



## Pentadic Criticism of Select Western and Chinese Plays

Huang Haowen<sup>[1]</sup> Concepcion G. Doyugan<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup>School of Foreign Languages, Huan University of Science and Engineering, China  
<sup>[2]</sup>Graduate School of Saint Paul University Philippines. Tuguegarao, Philippines  
Corresponding authors' email address: 120671329@qq.com, cdoyugan@spup.edu.ph

**Abstract:** This study applies Burke's Pentadic Criticism on the study of selected western and Chinese plays (The Family Reunion by T.S. Eliot; Thunderstorm by Cao Yu) to explore the pentadic elements inherent in each of them. From the perspective of pentadic criticism, the five elements of act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose in the plays, as well as the ten pairs of ratios between them are probed into to figure out the rhetors' motives individually. Through the analyses of both pentadic criticism, the researcher find out that the rhetors' motives can be discerned by analyzing their choices in shaping the acts, scenes, agents, agencies, and purposes within the play.

**Keywords:** Burke's Pentadic Criticism The Family Reunion, Thunderstorm, Play

### Introduction

The teaching of literature is a multifaceted and dynamic process that varies across cultures and educational systems. To contextualize how a Chinese professor would instruct his students in a literature class, it is important to consider some key aspects of Chinese education and cultural values<sup>[1]</sup>.

In China, the teaching of literature often focuses on traditional Chinese literary works, such as classical poetry, prose, and dramas, alongside contemporary Chinese literature. In most universities, taking Hunan University of Science and Engineering as an example, literary teachers aim to instill an appreciation for both the aesthetic and cultural aspects of literary works. When instructing students in a literature class, they typically adopt a combination of lecture-style teaching and interactive discussions. They often emphasize close textual analysis, encouraging students to examine the language, themes, symbolism, and narrative techniques employed in the literature<sup>[2]</sup>. In addition to analysis and interpretation, Chinese literature classes often explore the cultural and moral dimensions of literary works<sup>[3]</sup>. Also, they incorporate comparative literature studies, examining Chinese literary works in relation to international literature. Furthermore, they often assign written assignments, essays, and presentations to assess students' comprehension and critical thinking abilities.

Overall, the teaching of literature in a Chinese classroom combines historical and cultural contextualization, close textual analysis, interactive discussions, and the development of critical thinking skills. The aim is to foster a deep appreciation for Chinese literary traditions, encourage thoughtful engagement with texts, and nurture students' ability to articulate their interpretations effectively.

Nevertheless, teaching literature should not be limited to Chinese theories and experiences alone, and that a global perspective should be incorporated, since the students, especially language majors, mostly have never got a chance to experience and get contact with the foreign cultures in person. It is important to have a diverse and inclusive approach to literature education, which includes works from various cultures and regions. By incorporating a global perspective in literature education, students can gain a broader understanding of different cultures, perspectives, and literary traditions. This can enhance their critical thinking skills and foster a more inclusive and diverse learning environment.

Regarding the study of rhetoric, western plays and Chinese plays, scholars in China have made steps forward. Firstly, China has a rich tradition of rhetoric and persuasive communication, dating back to ancient times. Shen and Zhou<sup>[4]</sup> provided a comprehensive review of Chinese rhetoric research over the past three decades. Deng<sup>[5]</sup> examined the development of Chinese rhetoric studies during the 20th century. Luo<sup>[6]</sup> explored the landscape of rhetoric studies in contemporary China. Hu<sup>[7]</sup> provided an overview of the status of Chinese rhetoric studies. Li<sup>[8]</sup> discussed the development of Chinese rhetoric studies in the contemporary era.

Besides, China has a long history of engagement with Western plays and has produced various research studies exploring the study of Western plays in the Chinese context. Dong<sup>[9]</sup> investigated the transformation and localization of the Western play Hamlet in the Chinese context. Wang<sup>[10]</sup> explored the similarities and differences between Western tragic drama and Chinese traditional tragic drama. Yang<sup>[11]</sup> discussed the reception and adaptation of Western plays in contemporary Chinese theater. Ward<sup>[12]</sup> investigated the influence of Western plays on contemporary Chinese drama. Li<sup>[13]</sup> examined the cultural adaptation of the Western play A Streetcar Named Desire in China.

Moreover, China has a rich tradition of theatrical performance, and there have been numerous studies conducted in China regarding the study of Chinese plays. Zhao<sup>[14]</sup> explored the stage art in contemporary Chinese Peking Opera. Hu<sup>[15]</sup>



focused on the portrayal of female characters in contemporary Chinese plays. Chen <sup>[16]</sup> examined Chinese traditional drama from the perspective of cultural memory. Wang (2020) explored the differences and similarities between traditional Chinese drama and Western drama. Lu <sup>[17]</sup> focused on the creation and performance of contemporary Chinese plays. The recent studies above highlight the growing interest and research activities in the field of rhetoric, demonstrated the presence of studies addressing the ethical dimensions of literary texts in the Chinese academic context, the interest and engagement of Chinese scholars in studying Western plays, and the scholarly interest in studying Chinese plays from different perspectives.

However, literature is a rich and diverse field that encompasses works from various cultures, countries, and time periods. Both western literatures, including works by authors like T.S. Eliot, and Chinese literature, including works by authors like Cao Yu, can certainly be a valuable part. T.S. Eliot’s plays often incorporate elements of poetry, symbolism, and intellectual exploration. They reflect his concerns about the modern world, the spiritual crisis of his time, and the complexities of human relationships<sup>[18]</sup>. Cao Yu’s plays delve into themes of family, power dynamics, and societal changes, reflecting the tensions and conflicts within Chinese society during the early 20th century. Their plays offer thought-provoking themes and complex character development that can engage students in critical thinking and analysis.

