Week 15: Yingying’s Story

Section 1

1. An Introduction to Yingying’s Story

Today, we have no lecture for you. We have a story. And you have to read it. You can download it, or you can read off the screen as you please. And then we want to have a discussion with you about the story. And we'll be putting up some questions to guide that discussion.

The story has a simple name. It is Yingying Zhuan, The Biography of Yingying or The Story of Yingying. The story is set in the Tang Dynasty. And it's told as an autobiographical story by a man named Zhang, student Zhang. And it's a love story. It's a story about infatuations, enticements.

You will have seen-- or I hope you will have seen-- the module on poetry. That module is very important for making sense-- good sense, best sense-- out of this story of Yingying, because, as you'll see, the love affair is bound up in writing and the way people write to each other. It should be apparent right away as you begin the story that we're being told that these are members of the highest elite in the Tang. Yingying's family, the Cui family, is, in fact, one of the great aristocratic clans of the Tang, the bolding Cuis. Had to flee because of war, rebellion. And Zhang Sheng is also from the official class, an aristocrat.

The story of Yingying and Zhang-- student Zhang, Zhang Sheng-- becomes a famous story in Chinese history. It's attributed to Yuan Zhen, who was one of the great poets and great writers of the late 8th century. It gets adopted in Chinese history and goes into a very famous play, the Xixiang Ji, The Romance of the Western Chamber. Classic love story. Boy meets girl, boy and girl fall in love, boy and girl part, boy and girl come back together, are married, and live happily ever after. It has a happy ending.

What's interesting, for us perhaps, is that the Tang story ending was quite different. It's clear that later people were uncomfortable with the way the Tang story ended and did a new happy ending. But maybe the Tang story had a happy ending from a Tang point of view.

Now, as you read this story, you're going to start to choose sides between the woman-- was she wronged? And the man-- was he made to suffer, was he seduced? Or you will look at them and say that the woman seduced the man, and that poor innocent boy didn't know what to do. Or you could say that boy took advantage of her and dumped her in the end when he had better options. Either way, this is not a story about which you're going to remain neutral. But it is very much a story of the Tang and its aristocratic culture. And the very fact its ending unsettled people 100 years, 200 years later reminds us that it's also the story about the end of an age, an age that was changing.

Read it, enjoy it. We're reading a translation that's been given to us by Professor Stephen Owen, whom we met in the poetry module, and we'll be back to set up a forum in which you can talk with us, and with each other, about what you think this story is all about. You'll have a lot of fun.
2. In-Class Discussion: What is Yingying’s Story About?

Professor Bol: What's this story about? If you had one-- it is a "blank" story.

Student: Temperance or self-control.

Professor Bol: Story's about self-control. What's the story about?

Student: Missed opportunities.

Professor Bol: Missed opportunities. Jojo?

Student: A failed affair.

Professor Bol: Failed affair. Jill?

Student: Falling in and out of love.

Professor Bol: Falling in and out of love. Nadia.

Student: Sacrifice.

Professor Bol: Halla?

Student: You get carried away in something. Like an infatuation.

Professor Bol: Infatuation. It's about passion, infatuation. Yu Wen, what's the story about?

Student: It's a moral story.

Professor Bol: It's a moral story, she says. That's strange. Professor Kirby, what's this story about?

Student: It's a moral story.

Professor Bol: It's a moral story. So we'll have to figure out why they said that.

Section 2

In-Class Discussion: What Kind of Man is Zhang?

Professor Bol: Let's begin at the beginning. What kind of man is Zhang? How is he presented to us at the beginning?

Student: He's elite.
Professor Bol: He's a member of the elite. What's his character?

Student: He's 23 years old and he's never been with a woman. He's virtuous. He holds onto his principles.

Professor Bol: Virtuous. Holds on his principles. His friends carouse, he does not carouse. Katharine?

Student: He's always in control. When he goes out--

Professor Bol: Always in control of himself. Good. Now he has a connection. What's the connection that Zhang has to the Cui family and the context. Connor?

Student: Some distant aunt.

