

Royal Holloway, University of London

**Contesting Traditional *Luzi* ('Choreographic Paths'):  
A Performance-Based Study of Kunqu**

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# Abstract

Kunqu has been conceptualised as a comprehensive performance art of ‘fixed’ appearance and unassailable pedigree. This thesis demonstrates that it is literary, political and professional elites’ continual attempts to archive and categorise Kunqu performance that leads to this notion of ‘fixity’.

This argument is complemented by a careful analysis of the *luzi* (‘choreographic paths’) of contemporary performance. By analysis of two major monologues from *Peony Pavilion*, this thesis shows that actors continually carve out and maintain competing artistic identities by choosing to adopt, adapt or replace ‘traditional’ *luzi*. This new understanding of the relationship between performance and the archive of performance allows me to intervene in major debates from the works of Aoki Masaru to Lu Eting—not only regarding Kunqu historiography, but also in respect to the literature on Chinese theatre in general, where this apparent fixity is cited by Kunqu’s advocates as an orthodoxy that lends it cultural pre-eminence over other performance genres.

At the centre of my study, then, are the insights garnered from the practical experience of learning *luzi* over three years at the Jiangsu Province Kunju Theatre in Nanjing. This experience has enabled me to interpret many hundreds of hours of previously unanalysed video footage, much of which represents material that has only become available in recent years. From this analysis I establish the centrality of the *luzi* as the key locus where the actor seeks to validate his or her mediation of the tradition.

Drawing upon Derrida’s conception of archivism as an active force in the creation of meaning and Diana Taylor’s critique of UNESCO strategies that commit intangible repertoire into an archive, I demonstrate how multiple archiving projects have been continually implicated in the formation of Kunqu since its inception. Informed by Baumann’s ideas of mediation and performance, I further argue that audiences’ and practitioners’ increasing awareness of canonical *luzi* through the video archive actively shapes, rather than simply records, Kunqu performance.

# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	1
TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
A NOTE ON STYLE	4
INTRODUCTION	5
Methodology	10
Tradition as authorship	19
Aspects of ‘traditional’ Chinese performance	22
The <i>luzi</i> as template in a modular system	28
Kunqu and social status	34
Authority and competition	38
Research material	39
Literature review	42
Thesis structure	49
1. TEXT AND PERFORMANCE	51
The playlet as performance format	53
Musical notation	61
<i>Shenyin jiangou lu</i> and performance	69
Concluding remarks	78
2. FIXED <i>LUZI</i> IN THE CONTEMPORARY REPERTOIRE	80
The Chuanxisuo as a living archive	81
Transmission in state institutions	88
The current repertoire	93
The traditionalised <i>luzi</i> : <i>Si fan</i>	111
Concluding remarks	118

3. THE FLORID AND THE ELEGANT: CONTENDING TYPOLOGIES AND PATRONAGE	120
Transnational scholarship and global heritage	121
Contesting the elegant and florid sections	130
Star-system and state subsidy	136
The PRC and juzhong	141
Kunqu as dance	145
Concluding remarks	152
4. THE ARCHIVE AS CONSTRUCTED HERITAGE	154
Wei Liangfu and Kunqu mythology	154
‘Six hundred years’	158
Hand-written <i>shenduanpu</i>	160
Concluding remarks	170
5. PERFORMANCE AS A MULTIPLICITY OF <i>LUZI</i>	171
The Startling Dream	173
Picking up the Portrait	212
Concluding remarks	237
CONCLUSION	237
BIBLIOGRAPHY	249



## A note on style

Chinese words are otherwise written in *pinyin* are italicised (for example *xiqu* and *xiju*), however Jingju and Kunqu (where ‘Jing’ and ‘Kun’ refer to places, Beijing and Kunshan respectively) are considered proper nouns and are therefore not italicised. Traditional Chinese graphs are provided for names (in the first instance), ambiguous terms, and quotations of classical Chinese only.

# Introduction

While many studies of Kunqu take the UNESCO designation of 2001 which identified Kunqu as ‘one of the oldest forms of opera still existing in China’ as their starting point, I argue this designation should be recognised as just the latest imprint in a long trajectory of archivism that has for over three centuries incrementally constructed Kunqu as a cultural category. By archivism, I refer to the project, largely lead by non-practitioners, through which Kunqu has been documented and recorded over several centuries. I argue that the products of this archivism cannot be regarded simply as objective records to be mined to uncover a historical Kunqu; rather we must see them as traces of the creation of Kunqu by those who create and organise the archives.

For centuries prior to its 2001 UNESCO designation as ‘intangible heritage’, Kunqu has been defined by an archival impulse the likes of which perhaps no other intangible heritage can compare. The sheer range of the archiving projects that Kunqu has been subject to stretch from the 18th century block-printing of musical scores for a previously oral tradition to ‘correct the mistakes of vulgar actors’, to the box set of over a hundred DVD lectures in which just one ‘grandmasters’ 大師 was chosen for posterity as the authority on each of its ‘traditional’ independent excerpt scenes (*zhezi* 折子, hereafter referred to as ‘playlets’). Successive waves of compilation, notation, categorisation, designation, and definition have over centuries constructed ever more rigid paradigms over the underlying fluidities of performance. By examining successive waves of archivism, I will explore how these apparently contrasting genre delineations have developed. I will also show how the fluidities of performance have been

increasingly documented by social, professional and political elites of several contrasting periods, but that with this trend toward rigidity has come increasing dynamism at the fringes, with interpretation and personal expression relocated to ever finer details of performance.

While the repertoire and traditions on which 20th century Kunqu troupes have drawn derive from three immediate practices— those of the itinerant troupes of the Jiangnan waterways, the urban commercial theatres of Shanghai and Beijing and the lyric singing traditions of the national intellectual elite—the projected heritage of Kunqu however is created from its archival instinct, expanding at an unprecedented rate as digital recording technologies file modern practice within a historical category which attributes immutable, unitary performance and simultaneous song and dance (*zaige zaiwu* 載歌載舞).

As I will show in this thesis, prior to the 20th century there is in fact much Kunqu repertoire in which instead of dancing, the actor conventionally sat down at a table and sang. Aestheticized choreography was added to Kunqu, as it was to its rival category, Jingju, as a result of the National Drama movement 國劇運動 in the Republican era. However, the melisma of the Kunqu, which allows word-characters to be matched to individual movements, each of which must be danced, is precisely what the uninitiated are told is what makes ‘traditional’ Kunqu ‘so beautiful’ (e.g. Pai 2008, pp. 22, 71, 427).<sup>1</sup> In 1986, the Ministry of Culture Kunqu Revival Advisory Committee 文化部振興崑劇指導委員會 enshrined in policy the requirement for actors to ‘excavate’ 挖掘 repertoire for which choreography had fallen out of transmission. Much of repertoire is perceived as

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<sup>1</sup> The *pihuang* 皮黃 style to which most Jingju repertoire is sung is of faster tempo and thus difficult to add movements to (Qi 2014, 60). Prior to the ascendancy of Kunqu as a category ‘Jing’ referred primarily to the troupes (*ban* 班) of the capital rather than their musical style, of which there many including *kunqiang*. There are still a great number of Kunqu scenes in the Jingju repertoire.

‘traditional’ when in fact they it was choreographed in the later years of the 1980s. Moreover, even these newly choreographed pieces are presented as fixed and unchanging. However, as I will show, rather than there being just one standard, there are also pieces in which several methods of performance or choreographies are performed in the current day. Since the late 1980s, these have been vying to be recognised in the archive as the historical (or historicised) benchmark.

At the centre of this thesis, then, is the *luzi* 路子, literally meaning the ‘path’, ‘way’ or ‘route’ of tackling a performance—the idea that each Kunqu scene has its own unitary choreography of performance, identical across all performers and lineages. The following quotes are taken from the memoirs of Zhou Chuanying 周傳英, the founder of the *Guofeng* 國風 troupe that became the PRC’s first Kunqu theatre. These reflect the centrality of the *luzi* in contemporary Kunqu. Indeed, by their very publication they have also promoted that centrality.

Any given scene, as long as it originated from an old master, regardless of who is performing it or where they learned it, has the same structure and manner. People call this ‘the Kunju standard’ or ‘the Suzhou benchmark’ (Zhou & Luo 1988, p.26)

As soon as you sing there is movement, and the movements have to be beautiful; this becomes dance. So you can say that in Kunju there is only un-sung dancing and no un-danced singing. (Zhou & Luo 1988, p.132).

The memoirs were assembled by the music and theatre scholar Luo Di 洛地 and published soon after Zhou’s death in 1988.<sup>2</sup> Both Zhou and Luo were members of the

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<sup>2</sup> In the preface to Luo’s collected works (2007, vol. 2 p.4), Luo alludes to the fact that much of the content in Zhou’s biography is in his own summation rather than that of Zhou. He refers specifically to first quote as one such example. These circumstances have also been related to me by Xie Yufeng 解玉峰, a student and close friend of Luo’s, as well as a specialist in Kunqu history and theory.

Kunqu Revival Advisory Committee set up by the Ministry of Culture in 1986, a committee made up of several of the surviving links to Kunqu's last dedicated troupes, with members also including Yu Zhenfei 俞振飛, a famous actor on the Kunqu and Jingju stage who, and Shen Chuanzhi 沈傳芷, the descendent of a family of Kun actors who had transmitted the stage art into the 20th century. Luo, who sadly passed away in 2015, was a visionary in scholarly terms and his occasional involvement in policy. His awareness of the arbitrariness of categories and terminologies presented by both the archive of texts and the state apparatus was coupled with an understanding of how to effectively mould them.

Over the course of this thesis I contest the notion of the traditional *luzi*, ask what conditions have created it and, finally, demonstrate how it corresponds to broader trajectories in Kunqu and other cultural forms. I will show that numerous pieces of regularly performed repertoire that are billed as traditional (*chuantong* 傳統), leading audiences to assume that they have been transmitted from the late imperial period, are in fact newly choreographed, and that a number of canonical Kunqu works prior to the 1980s contained very little dancing at all. I will also show that far from there being a single Kunqu standard inherited from the imperial past, divergent lineages compete with the aid of new archives for their *luzi* to become the standards of the future. I assess both how the current *luzi* are perceived to relate to 'the tradition' and comment on some of the strategies that performers employ in order to situate themselves as mediators of the tradition.

This thesis is built on extensive periods of training and practice, spectatorship and professional involvement with Kunqu in China. It was over the course of these activities that it became clear to me that there was a mismatch in the way performance is written about and how it is talked about, which again revealed large discrepancies between actor, spectator and academic discourses. Over two periods of extended

fieldwork between 2012-2013 and 2015-2016, I spent almost three years in Nanjing and Shanghai learning from and working with both Kunqu professionals and singing masters. I studied singing under the star actor Qian Zhenrong 錢振榮 at the Jiangsu Province Kunju Theatre 江蘇省崑劇院. With Qian, I also trained to perform the movements of the young male lead role-type (*xiaosheng* 小生), from basic skills (*jiben gong* 基本功) training to the choreography for five segments of repertoire, including one scene that I analyse in this thesis, *Shi hua* 畫 (Picking up the Portrait) from *Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭. I performed this scene at the British Museum Chinese New Year show in February 2015.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to learning myself, I spent three months as a visiting scholar at the Shanghai Theatre Academy observing the training of a future generation of professional actors. I also regularly observed rehearsals of traditional repertoire at the Nanjing troupe in 2014 and 2015. These experiences inform my analysis of pedagogy in Chapter Two.

Furthermore, my two years working as a translator with the Jiangsu troupe and on one short-term assignment with the Fujian Province Liyuan Experimental Theatre in 福建省梨園戲實驗劇團 in Quanzhou in May 2015 have given me numerous insights into the tensions and considerations a Chinese actor contends with, in often multiple identities of artist, management, mentor and pupil.

Prior to these experiences, I attended the 'Kunqu Appreciation Class' 經典崑曲欣賞課 organised at Beijing University by Taiwanese author and Kunqu advocate Pai Hsien-yung (Kenneth Pai) 白先勇, the flagship course of a pan-Chinese program to promote

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<sup>3</sup> I also played a role in trying to promote the singing among (primarily Chinese) students in London, organising and participating in numerous classes, workshops and singing and performing myself at aficionado gatherings in China and various events in the UK over the past two years.

Kunqu as Chinese classical heritage at universities. This was followed by two years at Nanjing University in tutorials with Professor Xie Yufeng 解玉峰, a theatre historian and singing expert. The impact of the Chinese academy on modern Kunqu is explored in Chapter Three. Furthermore, participation in the Kunqu singing societies in Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing gave me access not just to an important audience base but also provided me with a window on how attitudes are formed between the amateur singing and professional acting communities—and how my own participation as a visible Westerner intervened in constructed equivalencies (also discussed in Chapter Three) that are designed to project a classical cultural form that is specifically Chinese on the global stage.

My position as an outsider, relatively shielded from the Chinese troupe and academic system, allows me to address some of the most sensitive issues of Kunqu discourse. In particular, I explore the hierarchies and competing lineages between troupes, as well as the tensions between the professional community and the two related interest groups, namely the avocational singing experts and theatre academics.

## **Methodology**

Derrida's challenge to the classical concept of the archive provides a number of insights and observations which allow me one methodological tool with which to analyse my subject. I also draw upon art historian Craig Clunas' notion of the 'poetics of the list' in Chinese connoisseurship, in which he argues that specificity is frequently given preference to systemisation in the Chinese intellectual tradition. I also employ theatre scholar Diana Taylor's distinction between the archive of enduring materials and the apparently ephemeral 'repertoire' of performance as a dichotomy of political significance. These approaches allow me to examine a relationship between

performance and archive, while identifying broader issues of import with insights on notions of genre and tradition. My definition of the archive includes the audio-visual as well as the textual record; its scope extends also to performance and the very delineation of Kunqu as a cultural category.

In outlining my theoretical position, I will provide a background to Derrida and post-structuralism in general, before looking specifically at Derrida's *Archive Fever* and how I relate the work of Taylor and Clunas to it. According to Derrida, the process of archival is not just the preservation and storage of knowledge from the past but the process, by selection and organisation, of determining and arranging the future; it 'produces as much as it records the event', determining the structure of meaning in its relationship to possible future 'even in its very coming into existence' (1998, p.17). Derrida contests the structuralist principle that linguistic or cultural systems are simply descriptive of independent realities underlying them. There is nothing, he claims, that is underlying or 'outside of text' (1976, p.158).<sup>4</sup> Post-structuralism resists synchronism, analysing structures diachronically to reveal epistemological shifts in which the supposedly stable centres of meaning are moved or 'deferred' by changing contexts and dynamics. Thus, for the post-structuralist, interpretation is only ever provisional. Applied to the notion of the archive, Derrida deconstructs historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's 'discovery' of an apparently unacknowledged debt that psychoanalysis

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<sup>4</sup> Derrida's critique of structuralism was first targeted at anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss' influential work *The Savage Mind*. Lévi-Strauss' methodology had evolved from Ferdinand de Saussure's synchronic approach to the structure of language, just as different languages exhibit varying structures that point to underlying realities, he noted, the myths of different cultures—although structured differently reveal a underlying universal truths that applied equally to both 'savage' and modern society. By reading a Rousseauian project at the heart of Lévi-Strauss' work, Derrida draws attention to the desire for an unquestionable centre, or in structural terms, an organising principle. Derrida argues that Lévi-Strauss first accepts the premise of ethnocentrism in order to denounce it on encountering the apparent scandal of 'something which no longer tolerates the nature/culture opposition he has accepted' (Derrida 1970, p.357).



owes to Freud's Jewish heritage.<sup>5</sup> The instinct to create and consult archives, Derrida notes, is destructive like Freud's own concept of the 'death drive'. The archive occupies the space held by memory, inciting forgetfulness and eradicating all that it cannot or does not record, including the traces of its own agency (Derrida 1995, p.11). The *mal d'archive* stems from a yearning, argues Derrida, 'compulsive, repetitive and nostalgic' to return to the place of origin, 'to the most archaic place of absolute commencement' (ibid, p.91).

