

Reworking Songs Past and Present: Literary Forms and Traditions in Chinese Court Drama

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Abstract:

Ming and Qing dynasty court plays are commonly read and used as valuable sources for understanding the court performance traditions and practices in late imperial China. As such, however, they are largely studied as a separate field of research in theater history, in isolation from other Chinese literary genres. To redress the imbalance in current scholarship, this paper reconsiders the role and place of court drama in Chinese literary history and calls attention to the potential interconnections between court drama and other forms of Chinese literatures. The paper proposes a new approach to link court drama to Chinese literary tradition by focusing on the composite nature of court drama texts. Using the Qing dynasty court play *Bayi wu Yuting* as a case study, it explores ways of reading court drama as a composite literary text consisting of various poetic genres and components deriving from different historical periods and engaging actively with these literary traditions.

Keywords: court drama, literary history, *Bayi wu Yuting*, ritual, poetry

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By examining the textual production of late imperial Chinese court theater, this paper has two basic aims: first, to take stock of the rich textual forms and composite nature of what are collectively referred to as ‘court drama,’ and second, to reconsider these court performance texts in the context of Chinese literary traditions.

In modern scholarship a wide swathe of texts associated with court theatrical performance in late imperial China are classified under the umbrella term ‘court drama’. This comprises a broad spectrum of dramatic texts of different shapes, forms, functions, and sizes, ranging from single-act short plays of only one to two pages in hand-copied manuscripts to grand theater of 240 acts in lavishly produced five-colored printed editions.

What can these court dramatic texts tell us and how may one approach this vast corpus of Chinese court drama? On one level, court plays are predominantly read and used as valuable sources for our understanding of the performance traditions and practices in late imperial Chinese courts. In their multiple forms, these court dramatic texts contain very rich information and excellent clues in illustrating the major characteristics that Chinese court theater is usually renowned for: visually pleasing, with elaborate props, marvelous stage machinery, exquisite costumes, and filled with spectacular features to impress and entertain the emperor and the imperial family. We can also trace the earlier court theatrical traditions that gave shape and structure to these late imperial court dramatic forms.² Recent studies also provide us with rich accounts on the theatrical practices and institutional organizations in the late imperial Chinese court.³ Perhaps because of their more apparent value as theatrical sources, however, despite the growing attention to these court dramatic texts, existing studies

² For surveys of the earlier performance traditions of court entertainments, see the relevant sections in Wilt L. Idema and Stephen H. West, *Chinese Theater, 1100-1450: A Source Book* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1982), Tsai Hsin-hsin 蔡欣欣, “Lun lidai gongting yanju zhong zhi xiaoxi” 論歷代宮廷演劇中之小戲, in Tseng Yong-yih 曾永義 and Shen Tung 沈冬 eds., *Liang'an xiaoxi xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 兩岸小戲學術研討會論文集 (Yilan: Guojia chuantong yishu zhongxin, 2001), and Zhang Ying 張影, *Lidai jiaofang yu yanju* 歷代教坊與演劇 (Ji'nan: Qi Lu shushe, 2007).

³ In addition to the fast-growing body of Chinese and Japanese scholarship, we now have two English-language monographs that examine Qing court theater specifically. See Ye Xiaoqing, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas: Drama and the Qing Imperial Court* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2012) and Liana Chen, *Staging for the Emperors: A History of Qing Court Theatre, 1683-1923* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2021).

are mostly restricted to the specific field of theater history and studies, and these dramatic texts have been largely if not completely shunned in Chinese literary histories and research. As a result, texts of court drama are commonly read *in isolation*, as a separate field of research, from other Chinese literary genres.

On another level, and herein lies the focus of this paper, I propose that court drama texts can be read as composite texts with various layers and potential for readings from multiple perspectives.⁴ Researchers now have excellent conditions to take on such an approach in the context of what one may describe as a ‘textual turn’ in court drama studies in recent years. Primary sources have been made more readily available. For example, Qing court dramatic texts are now more accessible through various large-scale reprint projects such as *Gugong zhenben congkan* 故宮珍本叢刊, hereafter *GGZBCK* (Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2000–2001), with volumes 660–696 on drama texts; and most recently, the more complete 450-volume *Gugong bowuyuan cang Qinggong nanfu shengpingshu xiben* 故宮博物院藏清宮南府昇平署戲本, hereafter *QGNF* (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2015–2017). Other projects in publishing the private collections of bibliophiles and pioneering theater scholars such as Fu Xihua 傅惜華 (1907-1970) and Wu Xiaoling 吳曉鈴 (1914-1995) also include a sizable corpus of court-related drama texts.⁵ These, in turn, have encouraged researchers to pay more attention to the textual forms and conditions of

⁴ In an earlier rumination on ways of reading a court play, I called for a need to understand Chinese court drama as a wide spectrum of texts, produced both within and beyond the imperial palace, and operating between the dual functions of reading text and visual performance, consumed both on page and on stage. See Tan, “*Song of Dragon Well* and Other Court Plays: Stage Directions, Spectacle, and Panegyrics,” in Patricia Sieber and Regina Llamas, eds., *How to Read Chinese Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), Chapter 13, pp.309-324.

⁵ Wang Wenzhang 王文章 and Liu Wenfeng 劉文峰, eds. *Fu Xihua cang guben xiqu zhenben congkan* 傅惜華藏古本戲曲珍本叢刊 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2010); Wu Shuyin 吳書蔭 ed., *Suizhong Wushi chaoben gaoben xiqu congkan* 綏中吳氏抄本稿本戲曲叢刊 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2004).

court drama scripts and to take a textual approach in studying these theatrical texts (*xiben* 戲本 or *quben* 曲本).⁶

In this paper, I will reconsider the place of court drama in Chinese literary traditions and the potential interconnections between court plays and other literary genres, with the following questions in mind: which earlier works or literary traditions came to the minds of the writers⁷ and the readers in framing the production and reception of court drama texts in late imperial China? To what extent was there a conscious tradition?