Professor Bol: So you notice that when they get together one of the first things they do is find out if they're related to each other and they figure out there is a relationship. They trace their family trees. Why would they be doing that? Is that a normal thing? When you meet somebody for the first time, do I say to you, Jill, tell me about your grandfather, your mother's maiden name. Why would they be doing this here? Shilpa?

Student: In the modules you were talking about how dynasties would inter-marry within--

Professor Bol: Elite families, great clans would intermarry. Yes, and the imperial family is one of those Great clans. Han Ling?

Student: Lineage can determine your social status.

Professor Bol: Now what's the context?

**Section 3**

**In-Class Discussion: What is the Context that Allows Zhang to Meet Yingying? How does Yingying Act?**

Professor Bol: What's the context in which the connection is made? What's happened that is going to give Zhang his in?

Student: He is friends with the commandant, and there's rioting going on. And so basically he's able to have them protect Madam Cui.

Professor Bol: And so what's the rebellion that's taken place that has stirred all this up?

Student: The An Lushan Rebellion

Professor Bol: An Lushan Rebellion of 755, 757. So he's going to offer protection, right? It is at that moment that Yingying is called out by mom to show herself and to express her thanks to their savior, their
protector. What does Yingying do, and what's unexpected or expected about what she does? And what are the consequences of that?

Student: Well, instead of behaving properly as a woman as was expected, she acted very childlike.

Professor Bol: Jason?

Student: I think she was playing hard to get with Zhang.

Professor Bol: She's playing hard to get with Zhang. Jojo, do you agree with that?

Student: I don't think she's playing hard to get. I think she's more mad at her mother so she's acting out. And that ended up being attracted to him, but it wasn't like her intention to seduce him.

Professor Bol: I see, so she's innocent. She's mad at mom for making her come out and thank the person who saved her life. Why should-- I mean, doesn't her mother say, dammit, he saved your life. Get out here. But so she's childish. So this brings a new light out of the story if we think of her as childish. Henry?

Student: It could be that, from the start, marriage was sort of in the air. If they were already talking about relations to decide whether or not they get married, and maybe her mom keeps bringing suitors in--

Professor Bol: So you're proposing now that she's a child but she has certain-- she's developing. And mom has put her on the marriage block and is basically bringing her out to say, take a look at my daughter. Wouldn't you like to marry her? Michelle, you're nodding your head. Do you agree with that?

Student: I mean, I think if I were in her position, in Yingying's position, I would be fairly reluctant to meet this random guy.

Professor Bol: Random guy? It's a cousin, five times removed, perhaps, but still a cousin. And if you're in an aristocratic clan, that's a very important connection. Random guy. Oh, god.

Student: Probably thought her mom was trying to set her up with this courageous man and didn't want to.

Professor Bol: This is the first time I've heard this line of-- I don't know what to do now. I have never-- the idea that she is resisting her mom-- OK.

Student: I just thought she's a little rebellious. She's selfish, maybe. She stands up to authority. And this is her way of showing her defiance.

Professor Bol: We need to have the opposite point of view in here, which is not that she's resisting her mom, an alternative to that narrative.

Student: When I read that she was reluctant to come out, the first thing that came to my mind is that she had seen him and really liked him and was just shy to go in and actually interact with him.

Professor Bol: So she has the hots for him, but she doesn't want to show it. Is that it?

Student: Yeah.

Professor Bol: Eric?
Student: I think she just falls in love. Zhang's been sending her poetry and she's reading it. Even though she's not coming out, I feel like she, on the inside, is probably really happy to see it. And she initiates things further on in the story.

Professor Bol: Ah, so she initiates things now. Joy.

Student: She had not seen him at this point, though. I don't understand how she could be like, oh, yeah, I like this guy who I've never even seen so I'm going to try to seduce him. It doesn't make sense.

Professor Bol: Doesn't make sense. OK. So that's a voice against the seduction scenario, but let's play out the seduction scenario just a bit more.

Student: He saved her, and he's in a high position. Maybe he's an attractive guy.

Professor Bol: Well, that's what we're told in the story that he's an attractive guy, a handsome dude. There's no question about it. Conor?