Derrida's own discussion of the archive, then, starts with a reminder of the etymology of the word itself, from the Greek *arkhe*, or the 'beginning', and the *arkheion*, or the house, dominion and jurisdiction, 'the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded' (Derrida 1995, p.1). The archive, argues Derrida, is both the commencement and the commandment, with 'two orders of order'—the sequential and the jussive:

The *archons* are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives. Entrusted to such *archons*, these documents in effect speak the law: they recall the law and call on or impose the law. (ibid.)

The power of the *archons*, Derrida surmises, is not just of unification, identification and classification, but what he calls 'consignification', meaning both the act of saving

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<sup>5</sup> Yerushalmi seeks to demonstrate that the practice of psychoanalysis stems from Freud's repressed Jewish background. His discovery is the gift of a rebound copy of the Hebrew bible Freud's father had given him as a child, now given back on his thirty-fifth birthday. Inscribed in the bible the words (in Hebrew) 'has never been properly transcribed (...) let alone adequately glossed'. For an excellent analysis of both Yerushalmi and Derrida's texts, see Earlie (2015).

something in a substrate, physical or digital, but also more literally as the ‘gathering together of signs’ in a synchronic system—of creating an ordered structure, an ‘ideal configuration’ (ibid, p.3). The technical structure of the archive, argues Derrida, ‘determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future.’ The boundaries, categories and reproduction technologies of the archiving archive acts like the news media, ‘producing as much as recording the event’ (ibid, p.17).

In considering the structure of archive in the Chinese context, art historian Craig Clunas provides an invaluable perspective identifying what he describes as the ‘poetics of the list’ in Chinese connoisseurship that privileges the specific rather than the systematic. Chinese connoisseurship, Clunas writes, is based on ‘an episteme in which it is the multiplication of categories, and not their reduction to what we now call order (through the elimination of what is perceived as redundancy and overlap) that is the powerful creator of pattern and meaning in the world’ (2007, p.115). Just as this applies to connoisseurship of art objects, any researcher of Chinese theatre will have been struck by the sets of numbers and categories that aim to bring order to the world—numbers such as ‘four great musical styles’ 四大聲腔 or <sup>6</sup> ‘twenty role-types’ 二十家門. Repertoire gets arranged in categories that include and exclude items in canons that roll off the tongue: ‘the five monologues’ 五獨, ‘the three assassinations’ 三刺三殺 and ‘the three Drunks’ 三醉. Even famous actresses can claim their own mnemonic, such as Zhang Jiqing’s ‘Three Dreams’ 張三夢. Rules and directions come in numbers too. The Ming dynasty guide *Rules of Singing* by Wei Liangfu 魏良輔 lists ‘Five Do Nots’ 五不可 of

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<sup>6</sup> Change over centuries is often belied by the stability of a magic number. The ‘Four Great Musical Styles’ of the Ming were Kunshan, Yiyang (Jiangxi), Haiyan (Southern Zhejiang) and Yuyao (Ningbo), however the current proverbial ‘four styles’ include Kunshan, Yiyang, *bangzi* and the Jingju *pihuang* style.

lyric singing, while the Qing acting theory text *Pear Garden Basics* by Huang Fanchuo 黃憫綽 lists ‘Eight Principles for Movement’ 身段八要.

However, this ‘aesthetic of multiplicity’ in which ‘more is more’ and in which categories are not mutually exclusive, writes Clunas, runs contrary to familiar Aristotelian thought in which lists are ‘raw data’ to which order can be applied and patterns deduced (2007, p.115-7). The number of official *juzhong* 劇種 or ‘theatrical genres’ there are changes on each count and currently stands at 394 (e.g. Liu 2006, p.6) is a category in which the ostensibly musically-defined Kunqu might be compared to historical categories such as the textual category *chuanqi* 傳奇 (lit. ‘transmitting the marvel, often translated as ‘marvel play’), or international ones in ‘Greek tragedy’ or ‘Shakespeare’. Clunas’ observation allow me to frame the change that takes place in the 20th century as May Fourth ideals and global contexts promote the need for ‘ideal configurations’ corresponding to Aristotelian logic. This becomes increasingly the case as Kunqu-as-the-archive that was increasingly formulated in contrast to another genre, Jingju, with particular emphasis on the unique attributes of Kunqu in comparison, that for example its repertoire be ‘danced’ or ‘elegant’.<sup>7</sup>

Amid the contemporary array of traditional Chinese genres, Kunqu is perhaps most obviously identified not as the *chuanqi* genre of dramatic works but as a style of setting drama to music, flute-led and with high melisma, allowing monosyllabic character-words to be extended over several notes. However Jingju troupes also sing some repertoire according to the Kunqu style, similarly Kunqu troupes also sing some repertoire to *chuiqiang* 吹腔, another musical style associated with Jingju. Textually, Kunqu scenes are in fact derived from a variety of canons, mainly *chuanqi* but also earlier *nanxi* 南戲 ‘southern plays’ and *zaju* 雜劇 ‘variety plays’, together with later-

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<sup>7</sup> One reason for this may be that chuichang and Kunqiang melodies both share the bamboo dizi flute as their lead instrument.

period 'fashionable plays' *shiju* 時劇 adapted from various sources during the Qing dynasty

For my purposes the materials that make up the 'Kunqu archive' range broadly from printed miscellanies and scores, 'random jottings' of the literati, the popular modern genre of actor biographies, scholarly histories of theatre, the national and international databases of performance traditions to audio-visual recording, freely available from the internet. Many of these sources have been assembled in various 20th century compendia, Kunqu encyclopedias, book sets and DVD box sets often associated with modern Chinese *arcons*—academic institutions, publishing houses and government departments on both sides of the Taiwan straits and in Hong Kong.

While it has been suggested by Sarah Whatley that the openness of the internet 'challenges the classical view of the archive as the monolithic representation of a person or institution' (2003, p.164), the opposite case could equally be made that it expands it. Derrida muses on the similarities of then emerging technologies, in particular email and the digital copy:

Was it not at this very instant that, having written something or other on the screen, the letter remaining there as if suspended and floating yet at the surface of a liquid element, I pushed a certain key to 'save' a text undamaged, in a hard and lasting way, to protect marks from being erased [...] to make the sentence available in this way for printing and for reprinting, for reproduction? Does it change anything that Freud did not know about the computer? (Derrida 1995, p.26)

Derrida's contention is that the digital substrate leaves no less of an impression than the physical one. Even the copy of an impression, suggests Derrida, 'is already a sort of archive' (ibid. 28). The 'open' algorithms of the internet search are surely then the automated archivists, copying and organising impressions of the archive on a scale

unprecedented. Just as some physical archives are more open than others, elements of particular digital archives are just as easily promoted, restricted or deleted. Even of truly open content, the algorithms of the internet search create categories and orders. In terms of Kunqu, entering an actor's name as a search term produces an archive of video links to their work, many of which will have been posted by themselves or their troupe. The search of the name of a particular scene brings up an archive of renditions by different actors that can be accessed and compared. While terms are seemingly created by the user (whose *mal d'archive* instigates the search), many of the videos that appear in those spontaneous categories are there as a result of official policy, instituted since UNESCO's 2001 designation that all performance be recorded.<sup>8</sup>

When applying Derrida's theory to both recorded and live performance it is necessary to consider the technical and epistemological differences between the word and the act. Performance scholar Diana Taylor states what she sees as the political implications of the dominance of the archive of both written and recorded materials over the 'repertoire' of 'dance, music, ritual, and social practices that [Taylor] came to understand broadly as 'performance' (2008, p.92).

In the context of Kunqu, I swap Taylor's 'repertoire' for two pre-existing Chinese terms, *chengshi* 程式 and the *luzi* 路子. This first, *chengshi*, is a term first applied to stage performance by Zhao Taimou 趙太侖 in the 1927 essay collection *Guoju* 國劇 (The National Drama) (Li 2010, p.25).<sup>9</sup> *Chengshi* (usually translated as 'conventions') prescribe ways of standing, walking, pointing, looking, as well as a whole battery of physical and facial gestures, combinations and encoded signals. *Chengshi* transmit and

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<sup>8</sup> Ong notes that the UNESCO plan 2005-09 includes 40 playlets to be recorded each year total 200 (Ong 2013, p.214). Currently in the Nanjing troupe's Lanyuan theatre every single performance is recorded.

<sup>9</sup> As Chen Fang records, the term is also found in *Jiugong Dacheng*, the Qianlong musical compendium (discussed in Chapter One)

store knowledge about specific role-types; these often share commonalities across several 'genres' of Chinese theatre. *Chengshi* are not delineated by specific texts but rather by the performance of specific role-types, any of which might require years of training and experience to fully master. The second concept, *luzi*, is an oral expression used by actors in a relatively informal manner. It most closely rendered in English as 'choreography', referring to the kinesic routines used to perform a specific piece of Kunqu repertoire. *Luzi* may be ascribed to a particular person, geographical area or, as is mostly the case, simply to 'tradition'. I shall expand on both of these concepts and other aspects of Chinese performance later in this introduction.

Taylor's reflections provide an important critique of the UNESCO programs aiming to preserve living intangible cultural heritage, of which Kunqu has been a beneficiary since its 2001 designation as a 'Masterpiece of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. Taylor argues that UNESCO policy implies that performance is 'fragile, short-lived and that it somehow belongs in the past' (2008, p.99). It actively promotes the production of archives, records and manuals—the antithesis to what Taylor sees as the living repertoire. The 'rift', she argues, was in fact not simply between written text and the spoken word, but between the archives of the enduring and the repertoire of the ephemeral (2003, p.19). The separation in time and space between the writer of a document and its reader, she argues, displaces authority outside the immediate sphere. The repertoire, on the other hand, requires the actual presence of all participants in the attribution of authority.

Taylor's critique should however be seen in the context of her research into post-conquest Latin America. She argues that the written word (the archive) allowed Spain and Portugal to control their colonies from a remote metropole. Writing, she argues, was invested with an authority that trumped the once binding significance of performance.

Many kinds of performance, deemed idolatrous by religious and civil authorities, were prohibited altogether. Claims manifested through performance, whether the tying of robes to signify marriage or performed land claims, ceased to carry legal weight. (2003, pp. 18-19)

If the physical repertoire of human interaction beyond the word did not somehow transmit knowledge, she argues, then 'only the literate and powerful could claim social memory and identity' (ibid. p.xvii). Taylor is a critic of policies that seek to commit the repertoire to the archive. She proposes that, rather than archiving the supposedly ephemeral, policy should support the conditions by which a 'way of life' is maintained in order for its performance to be sustained (2008, p.101).

In the particular the case of Kunqu, however, I will show that the relationship between 'archive' and 'repertoire' is less an act of suppression and more a fundamental aspect of the genre that is celebrated even by its low literacy actors, who can use it as a form of social leverage and posturing over other 'genres' such as Jingju.

In this thesis I observe that various aspects of Kunqu performance have become increasingly notated and archived over the centuries, leading to a certain fixity of performance. Thus, while it is commonly argued that the emergence of choreographic notation reflects a 'fixity' of performance, I argue that it is the notation or record itself that causes this fixity. Idema notes of Jingju, which in the early 20th century was given the status of 'classical art', thus became a fit object for scholarly study: 'The ensuing codification of theatrical habits turned these fluid conventions of the profession into rigid norms imposed on the profession.' (Idema 1993, p.16).

Yet fixity itself corresponds to separate yet similar trends in other parts of the world, where creativity is also accompanied by a rise in the 'archival' process. Similarly, the decline of the improvised cadenza in European classical music came about just as musical notation began to circulate widely, causing the roles of composer and performer

to become ever more split (Ferand 1961, p.14). Lydia Goehr observes that from around 1800, the European composer effected a transformation in the public consciousness from artisan to artist (1992, p.253). The emergence of published scores and public concerts, she argues, elevated the musical 'work' into a piece of intellectual property, with performance considered a mere reproduction. The performer had become a middleman tasked with creating an accurate reproduction of the artist's intentions, with the composer seen as the locus of meaning and 'authenticity'; performers had merely to be 'faithful' to his intentions. I consider the various aspects of Kunqu performance that have become increasingly notated and archived over the centuries and ask when and whether a similar shift occurs in the perceived ownership of the *luzi* as a 'work', whether in the future it *will have* belonged to a choreographer (performer), the 'tradition' or both.

### **Tradition as authorship**

In order to address the dichotomy posed between creativity and tradition, I draw on a number of works, most immediately Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's insights into the invented tradition. As a methodology for analysing tradition as a tool of mediation in performance, I use Richard Bauman's conception of performance as discursive practice to show how the actors can invest authority in their own *luzi* by 'traditionalising' it to establish themselves as the singular authority of a certain piece of theatre, as either the creator or legitimate authenticator of its performance 'tradition'.

Hobsbawm famously argued that some traditions that appear or claim to be old 'are quite often recent in origin or invented,' and have scant relationship to an actual body of transmitted knowledge or practice (1983, p.1). According to Hobsbawm's definition, the essential attribute of a tradition is its fixed nature: 'the object and characteristics of



tradition, even invented ones, is invariance' (ibid, pp. 2-3). Many scholars have attempted to modify Hobsbawm's rigid definition, including, in the field of Asian performance studies, Guru Rao Bapat. He rejects the term 'invented' in favour of 're-scribing' which he argues reflects more accurately the processes of 'recoding', 'redefining' and 're-interpretation' which he believes characterise this process in the context of South Indian dance drama (Guru 2012, p.16). This description may seem apt with regard to the process that occurs in Kunqu 'transmission', yet there is nonetheless the problem of variance within a generation and the question of what denotes authenticity, particularly when there is an archive to consult. In Hobsbawm's own terms, any acknowledgement of variance would seem to negate 'tradition'.

Guru and other modifiers of Hobsbawm's formulation blur the distinction I explain between the moment of creation of a tradition (similar to the moment the archive is created – erasing its past and determining its future) and its subsequent stability. For Hobsbawm, a tradition is not continually morphing but furtively invented and then visibly or apparently sustained, or, in current terminology, 'protected'. The question remains one of denying variance. In situations where there is variance, it means denying the validity of one variant. To satisfy Hobsbawm's formulation, the tradition either never changes or its change is never acknowledged. If there is an acknowledgement of change, Hobsbawm's logic suggests, the tradition no longer appears 'real'.