It is common for prefaces of court drama to trace its origins to *guofeng* 國風 (airs of the states) in *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of poetry) or *yuefu* 樂府 (music bureau songs). For example, in his inscription for a court play, Hong Sheng 洪昇 (1645-1704) begins with references to *yuefu* such as “Tianma” 天馬 (Heavenly horses) and

⁶ See David L. Rolston “Research note: recent color reproductions of Qing dynasty palace multi-colored play scripts,” *CHINOPEARL*, 34:2 (2015), 188-193; Xiong Jing 熊靜, *Qingdai neifu quben yanjiu* 清代內府曲本研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2018); ERC-funded research project: “Linking the Textual Worlds of Chinese Court Theater, ca. 1600–1800” (TEXTCOURT): <https://textcourt.orinst.ox.ac.uk/>, launched in October 2019 at the University of Oxford.

⁷ Here I prefer the term “writer” to “author” when referring to the person(s) who put together the words of these court dramatic texts in the imperial palace. In contrast to the type of individualized authorship usually associated with the world of elite theatre, the production of court dramatic texts might not necessarily be associated with one single playwright, but often involved multiple hands. For a preliminary study on issues related to the compilation and authorship of late imperial court drama, see Tian Yuan Tan, “Ming Qing gongting juben zhi bianzhuang ji zuozhe wenti chutan” 明清宮廷劇本之編撰及作者問題初探, Gugong bowuyuan (Ming Qing gongtingshi yanjiu zhongxin) 故宮博物院 (明清宮廷史研究中心) ed., *Ming Qing gongtingshi xueshu yantaohui lunwenji (di'er ji)* 明清宮廷史學術研討會論文集 (第二輯) (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2017), pp 435-447. Liana Chen has also highlighted the need to consider the multiple channels, including the palace troupe instructors in charge of adapting the scripts for different occasions, through which theatrical ideas were materialized into written words in Qing court drama. See Chen, *Staging for the Emperors*, pp.23-24.

“Jingxing” 景星 (Phosphor star) and the tradition of the *binfeng* 邇風 (airs of Bin).⁸

Anyone familiar with reading prefaces and inscriptions to literary works will be all too aware of the common rhetoric in laying claims to ‘ancient’ origins especially for later or less respected vernacular genres. Here, however, I would like to argue that such references were more than mere rhetorical practices by the preface writers. We can trace the existence of earlier songs and poems in various forms, borrowed directly or reworked in varying degrees, in court drama. I will take one Qing dynasty court play as a case study to explore ways of reading court drama as composite texts containing various ‘poetic parts’ which may derive from different historical periods. In doing so, I propose that we can see how late imperial court drama not only made strong references to earlier literary traditions, but also engaged actively with these earlier texts in its rearrangements.

Tracing Literary Worlds: *Bayi wu Yuting* and Its Texts

The *bayi* 八佾 dance, performed by eight rows of eight dancers, is a form of court entertainment specified for the Son of Heaven. Nobles and ministers should only have smaller-scale dances in six (*liuyi* 六佾) and four rows (*siyi* 四佾) respectively. Hence, in *Analects* 3.1, Confucius complains about the Ji lineage from Lu for its usurpation of this royal rite in having “the eight-row dance performed in his courtyard” (八佾舞於庭).

The title of the Qing court drama, *Bayi wu Yuting* 八佾舞虞庭 (Eight-row Dance performed in Yu [Shun]’s Court), plays on this quotation in the *Analects*, changing only one word, the preposition *yu* 於 to *yu* 虞, referring to the legendary sage-king Shun, who appears on stage and introduces himself as “emperor Shun of the Youyu lineage” 吾乃帝舜有虞氏. In the play, it becomes quickly apparent to the reader that *Yuting* does not denote the sagely court of Shun of the distant past, but is instead a reference to the court of the Qing ruler at which the play was performed.

⁸ Hong Sheng 洪昇, “*Taiping leshi tici*” 《太平樂事》題詞, reproduced in Feng Qiyong 馮其庸 ed., *Cao Xueqing jiashi Hongloumeng wenwu tulu* 曹雪芹家世紅樓夢文物圖錄 (Qingdao: Qingdao chubanshe, 2015), vol.2, p.371.

The main function of Shun in this play is to bear witness to and endorse the Manchu rule by summoning a series of performances to congratulate the great age of peace and joy: first, a group of eight skilled men are arranged to play the nine parts of the Shao music for reed pipes (*xiaoshao jiucheng* 簫韶九成)⁹, followed by sixty-four performers, who carry out the eight-row dance with crimson shields and jade battle-axes.

The play *Bayi wu Yuting* (hereafter *Bayi*) was first compiled around 1760 after the Qing empire's pacification of the western regions. Ye Xiaoqing has given an excellent introduction to the context of the performances of this play in association with the martial rites (*junli* 軍禮) in the Qing court.¹⁰ We also know that the play was performed during the reign of Qianlong, because it was included in the list of plays performed at the emperor's seventieth birthday in 1780 at Jehol, as recorded by a Korean envoy in his diary.¹¹ The play continued to be performed in later reigns.

Multiple copies of the play have survived, which allow us to see how the text of the play could be adapted for various occasions.¹² Manuscript copies were prepared for each performance, at times updated with minor emendations to adapt to the respective occasions.¹³ For instance, the extant scripts are addressed to "Emperor Gaozong (Qianlong)" 高宗, "Empress Dowager" 皇太后 or, more generally, "the Son of Heaven of the Great Qing" 大清天子 in the various scripts in *QGNF*. The play also makes specific references to various historical events, including "the Son of Heaven

⁹ In "Yiji" 益稷 chapter of *Shangshu*.

¹⁰ Ye, *Ascendant Peace in the Four Seas*, pp.77-80.

¹¹ It was listed as the 15th out of 80 plays performed on the occasion. See Pak Chiwŏn (1737-1805), *Yŏrha ilgi* 熱河日記 ('The Jehol Diary'), 26-juan edition (1783) housed in the Kyujanggak Library of Seoul National University, vol. 8, *juan* 18, p.14a. See <https://textcourt.orinst.ox.ac.uk/database/foreignrecords/KY00002B/?tab=pages>

Among the extant scripts I have examined, none appears to be the drama script as performed on that occasion in 1780.