Also, theories like Kenneth Burke’s Pentadic can provide students with a framework for analyzing and interpreting literary texts. Kenneth Burke’s Pentadic Theory, introduced in *A Grammar of Motives* <sup>[19]</sup>, provides a framework for analyzing human communication and symbolic action through the lens of five key elements: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. This theory can be applied to literature analysis to uncover underlying motives, conflicts, and rhetorical strategies within literary texts.

This study applies Burke’s Pentadic to the analysis of select Western and Chinese plays to discuss about the ratios among the five basic pentadic elements, as well as the rhetors’ motives.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The descriptive qualitative research design were utilized employing Pentadic criticism and ethical literary criticism as approaches.

Burke’s Pentadic Criticism is a rhetorical theory developed by Kenneth Burke, an influential American literary critic and theorist. It provides a framework for analyzing and understanding human communication and symbolic action. The theory is based on the idea that all human communication involves the use of five key elements or “terms,” which Burke refers to as the pentad.

### Corpus of the Study

Table 1. The Select Plays of the Study

| Year of Publication | Title                     | Theme   |
|---------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 1939                | <i>The Family Reunion</i> | The play delves into the theme of redemption and the search for spiritual renewal.  |
| 1933                | <i>Thunderstorm</i>       | The main theme is the decay of traditional values and the moral corruption within Chinese society during a time of political and cultural change. |

The corpus of the study involved two authors. First, T.S. Eliot’s plays cover a range of topics and explore various aspects of the human experience, there are several recurring themes that can be found throughout his dramatic works: identity and alienation, spiritual crisis, time and memory, decay and decline, the illusion of communication.

Second, Cao Yu’s plays can be characterized as the portrayal of the struggle and suffering of individuals within a harsh and oppressive society. His works often examine the conflicts and contradictions that arise between traditional values, societal expectations, and the individual’s desire for personal freedom and fulfillment.

### Instrumentation

Instrumentation in qualitative research refers to the process of developing and using tools, techniques, or methods to collect, analyze, and interpret data in qualitative studies. Unlike quantitative research, which often involved structured surveys and statistical analysis, qualitative research focused on understanding the underlying meanings, patterns, and contexts of human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena.

In this research, the following instrumentation were utilized:

1. Documents and artifacts. Analyzing written texts of *The Family Reunion*, *Thunderstorm*, and other materials related to the research topic.
2. Thematic analysis. Identifying and categorizing recurring themes and patterns in the select plays.
3. Content analysis. Analyzing the content of the select plays and the related materials to extract meaning and insights.

In qualitative research, the goal is not to generalize findings to a larger population like in quantitative research. Instead, it is exploring the depth and context of human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena. Therefore, the instruments used in qualitative research focus on capturing the complexity and nuances of these experiences.

## Data Gathering Procedure

To obtain the data needed for the investigation, the following procedures were undertaken by the researcher.

Before the data collection, the validity of the research tools was established, and the identification of the validator-participants was undertaken.

Informed consent from these validator participants were likewise sought to ensure that the study conforms to the ethical norms of research.

The qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis.

Moreover, the research ensured the data privacy by safeguarding the anonymity and confidentiality of the data, and regulating the data access, data security, and data disposal.

## Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed, interpreted, and summarized using the following statistical tools:

### Close Reading

In literary criticism, close reading is the careful, sustained interpretation of a brief passage of a text. Close reading emphasizes the single and the particular over the general, effected by close attention to rhetoric words of the rhetors as well as the discourse languages.

By means of close reading, this study was able to understand the five elements of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose, the motives of the rhetors, as well as the family relationships, ethical identities, ethical predicaments, and the ethical choices related to the main characters in select plays.

### Pentadic Analysis

Burke (1969) argues that, “if rhetors aim to provide a comprehensive description of events, they must involve the five elements of drama. In general, Rhetorical Criticism of Dramatism can be conducted as follows: The first step is to identify the five elements of drama in rhetorical discourse; The second step is to systematically put in pairs the five elements to form multiple relationship ratios and identify the dominant element among them; The last step is to explain the rhetor’s motivation based on the dominant element.” Thus, the following questions were answered with the use of pentadic analysis.

1. What are the five basic elements and the dominant one in select plays?
2. What are the related ratios in select plays?
3. What are the rhetors’ motives in select plays?

### Coding Scheme

In the following, codes were used to analyze the dramas:

D-drama                      Ag-agent                      Ac-agency                      A-act  
S-scene                      P-purpose                      M-motive

Examples: D1Ag1 means Drama 1 Agent 1.

D2P2 means Drama 2 Purpose2.