Surveying performance of the current Kunqu repertoire, I uncover an impulse to 'fix' the traditional *luzi* that comes not from literary elites directly, nor the training system but rather from the actor him or herself. This often involves change, however mostly acknowledged change, as the actor seeks to establish an artistic identity (often an identity as 'traditional') in a competitive environment. Borrowing from Richard Bauman's description of performance as discursive practice, I show how the actor authenticates his or her *luzi* by tracing its origin and sourcing lines of transmission. This

is done in order to establish the actor as the singular authority of the piece and mediator of its tradition. In this role, the actor carefully manages two dialogues, one with the source (source dialogue) and the other with the target audience (target dialogue). Bauman describes 'traditionalisation' as a process 'of endowing the story with situated meaning' (2004, p.26). Giving the example of Icelandic sagas, he draws the links of continuity by which the reciter of the poem may tie his story to past discourses as part of his own recounting of it, thus making the traditional 'personal' (ibid, p.26). For Kunqu, actor-centred archiving projects such as *Dashi shuoxi* 大師說戲 (Master performers tell plays, 2014), university-hosted lecture series and the large number of actor 'narrative accounts' (*koushu*) of their performance practice, have all given actors an opportunity to endow their *luzi* with the same appeal to legitimacy. In analysing 20th century performance recordings, lectures and commentary, I will draw attention to how actors frame in this manner their own *luzi* in reference to previous masters, in order to 'traditionalise' their own 'creations'.

The negotiation of source dialogues is often also an act of defensiveness. In his narrated memoirs, for example, Mei Lanfang relates one instance in which a member of the audience wrote in a newspaper that his pronunciation of the word 'mo' 沒 in the Kunqu scene *Jing meng* was incorrect. Mei wrote to Yu Zhenfei 俞振飞 (though a famous Jing-Kun actor he was also a southerner from a family of pure-singing experts) to consult on the correct pronunciation and published the correspondence in the same newspaper, in order to explain his position (Mei 2013, p.157). We see here an interesting example of what Bauman calls the audience's expectation of 'observation confirmation'. Bauman equates the role of the performer to that of mediator between two sequences of dialogue (2004, p. 130); one between the performance and a source of origin, and another between the performer and the target audience. As audiences have increasing access to both the origin dialogue and the target dialogue, there is a process

of observational confirmation of the expectations they bring to the theatre (ibid., p. 131). The circulation of many scores and miscellanies in the 19th century explicitly accusing actors of being incapable of singing correctly was surely a threat to their mediational authority. This was clearly a danger Mei Lanfang took very seriously, as seen by his response. Heng Shifeng 恆詩峰 also notes that actors of all troupes in the capital at the beginning of the 20th century (i.e. Jingju troupes) who could not sing Kunqu were looked down upon (1927, p.241).<sup>10</sup>

## Aspects of 'traditional' Chinese performance

Keeping within the tradition of numerology, the art of the Chinese actor in performance is proverbially categorised into 'the four skills and five channels' (*sigong wufa* 四功五法). The four skills are singing (*chang*), recitation (*nian*), characterisation (*zuo*) and martial dexterity (*da*). The 'five' channels are the mouth, hands, eyes, steps and *fa* 法 (the same *fa* as *wufa*). There is no consensus on what this fifth *fa* actually refers to. Some have removed *fa* altogether, assuming (with undoubtedly some justification) that the five is mainly there as it possible sounds better than if both categories were four, *si gong si fa*. However, there are also several explanations as to what the *fa* refers to, an exploration of which allows me to discuss several important aspects of Kunqu performance that bear directly on debates contained in this thesis.

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<sup>10</sup> Perhaps it was safer for an actor's brand to demonstrate this infrequently in a controlled environment (i.e. where they knew who was in the audience) and to focus instead on *pihuang* and other non-literary styles in which the intellectual classes would not respond with criticism.

As Wu Xinlei relates, one used by veteran actors of the Qinqiang 秦腔 style,<sup>11</sup> is that it is mistaken for another *fa* 發, interpreted by the actors to mean ‘projecting’ the sound of the character-word (Wu 1992, p.74).<sup>12</sup> The Republican era Jingju *laosheng* Ma Lianliang 馬連良, believes that *fa* is rather a mis-writing or *fan’r* 范兒 (ibid, p.74) (pronounced ‘far’). Scholar Wu Baiju interprets *fan’r* to mean ‘tricks to please the audience’ however in my own experience of learning to perform this was not the case. The phrase *qi ge fan’r* 起個范兒 was commonly used to refer to the process of emphasising or emboldening a movement by setting it up visually with a preceding movement, i.e. if wishing to emphasise a movement to the right, first move to the left. In this manner small movements on stage become amplified in the way are perceived by the audience—a trick employed with most effect, perhaps, in eye movements.

The famous Jingju actor Cheng Yanjiu 程硯秋 replaces *fa* with ‘body’ (*shen* 身) (Li 2010, p.58). The eminent Jing-Kun actor Yu Zhenfei however believed that no such explanations were sufficient and that *fa* refers to the synchronisation of the other four channels together (Wu 1992, p.74). The observation here is that being able to combine these various channels together can create itself a sum greater than the parts combined, or, conversely, if coordinated poorly detracts from any qualities in each of the channels if witnessed in isolation.

Wu himself proposes that the phrase may have roots in the Buddhist list of ‘six external bases’ (*liuchen* 六塵, Skr. *guṇa*) of sight, sound, scent, taste, touch and *fa*

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<sup>11</sup> Once the rage in Qing dynasty Beijing, Qinqiang has been largely confined in the 20th century to its place of origin (in dialect terms) of northwest Shanxi province.

<sup>12</sup> While this meaning could be encompassed within the ‘mouth’ channel, the transposition to *fa* meaning to ‘send out’ or ‘project’ invites connotation with other aspects of performance that I have encountered in informal discussions with actors and audiences alike, often also referred to as the ability to *fang* 放, or ‘release’. If an actor is considered unable to do this it means he may be technically excellent in these channels, but struggles to perform in a way that touches the audience.

(*dharma*, or 'idea'). Wu proposes that *fa* could thus correspond to what he calls 'heart-skill' (*xingong* 心功) or 'creative-conception' (*yijiang* 意匠) (ibid. p.75). This internal aspect of performance is often discussed by practitioners and scholars for whom it raises complex questions regarding the relationship between China's traditional theatrical practice and imported dichotomies between formalism and naturalism.

Returning to Bauman's theoretical framework of performance as discursive practice (2004, pp. 128-131) we recall that the actor occupies a complex role as mediator between the origin text/behaviour and the target audience. In the performance of Kunqu, actors confront not just highly abstract texts but also highly abstract *luzi*, taught on a move-by-move basis by their teachers. Interpretation is required at least two levels, not just that of the text but also that of the choreography. For example, it may not immediately obvious to the actor himself *why* the character casts out his water-sleeve or to what object he is pointing at. In an interview with me, Yue Meiti made such a point. The process of being convincing in performance, she told me, requires the actor to reconcile (in their own mind) their own understanding of the character with the text and the *luzi*, 'You must ask yourself, why am I doing this movement'.

Li Yuru's account of her acclaimed performances of *The Imperial Concubine Becomes Intoxicated*, learned from Mei Lanfang, illustrates the same point. Having first learned the stylised movements, Li claims it was equally as important to perceive the meaning underlying them: 'when [actors] have such "meanings" in mind, their eye expression or movements will gain the purpose and will no longer be empty' (qtd. in Li 2010, p.144). Li's daughter, the theatre scholar Li Ruru, has written about her mother's performance style in the following way:

The 'internal study' approach differs from the character-building method in Western acting because she had learned the stylised movements first. In order to make herself more comfortable on the stage, to understand what she was doing and why, and ultimately to put her personal mark on a shared property (a traditional play), she moved from the external to the internal and discovered the meaning to support the stylised conventions she acted.' (ibid, p.144)

Understood in this way, negotiating a personal understanding of a *luzi*, inherited from external study, is then for contemporary Kunqu actors one of the 'source dialogues' that Bauman refers to. The actor must engage with it before hoping to negotiate a target dialogue between his own understanding and the audience. This is also the subject of theoretical writings during the Imperial period prior to Chinese consideration of Western models. The 17<sup>th</sup> century dramatist Li Yu 李漁 (1610-80) wrote that 'the understanding of dramatic text changes a dead voice into living theatre and transforms a singer into an intellectual,' (qtd. in Shen 1998, p.73). The job of the literatus was to explain the text to the actors in order to bring the performance to life. The encounter with Western naturalism, however, brought into question the notion of what 'lifelike' actually is. As Idema notes 'in their own eyes, the Chinese way of acting was a perfectly natural imitation of action' (Idema 1993, p.15).

Chinese intellectuals who had returned from studies in Japan, Europe or the United States had been exposed to the naturalist theatre. During the early years of the Republican era, Chinese intellectuals led by radicals such as Hu Shih 胡適 (1891-1962) ushered in a decisive break from Chinese tradition—known as the May Fourth Movement.<sup>13</sup> Both May Fourth radicals and traditionalists who sought to enter a

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<sup>13</sup> Recent studies have contested the significance of the May Fourth dichotomy, recasting China's modernisation as a continuous process from the late imperial period rather than a decisive iconoclastic break. David Der-wei Wang, for example, argues that the 'crucial burst of modernity' can be seen in late Qing fiction, which he argues was not only a reworking Chinese traditions, understanding Western ones and self-consciously presenting a notion of newness (1997, pp. 6-9). Dorothy Ko argues that the significance of May Fourth is primarily not as the transition in itself but as an 'ideological and

national discussion of what defined China within modernity, and what presented China on the world stage. May Fourth reformists (and later communists) were particularly concerned with drama as a means to preach modernist ideas to the illiterate masses.

The defense of indigenous theatre by ‘traditionalists’ such as Qi Rushan 齊如山 and Zhang Houzai became known as the National Theatre Movement 國劇運動. Between 1913 and 1935, Qi published his ideals for the national drama.<sup>14</sup> Unlike mainstream May Fourth intellectuals, Qi sought not to transition Chinese theatre towards realism, but to emphasise the difference between theatre and reality. Goldstein notes that Qi’s theory involved a ‘crucial shift in sensory priorities, from the musical to the visual’ (2007, p.156). Aesthetics became the central term to Qi’s work. National drama was to be ‘dance-ified’ 舞蹈化, ‘Old drama is derived from ancient dance, every single movement is choreographed (Qi 2014, p.61). Furthermore, every movement had to be beautiful (*mei* 美): ‘Because every bit must be beautiful, every bit of realism must be removed from every movement’ (ibid.).

Imperial edicts may show that *mei* had always been an important concept in theatre (Li 2010, p.51), however for Qi it was emphasised with the purpose of carving an identity on the global stage.<sup>15</sup> Beauty now became an objective of itself in defining

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political construct’ of a transition that would self-consciously define Chinese modernity (p.4). Historians such as Guo Moruo (1892-1978) began to appraise Marxist, historical materialist narratives of history rather than a Confucian historiography underpinned by a notion of the Mandate of Heaven.

<sup>14</sup> Qi also wrote or co-wrote thirteen of Mei Lanfang’s ancient-costume new-plays 古裝新戲, two of his modern-attire plays (both sung in *pihuang*) and edited much of the actor’s traditional repertoire.

<sup>15</sup> Also apparent in this review is *xiqu*’s early contemporary relevance as a tool of Chinese cultural diplomacy—a phenomenon that can be seen to inform Kunqu promotion at a PRC policy level. Mei’s role as cultural ambassador later took him to the United States in 1930 and Europe and the Soviet Union in 1935. The latter trip provided the opportunity to meet and perform to members of the global theatrical elite such as Brecht, Meyerhold and Gordon-Craig. These encounters would lead to a number of

Jingju on the world stage. For Qi, China could acquire a distinctiveness on the global stage through the beautification of every movement.<sup>16</sup> A similar approach was taken by Taiwanese celebrity author Pai Hsien-yung, almost a century later in the staging of his *Mudanting*, the *Qingchunban* 青春版 (Young Lovers Edition, 2004 premiere), in which he talks about a 'new aesthetics' or ideal of beauty 新美學 that, when reached, can 'surpass cultural signification' 超越文化的主格 (Pai, 2012).

Among the ideals advocated by Qi and others were the notions of 'indication' *xieyi* 寫意 (as contrasted with 'realism' *xieshi* 寫實) as well as 'virtuality' *xunihua* 虛擬化. This is an idea strongly related to the defence of Chinese traditional culture against accusations of traditionalism, *xieyi* is a term native to study of painting which, depending on context, Cahill translates variously as 'expressive of mood' (1991, p.12), 'drawing the idea' or 'free sketching', contrasting it with *gongbi* 工筆 meaning 'skilled brush' (ibid. p.20). *Xieyi* has played a central part in theatre discourse since its first use in that context by Yu Shangyuan 余上沅 in 1927.<sup>17</sup> Yu uses the term *xieyi* to defend traditional Chinese theatre as a 'pure art' 純粹藝術 in which the actor maintains his identity onstage as an actor, rather than as a 'real' character (Yu 1927, pp.194-5). However, many traditional Chinese arts were at this time being attacked as inferior in relation to western realist techniques. This was particularly the case with traditional Chinese painting, criticised in the May Fourth era as 'backwards' in comparison to Western realism.

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enthusiastic interpretations of Chinese performance that would dominate practitioner discourse in relation to *xiqu*.

<sup>16</sup> The director Chen Shizheng challenged this dogma, notes Swatek, in his 2000 Lincoln Center production (p. 232).

<sup>17</sup> The film director Huang Zuolin also, more famously, used the term in his 1979 book promoting *xieyi* as a positive characteristic of Chinese theatre.



As shall become clear in this thesis, these principles of the so-called national drama (and therefore Jingju) were applied with arguably greater rigour to Kunqu as it re-emerged as an independent genre in the PRC. The principal of choreographing every move in particular had a significant role to play, I argue, in the increasing centrality of the *luzi* in the contemporary period.

### **The *luzi* as template in a modular system**

In order to discuss the *luzi* within the context of these broader principles, it is necessary to consider the role-type system, through which movements are enacted. Like other forms of other Asian forms of drama, and the Commedia dell'arte in Europe, actors in the Chinese theatre perform types of character, specialising in the display of certain selected performance skills. Distinct role-types determine the clothing and make-up worn by the actor, the timbre of singing and recitation style and conventions of movement and gesture, or *chengshi*. Over the course of this thesis I shall be referring to role-types a great deal and shall therefore briefly introduce them before expanding on the notions of *chengshi* and *luzi* as a system of performance and 'transmission'.