Student: Maybe she's doing both at the same time. After a while, she's just like, fine mom, I'll come out, but this guy's getting seduced.

[LAUGHTER]

Professor Bol: But how should she behave? Xiaoxiao?

Student: So then, in the beginning of the paragraph, it mentioned that he went out with his guy friends and while his guy friends were attracted to other ladies that he wasn't. So that maybe she was trying to act differently to see, if she act this way, maybe--

Professor Bol: Maybe she could serve up. Robert.

Student: Maybe It's like a combination of the rebellion and seduction thing. Maybe she thinks that, by being rebellious, this will somehow be attractive to Zhang.

I think someone has pointed this out that she's always-- she wants to be in control here so she wants to first make him infatuated, make him fall in love with her before so she can have the upper hand in this ongoing relationship.

Professor Bol: So this, it's is all about control.

Student: For her, I think it's about control. And you see this play out later in the relationship. She's always-- she has to create this feeling of infatuation in him so that he loses his mind, perhaps.

Professor Bol: Oh, wow.

Student: I think that another thing is that by not acting proper she's not predictable. So once again going back to the control thing. She has control over the relationship because, rather than acting in a proper role, which Zhang can then kind of predict what's going to happen, that he has no idea what's going to come next.

Professor Bol: Remember one of the things that Confucius keeps talking about? Ritual, along with humaneness, right? But ritual is about how you're supposed to behave. And she's not behaving how she is supposed to behave. She comes out here, and what is the phrase that's used?
"she wore everyday clothes and had a disheveled appearance, without having dressed up specially for the occasion. Tresses from the coils of her hair hung down to her eyebrows and her two cheeks were suffused with rosy color. Her complexion was rare and alluring, with a glow that stirred a man." Doesn't that sound like seduction to you? Michelle, take it back.

Student: My thought on this-- she's a 17-year-old girl--

Professor Bol: And 17-year-old girls don't have feelings like this. I agree.

Student: But it's ancient China. How much experience-- she was probably very sheltered up until this point. How much experience could she have in reading a room, in reading a man and then playing him like that?

Professor Bol: Like that. True. So let's suppose for a moment the only man she had ever seen was her brother and her father. Her father is certainly an absent figure here. How could she ever have romantic thoughts? She wouldn't know. Is that right? Think about this now. Jojo.

Student: I don't think that's true, especially in the context of the Tang dynasty with the focus on poetry and expressing romance that way.

Professor Bol: So if poetry is a vehicle by which one knows-- do American 17-year-old girls read novels? Are sometimes those novels a bit erotic? Well, poems can be too. Poems can be too.

## Section 4:

### In-Class Discussion: How is Zhang Able to Clandestinely Meet Yingying?

Professor Bol: So "Zhang was, of course, infatuated with her, and he wanted to express his feelings but had no way." So how does Zhang make the connection to her?

Student: Through her handmaiden.

Professor Bol: Through her maid, Hong-niang. Niang just means girl but what does Hong mean? Hong like red? Red girl, little red.

Yu Wen: Later you use hong to describe some people who specialized to bring people together.

Professor Bol: Does that come from this story, you think?

Student: Yeah, I think so.

Professor Bol: So she becomes an archetype in Chinese literature, the girl who says, I'm going to get you. How does she do it?

Student: In this version, she's really angry at first. She's like how dare you, if you want to get with her you should offer to marry her. And he says, no, I'm too impatient for that.
Professor Bol: I can't wait. I can't wait, take too long, proper go between. And so what Hong-niang do to give him the in?

Student: He tells her that she is incredibly interested in poetry.

Professor Bol: She likes dramatic poetry. All Zhang has to do is send two poems. And what does she write back? "I await the moon on the western porch, my door half ajar, facing the breeze. Flower shadows stir, brushing the wall-- I wonder if this is my lover coming." And so Zhang, naturally, does what?

Student: He goes to visit her in her room, climbs up the tree and goes into her door.

Professor Bol: There he is. Climbs up the tree over the wall. Lovers in China always go over walls and climb. You'll find it in every story or they make holes in walls or go under. But the wall has to be there for you to go over because otherwise you couldn't. Let's think about this for a moment. He gets over the wall and then what does she do? What is she going to do once he's over there? All of a sudden, there she is all made up, dressed properly.