¹² For bibliographical records of the play, see Fu Xihua 傅惜華, *Qingdai zaju quanmu* 清代雜劇全目 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1981), pp. 619-620; Xiong Jing, "Qingdai neifu quben yanjiu" 清代內府本曲本研究 (PhD diss., Sun Yat-sen University, 2012), vol. 2 "Qingdai neifuben quben jianmu huibian" 清代內府本曲本簡目彙編, pp.95-96.

¹³ The extant manuscript copies are visibly marked with corrections such as strikethroughs and insertions.

of the Great Qing once again pacified Xinjiang” 大清天子重定新疆¹⁴ and “the Emperor Gaozong, posthumous title Chun, pacified Ili” 高宗純皇帝平定伊犁¹⁵. A Jiaqing version responded to the suppression of the White Lotus rebellion (1796-1804) by providing an update to the earlier versions:

The late emperor pacified Ili and brought peace to the western regions. The present emperor exterminated heterodox teachings and pacified the oceans...
先皇帝平定伊犁、救寧西域。當今皇帝殄滅邪教、安奠海洋.....¹⁶

Other palace archival records also indicate that the play may not necessarily have been restricted to occasions related to military commemorations. For example, in the ninth year of the Daoguang reign (1829), it was performed as the opening act of a series of six plays for the Mid-Autumn Festival.¹⁷

Researchers first gain more ready access to the various scripts of the play through the *GGZBCK* series, which includes two scripts of *Bayi*.¹⁸ Additional scripts are later included in the *QGNF* series.¹⁹ However, this is certainly not the full picture and only represents the collection in the Palace Museum. None of the five is the earliest script as performed in 1780; nor does it include the Jiaqing edition cited above, which is in the collection of the National Library of China. It is safe to say that far more scripts had been produced for *Bayi*, if it is the case that at least a copy was

¹⁴ Script A, *GGZBCK*, vol.662, p. 434.

¹⁵ Script B, *Ibid.*, p. 437.

¹⁶ *Bayi*, *Fagong yazou* 法宮雅奏 edition kept in the National Library of China (call number: A03542), ll. 30-31 [unpaginated]. Xiaoqing Ye also referred to a Jiaqing edition of *Bayi* in her publications but did not give full bibliographical details. See Ye, “Imperial Institutions and Drama in The Qing Court,” *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2003): 346; *Ascendant Peace*, pp.78-79. Based on a segment of the text cited by Ye, it appears to be similar in content to the copy in the *Fagong yazou* edition.

¹⁷ See *Zhongguo guojia tushuguan cang Qinggong Shengpingshu dang'an jicheng* 中國國家圖書館藏清宮昇平署檔案集成 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), vol.3, p. 1542.

¹⁸ *GGZBCK*, vol.662, pp.432-38.

¹⁹ *QGNF*, published later in an aim to provide a more complete collection of the drama scripts held at the Palace Museum in Beijing, includes five scripts of *Bayi*. Out of the five, three are new and the last two are the ones already included in *GGZBCK*.

prepared for each of the many performances throughout the late eighteenth and at least the first half of the nineteenth century.²⁰ Nonetheless, the above short bibliographical survey of *Bayi* suffices to give us a snapshot of the complex yet exciting textual conditions of Qing court drama. New copies continue to emerge and will further enrich our understanding of the textual and theatrical production of each play, much to the joy of any researcher in textual studies.²¹

For the purpose of this paper in tracing the literary elements and connections that remain largely stable across the various extant scripts, I choose to use the script that makes specific reference to “Emperor Gaozong,” which I believe may be the closest to the earliest text among the extant copies I have come across.²² In this script, the title of the play is introduced as being “Act Twelve” (第十二齣), which tells us that *Bayi* can also be performed as a constituent part of a larger repertoire of performances. The play is relatively short and contains 56 lines presented in eight lines per page.²³ References to the text and line numbers follow the original pagination and line breaks in the manuscript. The full text of the play can also be found in the “Appendix” to provide readers with an overview of the entire structure of the drama in relation to the distribution and configuration of the various literary components to be discussed.

As the title of the play and the above summary suggest, this play centers on *bayi*, a dance well recorded in standard histories, particularly in the treatises on *li* (ritual) and *yue* (music). There is no shortage of references in the play to such performance elements in its stage directions, such as *wuke* 舞科 (to act out performing the dance) and *raochang ke* 遶場科 (to act out going round the stage). An eighteenth-century Korean record describes this court play as a rather clamorous martial dance

²⁰ It was recorded in the Qing archives that the play was performed regularly, at times almost on an annual basis during the Daoguang reign. I thank Mei Yi Lau for this information.

²¹ For example, among the five scripts in *QGNF*, scripts #3 and #4 contain musical notations, indicating which verses are sung (versus recited, see below).

²² This is the fifth script in *QGNF*, vol.22, #5 (pp.547-555), which is the same as the second script in *GGZBCK*, 662:436-38. References to *Bayi* in this paper are made using the *QGNF* edition which presents a higher quality reproduction of the manuscript.

²³ *QGNF*, vol.22, #5 (pp.547-555). See Figure 1.

performed by sixty-four warriors clad with armor and armed with various weapons on stage.²⁴

If we turn our attention from the performance aspects to the written-out script of the play, however, we will find a different form of display on a textual and literary level, with an assembly of various genres and forms, as well as a juxtaposition of linguistic registers and literary styles. The play opens with following passage:

(Multiple performers dress up as the Officers of Eight Skills, enter via the entrance door of the Longevity Stage and speak)

Approaching the sun and looking up to the clouds verify an age of peace,

Splendor everywhere, all embracing sentiments.

Xiaoshao is nothing like music of the human realm, but

Most like the sounds of the "Grand Music of Harmonious Heaven"²⁵.