D1M3 means Drama 3 Motive 3.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis and the corresponding discussion are presented as follows:

### 1. Five Basic Elements and the Ratios of the Select Plays

#### 1.1 Basic Elements of the Select Plays

Table 2. The Five Basic Elements Related to the Protagonist in Select Plays

| Elements      | Drama 1  | Drama 2  |
|---------------|--|--|
| 1.1.1 Agent   | Harry  | Chou Ping  |
| 1.1.2 Agency  | dialogue, symbolism, dramatic techniques   | dialogue, manipulation, emotional confrontations, and unveiling of hidden truths                                   |
| 1.1.3 Act     | searching for identity, redemption, and confrontation with the past  | lies, secrets, and emotional manipulation  |
| 1.1.4 Scene   | The drawing-room; The library  | The Chous' drawing-room; a little inner room at the Lus'   |
| 1.1.5 Purpose | to uncover buried secrets, confront the past, and ultimately seek a form of spiritual and emotional resolution | To explore the destructive nature of repressed desires, societal expectation, and the pursuit of personal ambition |

This table depicts the five basic elements related to the protagonists in select plays. As shown in the table above, the select plays share some similarities of the basic elements. For agency, have have dialogue, with western drama sharing symbolism and Chinese one sharing manipulation in common; for scene, the dramas take place in the family, specifically,

in the family's drawing-room; for purpose, the agents in the dramas hold their personal ones different from each other. Thus, with Burke's Pentadic as the theoretical basis, the five basic pentadic elements related to the protagonists of the two dramas will be analyzed as follows.

### 1.1.1 Agent

#### 1.1.1.1 Agent in *The Family Reunion*

The agent is the person who performed the act. In *The Family Reunion*, the agents are the various family members who come together for the reunion. These characters include Harry, the protagonist, as well as his siblings, other relatives, such as Mary, Agatha, Charles, and the family's deceased members who appear as ghostly figures. Each agent represents different aspects of the family's past, present, and future, and they contribute to the conflicts and dynamics within the family.

As the central character in the play, Harry is the son of Amy and is expected to be the young Lord Monchensey. Harry is a complex and troubled individual with loneliness, social anxiety, and desire for recognition. His character is marked by a sense of inner conflict and spiritual turmoil. As the play unfolds, it becomes clear that Harry is wrestling with his past and the choices he has made. He returns to his family home for a reunion, but grappling with an internal struggle. He wants to run away from the family. His identities of being lonely, irresponsible, and selfish, can be understood in the following lines.

“But, mother, you will always have Arthur and John to worry about: not that John is any worry—the destined and the perfect master of Wishwood, the satisfactory son. And as for me, I am the last you need to worry about; I have my course to pursue, and I am safe from normal dangers if I pursue it. I cannot account for this. But it is so, mother. Until I come back.” (D1Ag1)

#### 1.1.1.2 Agent in *Thunderstorm*

In *Thunderstorm*, the agents are the members of the Chou family and other characters, including Chou Pu-yuan (the father), Chou Ping (Chou Pu-yuan's son by a former marriage), Chou Chung (Chou Pu-yuan's younger son by his present wife), Lu Kuei (the servant), Lu Shih-ping (Lu Kuei's wife), Lu Taa-hai (Lu Shih-ping's son by a former marriage, a miner), and Lu Ssu-feng (Lu Kuei and Lu Shih-ping's daughter, a maid at the Chou's).

The central agent is Chou Ping, the son of Chou Pu-yuan by his ex-marriage with Lu Shih-ping. In *Thunderstorm*, Chou Ping is portrayed as a weak and indecisive, selfish, sensitive, and introverted individual. He is torn between loyalty to his family and his own desires for love and personal fulfillment. He is respectful of his father, Chou Pu, and initially, he upholds the family's honor and reputation. When faced with problems and difficulties, he often chooses to evade rather than confront, rendering him unable to shoulder the responsibilities and obligations expected of him in the play. His selfishness is evident in his approach to relationships, as he desires personal happiness without being willing to exert the necessary effort and make sacrifices. As the play progresses, Chou Ping's character undergoes transformation and internal conflict. He grapples with personal desires, moral dilemmas, and the clash between individual aspirations and societal norms. His identities of being weak and indecisive, selfish, sensitive, and introverted, can be understood in the following lines.

“Job to say, really. I may be gone two years, perhaps three. Whew, it's suffocating in here!”

“Father, I hope you'll give me some real work to do this time. I don't want to just stand by and watch.”

“I've been stupid, an utter fool. Now I'm sorry, because I realize I've made such a mess of my life. I'm a disgrace to myself, to my brother, and what's worse, to my father.”

“Let'em say! Let them say what they like about “young Mr. Chou falling for one of the servants”—what do I care? I love her.” (D2Ag1)

In short summary, Harry and Chou Ping, are the central characters in the plays. Similarly, they suffered internal struggles to figure out their what they want. Harry serves as vehicles for T.S. Eliot to “explore profound themes related to human nature, societal expectations, and the search for meaning in life” (Kirk, 2014). And Chou Ping pursue a romantic ideal in love but lacks the courage and initiative to some extent. Diversely, Chinese plays frequently depict agents as interconnected with broader societal forces, embodying cultural values and collective identity. In contrast, Western plays often highlight individual agents grappling with personal dilemmas and internal conflicts, emphasizing autonomy and self-discovery.

### 1.1.2 Agency

#### 1.1.2.1 Agency in *The Family Reunion*

Agency refers to the means through which an action takes place. The agency in *The Family Reunion* lies in the interactions, dialogues, and revelations that occur among the family members. Language, symbolism, and dramatic techniques serve as the agency through which the characters' inner struggles, desires, and secrets are expressed. The supernatural elements, such as the ghostly apparitions, also contribute to the agency, highlighting the influence of the past on the present. The agencies can be understood in the following lines of the drama.