Student: She chastises him for being--

Professor Bol: She chastises him. How come?

Student: Because he's being improper making advances towards her.

Professor Bol: But why did she write the poem? I mean, the poem did sound like she wanted him to come over the wall? Allison?

Student: She comes up with all these excuses. She says, oh, I couldn't tell my mom to say this because of all these reasons. But I think, in the end, she sort of did want him to come, in some ways.

Professor Bol: Maybe.

Student: It's almost like she's a siren, and he's the savior. And she lures him into her room. And then she rejects him. And then, two days later, then she initiates again.

Professor Bol: So that we have that whole series of, I could have done this, I could have done that.

Student: Doesn't this take place at night?

Professor Bol: Middle of the night.

Student: All dressed up in the middle of the night like she didn't want him there.

Professor Bol: Finally, what is her reason for calling him over, she says? Joy?

Student: She says, I wrote these poems to get you to come so I could reject you in person.

Professor Bol: Right, exactly. She says, I've brought you in to reject you. This sounds to me like a very old story, which is not one, by the way, we agree with. No is supposed to mean no. But here we have this setup. But is it her fault? Is it her fault? Three days pass and what happens? Hong-niang appears again and what does Hong-niang do?

Student: Hong-niang says that she is coming and brings her bed things to him and then helps her to get in.
Professor Bol: The maid comes and says, by the way, here's her pillow, here's a blanket, she's coming along, and then there she is. What does she have to say to him at that moment?

Student: She doesn't say anything.

Professor Bol: All night long.

Student: All night or something like that.

Professor Bol: What do we make of that? It does seem to emphasize that in the story, that she has nothing to say.

Student: I think, maybe, it's because like before she was this tough figure rejecting him and all that.

Professor Bol: I found it interesting, though, because she's going to become rather voluble as time goes on. Nadia?

Student: She was also crying while spending the night in the bed and I think that maybe she's disappointed that he didn't try again, she's ashamed that she came to him all the way.

Professor Bol: Oh so, wow, this puts it back into a different story, because if she's disappointed, if she has to come to him, it's because he didn't try hard enough.

Student: I thought it was a little different because, I thought she was crying because she knew that she wasn't supposed to be there and that she was going out of what the ritual was and that after this point, she could never be seen in a certain light anymore, and she couldn't be the wife figure.

Professor Bol: She was crying for what she had done. Why did she do what she did?

Student: Because she wanted to.

Professor Bol: Because she wanted to.

Student: Along with along the lines of what Jill said, I think she's caught between her emotions, what she wants to, and also the social propriety and so she puts on the show of chastising him to acknowledge that, to acknowledge the social norms, and at the same time, she gives into her emotions, she goes to him, and perhaps, at some level, she's ashamed of that.

Section 5

In-Class Discussion: What Role does Poetry Play in Yingying and Zhang’s Relationship?

Professor Bol: 12 days pass, and they get it together again. How come? What happens that leads to--because, from henceforth, he's going to be going over the wall every night. What happens to make that possible? What does he do?
Student: He writes a poem.

Professor Bol: He writes a poem. "Meeting the Holy One." 60 lines. And he shows it to her. And that's the turning point. You'll notice that there's a lot of poetry that goes on in this thing. Letter writing poetry. What do you make of that? Anyone have any ideas about what was being accomplished through writing poems?

Student: Maybe they were trying to immortalize their moments together.

Professor Bol: Their moments together. Immortalize the moment. So that this is kind of memory. Julian?

Student: A lot of times, it's easier to sort of express emotions and feelings in writing. So this is sort of a way where they can very truthfully communicate to each other.

Professor Bol: So you said a number of things. You said it's easier to express emotions and feelings though writings, and you've said truthfully. Right.

Student: Makes it less crude and more artistic.

Professor Bol: Makes it less crude. Makes what they're less crude. OK.

Student: They're used to reading poems maybe about love that it's easier to express it through poems as well.

