mean that a “god” has become angry and will punish those who have committed terrible crimes (He 2004: 188). The use of the natural environment in the setting proves to be a great success in *Thunderstorm*. Later, Cao Yu comments on this: “About the atmosphere on stage in *Thunderstorm*, this is something that I was deeply concerned with. To associate the

natural phenomenon with the progress of the plot can play an important role in illuminating the characters and the relationship among them.” [Wang Xingping] (as cited in He 2004: 193). This natural phenomenon implies a mysterious power in the universe that handles everyone’s fate. It is worth to mention that using a natural phenomenon to push the plot forward is a common means in Chinese traditional drama.

As for fate, Confucius’ (551-479 BCE) conception of fate is a matter of special importance in the history of Chinese thought, for his thoughts have become the domain of thoughts advocated by the ruling class since Han dynasty, and he was regarded as a saint by civilians.

Confucius as an advocate of the human world being ruled by the virtuous, was naturally a believer of moral rewardism (Chen 1997: 342). Upon reflection after his middle age, Confucius neither abandoned the notion of a moral Heaven nor rejected the concept of blind fate; instead, he regarded them both to be valid (Chen 1997: 344). Shiping believed that Heaven was conceived of as a conscious and moral being, supporting the virtuous and punishing the wicked. She could face Puyuan valiantly because she thought Puyuan was the erring party, and it was blind fate from which she could not escape in meeting him, even though she tried to do so for almost thirty years.

The works of Euripides are generally regarded as showing the beginning of the decline of Greek tragedy. The idea of Fate, dominant in the plays of his predecessors, tends to be degraded by him to mere chance; the characters lose much of their ideal quality; and even gods and heroes are represented as being moved by the petty motives of ordinary humanity (Euripides 2010: 4).

The greatest Western text on fate, Homer’s *Iliad*, is filled with talk of fate, and fate defines much of its narrative. In the *Iliad*, fate and fatalism are not distinguished. Fate is necessity, and in particular it determines men’s deaths, and the outcome of such grand struggles as the Trojan War (many other conflicts are described in its pages) (Solomon 2003: 444).

In *Hippolytus*, at the beginning, Aphrodite declares herself resolved to punish the chaste Hippolytus, who disdained her and paid worship to Artemis. However, the mere chance of Hippolytus’ decision not to show his respect to Aphrodite triggers the fate of Phaedra and Hippolytus. Aphrodite goes mad with his action, and arranges his fate.

APHRODITE.

[...]

And Phaedra there, his father’s Queen high-born;

Saw him, and as she saw, her heart was torn
 With great love, by the working of my will.
 [...]

 And she, not in dishonour, yet shall die.
 I would not rate this woman's pain so high
 [...]

 But soft, here comes he, striding from the chase,
 Our Prince Hippolytus!—I will go my ways.—
 And hunters at his heels: and a loud throng
 Glorifying Artemis with praise and song!
 Little he knows that Hell's gates opened are,
 And this his last look on the great Day-star! (Euripides 2010: 6).

Aphrodite makes Phaedra fall in love with Hippolytus, and Phaedra's nurse speaks to Hippolytus under promise to keep this secret. But Hippolytus answers that he swore not on his soul, but on his tongue, and threatens to tell his father.

PHAEDRA.
 Sad, sad and evil-starred is Woman's state.
 What shelter now is left or guard?
 What spell to loose the iron knot of fate?
 And this thing, O my God,
 O thou sweet Sunlight, is but my desert! (Euripides 2010: 25).

Afterwards, Theseus thinks Phaedra has been defiled by Hippolytus, and prays to Poseidon to slay his son.

[Murmurs of amazement and horror; THESEUS, apparently calm, raises both arms to heaven.]
 Therefore, O Thou my Father, hear my cry,
 Poseidon! Thou didst grant me for mine own
Three prayers; for one of these, slay now my son,
 Hippolytus; let him not outlive this day,
 If true thy promise was! Lo, thus I pray (Euripides: 32).
 [...]

 THESEUS.
 Ye Gods! And thou, Poseidon! Not in vain
 I called thee Father; thou hast heard my prayer!
How did he die? Speak on. How closed the snare
 Of Heaven to slay the shamer of my blood? (Euripides 2010: 41).
 [...]

LEADER.

O God, so cometh new disaster, new

Despair! And no escape from what must be! (Euripides 2010: 42-43).

Phaedra's fate was manipulated by the goddess Aphrodite, who inspired Phaedra, Hippolytus' stepmother, to fall in love with him. Hippolytus' fate was executed by the god Poseidon, Theseus' father, who promised to grant his son three wishes.

A VOICE FROM THE CLOUD. [Artemis]

[...] She[Aphrodite] sent her fire to run

In Phaedra's veins, so that she loved thy son.