Role types are a function both of performance and of dramatic literature. The indication of a certain character's role-type is present in both *nanxi* and *zaju* scripts of the Yuan and Ming periods and in even earlier Tang dynasty precedents. The broad categories in Kunqu today are based on these but have undergone refining at various stages to include a number of subtypes. There are now said to be twenty in total, based on five main subdivisions, including: *sheng* 生 or male lead,<sup>18</sup> *dan* 旦 or female lead,<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> There are five varieties of civil (rather than martial) *sheng*, not including *laosheng* which in Kunqu is usually referred to as either *mo* or *wai*. The government official, or *guansheng* 冠生, comes in two varieties. One of these is a major official 大冠生, a role subtype usually reserved for emperors. These are the only *sheng* who wear a beard. The minor official has recently passed his exams and established himself in his position and

*jing* 淨 or ‘painted face’<sup>20</sup>, *mo* 末 or older male (sometimes called *laosheng*), and *chou* 丑, or clown.<sup>21</sup> Unlike other characters whose stylized speech is based on a heightened version of the language of court, clowns typically speak in dialect, usually in the Suzhou dialect, but depending on the role and the troupe performing, may also use the Beijing or Yangzhou dialects.

Actors are usually assigned a role-type at a young age and are trained to emulate the patterns and qualities of movement, or *chengshi*, particular to these role-types. Many

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does not wear a beard. The *jin sheng* 巾生, or ‘fan scholar’ has yet to pass the imperial examinations and enter official life. Fan scholars are talented, free-spirited and usually embroiled in romantic affairs. They wear a cloth cap or *jin*, and more often than not carry a fan. The *qiongsheng* 窮生 or ‘poor-scholar’ role-type is educated but destitute, one who usually hopes still to pass the imperial examinations and enter official life. His head is hung low, his back is hunched, and he shuffles in battered shoes. The Pheasant’s Tail *sheng*, *zhiwei sheng* 雉尾生, excels in both civil and martial arenas and wears a long pheasant plume attached to the headdress.

<sup>19</sup> Female *dan* roles are assigned both names and numbers. 1. *Yidan*, are older laodan. 2. *Zhengdan*, married women. 3. *Zuodan* child roles, sometimes played by a *sheng*, called *wawa sheng*. 4. *Cishadan*, or assassin *dan* (for example Fei Zhen’e from *Killing the Tiger General*) 5. *Guimen* (boudoir) *dan*, an unmarried maiden (for example Du Liniang from *Mudanting*). 6. *Tie* or *huopo* (lively) *dan* for a vivacious supporting *dan* role such as Du’s maid Chunxiang from *Mudanting*. The term *huadan* (flower *dan*) has come from other operatic styles, but is now used in Kunqu to refer to younger *dan* characters.

<sup>20</sup> The *jing* has three main divisions: *dalian* (big faces), *bailian* (white faces) and *wu lian* (martial faces). Big faces are men or supernatural beings of enormous strength or power. Their faces are painted in colorful and striking designs and their characters often bold, loud and uninhibited. White faces are negative, evil characters such as Yan Song from *Cry of the Phoenix*.

<sup>21</sup> The ‘little clown’ (*xiao chou*) plays comical characters, usually of a good nature. The area around the nose, eyes and forehead is painted with a white circle. For negative characters of higher status, there are two forms of *fuchou*: the ‘white face’ clown role-type mostly portrays comic treacherous officials (for example, Zhao Wenhua from *Cry of the Phoenix*), these characters have a distinctive white circle painted around the eyes and nose. There is also a *choudan* or *caihuadan*, played by men or women to represent a negative or humorous female character such as Sister Stone, the Daoist nun from *The Mudanting*. The clown holds an important, ritualistic, position within the troupe itself. When all the actors arrive backstage and are preparing to do their make-up, according to custom the clown must begin first because, as legend has it, the Tang emperor Minghuang played the role of the clown (Thorpe 2005, p.275).

professional actors can perform several sub-roles or even roles, but tend to excel in portraying a certain character types. The marital roles demand a particular set of physical strengths that must be built up which are difficult to maintain at performance level in later life. Actors of civil roles are able to remain on stage until late in life, and it is common for actresses in their seventies to play the role of a sixteen-year-old, for example Du Linjiang from *Mudanting*. The performances I will be analysing in depth are by subcategories of *sheng* and *dan* roles, namely; the *jinsheng* 巾生, or ‘fan scholar’, the romantically minded and talented youth yet to pass the imperial examinations and enter official life; the *Guimen dan* 閨門旦, an unmarried girl confined to her parents’ home and the lively *tiedan* 貼旦, also unmarried but of lower social rank.

While many *chengshi* have (or had) a basis in real life –a point often argued rigorously by those obliged to defend *xiqu* against charges of formalism (Xie 2004, p.65), audiences’ interpretations of *chengshi* are inevitably guided by the accumulation of spectator knowledge of characters and situations in which they are perceived on stage. These *chengshi* can be and are employed in the performance of any newly written play. By bending a knee of a forward leg in tip-toe position, the actor transmits a certain kind of information about the clown 小丑 role—who is usually a man of lower status and in a position of servitude. This knowledge that links these ways of moving to this type of character is not linked to any specific text.

The word *shenduan* 身段 (literally ‘segments [performed by] the body’, in imperial literature this refers to figure in general)<sup>22</sup> is a commonly used term that refers to physical technique in general (a certain actor’s *shenduan* may be praised) or to very specific movements. For example, in *The Butterfly Dream*, the minor clown playing the

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<sup>22</sup> For example in *Honglou meng* ‘[Lin] Daiyu’s face and figure are more or less the same as third mistress [You]’ 小名儿叫什么黛玉，面庞身段和三姨不差什么 (Cao 2006, p.914).

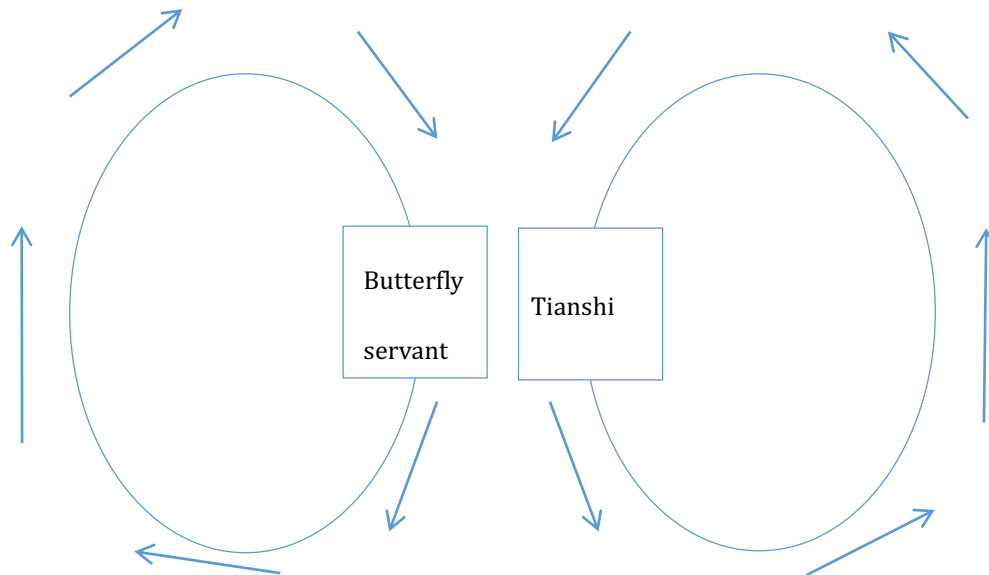
drunk servant-butterfly has a particular *shenduan* in which he flaps his arms as if they were butterfly wings. The term *shenduan* does not, however, refer to a prolonged series of movements in order set to a particular text.

For this, Taiwanese scholar Wang Shih-pei 汪詩珮 (2000) refers to a concept of *taoshi* 套式 or ‘stage patterns’. Having never heard actor use this expression I have preferred the more colloquial term *luzi* 路子, meaning literally the ‘path’ or ‘route,’ referring to the combination of *shenduan* applied to a specific playlet, in which movements are matched to specific words in music. For example in performance of the playlet *Jian niang* 見娘 (Reunited with mother) in the aria *Jiang'er shui*, the character Wang Shipeng on singing ‘Who was it that added a line to my letter’ 是何人套寫書中句 performs a ‘cloud-hand’ movement that integrates into the miming of writing with a brush on paper. However, the term *luzi* might also refer to the performances of more than one character and to movements not necessarily timed to specific words. For example, in the *shuixianzi* 水仙子 aria of the Jiangsu Province Kunju Theatre (hereafter, ‘the Jiangsu troupe’) *luzi* for the playlet called *The Response* 回話,<sup>23</sup> as a widow addresses her servant, both actors punctuate her song by simultaneously making mirroring circles in quick-step (*pao yuanchang*). They begin at the centre, moving front-centre, then upstage before returning to original spot. Together, their steps trace the shape of butterfly wings.

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<sup>23</sup> E.g. Zhang Jiqing & Yao Jisun ([http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XMzY3NDIzMDg=.html](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMzY3NDIzMDg=.html)) accessed December 2015. The scene concerns Zhuangzi’s widow, played by a *zhengdan* and a servant, played by a clown. The playlet is part of the *chuanqi* play *Hudiemeng* 蝴蝶夢 (The Butterfly Dream).

Figure 1: An impression of ten seconds of luzi during Jiangsu troupe version of 'The Response' from Butterfly Dream on words 些些些些小事莫要頌，老人家 Why, why? Why let these small things get in the way? Old Servant!



The 'luzi' can then be roughly translatable as 'choreography,' though this word does not carry the connotation of a *graph* or notation that has been written down. For a period in the late Qing dynasty and early Republican period a number of choreographic notations (*shenduan pu* 身段譜) were produced some of which I will examine later in this thesis. However, unlike detailed Western dance notations such as the Beauchamp-Feuillet Baroque notation, or Vladimir Ivanovich Stepanov's ballet notation, *shenduan pu* are written more like stage directions or memory aids, sparse and in the margins of the text. The authors of these scores leave little in the way of information as to their motivation in producing them, a question I also examine later in the thesis. Also, the scores tend only to notate *shenduan* rather than the pre-expressive *chengshi* tied to role-type, such as the poor man's stagger as he clutches his empty stomach, or the mandarin's swagger as he shows off the whites of his expensive thick boots. The act of interpreting them thus requires detailed practical knowledge of the conventions of *chengshi* for the role-types concerned.

Based on her comparison of notations, including the *Shenyin jiangu lu*, hand-copied manuscripts with that written by aficionado Xu Lingyun 徐凌雲 and performance in the contemporary era, the Wang Shih-pei concludes that notation records choreography at a comparatively broad level. She likens set choreography to a trunk and branches of a tree, in which smaller branches and leaves are likely to differ (2000, p.196). This metaphor is however to some extent limited as it is often the details (hands, eyes, sleeves, feet movements) that are both notated and stable in a particular *luzi*, as opposed to ‘trunk’ issues such as the number of steps or stage position.<sup>24</sup>

However, the score tells us just which movements go when and not how they merge together across time and to a text and music. It is arguably only through applying principles of movement garnered through practical study that one can begin to imagine some of the ways they might appear in action. It is necessary, also, to draw a line between the basic-skills (*jiben gong*) and choreography (*shenduan*), both of which are determined by a process of conventionalisation (*chengshihua*). Basic-skill refers both to the physical condition of the actor (a great deal of flexibility is required, particularly for martial roles)’ and also their technical mastery of the conventions of the role-type. Thus if a well-trained actor of the *xiaosheng* (young man) role type is required, for example, to point at a mountain, his arms will by habit assume a particular pointing angle and position, with perhaps one hand holding the water sleeve of the hand that is pointing and one foot extended forward, toe pointing up (*duo jiao*), aligned in formal symmetry and synchronised such as to emphasise the gesture itself, and yet appear effortless. ‘Basic-skill’ as a category covers the execution of almost all movement on stage, especially the stylised and precise methods of walking and running, the various gestures of the hands, and the manipulation of water sleeves. Actors go through rigorous training

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<sup>24</sup> This has parallels with Clunas’ observation on the emphasis of detail rather than systems in Chinese connoisseurship discussed earlier.

to perfect and habitualise these movements and gestures as a basic starting point before learning any actual plays.

Thus we see that there are a number of levels, from basic skill to role type-specific convention, to specific movements related to dramatic content (*shenduan*) and the combination of these movements together in a *luzi*. The trained actor is able to add, subtract, and rearrange these components as necessary. The *luzi* is, then, to place these modular components in order in relation to a text.

### **Kunqu and social status**

Jonathan Hay, an art historian writing in a recent study of *xiqu* in visual culture, equates Kunqu (which he calls ‘the literati theatre’) with literati painting. Hay explains that literati painting includes text and image on one page and depends on the calligraphic brush trace to mediate between text and image, and bring the different constituent practice into a stable relationship. Similarly, he argues that in Kunqu ‘the analogous mediating role [is] played by a sonic trace, tightly keyed to physical gesture, mediated between visual presence and narrative poetry.’ (2004, p.38) This is an apt observation of modern performance, projected onto an imagined Ming literati theatre. Yet it highlights the contemporary actor’s predicament, on one hand embodying the mediating stroke of performance and on the other merely representing its real author, perceived as either playwright or, if in performance terms, as the ‘tradition’.

Kunqu’s association with members of both the literati (*wenren* 文人) and the low-status actors (*yiren* 藝人), makes the issue of status a dichotomy that sits at the heart of the form. Much has been written on the cult of the amateur and the opposing conceptions of artist and artisan between China and the West. Lothar Ledderose notes that while architecture was considered the ‘mother of the arts’ in ancient Rome, in

China, it was the domain of the civil engineer. In the West, sculpture was seen as legacy of classical antiquity, but in China a skilled trade (2000, p.187). Whereas the role of the scribe in the West was a functional, clerical one, he writes, in China calligraphy was the highest artistic expression. Autographed calligraphy works remain the most collectable and valuable of all Chinese art (ibid.). Handwritten Buddhist sutras, for example, did not qualify as art in imperial China, because they were considered to be the work of professionals (2000, p.194). An artist's name was therefore seldom associated with a Buddhist statue or wall painting, whereas calligraphy and landscape painting were always identified with a member of the literati class. The distinction is less a function of the artistic object itself but rather the status of its creator.

The practice of keeping private troupes was made difficult by the Yongzheng edict of 1724. The rise of commercial troupes in cosmopolitan centres shifted the locus of creative control of performance from the literatus to the actor. Lu contends that the playlet, by its focus on performance rather than text, was the actor's solution to the problem of the dearth of new scripts and the next evolutionary stage for Kunqu (2000, p.173). Lu posits that Kun performers had to make their plays more accessible to the masses by adding more elements of performance to supplement the literary and musical merits. Specifically, he argues, by the time of the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns, Kun troupes began perfecting the performance of the most critically acclaimed scenes from the existing repertoire in order to compete. *Jing meng* (see chapters one and four) is one such example.

In the current day, however, although similar innovations and rearrangements take place they are more usually attributed to tradition than individual agency. Aficionados and academics of higher social rank consistently point to actors' lack of *wenhua* (education, literacy, culture) as an obstacle not just to pronouncing words correctly in song, but in order to be able to interpret difficult texts in performance 'correctly'. Actors,



it is thought, are furthermore unable to resist the temptation to dazzle audiences with their technical skills rather than the beauty of the text or tradition, as Isabel Wong notes:

Since the professionals depended upon the whims of the public for their living, they tended to be extremely flexible in their handling of plots and musical details. This practice was frequently denounced by the better educated who preferred to be faithful to the written texts at their disposal for learning Kunqu, even though many of them had received oral instruction from the professionals. (1978, p. 2)

In my own experience between 2012 and 2016, both scathing criticism in academic and aficionado circles and self-depreciatory comments by actors themselves are still common, perhaps increasingly so during this time.<sup>25</sup> This is despite the now comparatively high literacy of actors, who are mostly trained in ‘correct’ pronunciation to a standard higher than the overwhelming majority of amateur participants.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Kunqu has in recent years attracted many new fans, whose interactions I have witnessed occasionally bring to mind the ‘social posturing’ described by Sophie Volpp of newly enriched merchant classes of the late Ming some four centuries earlier (pp. 28-40).

