

Example of literature review on general tso

[Government](#), [Corruption](#)



Guard the Commander-in-Chief's remains. What a pitiable sight. I'll

Light candles and incense and lament his death. [He lights a Candle and mourns beside the corpse, then sings]:

The hero is dead of indignation, his people all dispersed.

There is only an empty boat to serve as his coffin.

I invoke his spirit by the river,

But where can I find wine for the sacrifice? (K'ung Shang-jen, 253)

The Peach Blossom Fan is an exposition of the realities of the nadir of the Ming dynasty of China. At the end of the Ming era, the Chinese government descended into corruption and China became a place of angst and uncertainty. In the above paragraph, General Tso Liang-yu, the man leading the resistance against the Manchu regime, dies after hearing that all of General Yuan's troops have broken discipline and are rioting and looting and are thus lost to them. Upon his death the other loyalist generals serving with Tso, Yuan and Huang Shu, leave his body with only the singing teacher, Su.

In Act I, Scene 13, Tso is named as the Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent, in effect the strength of the dynasty. Tso is thus the last vestige of Ming strength left in China, his death sounding the death knell for the empire. Importantly, General Tso's death does not follow a defeat in battle, rather K'ung Shang-jen utilizes deus-ex-machina, bringing about the general's death following news that his soldiers had descended into looting and rioting. In effect, the troops which were gathered to defend the citizens of China turn against them in a perverse fashion, violating their rights and

property. The question then is what does the playwright accomplish in this moment?

General Tso epitomizes loyalty and duty. Observe in the passage previous to the announcement of the looting wherein he instructs Su in the way to address Huang Te-kung and insists that he must explain that his aims are only to enforce justice and the rights of the Heir Apparent. Violation of these tenants would thus be grave corruption in Tso's eyes. Thus, the episode of his death serves as a summation of the slow degradation of the Ming dynasty as a process by which corruption slowly chipped away at the strength of a nation until all that was left was a vestige of its former self. In essence, Ming destroyed its own strength by allowing its society to fester just as General Tso, the symbol of the Ming strength, does not die in battle but rather he "vomits blood and collapses" (K'ung Shang-jen 252), destroyed from the inside by the descent of his men into criminality.

What is seen in the passage reproduced above is a seminal moment in the play where the struggle for the preservation of an old way of life climaxes suddenly and then wanes entirely. Su sits next to the body of General Tso and laments his death. Interestingly, he immediately seeks to invoke the appropriate formalities for the general of lighting candles, burning incense, and offering wine in sacrifice. This is in stark contrast to Su's introduction into the story in Act I, Scene 2 where Fragrant Princess rushes to greet him and he tells her to "avoid formalities (K'ung Shang-jen 21)." In this moment, Su adopts the general's role by exercising the traditions he fought to protect. The audience thus sees transference of presence to Su, him striving to

preserve what is lost. He says that he will “ light candles and incense” but we see in the stage directions that he lights a single candle and then in the next stanza, he has no wine to offer. The playwright reveals the ethos of the entire play in this final moment of the scene. Su grasps for a hold on the old way, a hold on General Tso and the version of China he represents, but the attempt is futile. In the end a piece can remain, a single candle can be lit, but it will never be possible to revive the life that was lost, the dynasty that existed, the wine that cannot be poured.