Yet strove she long with love, and in the stress

Fell not, till by her Nurse's craftiness

Betrayed, who stole, with oaths of secrecy,

To entreat thy son. And he, most righteously,

Nor did her will, nor, when thy railing scorn

Beat on him, broke the oath that he had sworn,

For God's sake. And thy Phaedra, panic-eyed,

Wrote a false writ, and slew thy son, and died,

Lying; but thou wast nimble to believe! (Euripides 2010: 43).

Greek tragedies impress us deeply with the feeling that the development of the action is inevitable. Critics have often explained this as resulting from the atmosphere of fate pervading the action; but there is another cause for this element of inevitableness. It lies in the handling of the plot. The Greek dramatist is inclined to develop his action, not by events in the ever-changing present, but by disclosing events from the unchangeable past (Stuart 1916: 185). This is the biggest difference between fate in the two plays: in *Thunderstorm*, everyone's fate is manipulated by a mysterious power that nobody knows, and the plot develops in coincidence. Even Cao (2010: 509) himself expresses that the structure of *Thunderstorm* is too dramatic in the Postscript to *Sunrise*, In his second play; however, *Hippolytus*, the protagonist's fate comes from what he did by mere chance and destiny cannot be escaped, because the plot of the play unfolds according to the Goddess's will.

4. Fate Reflects Time or Historic, Family or Social, Individual or Feminine Factors

The fate of the protagonists are necessities in the two plays, controlled by a mysterious power or by the wills of gods; however, the

governing power represented aspects of the society in which the protagonists are and decrees to which the masses agree.

Time or historic aspects

Euripides, the rebel and skeptic, was torn between a desire to equal the triumphs of his predecessors in demonstrating the justice of strange dooms, and a desire to surpass them by using drama to expose the injustices of the status quo in society (Myers 1949: 127). Euripides's characters resembled contemporary Athenians rather than heroic figures of myth. Thus in *Hippolytus*, a love-sick queen rationalizes her position and arrives at this comment on intrinsic merit while reflecting on adultery: Euripides showed great pity on Phaedra for having been set up by Aphrodite to feel passion for Hippolytus, and for not fulfilling her desire by fair means or foul. She was sick with shame and struggled not to reveal this secret love.

Euripides expresses his idea to the civilians that Phaedra was not evil and deserves our pity. On the other hand, she was subject to contemporary pressures, as women had no rights to pursue their loves; thus, her fate of death was set up by the goddess Aphrodite in the play, but her social conduct reflected contemporary society. It is the same for Hippolytus, as his father discovered Phaedra's death relating to Hippolytus's evil, and cursed him to death. However, Hippolytus was innocent, which makes the play dramatic and sophisticated.

For Euripides, there is a very regular strategy to the ending of his play; he borrowed old stories and great names to create contemporary images which he subjected to contemporary pressures in order to examine their motivations, conduct and fate in the light of contemporary problems, usages and ideals. If we say this is virtual adultery, there is real adultery between the stepmother and stepson in *Thunderstorm*, but what makes their relationship more complicated is that the stepson falls in love with their maid. In fact, these two kinds of loves are not accepted by society, so their fate must be miserable according to the background at that time in China.

On the one hand, society is occupied by a feudal ideology, so whatever the love between the stepmother and stepson, or the love between the young master and low-rank maid, it would not be accepted by the majority. On the other hand, the stepmother, tightened her grip on the stepson because she thought she was tricked by the father, while the father has been the hateful tyrant for grinding her down until she "became cold and dead as a stone" (Cao 2001: 115). The father is a symbol of feudal right oppressing everybody, reminding us that there is an impassable barrier to the pursuit of individual

freedom and happiness; also there is a gap in rank between the young master and the maid.

Ethnic or family aspects

The two plays discuss similar affairs that happened in two families, and mention adultery between a stepmother and a stepson. Stage sceneries were almost besieged in houses, which of course benefits the performance on the stage, and also reflects the social situation through typical mainstream family problems and by testing social norms.

As we know, a dramatist's function was not just to entertain but also to educate his fellow citizens. Euripides chose traditional myth's subject but the dramatist was meant to be innovative, providing a novel characterization of heroic figures, and using the mythical past to talk about present ethnic or family issues.

In *Hippolytus*, Phaedra confesses she loves Hippolytus to the nurse, but she decides to die rather than reveal the secret of her passion. The main motive is her concern for her own and her children's good reputation (Blomqvist 1982: 401), as we can expect, it is a normal and accepted norm; in Euripides' play, it is essential that her passion should be revealed to Hippolytus; then the nurse is the first agent to told Hippolytus to his promise to keep the secret. However, he reacts with a furious tirade about his hatred of women and threatens to tell Theseus. Phaedra believes she is ruined and sends a fake writ of her innocence to Theseus.