<sup>26</sup> The *Chuan* generation of actors were mostly taught directly by the aficionados of the intellectual classes, including Zhang Zidong 張紫東 and Bei Jinmei 貝晉眉 (Sang, 2010, pp.32-33), however former Shanghai troupe leader Cai Zhengren has said pronunciation was not emphasised during their training at the Shanghai Opera School. The Shanghai troupe has become infamous for its *putonghua* pronunciations, welcomed by some quarters in the 1980s as Kunqu sought new audiences, but generally now disparaged. Some actors in the Northern troupe are also criticised for this. In contrast, the Jiangsu troupe has sought to distinguish itself by ‘correct’ pronunciation. Most Jiangsu actors were taught to sing by either the by the former Tangming 堂名 singer Wu Xiusong 吳秀松 (an authority respected across the professional and aficionado communities) or his student, the teacher, researcher and singing expert Wang Zhenglai 王正来. However, some Jiangsu actors’ singing is nonetheless disputed, both externally and internally, as I have witnessed on many occasions. The Suzhou troupe differentiates further by pronouncing some words with extra Suzhou enunciation, claiming this to be more ‘authentic’.

The social elites also continue to play an important role in the promotion of Kunqu on the global stage as representing precisely an ‘elite’ Chinese culture. This was particularly the case for elites who left mainland China after the defeat of the Nationalists, many of whom established Kunqu amateur societies in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the United States. In Taiwan especially, this was an audience group that would welcome troupes when mainland audiences dwindled in the 1990s.

Particularly visible after the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 (one of the several crisis moments for the form) was also a flurry of academic papers by émigré Chinese on the subject of the Kunqu aficionado singing practice at American universities, including Ch'ung-ho Chang Frankel 張充和 at Yale (1976).<sup>27</sup> Frankel (*nee* Chang) (1914-2015) was one of four sisters from a wealthy Hefei family who have become intimately connected with Kunqu's 20th century history. In addition to Frankel's activities organizing amateur and professional performances in the U.S., her sister Yuanhe 元和 married the late *chuan* generation Kunqu actor Gu Chuanjie 顧傳玠 and settled in Taiwan, where she was involved in the amateur scene and also published a valuable choreographic score, yet another act of archivism that extended beyond singing practice and into the realm of ‘traditional’ performance.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See also: Marjory Bong Liu at the University of California at Los Angeles (1974), Isabel Wong at the University of Illinois (1978) and Lindy Li Mark at California State University, Hayward (1983).

<sup>28</sup> Gu Chuanjie passed away from illness in 1965. Another sister, Yunhe 允和, ran the Beijing Amateur Kunqu Society between 1956 and 1964. She was married to Zhou Youguang 周有光, a former high-ranking member of the early communist administration and principal architect of the *pinyin* system by which Chinese is spelt using Roman letters. A fourth sister Zhaohe 兆和 married the literary icon Shen Congwen 沈從文. These particular relationships help illustrate the connections between Kunqu enthusiasts and not just communities in Taiwan and the U.S. but also within both Nationalist and Communist elites. These connections are also well known outside the Kunqu community enhancing the general impression of Kunqu's connection to a pan-Chinese cultural elite.

## Authority and competition

Competition among *xiqu* actors operates on a number of levels, not all of which are familiar in other theatre systems. Lineages and genealogies act as informal capital allowing performers to claim authenticity and tradition, while having visible fan groups may put pressure on troupe leadership to assign certain roles or raise the number of performance opportunities. The terrain of competition is, however, limited by the repertoire. Thus, a performer in a troupe with, for instance, one or more dominant *guimendan* performers may find that her career will progress more smoothly if she switches to *zhengdan* or *laodan*. To cite another scenario, two dominant *chou* actors active in troupe might divide up the repertoire between them according to their strengths (for instance, physical agility or linguistic play), thus leaving less room for younger *chou* performers to shine, who might then consider specialising in the martial role.<sup>29</sup>

Across troupes, competition is an equally important, though differently structured, phenomenon. Indeed, it is probably intensifying, as it becomes increasingly possible for troupe members to leave their original troupes for work as performers elsewhere. Lineage remains important at both a personal and a troupe level, but the dominant feature of competition is the approval of cultural authorities (political, academic, and aficionado) at home and abroad. This is expressed in the numerous prizes which automatically canonize the *xiqu* performer and his/her portrayal of certain roles, the prestige of tours abroad, and especially the system of professional standing known as *zhicheng* 職稱, which creates (for instance) National Performers first and second

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<sup>29</sup> Since in most theatres, performers have a central and in many cases predominant role in administration, career advancement within a troupe is subject to any number of influences, among which are: family relationships, relationships by marriage, party role, professional standing, and fan following.

class. This dynamic further has profound implications on income and social status, being both directly linked to salary and pension, but also the likelihood of being asked to teach or perform after retirement. Competition furthermore continues by proxy through students, as young performers bind themselves in early career to new teachers, and older performers seek to have their *luzi* retained and their students cast, promoted, praised and advanced through professional ranks.

## **Research material**

The principal material on which this thesis is based is my fieldwork over several years in China watching live performance and learning to sing and perform in an amateur capacity. However, as my research asks how performance has (or has not) changed over time, I take advantage of the mass of audio-visual materials recording performance since the 1960s, some of which have only recently become available, and none of which have been methodically studied. Because of the precise level of detail at which I analyses movements, the material I use in this thesis comes principally from recordings. This allows me to pause, rewind and observe as carefully as possible how the movements are executed and when. However, the experience of watching live performance and of studying movement for some playlets myself has informed what I look for and how I interpret movement in recorded material—informing methodological issues such as, for example, when a movement begins and ends

The period over which I make my study is determined by their availability. Only a handful of recordings of selected Kunqu playlets predate the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) and these are of poor quality. These include the videos made by Northern Kunqu Theatre of Han Shichang, Hou Yongkui and others in the 1960s. The majority of videos used in this thesis have been recorded since the 1980s. For this reason, early recordings

are of particular value for conducting comparisons, particularly those made by the Ministry of Culture of *chuan* generation actors in the 1980s (also of varying quality) and the 135 playlets recorded by Taiwanese scholars Hong Weizhu, Tseng Yong-yi and Tsai Hsin-hsin in the 1990s. These three valuable resources were not freely available online when I began my research in 2012, and have gradually appeared first for DVD purchase and then online over the course of the past three years. I chose to focus most on *Jingmeng* 驚夢 (The Startling Dream) and *Shihua* 拾畫 (Picking up the Portrait) from *Mudanting* 牡丹亭 (Peony Pavilion) for two reasons. Firstly, there is greater wealth of both video material and comparable *luzi* for playlets such as these from *Mudanting* due to the primacy of the play in the 20th and 21st century Kunqu repertoire. Secondly, I have myself learned and publicly performed the role of Liu Mengmei for these two scenes, giving me a familiarity with the material in physical terms that allows me to consider broader questions of performance choices in a way that is more difficult than as purely a spectator, no matter how dedicated.

This leads me to discuss the limitations of performance analysis not just as a spectator but with using audio-visual recordings and screenshots to compare renditions. Diana Taylor argues that live performance ‘can never be captured’ and that a video of a performance is not the same as a performance, but merely a part of the archive representing a part of the repertoire (2008, p.20). Video is frozen in time and thus, like the textual archive, external to the practitioner. Actors and dancers, writes Taylor, ‘internalize a concept and repeat, rehearse, and recreate’. It has been said by many practitioners that both choreographic scores and videos are of limited use for learning playlets, something I can attest to based on my own experience learning as an amateur performer. However, although video is of little practical use on its own as a tool for the transmission of the repertoire, it does allow us to make observations of phenomena contained in the repertoire.

On a technical level, camera angles and different stage sizes and environments compromises comparison. Also, screenshots capture a single moment in an action, giving little information about the process and context of movement. It is also worth noting that performances often change, both in quality of execution and movement patterns, over the course of a lifetime. In cases in which there are a number of versions of a particular playlet, younger actors are more likely to follow the pattern of a living teacher very closely, before growing into the role later in their artistic life. On the other hand, for a few examples, particularly for martial role-types, the performance of an actor of a young age is far more representative than one recorded when the actor is past his physical peak. In such cases, when choices are available and important, I try to consider all these factors and refer to multiple videos if necessary.

Despite these limitations, recorded performance has become part of the audience and practitioner ecology of Kunqu in the 21st century. The consumption of video clips is a reality that cannot be ignored in any comprehensive study of contemporary Kunqu performance. Video clips play an important role in building audience knowledge of a performance *luzi* as opposed to knowledge purely based on a performance text. As previously mentioned, Richard Bauman equates the role of the performer to that of mediator between two sequences of dialogue (2004, p.130); one between the performance and a source of origin and another between the performer and the target audience. As the audience gains increasing access to both the origin dialogue and the target dialogues, an increasing body of shared knowledge results in an audience expectation for 'observational confirmation' of the knowledge they bring into the theatre (ibid, p.131). A Kunqu audience will have varying conceptions of this vague perceived origin (the 'traditional' *luzi*) and, depending on the playlet in question, some familiarity with other mediators of the role. In this uniquely 21st century ecology (for Kunqu), conscious decisions to reject or reference particular movements by other

mediators are more likely to be recognized and become particularly important tags of origin, pedigree, interpretation and style that define this dialogue between actor (mediator) and audience (target).

## Literature review

Kunqu has become an increasingly common subject of study from a variety of perspectives. The current thesis is one of at least seven PhD projects<sup>30</sup> to be written in English on the form since 2011. At the University of London alone, Min Yen Ong (2013) has scrutinised the approval of professional Kunqu performance as China's first 'Masterpiece' of Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2001 and the marginalising effect she argues this has had on its avocational singing tradition (*qinggong* 清工). Meanwhile, Sabrina Hsu (2015) has analysed the strategies and design of the series of high-profile, high-budget and self-consciously 'innovative' Kunqu productions that emerged in the wake of UNESCO recognition, most notably the *Young Lovers' Peony Pavilion* 青春版牡丹亭 collaboration between the Suzhou Kunju Troupe 江蘇省崑劇學院 and celebrity-author Pai Hsien-Yung 白先勇. My own project focuses neither on amateur communities nor on new projects, but rather the repertoire playlet performance that underlies both. This is a category that has been significantly neglected in Western scholarship, which has tended to focus on high-profile 'innovative', hybrid and 'preservationist' projects, understandable perhaps because of their international reach.

While I engage critically throughout this thesis with scholarly works in Chinese that take Kunqu as their subject, I shall seek to situate this research at the cross-section of

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<sup>30</sup> These include: Wei Zhou (Edinburgh 2011), Min Yen Ong (SOAS 2013) and Sabrina Hsu (RHUL 2015), Yang Ming (Hawaii, forthcoming), Da Lin (Pittsburgh, forthcoming), Wu Yanmei (Heriott-Watt, forthcoming)

performance and social history in a manner that does not set out to establish or reinforce an assumption that Kunqu is an essential category of performance, in either historical or formal terms. Within the Chinese academy, including Taiwan and Hong Kong, Kunqu has been specifically associated with a Chinese cultural renaissance and has been simplified as a category in the service of this latter, politically charged, narrative. This brings my contributions of my work more in line with work emanating from the Western academy.

As a study that is grounded in the analysis of contemporary performance, I seek to contribute not just to theoretical questions relating to the understanding of traditional performance practices in their contemporary global context, but also—by recourse to contemporary practice—to the way in which Kunqu has been constructed and valorised as a cultural category within late imperial and modern Chinese history. There are three categories of literature that relate to my work. The first is that of historical studies concerned with the relations between literary elites and the private or commercial stage during the late imperial period. The second consists of studies of Chinese theatre as performance (rather than purely as literature). The third encompasses specifically Kunqu-based studies grounded in contemporary performance.

In the first category, Grant Guangren Shen's 2005 book *Elite Theatre in Ming China* gathers textual records describing the social and practical environment of household troupes in the Ming. Shen's study is a useful repository of detailed information, but his focus on the professional and personal, often sexual, relationships between literati owners and actors, rather than questions of performance, limits the insights it can lend to studies of later periods in which these relationships were quite different. Of issues that relate to the Ming period, there remain a number of important questions that the book does not resolve conclusively, thus reinforcing gaps in our understanding of the period. Specifically, whether all thirty to sixty scenes of a *chuanqi* were commonly



performed in sequence, and if they were necessarily (or even most often) written for Kunshan style music.

Addressing the seventeenth century specifically, Sophie Volpp's *Wordly Stage* relies on many of the same materials as Shen, in particular the writings of the literatus Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597-1679), but proposes a specific vision for the private theatre of the Ming-Qing transition and its social context, namely that the stage provided a microcosm for experimentation in the real world. She argues that theatrical culture took over literary culture and 'social spectatorship' in general.

Andrea Goldman's *Opera and the City* examines Beijing during the transition to the commercial stage in the 18th and 19th centuries. Drawing largely from the *huapu* 'flower guide' 花譜 genre of literature which critically appraises the charms of young actors, Goldman builds up a picture of commercial and court theatre at a time in which 'Kunqu' was dominant in the capital. Her descriptions of the institutions and practices of the Chinese stage are extremely useful, with several crucial insights that I make use of in this thesis. However, Goldman's formulation of a transition from a 'southern' Kun style to 'northern' styles relies heavily on constructions of the 'elegant' and 'florid' sections, that she herself expresses doubts about. Goldman's formulation of trendsetting power on the stage as a reflection of 'shifting hierarchies' and negotiated tensions between Jiangnan elites and the Qing court obscures the fact that these two forms, if indeed they can be meaningfully separated, were often performed by the same troupes and actors, particularly on the Beijing stage. I expand on Goldman's misgivings on the delineations of theatre and reconfigure her analysis of negotiated tensions between Jiangnan literati and Qing court to that of one between the private and commercial stage.

The second category of literature—performance-centred research into Chinese theatre—is relatively rare. Jo Riley's 1997 monograph *Chinese Theatre and the Actor in*

*Performance* is a foundational Western-language work. It takes aim at the theatre practitioner 'who looks to China and finds only his own theories and visions confirmed' and claims to instead be written from a 'Chinese perspective'. Riley uses the nine-squared *luo* diagram 洛書 from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) as her framing device. Based on extensive fieldwork in the 1980s and afterwards—working with both Jingju in Beijing and surviving manifestations of shamanist, ritual *Nuo* theatre of Guizhou province—Riley identifies eight aspects of performance omnipresent in the performer onstage at any moment (the ninth element being the actor himself). She also divides two of these elements, the actors' body and the space he occupies, into the nine spaces on the diagram.