Student: Whenever they're together, it's always kind of like sneaking around at night.

Student: I think they realize at this point that they're overstepping their social norms, so through poems they could be trying to put a bright, bright aura around it.

Professor Bol: Poems are camouflage, decoration on top of the sordid truth of what's happening.

Student: I even read it as sort of a mode of communication that others may not be able to understand. For instance, the maid was given that poem to give to Zhang at the beginning. In that poem it's actually implied that he should come to her late at night. And one might expect that she maybe read that poem but didn't understand that. Because she was shocked when he came. So maybe it's a mode of communication that lower class would not understand.

Professor Bol: A mode of communication that people of a certain class-- so this is part of having elite status, being able to do this through poetry.

Student: Someone mentioned that poems make it easier to tell the truth. I think they also make it easier to tell lies, or to present yourself in a way that that's not truthful. For example, when we she lured him to the room using a poem, she's presenting an image of herself.

Professor Bol: So we've run the gamut now from that initial comment coming from Julian-- that in some ways, that it's a way to be truthful, which I agree with. Two, it's a way to deceive which I also agree with. But one way of thinking-- yeah, Kevin?

Student: I also notice that later on, he was kind of surprised that she never recited some of his poetry back to him. Which makes it seem like it's pretty common for lovers to communicate this way in China.

Professor Bol: One way of thinking about what's going on with all this writing is of course that writing's mediating between people. And it's mediating in two ways. One is, there are proper forms of writing. A
poem, after all, is not just anything. It's regulated verse. It's this sort of stuff. But it also is it also gives you a way of seeing the world. If I write a poem like this, I'm telling you-- think of Du Fu's poems. I see the world like that. You're invited to see the world through my eyes through the lens.

So, in that sense a poem is giving us a template for seeing things. So it's about us. It's about how we see the world-- its proper form. It's embedded into and ritual and exchange. Defines elites. In which case, how come the arc of the story is one in which she, although a good writer, is refusing to share her writings with him. That he wants her to recite to him, and do things. Show him. And she doesn't want to show him.

Student: I kind of almost see it the way that Jason mentioned before, kind of hard playing hard to get. Keeping like an air of mystery, and trying to keep some level of control.

Student: When he leaves her later on, she says to him, I know that it's the way when a man seduces a woman; he'll leave her eventually.

Professor Bol: is quite proper that quite when a man seduces a woman, he finally abandons her."

Student: So I feel like she also doesn't really feel secure in the relationship. And doesn't really trust that it's going to be something that she can rely on.

Student: I think in their use of language, we see this power struggle over what actually happened. I don't think they know, either. So she doesn't repeat what she says, but she doesn't want to give his argument of the fact that in credence she says, when a man seduces a woman, she puts her argument back out there. But she never repeats his poetry.

Professor Bol: It's not a matter of her only repeating her poetry, but of her not wanting to show what she writes to him. And he keeps saying, let me hear you play. Let me hear you sing, so to speak, let me hear you, let me see your poems. And she keeps saying, no, no, no. The question is, what's motivating that? Something that Will said, I think is worth thinking about, is how it ties into this, is that there's a power struggle going on between man and woman.

Student: She's very, very vulnerable. Someone mentioned this before. And she's putting a lot of emotions into her poetry and into her playing. On the last day, when she finally played, she couldn't get past the first few minutes. She just broke down. So I think in her poetry and in her music, there's so much love for him that she doesn't want to show.

Professor Bol: She's afraid of her own emotionality.

Section 6

In-Class Discussion: How does the Story Conclude?

Professor Bol: So Zhang goes off to the capital. Goes to take the literary examinations. He fails. He then sends a letter to Yingying to set her mind at rest. And then the story gives this long letter from Yingying to Zhang. Do you recall some of the things that she's saying in her letter?
Student: She's not sure exactly what his writing means, I think. Like the way that Jonathan was saying, he could be very deceitful in it. So she's kind of afraid of responding, because she doesn't know what role she plays in his life. It doesn't really help that. I think the story overall is somewhere between "Romeo and Juliet" and Miley Cyrus's "Wrecking Ball."