“They were always there. But I did not see them. Why should they wait until I came back to Wishwood? There were a thousand places where I might have met them! Why here? Why here?”  
 “That night, when she kissed me, I felt the trap close. If you won’t tell me, I must ask Agatha. I never dared before.”  
 “Did you know my father at about my present age?”  
 “What did he look like then? Did he look at all like me?”(D1Ac1)

#### 1.1.2.2 Agency in *Thunderstorm*

In *Thunderstorm*, the agency primarily consists of interpersonal communication, manipulation, emotional confrontations, and the unveiling of hidden truths. The agents employ various strategies to achieve their goals, such as lies, secrets, and emotional manipulation, which ultimately lead to the tragic outcomes. To achieve his goals, Chou Ping employs various strategies, such as lies, secrets, and emotional manipulation, which ultimately lead to the tragic outcomes. The agencies can be understood in the following lines of the drama.

“I can't hate myself enough: Who am I to be sick and tired of other people?”  
 “That's why I'm going away. So that we won't have to keep seeing one another and being reminded of what we most regret.”  
 “I hope you'll give me some real work to do this time. I don't want to just stand by and watch.”  
 “Let'em say! Let them say what they like about ‘young Mr. Chou falling for one of the servants’—what do I care? I love her.”  
 “Well, naturally I look unhappy. When I see the girl I love best of all always going about with someone else... I don't like it.”  
 “I've been stupid...I'm a disgrace to myself, to my brother, and what's worse, to my father.”(D2Ac1)

In short summary, similarly, the two dramas have dialogue as the agency in common. Diversely, T.S. Eliot delved into the inner thoughts and emotional conflicts of the protagonists, providing insight into their struggles with identity and purpose (Ward, 2015), while Cao Yu expressed his worship of primitive power in his plays (Lu, 2021). From the analysis above, it becomes evident that cultural nuances significantly shape the expression of agency in dramatic narratives. In Chinese plays, emphasis often lies on collective agency, where characters embody societal values and cultural norms. This is contrasted with Western plays, where individual agency and personal motivations often take center stage.

#### 1.1.3 Act

##### 1.1.3.1 Act in *The Family Reunion*

Act refers to what happens or takes place. The central act in *The Family Reunion* involves the gathering of the family at the ancestral home for a reunion. The reunion serves as the backdrop for the unfolding drama, where various characters confront their personal and familial issues. However, on a deeper level, the act can be seen as a search for identity, redemption, and a confrontation with the past. The play delves into psychological and emotional complexities, exploring themes of guilt, alienation, and the desire for connection. As for Harry, the acts mainly include: his encounter with elusive figures and his struggle to understand their presence and purpose; his observations and reactions to the unchanged state of the room as well as the family; expressing a sense of hopelessness and the acknowledgment that whatever he hoped for in the current situation, and his decision to pursue a certain path, not running away but seeking, all of which can be understood in the following lines of the drama.

“Come out! Where are you? Let me see you, since I know you are there, I know you are spying on me. Why do you play with me, why do you let me go, only to surround me?”  
 “I had only just noticed that this room is quite unchanged: the same hangings...the same pictures... even the table, the chairs, the sofa... all in the same positions. I was looking to see if anything was changed, but if so, I can't find it.”  
 “Whatever I hoped for now that I am here I know I shall not find it. The instinct to return to the point of departure and start again as if nothing had happened, isn't that all folly? It's like the hollow tree, not there.”  
 “Now I know that my business is not to run away, but to pursue, not to avoid being found, but to seek. I would not have chosen this way, had there been any other! It is at once the hardest thing, and the only thing possible. Now they will lead me. I shall be safe with them; I'm not safe here.” (D1A1)

##### 1.1.3.2 Act in *Thunderstorm*

In *Thunderstorm*, the central act revolves around the revelation of family secrets, particularly the extramarital affair between Chou Ping and his stepmother Chou Fan-yi. The act also encompasses the conflicts and consequences arising from this revelation, including the breakdown of family relationships, personal betrayals, and the tragedy that befalls the characters. As for Chou Ping, he conducts his acts of announcing his departure for the mine, and conveying a feeling of suffocation and being fed up with staying at home; expressing a desire for real work and a keenness to get away from the city to have a spell in the interior; expressing his revived feelings and the courage to fall in love with Ssu-feng; expressing intense self-hatred, a wish for death, and detailing a complex and disturbing relationship with his stepmother, all of which can be understood in the following lines of the drama.

“Job to say, really. I may be gone two years, perhaps three. Whew, it’s suffocating in here!”  
 “I don’t quite know how to put it. I feel I’ve been at home too long and I’m getting fed up.”  
 “I hope you’ll give me some real work to do this time. I don’t want to just stand by and watch.”  
 “I’ve been having much too easy a time here these last two years, and I’m really keen on getting away from the city and having a spell in the interior.”  
 “For years now my heart has been dead, and for years I’ve hated myself with all the hatred I could muster. Do you imagine that now, now that I’ve begun to revive and summoned up the courage to fall in love with a woman—do you imagine I’m going to start worrying about what people say? Huh! Let’em say!”  
 “I wanted to leave her, but she tightened her grip on me. She wouldn’t let me go. She’s a monster, capable of anything. My life was a burden to me. In the end I got so mad that I was prepared to do anything—anything to be free of her. Even death seemed preferable.” (D2A1)

In short summary, both Chinese and Western plays often share a profound emphasis on character-driven narratives, where the agent’s motivations and actions play a central role in shaping the unfolding drama. The cultural nuances, however, result in distinct manifestations of these elements. Chinese plays frequently evoke a reverence for traditional values and a connection to primal forces, evident in the portrayal of agents driven by a deep sense of duty or spiritual calling (Zhang, 2019). On the other hand, Western dramas highlight a broader spectrum of human experiences and conflicts, with agents motivated by individualism, societal dynamics, or existential dilemmas (Ward, 2015). Furthermore, the agency in Chinese plays leans towards manipulation, where characters navigate intricate social structures, while in Western plays, symbolism often takes precedence, conveying layered meanings through dialogue, actions, and settings.