The most important challenge put forth by Riley is to what she calls the 'Western idea of the spectator as witness to the theatre event'. Riley argues that there is a 'body of shared knowledge' about various actors' heritage and training, the play itself and its performance history, that is applied to the performance as it is observed (1997, p.3). The inference is that a single act of performance relies heavily on the body of performance history and knowledge of it. The actor is described as 'a vessel which is composed of all that his ancestors were, both his acting family and the various masters and other professionals who passed down their own traditions to him by example' (ibid, p.16). The actor's appearance too, his costume, make-up and the body itself, provide for the audience a 're-cognitive process [...] an appearance ratified by spectators over the centuries' (ibid, p.54).

On one hand, Riley's approach encompasses all possible performances. On the other, it remains, in a sense confined by the need to introduce Chinese theatre within an exoticised paradigm. Although Riley makes intricate use of one performance, Mei Lanfang's *Guifei zuojiu* 貴妃醉酒, to demonstrate a variety of ground breaking insights about performance in general, this is but one performance emanating from a particular

moment in Chinese theatre history, that may not be representative of the entire field to be both before Mei Lanfang's career and after it, as is intended.

There have been few studies that compromise between accommodating the general and the specific within a single conceptual framework. Li Ruru's *The Soul of Beijing Opera* is one, situating several performance careers within the 'tapestry' of Jingju performance. By analogy to Julia Kristeva's idea of intertextuality mapped onto vertical and horizontal axes, Li constructs the actor as the locus of where 'the genre's inherited tradition intersects the live performance', presenting the performer's 'creative responses both to that tradition and to the contemporary world' (2010, p.10).

For the third category of literature, referring to Kunqu specifically, Catherine Swatek's *Peony Pavilion Onstage*, published in 2002, is a major contribution. Chapter Four, 'Mudanting in an Actor-centered Environment' traces changes to the libretti printed in various miscellanies during the 18th and 19th centuries and positing these as traces of how the play evolved on-stage. Chapter Five also presents the manner in which details of performance routines are occasionally changed today and how these changes are wrought over and discussed at length by actors and critics. I engage in greater depth with Swatek's analysis of both the playlet *Shihua*, and the discussion of *Jingmeng*.

Swatek's research is crucial in contesting the illusion that authorship of *Mudanting* stops with Tang Xianzu. This line of enquiry combats the common perception that texts were finished in the Ming dynasty and performance perfected in the Qing, leaving the theatre of the current era a choice between preservation or iconoclasm. Swatek's focus on the play *Peony Pavilion* leads her to examine two projects directed by Peter Sellars and Chen Shi-Zheng in the U.S. in the late nineties.

Subsequent scholarship of Kunqu includes Isabel Wong's 2009 chapter giving an overview of its history in relation to debates surround intangible cultural heritage.

While useful as reference, Wong's chapter is relatively uncritical of a number of accepted narratives regarding Kunqu, some of which I challenge throughout this thesis.

Mackerras' 2010 thoughtful and informative review of the Imperial Granary production of *Mudanting* discusses important concepts such as the trends for historical revivalist and tourism-orientated theatrical productions, although his analysis might profit from engagement with the large number of *Peony* productions at that time in Beijing and elsewhere, all of which were extremely popular with young Chinese. Troupe-initiated productions, however, are not always very well publicised and require mobility and access to fan networks. As a result only those other innovative performances catering for international audiences such as Chen Shi-Zheng's 1999 Lincoln Center *Peony* and Pai Hsien-yung's *Young Lovers Edition* were used as a basis for assessing this performance. Another perspective might show how *The Peony Pavilion's* vibrant repertoire performance tradition formed the stable but evolving core from which such productions spin off.

A growing collection of studies are beginning to emerge, engaged with specific Kunqu playlets, contrasting their textual and performance histories. Yanting Qiu's 2013 thesis demonstrates how scene role-type selection transformed the *chuanqi* play *The Lioness' Roars* 獅吼記 'from a shrew-taming *chuanqi* in thirty scenes written in the mid-Ming dynasty to a husband-taming play in four scenes'. Joseph Lam's 2014 study of the playlet 'The Ballad' (*Tanci* 彈詞) from *The Palace of Eternal Life* 長生殿 demonstrates the collaborative and accumulative nature of Kunqu performance, which he argues is as 'a creative and continuously evolving genre'. In terms of performance, the particular playlet in question, as the author notes, contains little bodily gesture or acting-dancing. Lam's study is thus primarily a musical one, interspersed with literary analysis and observations of both a historical and ethnographic nature.

In a 2014 paper, Josh Stenberg shows how actor-derived innovations by three different actresses of the Zhu Maichen story (also known as *Lankeshan* 烂柯山) are responsive to social shifts in contemporary performance, both in Kunqu and other genres. The example that he raises is one that I draw on to demonstrate how competing interpretations vie to be recognised as the ‘traditional’ luzi, despite the fact that they compete over the modernity of their interpretation. In a 2015 paper Stenberg also addresses the performance history of *Cihu* 刺虎 (Slaying the Tiger General) revealing the traces of several phases of renegotiation between performance, text and interpretation of sensitive historical material.

By contextualising the history and ecology of one particular playlet, the systems (for example, of notation) and lineages of teachers, pupils and avocational masters, these recent studies, from their various perspectives, provide an excellent model for carrying out of research on Chinese theatre. I adopt a similar approach in chapters two and four of this thesis, while developing my own methodology, based on microanalysis of *luzi* as the locus of contested histories, interpretations and authority.

## Thesis structure

This thesis takes a combined chronological and thematic outline, starting in Chapter One with the textual archives of the late imperial period before tackling two themes that underlie the post-imperial period.

In Chapter One, drawing on Derrida's conception of the archive as the determiner of knowledge rather than its record, I propose that the dramatic miscellanies and music scores produced over three centuries should be perceived not just as records of Kunqu's history but as playing an active role, shaping both the corpus of performable Kunqu scenes and how it manifests onstage.

Chapter Two proposes a shift by which the pedagogy of teaching technique through a fixed sequence of movements transmutes into the fundamental basis of an authentic performance that is reinforced through an archival instinct that is apparent not just in modern archives but also the intertextuality of performance itself. I use an analysis of one of the latest archival projects of recent years, *Dashi shuoxi*, published in 2014, to further explore the notion of the 'traditional' *luzi* and how this relates to actual performance and the way it is framed by the archive. I uncover that a significant proportion of the Kunqu's 'traditional' *luzi* were in fact created or adapted in the 20th century. Surveying performance in the current generations of actors, I further uncover an impulse to 'fix' the *luzi* that developed outside literati forces or from the training system, but rather from the actor as s/he seeks to establish an artistic identity in a competitive environment.

Chapter Three surveys roughly the same period, but from another perspective, analysing how Kunqu has been categorised by Chinese and Japanese scholarship and enveloped into the creation of categories by national and supra-national policy. This

includes both understandings of late imperial theatre history that foreground a distinction between an elegant *yabu* and vulgar *huabu*, and draw a distinction between the star-centred innovations of Kunqu's most immediate referent, Jingju, with the apparently inherited orthodoxies of Kunqu. A further distinction is made to highlight Kunqu's simultaneous dancing and singing (*zaige zaiwu*) in contrast to Jingju, contributing to the centrality of the *luzi* by making choreography more central to what defines Kunqu.

Another crucial element of Kunqu's projected difference to Jingju is its pedigree. In Chapter Four, I demonstrate how post-UNESCO scholarship digs into the archive in order to assert a teacher-pupil transmission of *luzi* to the current day based on fragments of historical evidence, despite there being almost no observable correspondence between it and what is on stage today.

In Chapter Five, I turn to the archive of audio-visual material that has surfaced over the last few years to conduct a comparative analysis of performances of two extracts from *Mudanting* 牡丹亭 (Peony Pavilion) across generations and lineages. By detailed comparison of the performances of a key monologue from the playlet *Jingmeng* 驚夢 (The Startling Dream) I give the example of a playlet in which the *luzi* has already reached a high level of similarity across different lineages but plurality at a level of detail. From *Shihua* (Picking up the Portrait), I show how three lineages approach this playlet using different *luzi*, all of which claim to be 'traditional'. They demonstrate both varying textual interpretations and stylistic approaches.

# 1. Text and performance

In this chapter I propose that, prior the 20th century, three waves of archivism-- one of textual miscellanies, another of musical scores and a third of choreographic notation-- should be seen not simply as recording, but also playing a crucial role in the creation of Kunqu as a cultural category. I examine several important historical publications, including Ye Tang's 葉堂 (1736-95) *Nashuying qupu* 納書楹曲譜 (Pillar of Received Scores, 1792 preface) musical notation and the *Shenyin jiangu lu* 審音鑑古錄 (*A Record for Parsing Notes and Mirroring Classics*, 1834 preface) stage notation. I see these archives not as inert repositories of facts to be mined for the reconstruction of a history of 'Kunqu', but rather as constituting and elaborating the very project that led to the creation of Kunqu as a unitary cultural category and influenced how it subsequently developed.

In their recent study of the earliest known print editions of *zaju* 雜劇 'miscellany plays' from the fourteenth century, Stephen West and Wilt Idema note the gulf that exists between these earlier role-texts and those editions we are more familiar with; those collected and edited by the literati during the late Ming publishing boom, in particular Zang Maoxun's 臧懋循 *Yuanqu xuan* 元曲選 (A Collection of Yuan Plays, 1616 preface). In some cases, they note, the differences are so great as to be considered 'completely new plays' (2014, p. 2).

*Zaju* are mostly four-act plays, written to *beiqu* 北曲 (northern-style songs) in which all singing is carried by the lead character—a facet possibly derived from their roots in the oral tradition of performance ballads in the Song dynasty (ibid. p.3). West & Idema argue that the earliest manuscripts were in fact role scripts containing the song lyrics for the lead singing actor only. However, as they were printed for mass circulation, they



were clearly also intended for a reading public (ibid. p.15). The Ming editions, such as Zang's, were created as 'suitable reading matter of highly educated literati' (ibid. p.1). While the earlier texts are characterised by their 'rawness' and fluidity with absent stage speech to be improvised in performance, the Ming editions contain fixed dialogues in luxurious editions complete with illustrations, prefaces and stage directions.

If the Ming editions of *zaju* can be seen as the domestication of performance texts for an elevated reading public, the opposite can be argued in the case with Kunqu and the *chuanqi* 傳奇 on which much of the current Kunqu repertoire is largely based, written by the literati themselves in the century between 1550 and 1650. The *chuanqi* were resolutely not records of performance but independent publishing ventures. Indeed, the majority of scenes they contain were probably never were performed. As Katherine Carlitz notes, though Ming 'actors, anthologists and amateur singers were constantly altering popular plays', the 'appearance of their private editions' was in literati control (2005, p.275).<sup>31</sup> There is therefore a larger than normal gap between page and stage for *chuanqi*—with the play as an idealised, often unrealised performance.

Yet, the published play scripts, miscellanies and notations of the late Ming and Qing dynasty are often key for theatre scholars seeking to construct a history of the trends of the stage itself, as if they were windows on to how theatre was originally performed. My purpose in the current chapter is to deploy these texts not as evidence for how performance was conducted, but to trace how each wave of publishing influenced performance after its circulation and indeed continues to influence it now.

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<sup>31</sup> Statistics gathered by Lucille Chia show that drama and song constituted nearly a quarter of the output of Nanjing commercial publishers (qtd. in Carlitz 2005, p.213).

Thus, while *zaju* emerged from an oral practice later committed to print by the literati, *chuanqi* was developed in text and adapted to stage (and not necessarily according to the Kunqu style of music), often under the auspices of troupe-owning playwrights.<sup>32</sup> Though a commercial stage practice develops in the 18th century, the publishing classes of the Qing continued to assert their literary control over stage practice. This was most notably achieved by harnessing in a previously proudly oral (and thus fluid) singing tradition by the publication of detailed fixed musical notation. Furthermore, dramatic miscellanies canonise certain scenes and not others, suggesting which playlets to perform and when and, in the case of one of these anthologies, how. In this way, the history of Kunqu can be seen as a constant project of literati intervention attempting to 'fix' performance practices.

### **The playlet as performance format**

The gulf between text and performance surfaces most readily with regard to the issue of performance format. In contrast to the four-act *zaju* play, *chuanqi* are generally between thirty to sixty scenes long. To act them in full would take several full days. Indeed, there is lack of certainty to whether this was ever the intention. As Swatek notes, *chuanqi* were 'not play scripts as we tend to think of them', but were rather treated like novels, more often read and, if performed, seldom in their entirety (2002, p.8).

Historical performance format is still a highly contested issue in contemporary Kunqu discourse. Since at least the 18th century, the playlet (*zhezi* 折子) has been the conventional format of performance, either as an independent unit or strung together as

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<sup>32</sup> For an overview of the Ming private elite theatre see Shen (2005) *Elite theatre in Ming China*, and Lu Eting (1980, pp. 116-133).

four scenes of a single performance.<sup>33</sup> However, Kunqu is often portrayed as a performance tradition of full-length performance that was frequently carried out in private halls and distinguished gardens. For example, as Taiwanese celebrity author Pai Hsien-yung 白先勇 puts it, ‘a mature and fine performance art, a grand drama that can be continuously performed in succession for over ten-and-something hours’ (Pai 2004, p.69).

Recent international full-length versions of the *Peony Pavilion* such as Pai’s touring *Young Lovers Edition* (premiered 2004) and Chen Shi-Zheng’s 1999 Lincoln Center production were premised on a ‘return’ to full-length productions.<sup>34</sup> Part of their global marketability has been their sheer length, married to a claim to have recovered authenticity in this ‘return’ to an original format. In the context of these large productions, aiming to present the play in full, the performance tradition of presenting individual scene forfeits much of its status as an object of critical appreciation. A dogma insisting on the ‘completeness’ of a performed narrative is applied and projected upon late imperial Kunqu practice.

Working from this base assumption, Kunqu historian Lu Eting 陸萼庭 treats the playlet as a Qing dynasty break-through—an actor-inspired solution to a lull which had turned the business of theatre into a ‘mere formality’ (1980b, p.166).<sup>35</sup> More

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<sup>33</sup> This was the case for both the late 19th century practice of the Quanfuban and early 20<sup>th</sup> century practice of the *Chuan* generation. It is also evident from descriptions carried in texts such as Li Dou’s *Yangzhou huafang lu* and Wu Changyuan’s *Yanlan xiaopu* that this was the case.

<sup>34</sup> See chapter 2 of Sabrina Hsu’s thesis (forthcoming).

<sup>35</sup> Heavy censorship continued long into the dynasty. As Dolby puts it, the ‘intellectual inquisition’ of the Qianlong emperor’s project to catalogue the play scripts of the empire led to the further eradication of a large proportion of scripts and the executions of their authors in the 18th century (Dolby 1979, pp.137-45). Of new *chuanqi* written after *Taohua shan* 桃花扇 (The Peach Blossom Fan) in 1699 and *Leifengta* 雷峰塔 in 1806 (Leifeng Tower, more familiar as the *Baishezhuàn* 白蛇傳, or the Legend of the White Snake) none found a permanent place in the performance repertoire.

importantly, that a dearth of new performance-standard scripts had resulted partly from the heavy-handed censorship at the start of the new dynasty (ibid). Without any new texts of quality comparable to those of the past masters, Lu argues that actors kept audiences happy by innovating with performance rather than with new scripts. The significance of this argument to current understandings of performance history (and specifically the *luzi*) cannot be overestimated, since Lu further posits that this competitive emphasis on performance itself was essentially a Qing invention, and linked to the development of the playlet as performance form. Ming performance, he argues, would probably have been relatively simple in comparison, as there could not have been sufficient time for actors to rehearse the whole text *and* finesse movements as became the case later (Wang 200, p.193; Lu 1980a, p.76).