Professor Bol: How does that song go? I haven't heard that song.

Student: Don't make him do this.

Student: You go in and everyone just gets hurt in the end. You don't know their motives, necessarily. And it just ends up bad for everyone, which is kind of like what this story, I think, is.

Professor Bol: OK. So if we think of that letter she writes to him. All right? This is her account of everything that happened. Right? Her story. This is her story at this point. Her self story. What's her story? She gives a whole account of their love affair. Right?

How fortunate I am that you have not forgotten me. But when it comes to my vow to love you forever, that is steadfast, unwavering. When I brought bedding to your side, your love and honor were deep. In the folly of my passion I thought I would remain in your care forever. But, perchance, the successful scholar holds love to be but of little account and sets it aside as a lesser thing in order to pursue things of greater importance, considering his previous mating to have been a vile action. his having taken enforced vows as something one may well betray.

Yet my glowing faith will not perish. My petals, borne by the wind and trailing in the dew, will entrust themselves to the pure dust beneath your feet.

How beautiful. So she's setting this up, right? I love you forever, and you leave me.

Student: It comes across to me as a little bit sarcastic. It's like, oh I'm like-- I'm nothing to you.

Professor Bol: And then we have this wonderful movement where one of his friends-- now we're at the part where he's talking to his friends Right? And he-- ah, Yuan Zhen, he says, I've completed Zhang's poem. We have that wonderful long poem from him.

Student: He is talking about how his own virtue is inadequate, and that's why he has to leave her. I think this is a very superficial virtue. Confucius probably would have destroyed him. Because I think he has here all this ritualistic goodness without being tempered by humane-ness. He's not adjusting to the situation. And he's just using like propriety and goodness as an excuse now.

Professor Bol: Ah. Do you all agree with that? Yeah?

Student: I feel also in her letter, she was kind of making it like they had an understanding of marriage, almost. And she's saying that they had promised forever, where they really hadn't. But she's like rewriting the past, and then he's kind of like, I don't want to do anything with you anymore.

Professor Bol: So in fact, her letter is a retelling of the story. Right? Her account of the story from her perspective. She wanted to marry him?

Student: It seems like it.

Professor Bol: Seems like it, yeah. He was in love with her? Right? Infatuated by her?
Student: I don't think he was ever really in love with her. He was infatuated by her. He wanted to sleep with her. But even from the beginning, he's like, no it's too long to wait three months. Like, I need to have this now, and eventually was going to leave. And I think that she was trying to maintain some level of control over the relationship and over him, maybe by seducing him and the different things that she did. But ultimately, she had no real power.

Professor Bol: She had no real power. So it is a story about power. These guys thought it was a moral story, right? But you say it's a story about power.

Student: I mean, in a sense, it's a little bit of a moral story, too. Later, they kind of describe her as being kind of ruined. She ends up marrying someone else anyway, but--

Professor Bol: She's married. He gets married. Right. So I guess at this point, we have to get the heart of the story. Or the heart of the ending. We've gone through these poems. He's showing it to his friends. His friends are amazed by this. But everybody agrees he did the right thing. Everybody agrees he did the right thing. So the question is not whether we think he did the right thing. And I know you, all of you, think he should have married her and lived happily ever after.

But people at the time, his friends, said, you did the right thing. So why, why did he do the right thing? And so we have to make up the argument for why he did the right thing.

Student: As I understand it, he rectified his initial lapse of self-control. Pursuing her was a failing on his part. He was-- it wasn't his position to do so. He was going off to be a minister. He had other duties. Going off to be a scholar, sorry. And then, but he pursued her, and did so recklessly. He didn't have the time to-- He didn't have to take any time. He was impatient. But then ultimately, after the heat of the moment has died down, he looks at the situation and says, well, I shouldn't have done that. So I'm going to cut ties and move on and attempt to rectify my life.

Professor Bol: To be correct at this point.

Student: And return to a situation where he can exercise self-control.

Professor Bol: But no, no, it seems to me that you're making the argument from his point of view. Right? But I'm interested in what's the-- how, why would it be that the people look at this and say, hey man. You did the right thing. That was good. Right? Zheyang, could you help us out here?