#### 1.1.4 Scene

##### 1.1.4.1 Scene in *The Family Reunion*

The scene, according to Burke, refers to the background of the act or the situation in which the act took place. In *The Family Reunion*, the scenes are set in the drawing-room and the library in a country house in the North of England where the family of the Monchenseys live. Specifically, the scenes include: the drawing-room described as having the same hangings, pictures, table, chairs, and sofa in the same positions; the river in Memory of the childhood, where Harry goes after the holidays; Harry’s current state of being a “hollow tree”; the library where the conversation about his father take place.

“I had only just noticed that this room is quite unchanged: the same hangings...the same pictures... even the table, the chairs, the sofa... all in the same positions. I was looking to see if anything was changed, but if so, I can’t find it.”  
 “For the holidays... I... slipped down to the river to find the old hiding place...It’s absurd that one’s only memory of freedom should be a hollow tree in a wood by the river.”  
 “I hardly remember him, and I know very well that I was kept apart from him, till he went away... there was only a vacuum surrounded by whispering aunts.”  
 “I never saw a photograph. There is no portrait.” (D1S1)

##### 1.1.4.2 Scene in *Thunderstorm*

*Thunderstorm* is set in a wealthy Chinese household during the early 20th century. The scene includes the family’s grand estate (specifically, in the drawing-room), symbolizing their social status and power, as well as the Lus’ (specifically in a little inner room at the Lus’). Specifically, the drawing-room of the Chous’ is described as Chou Ping’s reflection on feeling suffocated and fed up with the current situation; a conversation between Chou Ping and his father; Chou Ping’s declaration of love and his rejection of worries about societal perceptions; Chou Ping’s unease state when left alone with Chou Fan-yi; Chou Ping’s emotional turmoil and the years of keeping the secret bottled up, all of which can be understood in the following lines of the drama.

“Whew, it’s suffocating in here!”  
 “I feel I’ve been at home too long and I’m getting fed up.”  
 “I’ve been having much too easy a time here these last two years, and I’m really keen on getting away from the city and having a spell in the interior.”  
 “ (ill at ease now that he is left alone with her in the room) : Oh, I see. (Pauses.) I must be going now: I’ve got some packing to do.”  
 “Yes, my stepmother!—All these years I’ve kept this secret bottled up inside me. I’ve never dared tell anyone.—She’s had a good education and all that, but—the moment she set eyes on me she developed a passion for me and wanted me to— (breaking off abruptly) though of course I can’t disclaim all responsibility for what happened.” (D2S1)

In short summary, for scene, the two dramas take place in the family, specifically, in the family’s drawing-room. In both Chinese and Western dramas, the scene serves as a crucial element in shaping the overall narrative. However, the cultural

influences embedded in the scenes differ significantly. Chinese plays, often steeped in historical and philosophical contexts, accentuate communal scenes that reflect collective experiences. In contrast, Western plays spotlight individualistic scenes, emphasizing personal struggles and conflicts. Tian (2008) emphasized that Chinese scenes often derive inspiration from rich historical and cultural landscapes, embedding profound symbolism and allegorical elements. Conversely, Western dramas prioritize realism, employing scenes as a backdrop to highlight the psychological and emotional dimensions of characters.

#### 1.1.5 Purpose

##### 1.1.5.1 Purpose in *The Family Reunion*

Purpose represents the goal, motive, or intention behind the act. The purpose of *The Family Reunion* is to explore themes of identity, guilt, redemption, and the search for meaning and connection within the context of family relationships. The play delves into the complexities of human existence and the impact of the past on shaping individual lives. It examines the consequences of suppressed emotions, the weight of familial obligations, and the possibility of breaking free from inherited patterns. The characters' interactions and the revelations that occur during the family reunion serve to uncover buried secrets, confront the past, and ultimately seek a form of spiritual and emotional resolution.

Harry, in different situations, shows his diversified purposes: to uncover buried secrets, confront the past, and ultimately seek a form of spiritual and emotional resolution. Specifically, Harry's purposes are: to persuade his relatives to accept one of the reasons why he could not stay is the ghosts chasing him around while he is at home; desiring for honesty and directness in communication; a quest for freedom and nostalgia for a past memory; to convey the challenges of communication and the barriers that exist between Harry and others; to gain a better understanding of their father; an exploration of the potential for John to settle down and become the master of Wishwood; to get away to pursue a certain path for redemption, which can be understood in the following lines of the drama.

“Can't you help me? You're of no use to me. I must face them. I must fight them.”

“yet you are talking of nothing else. Why not get to the point...I shall be less embarrassing to you.”

“For the holidays... I made my escape...to the river to find the old hiding place...It's absurd that one's only memory of freedom should be a hollow tree in a wood by the river.”

“If I tried to explain, you could never understand...There is only one way for you to understand and that is by seeing.”

“But if you want to talk, at least you can tell me something useful. Do you remember my father?”

“John is the only one of us I can conceive as settling down to make himself at home at Wishwood... and be an excellent landlord.”

“Now I know that my business is not to run away, but to pursue, not to avoid being found, but to seek.”