We are the scholars of eight skills. The Sage makes music, to manifest virtue²⁶ and to give image to [battle] merits. [Music] in harmony with Heaven and Earth²⁷, phoenixes come down in stately formation and beasts lead one another to dance. We arrange the *yin* and *yang*, observe the governance and ruling, regulate the pitches (literally, the odd- and even-numbered semi-tones), correct the five sounds. This is just as the saying goes, "the scholars are equipped with eight skills; the music needs to undergo six transformations [before the ceremony is complete]". Of this no more need now be said.

(衆扮八能官從壽臺上場門上) (白)

就日瞻雲占太平，風光無處不含情。

簫韶不似人間曲，半是鈞天廣樂聲。

我等乃八能之士是也。聖人作樂，昭德象功。天地同和，鳳儀獸舞。我等調陰陽、觀政治、均律呂、正五音、正所謂士備八能、樂合六變，這也不在話下。²⁸

²⁴ *Seungjeongwon ilgi* (The Daily Records of Royal Secretariat of Joseon Dynasty) 承政院日記, copy housed in the Kyujanggak Library of Seoul National University, vol. 1474, p.23b. See http://kyudb.snu.ac.kr/pf01/rendererImg.do?item_cd=SJW&book_cd=GK12788_00&vol_no=1474&page_no=022a, accessed 02 May 2022.

²⁵ The music heard by Duke Mu of Qin in his dream; allusion to *Shiji*, 43.1787, and literary references to Zhang Heng張衡, "Xijing fu" 西京賦 (Western Metropolis Rhapsody).

²⁶ "Zhaode" is also the title of a form of *yawu* 雅舞 (elegant dance) during the Han dynasty.

²⁷ Reference to *Liji*.

²⁸ *Bayi*, ll. 1-6, *QGNF*, 548.

The last line marks a transition. The eight skilled officers then introduce the context: they have received the order from Shun to lead the *bayi* dancers to play the ceremonial music and they await Shun’s arrival.

This opening segment gives us a taste of the array of different linguistic registers. A series of tetrasyllabic lines that suggest a more solemn tone, all of which invoke classical allusions, is juxtaposed with the colloquial transitional marker “of this no more need now be said” (這也不在話下) more commonly found in vernacular literature.

Explicit and Silent Borrowings: Poems

At times, the play *Bayi* draws our attention to earlier literary texts through explicit citations. The lines “the scholars are equipped with eight skills; the music needs to undergo six transformations” (士備八能/ 樂合六變), for instance, are cited from a Northern Qi (550-577) *yuefu* poem.²⁹

More interesting are the silent borrowings in the play, in particular, in the two entrance verses (*shangchang shi* 上場詩). The opening verse of *Bayi* was adapted from a poem attributed to Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837–908):

These <i>yuefu</i> songs, as rearranged here, verify an age of peace,	樂府翻來占太平，
Splendor everywhere, all embracing sentiments.	風光無處不含情。
Uproarious songs play across a thousand gates and ten thousand households,	千門萬戶喧歌吹，
Wealth and honor in the mortal world are all in these sounds.	富貴人間只此聲。 ³⁰

²⁹ *Yuefu shiji*, 3.29 (“Gaoming yue” 高明樂).

³⁰ Cf. *Bayi*, ll.2-3, and “Yangliu zhi shoubei ci” 楊柳枝壽杯詞, attributed to Sikong Tu in the Jiajing edition of *Wanshou Tangren jueju* 萬首唐人絕句, included in both *Quan Tang Wudai ci* 全唐五代詞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), p.1048, and *Quan Tang shi* (zengdingben) 全唐詩 (增訂本) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), expanded and revised edition, *juan* 634, p.7331. It is also noteworthy that the last of this set of eighteen verses by Sikong Tu makes explicit references to the sage ruler and might be written for an imperial birthday celebration.

This is the first of a series of eighteen verses written to “Yangliu zhi” 楊柳枝, which was a stylish tune during the Tang dynasty.³¹ Sikong Tu’s original verse points out how the age of peace can be reflected in the rearrangement of *yuefu*. In *Bayi*, the emphasis is instead given to the sovereign. “Approaching the sun [i.e., the emperor] and looking up to the clouds [i.e., the emperor] verify an age of peace” (就日瞻雲), alluding to *Shiji*, is an expression later widely used to express a writer’s awe of His Majesty in courtly verses and drama.³²

The significance of rearranging *yuefu* (樂府翻來) in the original line, however, was not entirely replaced. This idea of ‘reworking’ surfaces again on the second page of the text:

In the Hall of Southern Fragrance, the five strings are strung anew,	南薰殿裡五絃新，
Before the Kingfisher Tower dancers appear.	翡翠樓前出舞人。
In the Bureau of Musical Ritual (<i>Yifeng si</i>) the entertainment officers rework <i>yuefu</i> ,	儀鳳伶官翻樂府，
Long live our sage and glorious one, lasting a thousand springs!	聖明萬壽一千春。

Rather literally, this poem is a “rearrangement” as it is adapted from an earlier *yuefu*³³: the second and fourth lines are kept unchanged, but the first and third lines are newly created, both of which are noteworthy. The keyword here is novelty. In the first line, the music of Shun is played anew in a new space of the Qing imperial compound. The Nanxun Hall 南薰殿 (Hall of Southern Fragrance), situated in the Forbidden City, derives its name from the allusion of Shun playing a five-string *qin*

³¹ See Anna Shields, *Crafting a collection: the cultural contexts and poetic practice of the Huajian ji (collection from among the flowers)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), Chapter One, for a discussion on the Tang dynasty “Yangliu zhi” lyrics.

³² See *Shiji*, 1.15. In addition to *Bayi*, the expression is also commonly found in numerous other Qing dynasty court plays such as *Sihai shengping* 四海昇平, *Hongqiao xian dahai* 虹橋現大海, and *Wufu wudai* 五福五代.