In highlighting the rise of the playlet, Lu leads subsequent scholarship to deduce that the finesse seen in 20th century performance was a Qing dynasty development reaching maturity in the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns (1735-1820, hereafter referred to as 'Qian-Jia era'), from which point it has been assiduously 'preserved' where possible. Before returning to this dichotomy of 20th century performance—its modern emphasis on aesthetics and choreography coupled with claims to an ancient pedigree—I wish to further explore the relationship between publishing trends in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties and their influence upon performance both then and now. Specifically, to ask how these come to bear on the proposed Qian-Jia transition of Kunqu from full-length plays to playlets.

The first point that emerges is that there are in fact few records to indicate that full-length *chuanqi* production was ever a common occurrence.<sup>36</sup> Swatek notes that there is

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<sup>36</sup> In a clarifying note in parentheses on page 175 of the 1980 edition (that has been deleted from the 2005 edition) Lu writes that by 'full-plays' 全本 he does not necessarily mean the original *chuanqi* but an abridged 'actor's performance script', although it is not clear whether this might mean three scenes or thirty.

no evidence for even one single full-performance of all 55 scenes of *Mudanting* in the Ming dynasty (2002, p.11). Furthermore, a letter from the literatus Mei Dingzuo 梅鼎祚 to fellow playwright Tang Xianzu dated 1614 illustrates the complexities of assuming an immediate correspondence between performance and textual cultures. Commenting on a visit by Yihuang actors 宜伶 trained and sent by Tang Xianzu to his hometown, Xuancheng in Anhui province, Mei notes that the troupe was in high demand on account of the popularity Tang's plays, but that it had been unable to perform them in full:

When three families of Yihuang actors came, our village being small, we could offer them little. Still, the troupes that came from Wu (Suzhou) and Yue (Shaoxing) were not as popular as your lot, owing to the fame of [your] *Mudanting* and *Handan ji*. However, they were unable to perform more than a third of the scenes. (qtd. in Swatek 2002, p.3)<sup>37</sup>

宜伶來三戶之邑，三家之村，無可愛助，然吳越樂部往至者，未有若曹之盛行，要以《牡丹》、《邯鄲》傳重耳，而皆不能演什三。

Assuming Tang was indeed aware that the troupe would only perform a third of the scenes, this missive demonstrates an interesting contradiction of expectations. Mei clearly seems to expect that they might perform the whole thing. Was the expectation of a full-length performance grounded on publishing trends or performance trends? Having probably become familiar with the plays through their texts in entirety, would Mei have expected a full performance to match? Or perhaps Mei simply means that the troupe had only time to perform one-third of the *Mudanting* or *Handan ji* playlets that they had been *asked* to perform. Whichever the case, it is clear that among the Ming literati there was just as much a lack of certainty as to how *chuanqi* should actually be performed.

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<sup>37</sup> This translation is an adaption from Swatek's. For further analysis of this passage see also Hou (2009, p.19) and Zhou Yude (1991, p.229).

Another commonly cited record is that of Hong Sheng's *Palace of Eternal Youth* (Changsheng dian 長生殿) which was performed in full in 1704 over full three days and evenings at the invitation of the Nanjing textile commissioner Cao Yin 曹寅 (Hu Ji 1989, p.233).<sup>38</sup> However, this extravagant performance is notable in history as an exception rather than evidence of a common practice.

The strongest suggestion that there was any intention to perform *chuanqi* in full are perhaps to be found in the efforts of Zang Maoxun, Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 and dramatist Shen Jing 沈景 to reduce the length of *chuanqi* to a slightly more manageable length.<sup>39</sup> In his preface to his edited collection of Tang's plays, Zang Maoxun seems to chide Tang for seeming not to know that *chuanqi* are no longer written to such length:

Since Zhang Boqi of Suzhou's *Hongfu ji* [it has been the custom] to just use thirty scenes. This makes actors happy. [The custom then became] for shorter and shorter plays, some with only twenty-something scenes.

自吳中張伯起《紅拂記》等作,止用三十折,優人皆喜為之,遂日趨日短,有至二十餘折者矣 (Zhou 1991, p.242).

While far fewer than fifty-five scenes, thirty scenes would still be at least a two-day affair. If audiences were as prone to boredom and actors to incapacity as both Zang and common sense suggest, this would be but a mild improvement.

Goldman points out that as Shen raised his own troupe of actors he, at least, would indeed have had them perform his plays in full (2013, p.322). While I would not dispute that this is possible, there remains insufficient evidence to claim that he frequently

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<sup>38</sup> Cao Yin was the grandfather of Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹, author of *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢.

<sup>39</sup> Both Zang and Feng Menglong's 馮夢龍 adaptations of the *Mudanting* were accordingly rewritten to this length, in thirty-five and thirty-seven scenes, respectively.

entertained audiences in this manner, and no special reason to assume that playwrights enjoyed full-length plays over playlet performance.<sup>40</sup> There is little evidence that full-length performance was even the case of the next generation of Suzhou writers, such as Li Yu 李玉 (1610-70), who, unwilling to pursue an official career under the new dynasty, relied on their dramatic works to make a living. In his lifetime, Li Yu wrote forty-two *chuanqi* (Wu 2002, p.463), which has been taken as evidence that he was under financial pressure to write both new works and shorter ones. Yet even Li's shorter *chuanqi* would have taken two days to act out and there are currently no records of such performances.

Instead of reflecting performance practice trends, this shift towards thirty scenes, for example in the works of Shen, may have been primarily a publishing trend rather than a performance one.<sup>41</sup> An alternative reading of the Zang Maoxun passage above places his works in the context of his disdain for the convolutions of southern drama in general, a genre which he regarded as vastly inferior to earlier northern *zaju* literature (Carlitz 2005, p.293). Zang's general concern, here and elsewhere, was surely less with performance format—as Li-ling Hsiao has argued (2007, p. 82)—but rather with what Carlitz calls 'competitive publishing' (2005, p.293) on which then 'penniless' Zang depended on for a living (West 2016, p.129). Zang's thirty-five scene edition of Tang's *Mudanting* was ostensibly to make it more performable, but as West notes, 'the underlying cause was clearly economic' (ibid, p.129).

The same can be said of the dramatist Li Yu 李漁 (1611-80) (note, not the same Li Yu as above), who for a living relied on not just his published works but their realisation in performance by his troupe (Wu ed. 2002, p.466). Li writes that four scenes is the best

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<sup>40</sup> In his study of the elite private theatre of the Ming literati, Grant Guangren Shen notes that, with the exception of Ruan Dacheng's plays and actors (Shen, pp.125-8) the actors of the Ming were known to specialise in scenes rather than whole *chuanqi* plays (ibid, p.123).

<sup>41</sup> Of Shen Jing's extant plays *Yixiaji* 義俠記 has 36 scenes, *Zhuichai ji* 墜釵記 has 31

length of performance. However, in stating this Li himself was able to appeal to an archive, noting that this structure mimics the four-acts of *zaju* (qtd. in Lu 2014, p.253). The four-scene format is later instituted by the 1700 edition of the popular miscellany *Zuiyiqing* 醉怡情 (Drunken pleasures), which lists four scenes alike for each of the 38 *zaju* and *chuanqi* it lists. Four scenes from a larger work ‘strung together’ is a structure common in presenting performance known as to *chuanxi* 串戲.

Even a century prior to the *Zuiyiqing*, publishing trends originating in anthologies of the northern style lyrics such as *Shengshi xinsheng* 盛世新聲 (New Songs of a Prosperous Age, 1517 preface) and *Yongxi yuefu* 雍熙樂府 (Songs of a Harmonious Era 1566 preface) became instituted in a number of miscellanies compiled of southern lyrics extracted from *chuanqi* plays. West and Idema note that actors during the Yuan were often literate, as evidenced in the exchanges between actors and literati in the *Qinglou ji* 青樓集 (Collection of the Green Bower) (2014, p.16). The same is not true of the Ming (Shen 2005, pp. 99, p.127) and Qing dynasties. This may be at least partly because the first Ming emperor, Taizu, banned actors and their families from the imperial examinations, removing actors’ chances for social advancement (Tan 2008, p.149). The dramatic texts of these dynasties were therefore not, like early Yuan editions, role-scripts intended for actors—who remained in the Ming largely dependent on their literati masters to explain meanings to them.

Carlitz notes that the miscellanies of the late Ming constituted two types, one commercial type furnished with secondary information for the traveller or general reader, and the second for ‘cultivated amateurs’ with which to perform for one another (2005, p.214).<sup>42</sup> Thus while the printed miscellanies of the Ming did not necessarily

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<sup>42</sup> The operation of xylographic printing was a costly one carried out with a return of investment in mind. By an analysis of their illustrations, Kathryn Lowry identifies travelling merchants as their most likely readership for the first variety of miscellany (2005, p.266). Yuming He describes how these particular miscellanies innovated a



correspond to performance or content of what was performed by actors, these documents tended to become regarded as play scripts by successive generations, or at least exerting a large influence as taste-makers, creating rather than recording trends in performance.

The *Yuefu hongshan* 樂府紅珊, (Red Coral Ballads, 1602 preface), for example, lists single scenes organised according to the ceremonial occasion on which they can be performed, such as ‘birthday celebrations’ 慶壽, ‘birth of a new child’ 誕育. Most importantly (due its wide circulation) is the *Zhuibaiqiu* 綴白裘 (Patched White Cloak; several editions between 1688-1777), the resource most commonly mined for performance historians of the urban stage. It should also be seen as the taste maker rather than simply a record.<sup>43</sup>

By tracing and comparing the changing presentation and secondary titles of the miscellanies, including the various *Zhuibaiqiu* editions, we can see that they progressively link Kunqu to *chuanqi* as its supposedly ‘natural’ musical form, and to shape the repertoire that has been expected from Kunqu troupes. As Kunqu troupes in the 20th century and in the present day seek to revive or ‘excavate’ material from the great century of *chuanqi* writing, they are inevitably guided in their choices by the editing, emendations, and anthologising of 18th century literati archivists.

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‘middle register’, setting the page in three blocks—the top and bottom containing dramatic excerpts and the middle drawing from: ‘popular songs, drinking games, riddles, jokes, “local expressions”, “winsome sayings”, brothel treatises and geographical lists’ (2013, p.87) set between two rows of songs. The second variety, the ‘cultivated amateur’, Carlitz suggests may not have commercial ventures but have been single imprints produced by wealthy literati for social reasons or indeed pure connoisseurship (2005, p.274).

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed list of the various dramatic miscellanies from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that contain *Mudanting*, including their subtitles, see Swatek’s Appendix C. 285-288. For an overview of the various incarnations of the *Zhuibaiqiu*, see Wu (2015, pp. 200-218).

Swatek argues that the changing content of Ming and Qing drama miscellanies reflects a shift from a diversity of styles to the pre-eminence of Kunqu (2002, pp.101, 105). However, it is important to remember that *chuanqi* plays make up a corpus which were sung to other styles using the same text, which shared a common store of named fixed-tunes. Luo Di, for example, argues that prior to the second-half of the 20th century the majority of *chuanqi* and *zaju* productions were not sung to Kunqu but *gaoqiang* 高腔 (which Luo classifies as a categories of styles which encompasses *Yiyang-qiang*) (Luo 2007, p.117). It has later become the perception that *chuanqi* were necessarily written for Kunqu, largely due to the *chuanqi* scenes contained in these miscellanies as being 'Kun *qiang*'.

## **Musical notation**

The rise of an urban theatre, often funded by wealthy merchants, directed by professional actors, meant that the literati were now no longer in control of the way the texts were interpreted on stage or how the melodies were sung. The result was a disconnection between the intelligentsia and the profession, and between the textual legacy literati saw as their own and the performers who were no longer under their control. It is with this context of a momentous change during the 18th century to the environments in which Kunqu was performed and patronised that one may consider perhaps the birth of perhaps the most important archive to define Kunqu, that of musical notation.

As Kathryn Carlitz notes, there was little if any public commercial theatre at the end of the Ming (2005, p.275). Performance took place in venues that brought actors and audiences together for specific social or ritual purposes—often in family homes or merchant guild halls (*huiguan* 会馆). However, in 1724, the fiscally conservative

Yongzheng emperor issued an edict forbidding officials from maintaining private troupes, a custom he considered a major drain on financial resources (Hu 1983, p.262). This period saw the establishment of the first public 'playhouse' 戲館 in Suzhou (Lu 1980, p.197). This was an environment in which the public bought tickets, similar to what was in Beijing called the 'tea house' 茶園 (ibid, p.261), which by the mid-18th century began to offer regular theatrical performances (Goldman 2013, p.68).

This impact of this shift in the very premise of the theatre has been given insufficient attention in the study of Kunqu's formation, as most scholars have preferred to emphasise its earlier historical roots. Thomas Rimer compares the shift of patronage of Noh theatre from the samurai class to the public market in the Meiji period to the 'revolution' in Western music when Mozart left the service of employers to be a freelance composer in Vienna in 1781 (cited in Brandon 1997, p.99). In China performance troupes also now left private patronage and moved into the public urban arena, in the commercial cosmopolitan centres of Suzhou, Yangzhou and later Beijing. The status of the actor underwent a complex but important shift. Although most actors in the early reigns of the Qing remained illiterate, unlike those of the Yuan dynasty, actors of great talent nonetheless commanded some authority and were able to exercise considerable control over the stage.

In the period of over a century between the Qianlong emperor's 1751 visit, and 1853 when it was captured by the Taiping rebels, Yangzhou was arguably the most active and important centre of Kun performance activity. Lindy Li Mark notes that there were at least fifteen troupes singing Kunqu in Yangzhou between the 1780s and 1853 (2009, p.230). Yangzhou was a major administrative and strategic capital on the Yangtze and headquarters of the Liang-Huai salt control. The city was a commercial centre for salt merchants from Huizhou (Anhui), Jiangxi, Hu Guang (Hunan and Hubei) and Guangdong provinces— a unique centre in which many of the richest men in the empire

lived and spent their money (Olivová 2009, pp.8, 10). It also became a crucial southern stronghold for the dynasty, frequently hosting the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors on their southern inspection tours, during which they were accustomed to watching a great deal of theatre.