“I shall say good-bye, until we meet again.” (D1P1)

##### 1.1.5.2 Purpose in *Thunderstorm*

In *Thunderstorm*, the purpose revolves around the exploration of the destructive nature of repressed desires, societal expectations, and the pursuit of personal ambition. The play delves into the consequences of suppressing one's true self and the impact it has on individuals and their relationships. It also serves as a critique of traditional Chinese society and its rigid values.

As for Chou Ping, his purpose revolves around the exploration of the destructive nature of repressed desires, societal expectations, and the pursuit of personal ambition. Specifically, his purposes are: to communicate their decision to leave for the mine to avoid reminders of regret; to assert his feelings of love, reject self-hatred, and dismiss concerns about societal judgment; to communicate his discomfort and the admission of having made a mess of his life; to reveal the depth of his distress and the disturbing nature of the relationship with his stepmother, which can be understood in the following lines of the drama.

“I'm leaving for the mine tomorrow.”

“That's why I'm going away. So that we won't have to keep seeing one another and being reminded of what we most regret.”

“Huh! Let'em say! Let them say what they like...—what do I care? I love her.”

“I'm a disgrace to myself, to my brother, and what's worse, to my father.”

“Yes, my stepmother!... —the moment she set eyes on me she developed a passion for me and wanted me to—  
(breaking off abruptly) though of course I can't disclaim all responsibility for what happened.”

“I hated this unnatural relationship. Can you understand? I wanted to leave her, but she tightened her grip on me. She wouldn't let me go.” (D2P1)

In short summary, for purpose, the agents in the two dramas hold their personal ones different from each other. From the analysis above, it becomes evident that Chinese plays often prioritize collective identity, historical continuity, and Confucian values, thereby weaving intricate tapestries that resonate with the socio-cultural fabric. In contrast, Western plays frequently delve into individualism, existential dilemmas, and the complexities of personal relationships, reflecting a cultural ethos rooted in Enlightenment ideals and existential philosophy. Tian (2008) argued that the purpose in Chinese

plays often reflects a harmonious integration of cultural values, emphasizing collective goals and societal harmony. In contrast, Western dramas prioritize individual motivations and existential purposes, showcasing the complexities of human experience.

### 1.2 The Ratios in the Select Plays

Table 3. The Causal Analysis of the Protagonists' Rhetorical Discourse in Select Plays

| Ratios         | Whether Causality Holds |           |
|----------------|-------------------------|-----------|
|                | Drama 1                 | Drama 2   |
| Protagonist    | Harry                   | Chou Ping |
| agent-scene    | No                      | No        |
| agent-act      | Yes                     | Yes       |
| agent-agency   | Yes                     | No        |
| agent-purpose  | Yes                     | Yes       |
| scene-act      | No                      | Yes       |
| scene-agency   | No                      | Yes       |
| scene-purpose  | No                      | No        |
| scene-agent    | No                      | No        |
| act-agency     | No                      | Yes       |
| act-purpose    | Yes                     | Yes       |
| act-agent      | No                      | No        |
| act-scene      | No                      | No        |
| agency-purpose | Yes                     | Yes       |
| agency-agent   | No                      | No        |
| agency-act     | No                      | No        |
| agency-scene   | No                      | No        |
| purpose-agent  | No                      | No        |
| purpose-act    | Yes                     | Yes       |
| purpose-agency | Yes                     | Yes       |
| purpose-scene  | No                      | No        |

The table above is about the causal analysis of the protagonists' rhetorical discourse in the four plays selected. Clearly, the terms of "agent-purpose", "act-purpose", "agency-purpose", "purpose-act", and "purpose-agency" establish a causal relationship in the four plays, though each of which has its own causal relationships respectively. Ratio is the relationship between two pentadic terms. Foss (2004) points out that, among the generated series of relationship ratios, some align with the rhetorical discourse while others do not. Consequently, the dominant element should be identified as the one that most closely corresponds to or has the highest frequency of alignment with the rhetorical discourse.

As shown in the table above, based on the analysis of the five basic pentadic elements in select plays, the causal analysis of the protagonists' discourses can be conducted as follows:

In *The Family Reunion*, Harry's discourse mainly involves seven relationship ratios: "agent-act" "agent-agency" "agent-purpose" "act-purpose" "agency-purpose" "purpose-act" and "purpose-agency". Therefore, in Harry's discourse, these

seven pairs of relationship ratios are valid, while the remaining ones are not valid. At the same time, the element of "purpose" appears the most frequently, so "purpose" is the dominant dramatic element in Harry's rhetorical discourse.

In *Thunderstorm*, Chou Ping's discourse mainly involves nine relationship ratios: "agent-act" "agent-purpose" "scene-act" "scene-agency" "act-agency" "act-purpose" "agency-purpose" "purpose-act" and "purpose-agency". Therefore, in Chou Ping's discourse, these nine pairs of relationship ratios are valid, while the remaining ones are not valid. At the same time, the elements of "act" and "purpose" appear the most frequently, so "act" and "purpose" are the dominant pentadic elements in Chou Ping's rhetorical discourse.

In short summary, in the realm of literary analysis, a compelling avenue of exploration lies in the causal analysis of protagonists' rhetorical discourse in Chinese and Western plays, employing Kenneth Burke's Pentad as a theoretical framework. This analytical approach delves into the interconnected elements of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose, unraveling the intricate web of motives and consequences embedded in the characters' speeches. In the select dramas, the protagonists' discourse is not merely a reflection of individual expression, but a manifestation of deeper cultural, historical, and societal forces (Zhao, etc. 2022). Dong (2009) pointed out that, by juxtaposing these diverse theatrical traditions, a richer understanding of how language is wielded as a tool of persuasion can be gained, reflecting and shaping the ethos of distinct cultures. Thus, the significance of contextualizing rhetorical discourse within its cultural and historical backdrop is clear, offering a nuanced comprehension of the protagonists' motivations and the intricate dance between language and culture in the dramatic realm.