³³ Cf. *Bayi*, ll.13-14, and *Yuefu shiji*, 79.1118: 鴛鴦殿裡笙歌起，翡翠樓前出舞人。喚上紫微三五夕，聖明方壽一千春。

and singing the “South Wind” poem, of which the first two lines read, “The fragrance of the south wind/ can relieve the hardships of my people.” 南風之薰兮，可以解吾民之慍兮。³⁴

The third line (儀鳳伶官翻樂府) may call to mind a line from a Yuan dynasty poem that reads “in the hands of the entertainment officers at the Bureau of Musical Ritual, the music is complete” 儀鳳伶官樂既成。³⁵ In the court play *Bayi*, the emphasis lies no longer in the completion (*cheng* 成) of music, but rather in the process by which it was accomplished: how it was reworked (*fan*). One may even say that “*fan yuefu*” 翻樂府 (reworking *yuefu* songs) summarizes what the entire court play is about: it is a rearrangement of several literary elements that may all be broadly called *yuefu* and that derived from court-related settings.³⁶

Words Set to Music: Hymns, *Naoge*, Dramatic Arias

The poems discussed above might be originally linked to musical performances, but in the play *Bayi* they are certainly treated as literary texts that are to be recited or spoken (*bai* 白) as indicated in the stage directions. In comparison,

³⁴ See Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩, comp. *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 57.824-825. Translation cited from Jack W. Chen, *The Poetics of Sovereignty: On Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), p.207. The allusion to the music of Shun is a popular one commonly found in Qing court drama. In one of the more elaborate re-enactments, the entire process of Shun reciting the “South Wind” poem and reproducing the words in calligraphy was performed on stage. See *Huanyu xianning* 寰宇咸寧 (All the World is At Peace), *GGZBCK* edition, vol. 662, p.411; TEXTCOURT digital edition: https://textcourt.orinst.ox.ac.uk/database/scripts/Q00068_01_A/?tab=pages, accessed 2 May 2022.

³⁵ See Yang Yunfu 楊允孚 (1316–1374), *Luanjing zayong* 灤京雜詠, *Siku quanshu* edition, p.7b. It is worth noting that the poem was also included in the imperial anthology *Yuxuan Song Jin Yuan Ming sichao shi* 御選宋金元明四朝詩, *Siku quanshu* ed., 75.28.

³⁶ Sikong Tu’s verse may not be included in *Yuefu shiji* but other *Yangliu zhi* verses are. See *Yuefu shiji*, 81.1142-1149. For a discussion on how *yuefu* came to be used as a blanket term for a loose assortment of poetic texts, see Stephen Owen, “Appendix A: *Yuefu* as a Generic Term”, in *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 301-307.

several other segments of the play are marked to be sung (*chang* 唱). In at least two editions of *Bayi*, these segments are accompanied by musical notations.³⁷

As one may expect in a Chinese drama, a considerable part of these musically accompanied segments is made up of dramatic *qu* 曲 arias written to three tune patterns in the Zhonglü mode, namely, the introductory tune *Tangduoling* 唐多令, the main tune *Qianqiu wu 13iching* 千秋舞霓裳 (a combination of two tunes, *Qianqiusui* 千秋歲 and *Wunichang* 舞霓裳), followed by the concluding tune *Qingyu* 慶餘.³⁸

Other than these dramatic arias, there are two additional musical segments. First, there is a hymn (*zhang* 章 or *yuezhang* 樂章) titled “Zhide dashao” 至德大韶 (Ultimate Virtue in the Grand Shao Music) containing eight tetrasyllabic lines steeped in allusions to sources of antiquity.³⁹ I follow the designation in the *Bayi* text and call it a hymn, and as such one might wish to compare this with the actual hymns as used in Qing dynasty court rituals.⁴⁰ But it is also worth keeping in mind that hymns resembling such forms are also regularly classified as song verses (*geci* 歌辭) and more broadly as *yuefu* in the twelfth-century anthology *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 (Collection of Music Bureau Poetry).

The performance of the “Zhide dashao” hymn is followed by another musical piece introduced as a form of military music known as *naoge* 鐃歌 (Bell songs) from the Northern Di 北狄 and later brought to the Han court where it was used in the music played for palace gatherings, processions, and excursions.⁴¹ The received texts of *naoge*, or *duanxiao naoge* 短簫鐃歌 (Songs for short panpipe and *nao*-bell)

³⁷ *Bayi*, versions #3 and #4, *QGNF*, pp. 524-531 and 532-546.

³⁸ *Bayi*, ll.10-12, 50-54, and 55-56 respectively; *QGNF*, 549, 554, and 554-55.

³⁹ *Bayi*, ll.26-28, *QGNF*, 551.

⁴⁰ The words of these hymns are recorded in *Qingshigao*, *juan* 96-100 (*zhi* 71-75). On the sources of these hymns in earlier Qing sources, see Wen Xiangui 溫顯貴, *Qingshigao Yuezhi yanjiu* 《清史稿·樂志》研究 (Wuhan: Chongwen shuju, 2008), 56-74.

⁴¹ See David R. Knechtges, “Duan xiao nao ge” 短簫鐃歌 in Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds. *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, Part One (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 209-210.

include the famous set of eighteen Han dynasty *naoge* as well as a sizable corpus of later compositions classified under the “*Guchui quci*” 鼓吹曲辭 (Song lyrics accompanied by drums and wind instruments) section in *Yuefu shiji*.⁴² To read the *naoge* in the court play against this early tradition, in particular those addressing the ruler, such as “Shengren chu” 聖人出 or “Yuan ru qi” 遠如期 in the set of eighteen Han dynasty songs, might therefore appear to be a natural reading strategy.⁴³ The first two lines (天聰明，聖時憲) of the *naoge* in the court drama also clearly derives from the lines 惟天聰明，惟聖時憲 (“It is Heaven which is all-intelligent and observing/ Let the sage *king* take it as his pattern”) in *Shangshu* 尚書 (Classic of Documents).⁴⁴