Student: I think maybe his friends think that has put himself in a very disadvantageous position by pursuing her and not getting response.

Professor Bol: Why is he in a disadvantaged position? Because what we've been told in the first chapter is this is what guys do. It's not true, by the way.

Student: The messages that Cui kept sending him is very ambiguous. And he's not getting definite response.

Professor Bol: He's not getting a definite response. Jamal?

Student: Well, basically, to elaborate on that idea, what I thought the reason they approved of it was basically that the relationship is being detrimental to his overall well being. I assumed that it was because the problems he was facing in the relationship that he failed an exam the first time. And his friends realized that this thing is going-- it's messing up other areas of their life.
Student: I almost feel like through the extent of the letter, we see the enormity of her own love. And maybe he realized that he can never reciprocate to that extent. And so, by cutting it off, he wasn't endangering her and himself in the future. Kind of just nipping it in the bud before it got--

Professor Bol: Does Zhang think Yingying is a strong woman? Does he think? Or is she just sort of a wilting flower, at his mercy. Does he think she is a strong person? How many of you think she's-- he thinks she's really strong? How many of you think he sees her as being really weak? Well, that's a nice division. What's the argument for strong?

Student: The reason he left her is because he thought she would be able to destroy him, just like those--

Professor Bol: He loved her because she thought-- he thought she would be able destroy him?

Student: Sorry, "left her." Because he was talking--

Professor Bol: Oh, he left her because

Student: These kings who got destroyed by women and became the subject of laughter, so he does think she's strong.

Professor Bol: I wonder if the first-- my mishearing of you might be true, too, that he loved her because she could destroy him.

Student: I think he should admire the way she accepts her position as not being this intrusive woman. Just let him be, she says that. I'll try not to get in your way in your affairs when you're in Chang'an. So I think it's very noble the way she just pacifies the situation, really.

Professor Bol: A noble woman who understood what her role was, in that she had been-- it was her own fault. She had seduced him. And it was time for him to go on. She should set him free from her clutches. So for Confucius, he's pairing ritual and humane-ness. But for Zhang and Yingying, what is the opposite of ritual?

Student: Unrestrained love.

Professor Bol: Unrestrained love. Or, what might be called, passion. Right? The Chinese word here is, one of that Chinese words is Qing. Which is filled up-- filled with notions of desire. Right? Passion. And against that is ritual. So does Zhang have a choice in the matter? Does he have a choice? If he wants to lead a proper life and contribute to his country, serve the nation, does he have a choice?

Doesn't he have to just leave?

Student: Well, in the beginning, it mentioned how he was always in control of anything, that kind of goes towards the ritual side. But the development of the story kind of pulls him towards the passion side. In the end, he actually chooses to go with the ritual.

Professor Bol: So in some ways, the story is always going back and forth, right? Between what's proper, between what's unrestrained. And if we could read the story for a moment, because I think our time is up. But I'll give you one last word, Ben.

Student: Oh, I was going to say that this is why I called it self-control. It's about the-- he could either go and have a passionate-- marry her and be in love. And then he wouldn't be able to follow the restrained and ritual path. He wouldn't be able to be properly--
Professor Bol: The public path. The public path. Right? So I do think that we're in a situation where there is a dichotomy that's been drawn between proper life, ritual life, and a life of the passions. Right? And what they haven't figured out yet is how to put those together. Professor Kirby.

Professor Kirby: Listening to all this, just a couple of thoughts. I was struck-- I think it was Michelle who made the point that, at one point early on in the conversation, my God, its ancient China. They shouldn't behave like this. They didn't know it was ancient China! But this really is a timeless story of love and duty and betrayal. But it is situated in what we now think of as ancient China. And you compare the outcome; this is a happy ending compared to Romeo and Juliet. And people do choose, or he chooses, duty. And I'm just reminded at the end by the famous phrase, "A scholar is the first to suffer the sufferings of the world, and the last to take pleasure in its pleasures."

Professor Bol: That is what it should be.

Professor Kirby: Yinggai de.

Professor Bol: Yinggai de. It should be. Right. Good.