### 2.The Rhetors and Motives Reflected in Select Plays

Table 4. The Rhetors and Motives in Select Plays

| Plays                     | Rhetors   | Motives  |
|---------------------------|-----------|--|
| <i>The Family Reunion</i> | Harry     | To seek for personal fulfillment and a deeper understanding of his own identity                            |
|                           | Amy       | To find redemption for her sins  |
|                           | Agatha    | To guide and provoke self-awareness in the other characters, particularly Harry                            |
|                           | Lavinia   | To preserve her social status and maintain a façade of a perfect marriage                                  |
|                           | Reilly    | To help others navigate their emotions and conflicts; to guide them toward understanding themselves better |
| <i>Thunderstorm</i>       | Chou Ping | To desire for power and social standing; To seek for freedom and love                                      |



|  |              |   |
|--|--------------|---|
|  | Chou Pu-yuan | To maintain his social status and family reputation; to secure his authority                              |
|  | Chou Fan-yi  | To escape the suffocating arrangement and find true love and happiness; to long for freedom and happiness |

The table above is about the rhetors and motives reflected in the four dramas selected. Since the rhetors hold different roles in their family life, their motives differ from each other. Burke (1969) argues that if rhetors aim to provide a comprehensive description of events, they must involve the five elements of drama. The dramas often contain layers of symbolism and ambiguity, making it possible for multiple interpretations of the characters' motives to coexist.

### 2.1 The Motives of the Rhetors in *The Family Reunion*

The element "rhetors" refers to the characters themselves as they engage in discussions and dialogue that reveal their inner thoughts and motivations. Motive refers to the specific purpose or objective that underlies the use of rhetorical techniques and strategies in communication. The main rhetors in *The Family Reunion* include Harry, Amy, and Agatha.

Harry, is returning to his family home for a reunion, but he seems to be grappling with an internal struggle. He appears to be seeking a sense of redemption or reconciliation for some undisclosed guilt or wrongdoing.

Harry has motives that are complex and somewhat ambiguous. He is searching for something that can fill the emptiness in his life. His motive could be seen as a quest for personal fulfillment and a deeper understanding of his own identity. Throughout the play, he interacts with the other characters, each of whom represents a different aspect of his past and his psyche. His motives can be understood in the following lines:

"Now I know that my business is not to run away, but to pursue, not to avoid being found, but to seek. I would not have chosen this way, had there been any other! It is at once the hardest thing, and the only thing possible. Now they will lead me. I shall be safe with them; I'm not safe here."

"I shall have to learn. That is still unsettled. I have not yet had the precise directions... John shall be the master. All I have is his. No harm can come to him. What would destroy me will be life for John... I must follow the bright angels." (D1M1)

Amy is Harry's mother. She is tormented by guilt and remorse for her past actions. Her motive is to find redemption for her sins, particularly her involvement in a love affair that resulted in a child's death. She wants to keep everything in the Wishwood the same and seeks forgiveness and wants to make amends, but she is also haunted by her past. Her motives can be understood in the following lines:

"I keep Wishwood alive to keep the family alive, to keep them together, to keep me alive, and I live to keep them."

"I have only struggled to keep Wishwood going, and to make no changes before your return. Now it's for you to manage."

"Seven years I kept him, for the sake of the future, a discontented ghost, in his own house, what of the humiliation, of the chilly pretences in the silent bedroom, forcing sons upon an unwilling father?" (D1M2)

Agatha, Harry's aunt, is a mysterious figure who appears to have a deeper understanding of the spiritual and psychological aspects of the characters' dilemmas. Her motive is to guide and provoke self-awareness in the other characters, particularly Harry. She acts as a sort of catalyst for the emotional and psychological transformations taking place. Her motives can be understood in the following lines:

"I can guess about the past and what you mean about the future; but a present is missing, needed to connect them."

"We do not pass twice through the same door or return to the door through which we did not pass... relief from what happened is also relief from that unfulfilled craving... you have a long journey."

"Success is relative: it is what we can make of the mess we have made of things, it is what he can make, not what you would make for him." (D1M3)

### 2.2 The Motives of the Rhetors in *Thunderstorm*

In *Thunderstorm*, the main rhetors include Chou Ping, Chou Pu-yuan, and Chou Fan-yi. Chou Ping is Chou Pu-yuan's son. He wants to leave the family to do some real job in the mine to seek for freedom. Also, he proposes his love to Lu Ssu-feng, though he could not get rid of his stepmother, Chou Fan-yi's love. His motives are complex, involving a mixture of ambition, jealousy, and resentment. He desires power and social standing, and his obsession with Chou Fan-yi is driven by both his ambition and his attraction to her. His motives can be understood in the following lines:

"I hope you'll give me some real work to do this time. I don't want to just stand by and watch."