But I want to suggest a more contemporaneous source that might also potentially be in the minds of the Qing writer(s) in composing the *naoge* in *Bayi*. The cue is in the stage directions of the play which says the performers acted out “playing *Naoge Deshengyue*” 饒歌得勝樂. At first glance, this appears to suggest that the *naoge* was written to the title or to the tune of *Deshengyue*, but this should not be confused with the northern tune pattern also titled *Deshengyue*, which has a different prosodic pattern from the one seen in *Bayi*. Instead, it is more likely that this is a reference to a group of sixteen contemporary *naoge* produced in 1760 entitled “Music on the Achievement of a Victory, Bell Songs in Sixteen Verses” (*Deshengyue naoge shiliu zhang* 得勝樂饒歌十六章). As recorded in *Qingshigao* (Draft Standard History of the Qing), these *naoge* were composed for “Welcoming a Victorious Army upon Return (*jiaolao* 郊勞)” after Qing’s “pacification of the western regions” (平定西域).⁴⁵ *Jiaolao* denotes the ceremonial practice of emperors riding out beyond the

⁴² *Yuefu shiji*, juan 16-18.

⁴³ *Yuefu shiji*, juan 16, pp.231-232.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Bayi*, ll.34-35, p.552, and *Shangshu*, “Yueming” 說命 (Middle section), translation by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. III, *The Shoo King, or The Book of Historical Documents* (London: Trübner & Co., 1865), Bk. VIII, Pt, ii, 3, p.255.

⁴⁵ See the sixteen *naoge* in *Qingshigao* 100: 2957-2960.

limits of the capital city to welcome back the victorious officers returning from a campaign, honoring them with rewards and feasts.⁴⁶

A full intertextual analysis of these two separate *naoge* texts produced around the same time, one enacted in a court play and the another archived in the official dynastic history of the Qing dynasty, is perhaps better served by a critical edition of the play and will have to wait for another occasion. For now, I shall only highlight a few examples to illustrate how such intertextual readings of the *naoge* in *Bayi* may be rewarding. First, the line “the camp is filled with pipes and drums, joyous sounds extends” 滿營笳鼓歡聲長 appears both in the *naoge* in *Bayi* as well as the twelfth *naoge* in the set of sixteen written in 1760.⁴⁷ With this in mind, the resemblance between the line “the sage mind silently meets with that of Heaven” (聖心默與天心迎) in *Bayi* and the line “Where the mind of Heaven is, the Emperor silently agrees” (天心所在帝默契) in the first song among the sixteen *naoge* is likely to be more than a coincidence.⁴⁸ In addition, a series of repetitive phrases found in the *naoge* composition in the court play as compared to yet another set of forty victory songs (*kaige* 凱歌) also produced in 1760 indicate how the drama engages with a wider corpus of lyrics written for military music.⁴⁹

Reflections: Genres, Poetic Parts, and Court Literature

Let us take stock of what we have seen in *Bayi*. In this short court play of no more than eight pages and 56 lines, we encounter a medley of various literary forms and genres, including the “Yangliu zhi” lyrics (classified either as a *shi*, or *ci*, poem in

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the *jiolao* ritual including a full-scale victory celebration in 1760, See Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp.77-80.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Bayi*, ll.42; *QGNF*, p.553, and *Qingshigao*, 100.2959 (#12 和門開第十二).

⁴⁸ Cf. *Bayi*, ll.44; *QGNF*, p.553, and *Qingshigao*, 100.2957 (#1 帝郊天第一)

⁴⁹ Cf., Verse #1 of the 40 verses of victory songs in *Qingshigao*, 100.2978 (乾隆二十五年平定西陲凱歌四十章). It is noteworthy that line 53 in *Bayi* makes a general reference to the singing of *kaige* (凱歌唱).

different sources), hymns (*yuezhang*), military songs including bell songs (*naoge*) and victory songs (*kaige*), as well as dramatic *qu* arias.

To add to the range and complexity in defining or naming these different literary components, one of the dramatic arias in *Bayi* was written to the tune pattern *Tangduoling*, which was listed as an example of *Zhonghe yuezhang* 中和樂章 (hymns of central harmony) in *Taihe zhengyin pu* 太和正音譜 (A formulary for the correct sounds of great harmony).⁵⁰ The verses, presented as dramatic arias in *Bayi*, are stylistically very close to the hymn as quoted in *Taihe zhengyin pu*. Had the same verses appeared outside of the context of the court play, for instance, in a separate anthology or music manual, it might not be immediately clear whether these verses were the lyrics for a piece of ceremonial hymn for ritual music or the words for dramatic arias. Perhaps making any such distinction would be an artificial one. Elsewhere, I have argued that some court plays and *sanqu* songs share a similar style and language. It is not unthinkable that courtly *sanqu* songs might also be rewritten or incorporated, in parts or whole, into court theatrical performances, as seen in the drama titled *Taiping leshi* 太平樂事 (Joyous Matters in the Era of Great Peace) written by Cao Yin 曹寅 (1658–1712).⁵¹ It would appear, from what we saw in *Bayi*, that the same can be said for hymns and other poetic genres as well.

The case of *Bayi* illustrates how a court play, in its composite form, incorporates multiple literary genres and texts. In many ways, one could therefore read such court plays as an arena where various literary components, both from the past and from more recent times, coexist either in their original form or in a rearranged format (*fan*) in order to match the dramatic genre or the occasion.

If we look more closely at the different poetic parts in *Bayi*, apart from the dramatic arias, the rest of the literary forms and ‘genres’ cited or reworked could all be loosely referred to as *yuefu* and these are literary texts related to some form of

⁵⁰ Zhu Quan 朱權, *Taihe zhengyin pu* 太和正音譜, *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng* 中國古典戲曲論著集成 edition (Beijing: Zhongguo xiqu chubanshe, 1980), vol. 3, p.184.