In *Thunderstorm*, both Fanyi and Ping at first hate and are afraid of the father's authority in the family, and want to escape from their oppressive situation. Fanyi begs Ping to take her with him away from the house, even have Sifeng come and live with them. Ping hates himself, on the one hand, and thinks his relationship with his stepmother was disgusting according to ethnic or family rules; on the other hand, he thinks his position is an extremely difficult one because he believes his family disapproves of his love for Sifeng, who was low in social rank.

Compared to *Hippolytus*, the relationship is more complicated given that, Ping even reproaches himself, "Can you imagine a family like mine approving of a thing like that?" (Cao 2001: 293). In the end, Sifeng is horrified to learn that she had committed incest with Ping, which is an ethnic sin nobody can endure at that time, so they are doomed to a tragic fate.

Individual or feminine aspects

Euripides aims to dig into two sides of humanity: emotional and rational, with which human beings confront their own mortality and

make a choice. *i.e.* Pheadra felt an emotional passion for Hippolytus, and when the disclosure of her love is refused, she commits suicide. Everywhere in Euripides a preoccupation with individual psychology and its irrational aspects is evident. In his hands, tragedy for the first time probed the inner recesses of the human soul and threw reason back, allowing passions to spin the plot. The tension between reason and passion is symbolized by his characters' relationship with the gods, and Phaedra is a good example.

From the perspective of women's rights, both plays explored a society of patriarchy, in which female protagonists didn't have rights to ask for true loves, and even sons couldn't question their fathers' rights in the family.

Confucianism and Daoism are two important schools in ancient China, greatly influencing Chinese culture for thousands of years. One of the Confucian classics, *Book of Rites* [Liji], dedicates a whole chapter, "Neize" [The Norm of the Family] to setting rigid gender boundaries for men and women in observance of the Confucian emphasis on the virtue of hierarchy and subordination of women. And in "three obediences", it is considered the highest virtue in the tradition of Confucianism: before marriage, the woman was to obey her father; after marriage, the woman was to obey her husband; and lastly, after the death of her husband, the woman was to obey her son (Liu 2009: 83). People's thoughts were seized by the traditional obedience, albeit Fanyi said she can't stand this house any longer, she can't complete victory on feminine rights in the semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. Cao treated Fanyi as the first character to courage him to start writing the play, and he was not niggardly in praising her straightness and struggle; however, her individual conclusion in the play must be miserable in that family in that society.

5. Conclusion

On many different occasions, Cao Yu cautioned his readers, theatre directors included, that there is a ninth character, the principal one, absent in his play *Thunderstorm*. Two years after the publication of the play, Cao complained:

He is present throughout the play, manipulating the other eight puppets. But I cannot just add in this character, so the theatre director seems to have forgotten him. I have watched several performances of the play and felt that it was lonely on the stage with the characters

moving in and out. There is no life in it, because the hero called thunderstorm is absent [Wang Xingping] (He 2004: 188).

Cao can't name the mysterious power that exists in the universe, but maybe we can quote from the well-known ancient Chinese philosopher Laozi's verses: the way that can be told of is not an unvarying way; the names that can be named are not unvarying names (Lao Tzu 1997: 3).

Unnamed fate is not invisible; in fact, it appears and goes throughout the two plays. The power of fate was strongly seized by contemporary social criteria, rather than by ethereal power no matter what the playwrights depicted in plays. Sometimes condemned by critics as an unimaginative way to end a story, the spectacle of a "god" making a judgment or announcement from a theatrical crane might actually have been intended to provoke skepticism about the social, ethnic and feminine dimension of plays.

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Abstract

Theatre, as opposed to traditional Chinese drama, was introduced to China through the first Opium War, and the establishment of Chunliushu in Japan is regarded as the birth of the real Chinese play in 1907. Hereafter, many plays were written and performed in China and were accepted as new form plays.

Thunderstorm (Leiyu), Cao Yu's first play, was published in 1934, and became the first masterpiece of modern Chinese theatre, symbolizing its becoming mature. As the playwright admitted, it was influenced by classical Greek Plays, as well as by Henrik Ibsen. This paper reflects upon the theme of fate in *Thunderstorm* by Cao Yu and

Hippolytus by Euripides. Although Cao Yu interpreted that he was influenced by western plays consciously or unconsciously, *Thunderstorm* has its own Chinese roots. Similarities and differences in the themes of fate are compared by time or history; ethnic or family aspects; and the individual or feminine.

The indescribable fate of the protagonists leads to the agony they suffer inside and also effects them outside because of typical social beliefs and family life; meanwhile, it helped to bring fame to the two tragedies.

Keywords: *Thunderstorm*, *Hippolytus*, fate, tragedy