“I’ve been having much too easy a time here these last two years, and I’m really keen on getting away from the city and having a spell in the interior.”  
 “When I see the girl I love best of all always going about with someone else... I don’t like it.”  
 “That’s why I’m going away. So that we won’t have to keep seeing one another and being reminded of what we most regret.”  
 “I wanted to leave her, but she tightened her grip on me. She wouldn’t let me go... In the end I got so mad that I was prepared to do anything—anything to be free of her. Even death seemed preferable.” (D2M1)

Chou Pu-yuan is the patriarch of the Chou family. His primary motive revolves around maintaining his social status and family reputation. He is obsessed with preserving appearances and controlling the actions of his family members to secure his authority. His fear of scandal and desire to uphold traditional values drive his actions. His motives can be understood in the following lines:

“I think you ought to go back upstairs and rest.”  
 “It seems to be quite the fashion nowadays for young men to hobnob with the workers and go around mouthing meaningless words of sympathy with them!”  
 “What do you know about society? How many books on sociology and economics have you read?”  
 “Take it, I say! Don’t be so headstrong. And in front of the children, too!”  
 “Go on! Down on your knees and persuade her!”  
 “I think your mother’s becoming mentally unbalanced... And the same goes for you, too.” (D2M2)

Chou Fan-yi: Chou Fan-yi is Chou Pu-yuan's second wife. Her motives are centered on her longing for freedom and happiness. She is in a loveless marriage with Chou Pu-yuan, and her actions are driven by a desire to escape this suffocating arrangement and find true love and happiness. Her motives can be understood in the following lines:

“(protesting): I won’t touch it—it’s too bitter.”  
 “It’s not in my nature to do just as I’m told by anybody.”  
 “Oh, Ping, I wish you’d be as warm and human as you used to be. You must realize that it’s bad enough for me as it is, not being able to have you near me.”  
 “You’re in my debt. You’ve incurred certain responsibilities. You can’t just run off on your own the moment the chance of a new life offers itself.”  
 “Ever since I placed my life and my reputation in your hands, I’ve shut myself off from everything else.” (D2M3)

In short summary, the insightful exploration into the rhetors’ motives within Chinese and Western plays provides a lens through which to unravel the complexities of character-driven discourse. The rhetors—be they protagonists or antagonists—serve as conduits for cultural, historical, and societal undercurrents. Tian (2008) pointed out that, Chinese and Western plays illuminated a dynamic interplay between individual motives and broader cultural ethos. Cultural perspectives help shape the motives of rhetors, revealing a rich tapestry of human experiences across diverse theatrical landscapes. In Chinese plays, where collectivism often prevails, rhetors are driven by communal motives, emphasizing harmony and societal cohesion. On the other hand, Western plays, rooted in individualism, showcase rhetors motivated by personal agency and self-expression.

## CONCLUSION

Pentadic criticism is viewed as a crucial method in both Chinese and Western literary analyses. It underscores the unique characteristics and values of language and expressive techniques in drama as an artistic form. Pentadic criticism in Chinese and Western dramas presents challenges and opportunities in cross-cultural communication. With the advancement of globalization and increased cross-cultural communication, Pentadic criticism in Chinese and Western dramas faces both challenges and opportunities in mutual understanding and appreciation. The cultural and historical differences between Chinese and Western dramas pose difficulties in mutual understanding and appreciation. However, there are also similarities and commonalities in certain aspects of Pentadic criticism, providing a foundation and possibilities for mutual exchange and understanding. Therefore, in cross-cultural communication, it is crucial to respect the differences and uniqueness of Chinese and Western dramas while seeking common ground and similarities to facilitate communication and understanding.

This study applies Burke’s Dramatic Pentad to the study of selected western and Chinese plays. Based on the analysis, the researcher found out that the rhetors’ motives could be discerned by analyzing their choices in shaping the acts, scenes, agents, agencies, and purposes within the play.

## RECOMMEDATIONS

Based on the findings presented and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were drawn for the improvement of the study.

1. Universities and colleges may consider the use the results of the study as a reference to strengthen its program on comparative literature and help stakeholders, particularly the students, appreciate plays from Pentadic perspectives.

2. Literature teachers and students may consider using pentadic analysis to help understand and teach plays in a comprehensive way.

3. Literature critics, who study literature, especially, those who do researches on plays, may consider using the results of the study to understand how literary authors conduct their ideas in their works.

Researchers and future researchers, taking the results of the study as baseline information, may consider character archetypes, symbolism and imagery, language and linguistic analysis, narrative structure, cultural and intertextual influence, genre-specific analysis, eco-critical perspectives, ethical literary criticism, etc. for further investigation on topics related to analysis of plays, to obtain a more nuanced and holistic understanding of how ethical and rhetorical elements operate within the complex dynamics of dramatic literature.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study received financial support from the 2022 Hunan Provincial Social Science Fund Foreign Language Research Joint Project "Research on T.S. Eliot's Plays from the Perspective of Western Rhetorical Criticism" (Project Number: 22WLH25). The researcher would like to express his sincere gratitude and genuine appreciation to the following significant individuals for their valuable assistance and encouragement in the completion of this essay.

To his adviser, his data consultant, and language editor, Dr. Concepcion G. Doyugan in SPUP, for continually providing the researcher with words of wisdom and giving the inspiration to become enthusiastic in the field of research. The researcher would not have fulfilled the rigorous process without her encouragement and enlightenment.

The same acknowledgment is accorded to the members of this project and friends, Yu Cheng, Liu Jianfang, Li Liang, and Zhang Qin, for their assistance and moral support in his whole academic study process.

To his very supportive mother, Ms. Li Xingchang; his loving wife, Huang Shanying; his beloved children, Huang Huang, Huang Ni and Huang Tianyou; for providing sustained inspiration, and unceasing love which allow the researcher to concentrate on his study.

His gratitude also goes to those very kind persons, who in their special ways have inspired and helped him directly or indirectly in his work.

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