⁵¹ Tian Yuan Tan, “In Praise of This Prosperous and Harmonious Empire: *Sanqu*, Ming Anthologies, and the Imperial Court,” *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 8:1 (April 2021): 155-6.

court-related musical performance at least in their origin.⁵² What can we take away from this assembly or alignment of texts? It appears that those tasked to compose or adapt the words for palace theatrical entertainments (be they court writers or performers, or perhaps a combination of both in some cases) could freely tap into a common reservoir of shared tropes, allusions, and formulae in court culture. Even if one does not necessarily see them as conscious borrowings between specific texts and even if such literary overlaps are mere coincidences, it nonetheless reminds us to read court drama in relation to, and no longer in isolation from, the broader web of court literary sources and traditions.

And if we begin to read court drama within this wider web of literary texts linked to court poetry, music, and dances, it opens up a whole range of questions: Is there an overarching ‘courtly’ style that holds these different literary forms and texts together? In what ways might the composition of a court play be different from, or similar to, the writing of a court poem or lyric⁵³? Or, perhaps even more polemically, might we find that a court play indeed shares more similarities with other court literary genres (e.g., a Tang dynasty court poem) than with other types of drama? If so, this would suggest that occasions take precedence over genre distinctions in the textual production and reception of court literature.

It is in this context that I contend we could reconsider the role and place of court drama in Chinese literary history and traditions. We might also expand this mode of enquiry to other genres such as the hymns and military songs from the Qing dynasty mentioned earlier in the paper. To gain a fuller understanding of the scope and dynamics of Chinese court literatures, it would be fruitful, and indeed essential, to examine the multitude of literary forms produced in the process and to read them in situ, across genres, in relation to the respective courtly occasions.

⁵² As discussed above, some are no longer accompanied by music and are simply recited in *Bayi*.

⁵³ Here, I am thinking of the traditions of earlier court poetry, for instance, as discussed in Howard L. Goodman, “A History of Court Lyrics in China during Wei-Chin Times,” *Asia Major* 19, no. 1/2 (2006): 57–109, and Fusheng Wu, *Written at Imperial Command: Panegyric Poetry in Early Medieval China* (Ithaca: State University of New York Press, 2008), and by other contributors in this current special issue.

第十二齣 八佾舞虞庭

1. (衆扮八能官從壽臺上場門上) (白)
2. 就日瞻雲占太平。風光無處不含情。簫韶不似人間
3. 曲。半是鈞天廣樂聲。我等乃八能之士是也。聖人作
4. 樂。昭德象功。天地同和。鳳儀獸舞。我等調陰陽。觀政
5. 治。均律呂。正五音。正所謂士備八能。樂合六變。這也
6. 不在話下。昨日帝君有旨宣召。著我等帶領八佾之
7. 士。奏簫韶九成之樂。已著衆工預備。那邊香烟飄渺。
8. 帝君降臨也。只得在此伺候。(衆扮儀從衆扮文官衆
9. 扮九官四昭容引舜帝從壽臺上場門上) (仝唱)
10. 【中呂宮·引·唐多令】瑤砌綻仙萼。{韻}時和政自平。{韻}看西維
11. 萬里風清。{韻}作樂昭功逢
12. 盛世。{句}依舊的奏韶謨。{韻}(內奏樂)(九官等引舜帝上仙
13. 樓陞座科)(舜帝白)南薰殿裡五絃新。翡翠樓前出舞
14. 人。儀鳳伶官翻樂府。
15. 聖明萬壽一千春。吾乃帝舜有虞氏。目今恭逢
16. 大清天子治世。寰中疊著獻休祥。宇內咸登仁壽。兼之西域
17. 之賓王滋至。
18. 天家之禔福維新。上下神人。普同慶幸也。(九官白)啟上帝
19. 君。如今
20. 中華聖主。上之政教和以平。下之氣象愷以樂。明德之至
21. 如此。何不將大韶之樂。迭奏一番。以昭恢文奮武之
22. 盛。(舜帝白)可即傳旨。著八能之士。奏簫韶九成之樂。
23. 八佾之士。舞朱干玉戚。以頌昇平。(衆應科)(八能士持
24. 樂器分左右階奏簫韶樂)(衆扮八佾士各持朱干玉
25. 戚從壽臺兩場門上行列皆八歌至德大韶章)
26. 至德大韶。業廣功高。聿來儀鳳。旋格有苗。神人胥洽。
27. 律呂斯調。
28. 大清媲美。千古為昭。(奏樂科)(八佾士仍從兩場門分下)(舜
29. 帝白)
30. 高宗純皇帝平定伊犁。奠安西域。以致普天率土。無不來享
31. 來王。再傳旨。八能之士。大奏饒歌之樂。以昭功德。(衆
32. 應科)(八能士奏饒歌得勝樂科)(八佾士各持鍾揚斧
33. 鎗弓刀劍棒從壽臺兩場門上)(作舞科)(唱)
34. 天聰明。

⁵⁴ A digital edition of the play, prepared by the TEXTCOURT research team following the guidelines of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), is also available via the database on the project website:

https://textcourt.orinst.ox.ac.uk/database/scripts/Q00008_01_B/?tab=info

35. 聖時憲。
36. 聖人首出膺天眷。（邊場科）彰天討。承天命。大武成功歌底定。億萬
37. 斯年德水清。天威
38. 帝德總難名。（邊場科）掃準夷自伊犁。名王尺組繫軍旗。若大宛。
39. 若布魯。厥角咸稽拜
40. 聖主。（邊場科）日淵月竊振天西。來享來王聽旨揮。和門開。軍容壯。
41. 拔達克善喁內向。凱書來當面剖。白鵲旗高亟逆首。
42. 滿營笳鼓歡聲長。捷奏神京值小陽。
43. 睿謀運斷乃成。
44. 聖心默與天心迎。紀泮林宏錫類。嵩嶽遙聞呼萬歲。昭功
45. 作樂重韶韻。干羽兩階慶永清。（八佾士各從兩場門
46. 分下）（舜帝白）妙嘏、細聽鑿歌之音、可見皆係廟謨勝
47. 算。指示機宜。休祥之氣。真可媲美賡歌也。就此起駕。前往
48. 神州去者。（內奏樂）（全下仙樓）（扮推輦力士推輦從壽臺
49. 上場門上）（舜帝陞輦）（九官文官等全唱）
50. 【中呂宮·集曲·千秋舞霓裳】駕雲駟。{韻}環顧山河影。{韻}偕民物
51. 共樂昇平。{韻}那律呂和諧。{句}律呂和諧。{疊}都只為。{讀}
52. 偉烈豐功彪炳。{韻}看八能之士爭承應。{韻}來儀威鳳
53. 集于庭。{韻}這的是同音笙磬。{韻}凱歌唱。{句}絕勝却天
54. 保定爾祝慶升恒。{韻}
55. 【慶餘】花迎劍珮香浮鼎。{韻}到神京鼓吹休明。{韻}都

56. 只為壽域宏開慶太平萬載清。{韻}（全從下場門下）

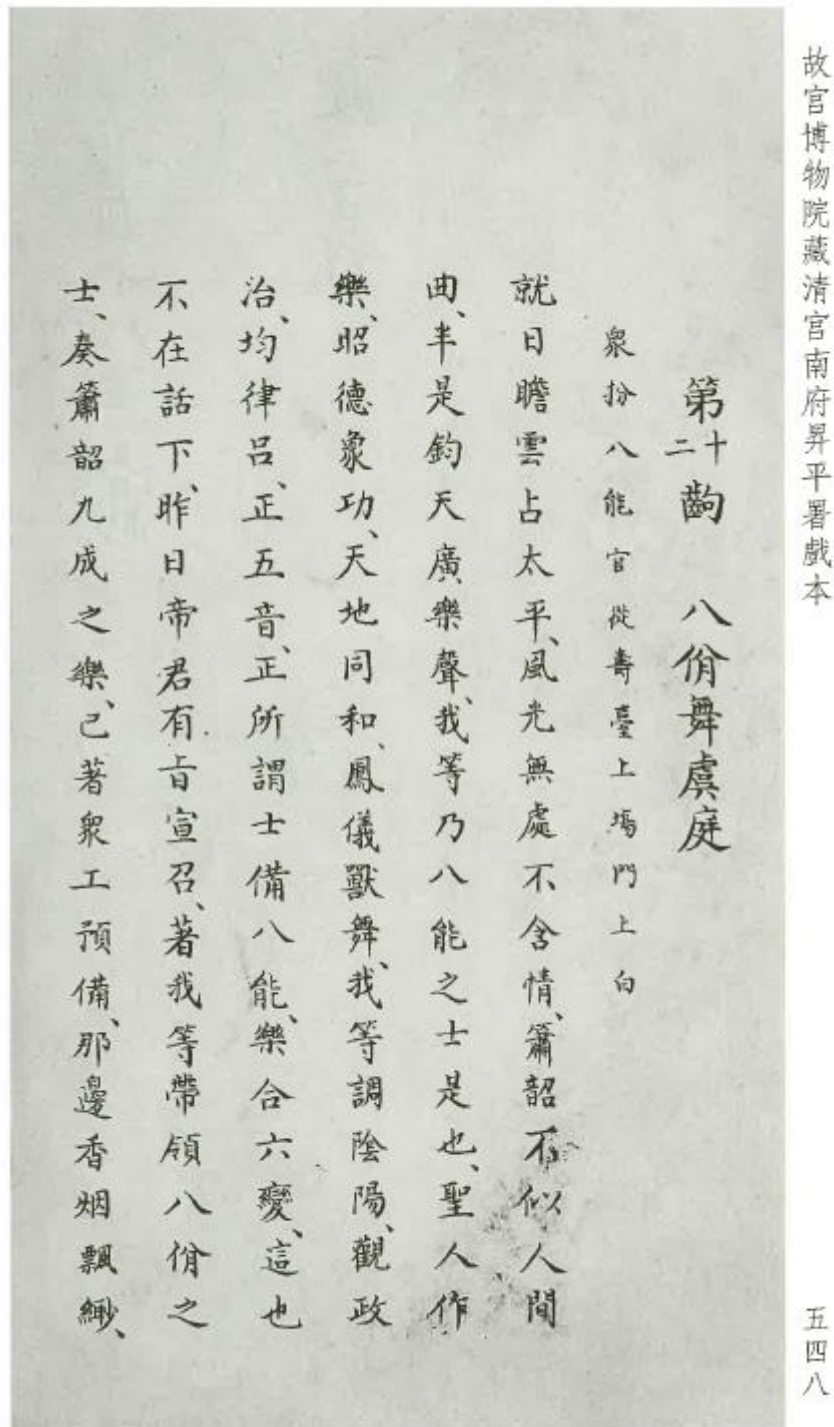


Figure 1 The opening page of *Bayi wu Yuting*, reproduced in *Gugong bowuyuan cang Qinggong nanfu shengpingshu xiben* 故宮博物院藏清宮南府昇平署戲本 (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2015–2017), vol.22, p.548.

重編古今歌謠：中國宮廷戲曲中多樣的文學形式與傳統

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摘要：明清宮廷戲曲近年得到廣泛關注。論者一般把它視為珍貴的文獻材料，藉此了解明清年間中國宮廷的演戲傳統和實踐。然而，正因如此，學界經常從戲曲史的角度研治這些材料，把它當成一個獨立的研究領域，忽略了這些作品與其他文學體裁的關係。為了讓學界更重視這方面的研究，本文重新審視了宮廷戲曲在中國文學史上的作用和地位，並呼籲關注宮廷戲劇與其他中國文學形式之間的潛在聯繫。本文著眼於宮廷戲劇文本的複合性，並提出了將宮廷戲劇與中國文學傳統聯繫起來的新思路。本文以清代宮廷戲《八佾舞虞庭》為例，試圖把宮廷劇視為一種複合的文學文本。藉由這種解讀方式，本文解析了《八佾舞虞庭》中來自不同歷史時期的各種詩歌體裁和成分，並說明了宮廷戲曲如何積極地回應這些文學傳統。

關鍵詞：宮廷戲曲 文學史 八佾舞虞庭 儀式 詩歌