Many performance troupes were owned by wealthy merchants (rather than literati-officials), and can be seen as semi-commercialised form of private theatre. These troupes were financed privately but performed both in public venues and to entertain the emperor on his tours. As Wu notes, one reason the salt magnates needed to maintain so many Kunqu troupes was precisely in order to curry favour with the emperor on his inspection tours (Wu 2015, p.122). Indeed the star *dan* actor Jin Dehui 金德輝, is recorded as being the one to suggest in 1784 that the Yangzhou salt and Suzhou textile commissioners assemble a troupe of the finest actors from across the region (the three urban centres of Suzhou, Yangzhou and Hangzhou) called the Jixiu troupe 集秀班 (ibid, p.91), performing a combination of Kun (*ya* 雅) and assorted/floral (*hua* 花) genres for the emperor.<sup>44</sup> On the back of this initiative, a number of troupes carrying the name *Jixiu*, appeared all around the country, including Guangzhou (called the Suzhou Jixiu troupe 姑蘇集秀班), Changsha (Hunan Jixiu 湖南集秀班) and Jiangxi (Yihuang 宜黃集秀班). These were actor led enterprises, commanding an economy of their own across the Empire.

Divorced from the process of staging drama, the literati however remained committed to Kunqu as 'pure singing' *qingchang* 清唱 rather than performance. This is the practice of lyric singing among the literati, one which is claimed to date from the Tang dynasty and is considered by some to be a refined art for scholarly classes to

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<sup>44</sup> The distinction between these apparent genre delineations and how they have been presented in 20th century scholarship is something I tackle in depth in Chapter Three.

pursue in a similar manner to calligraphy, painting and zither playing. It was in this realm that I argue members of the literati re-asserted their ownership of the southern lyric-drama tradition, through the means of the archive. Thus the mid- to late Qing era collections of musical notation also begin to appear in what I classify as the second wave of archivism, an attempt to wrestle back control of what the literati saw as its repertoire.

Xu Lili notes that Kun singing had originally spread orally and that it had not been the concern of the literati to write or publish musical notation (2011, p.92). Rather, the proficient Kun singer should be able to sing it according to knowledge of the *qupai* melody and tonal characteristics of each word.<sup>45</sup> The Republican era scholar Wang Jilie 王季烈 explains:

The reason that the ancients did not talk about their methods [of composition] is that because they expected people to learn them as they learned to sing the *qu*. It is like teaching calligraphy, all you have to do is have the person copy lots of classical models; you do not have to tell them how to hold the brush, they will write well regardless. (Mark 2013, p.10)

Even the issue of rhythmic notation (*dianban* 点板) had been dismissed by some literati following Liang Mengchu's 'red and black' edition of *Pipa ji* 琵琶記 in 1620. It contained with punctuation in red and indication of *ban* 板 in black help singers ascertain how many beats to sing each word to. Swatek notes that the increasing inclusion of *dianban* rhythm notation in textual miscellanies from around this period indicates the rise in popularity of Kunqu (2002, p.105). Carlitz suggests that such aids would have been

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<sup>45</sup> Bell Yung's monograph *Cantonese Opera: Performance as Creative Process* (1989) approaches the complex issue of how performers of that tradition sing to newly written libretti without the aid of either notation or rehearsal, making an initial investigation into the relationship between speech-tones and music in what appears to be spontaneous composition, with a resulting framework that appears similar to Chomsky's theory of rule-governed creativity (1964, pp.22-3).

looked down on by the true connoisseurs as an insult to their intelligence (2005, p.281). The rise in 'popularity' may not have however been to the liking of the true connoisseurs.

The first major project to archive musical dictation was commissioned by the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-95) whose prolific archivism is well-documented. His project to catalogue almost the entirety of culture is seen by some scholars as particularly destructive in so much as it succeed in not only preserving the past but also in censoring and altering it.<sup>46</sup> The *Jiugong dacheng nanbei ci gongpu*, 九宮大成南北詞宮譜 (The Great Compilation of Musical Scores from the Southern and Northern Arias in All Nine Modes), was completed in 1746 (referred to hereafter as *All Nine Modes*) edited by the emperor's uncle, Prince Zhuang Yinlu (Wong 1978, p.101). As Isabel Wong notes, *All Nine Modes* was divided according to a cosmological scheme devised by Prince Zhuang (ibid.). It consists of twenty-five musical modes, aligned with four seasons and thirteen monthly subdivisions and most likely constructed from a combination of collected handwritten *gongche* 工尺<sup>47</sup> manuscripts and in consultation with court singers and musicians of the Nanfu 南府, the ministry that furnished the court with entertainment.<sup>48</sup>

Displaced from their traditional roles in the production of drama and powerless to influence theatre, intellectuals from the Qianlong reign onwards shifted their efforts to the a canonical method of singing. This was effected by means of the publication of miscellanies and treatises by both the literati and the court intended to regulate and

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<sup>46</sup> For a study into the destructive aspects of Qianlong's catalogues see Kent Guy, *The Emperor's Four Treasuries* (1987).

<sup>47</sup> For an introduction and guide to *gongche* notation in English see Strassberg (1976).

<sup>48</sup> There are a great many handwritten notational manuscripts prior to this, most probably the basis for these projects but no block print musical scores intended for mass circulation. For details of Fu Xihua's manuscript collection see Fu (2010).

correct the production of an elevated genre of music which had to be distinguished from the common run of theatre.

While the court sought to catalogue (and thus control) textual versions of dramatic works, the literati saw themselves as the true interpreters of *chuanqi* works and their *qu* in song. Goldman argues that Ye Tang's intention in completing his *Nashuying qupu* 納書楹曲譜 (Musical Scores of the Receiving Pillar) assembled music for 360 songs, published in three volumes from 1784 to 1792, was to have the 'last word' over both the actor and the court.<sup>49</sup> While the encyclopaedic scale of *All Nine Modes* 4,466 songs dwarfed Ye Tang's work, only a fragment (160 songs) of it had actually been published as the *Ziyixuan yuepu* 自怡軒樂譜 in 1757 (Feng 2003, p.20).<sup>50</sup> Its immediate power as an archive in Derridean terms was thus delayed by the fact that very few had access to it. Furthermore, the format, divided cosmologically by months and seasons, was not convivial to either *qingchang* or stage performance as compared to Ye Tang's work, categorised by the dramatic work and its scenes.

Goldman contends that Ye's project reflects an intent to carve out a cultural space distinct from both state recognition and urban commercialism (2013, p.117). The title *Nashuying qupu* is translated by Goldman as 'Scores from the Last Word Studio', but one might also translate it as 'Musical Scores of the Receiving Pillar'. In this reading, Ye's *ying* (pillar) suggests more that his work was intended as the mainstay of the tradition, without which its integrity would crumble. The imperial anthology was not the major threat. In his preface, Ye in fact states that it is his intention to rescue the form from the hands of actors who 'had no master' to teach them, and thus 'perpetuated mistakes'

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<sup>49</sup> Unlike the many hands engaged for court projects, Ye Tang's was a private initiative.

<sup>50</sup> Not until 1844 would another fragment (190 songs) be published as the *Cuijin cipu* 碎金詞譜.

(ibid, p.131). As a pillar upholding the scaffolding of tradition, Ye is self-consciously contributing to an archive and seeking to influence the future while simultaneously hoping to curb the improper practices of actors. Ye's reputation at the time is affirmed by praise such as that of the Qing dynasty literatus Qian Yong 錢永 in his *Notes on Stepping through Gardens* 履園叢話, which explicitly distinguishes it from the professional acting community:

Recently the most outstanding [singer] is old man Ye Guangping [Ye Tang] of Suzhou. His melodious flow follows in the footsteps of the Yuan masters, as the first among the singers of Kunqu.

近時則以蘇州葉廣平翁一派為最著，听其悠揚跌宕，直可步武元人，當為崑曲第一 (quoted in Xu 2011, p.19).<sup>51</sup>

If Ye's project was, as Goldman suggests, to have the last word, he largely succeeded, given his defining influence on Kunqu's musical scores. Today, almost all Kunqu musical notation is based on Ye Tang's scores.<sup>52</sup> As well as 'fixing' Kunqu melodically, Ye's scores also had an influence on dramatic repertoire, by exerting an enormous influence on the narratives selected for Kunqu repertoire. It is no coincidence that the two *chuanqi* performed most often today in long format (usually as either one or two evenings of four scenes), *Changsheng dian* 長生殿 (Palace of Eternal Youth) and *Mudanting* are those that Ye Tang decided to include in their entirety rather than in extracts. Ye dedicates a whole volume to Tang Xianzu's 'four dreams',<sup>53</sup> his notation for these thus

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<sup>51</sup> The date of this work is unknown. Qian Yong lived from 1759 to 1854.

<sup>52</sup> However, differences between the *All Nines Modes* and *Pillar Scores* are, according to modern Kunqu authority (and famed singing trainer) Wang Zhenglai, usually few (interview in Hong 2002, pp.678-9).

<sup>53</sup> Tang's four plays (all of which involve a dream) are *Zichai ji* 紫釵記 (The Purple Hairpin), *Mudanting*, *Handan ji* 邯鄲記 (The Tale of Handan) and *Nanke ji* 南柯記 (Dream under the Southern Bough).



becomes widely used, settling the controversy over which editions of these works to use.<sup>54</sup>

Also included in Ye's project, despite its proclaimed orthodoxy to the *qu* tradition, was an 'outside' collection in which he notates (and thus canonises) a number of fashionable plays (*shiju*) which are not erudite like *chuanqi* and were not derived from the pure-singing tradition but the popular stage, including a number of pieces that are still integral to the performance repertoire, including *Sifan* 思凡 (Longing for Worldly Pleasure), *Xia Shan* 下山, or *Seng-Ni hui* 僧尼會 (Descending the Mountain), *Lu lin* 蘆林 (Among the Reeds) and *Jie xue* 借靴 (Borrowing Boots). It also includes a Kunqu version of the playlet popularised in *pihuang* 皮黃 style<sup>55</sup> by Mei Lanfang, *Zui Yangfei* 醉楊妃 (*Imperial Concubine Yang Becomes Intoxicate*). Mei writes in his memoirs that the lyrics are more or less exactly the same (apart from deletions in the *pihuang* version) and that pure-singing hobbyists in Beijing still sung the Kun version in the early 20th century.

Ye states that his scores were correct in all respects and that readers were to use them absolutely literally (cited in Lam 1994, p.36). If a particular section seemed challenging to perform, no alterations should be made. True connoisseurs and experienced singers would be able to persevere with the notated directions (ibid, p.36). In itself this sums up the project: these were rigid written guidelines for serious singers, certainly not intended or expected to be used by illiterate actors.

Ye Tang's legacy does however become tied up with the professional stage in the 20th century when his scores and disciple lineages (or at least those claiming descent

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<sup>54</sup> Both Zang Maoxun and Feng Menglong had rewritten the language of Tang's works in order to make them more singable according to its fixed tunes (Swatek 2002, p.27). By notating the plays in *gongche*, however, Ye was able to change the music to fit Tang's language.

<sup>55</sup> *Pihuang* refers to the two model systems in Jingju music *xipi* and *erhuang* (see Wichmann 1991, pp.53-55).

from him) became involved in the public theatre as well as pure singing private community. Yu Sulu 俞粟廬, a renowned calligrapher and pure singing master from Songjiang (present-day Shanghai), claimed to be a third generation in teaching lineage from Ye Tang and was involved in the establishment of the *Chuanxisuo* and the teaching of its pupils. However, his son, the actor Yu Zhenfei 俞振飛, ‘stepped into the sea’ (*Xia hai*), making the extremely rare move from the lettered classes to become an actor.<sup>56</sup> By his making this move, and because of Yu Sulu’s involvement in the *Chuanxisuo*, Ye’s notation would be established as the standard for actors as well as the literati avocational singers, turning a previously oral performance tradition into a notated one.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Shenyin jianglu lu* and performance**

I now examine an archival category relating to physical performance directly and thus the concept of the *luzi* in particular. Written in the 18th century and circulated widely in the 19th century, the *Shenyin jianglu lu* 審音鑑古錄 (*A Record for Parsing Notes and Mirroring Classics*, 1834 preface) included arias, stage speech and also choreographic directions. As a block print edition, this text was able to circulate widely, allowing theatre connoisseurs to have an expectation of performance prior to attendance at the theatre.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> The fame that Yu reached as a result of his performances of Jingju, have been credited with helping ‘save’ Kunqu in the 1980s. A letter he wrote to the State Council led to the establishment of the Kunqu Revival Advisory Committee in 1986.

<sup>57</sup> Though there is a significantly greater interpretive space in *gongche* notation than for example in *jianpu*, intellectual propriety was now consolidated in the tradition, mediated by Ye Tang’s archive.

<sup>58</sup> The circulation patterns of the first edition are however unknown. The preface to the 1834 edition that Wang Jishan 王繼善 had bought a copy of the book, having chanced upon it in Beijing, and while he has no knowledge of the original author,

Accounts of the Beijing theatre scene in the late Qing describe an environment in which social upstarts would get hold of annotated play scripts in order to criticise actors' performances in a display of apparent connoisseurship (Goldman 2001, p.78). We can envisage that a block print text would probably have been highly familiar within the marketplace and taken as a standard by which to compare performance. Its appeal to historical standards is also evident in its title as a 'record' of the 'classic'.

The text contains *qupai*, metric notation and musical key, but no *gongche* notation for melody. Instead, it contains pieces of choreographic notation, written sparsely and in the margins of the text, a feature it has in common with unpublished handwritten *shenduan pu* scores preserved within acting lineages.<sup>59</sup> Such notation is limited in its ability to represent complex movement and nuance as it appears on stage; the use of *shenduan pu* to demonstrate continuity is thus inherently problematic. However, as I have outlined in my introduction, *luzi* can be seen as the process of moving from one movement to another within the conventions of the role-type and the pace of the lyrics in song. The question I ask now is whether this document should be seen as a descriptive record or archive that attempts to reflect performance patterns at the time of writing, or as an instructive one concerned with dictating how performance *should* be from then on.

The clearest illustration that it had the latter function is that we know the present *luzi* for at least one playlet in the 20th century repertoire, *Kaiyan Shanglu* 開眼上路 (Seeing Again, Taking the Road), was designed based on its directions, by the actor Shen

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managed to acquire the wood-block from which this edition is printed. However, little is known about the scale and distribution of the first print-edition(s). Indeed, no such edition is known to remain in China. Professor Huang Shi-Zhong uncovers a record that a copy of the *Shenyin jianglu* was taken to Japan in 1782 (2009) but has not located the document itself.

<sup>59</sup> Handwritten *shenduanpu* and their use in post-UNESCO research is examined in Chapter Four.

Yuequan 沈月泉 and singing master Zhang Zidong 張紫東 (Gu 2009, p.116).<sup>60</sup> Attesting to its intentions we can turn to the preface of the 1834 edition, Qin Yinweng 琴隱翁 writes:

From the Yuan and Ming onwards, there have been thousands of writers, and particularly in recent times there have been many busybodies. From all these have been selected the best by Master Wanhua [editor of Ming edition *Zhuibai qiu*]; for which musical notation has been fixed by Ye Tang; and Li Yu created materials for teaching and learning singing. These can together be called the standards for the theatre. But Wanhua's record has just drama and no music, Huaiting music but no stage-speech, Old Man Li is all theory and no lyrics. To concentrate the talents of all three in one volume for use on the stage-carpet would be to ensure that there would not be any errors.

元明以來，作者無慮千百家，近世好事者尤多。擷其華者，玩花主人；訂其譜者，懷庭居士；而笠翁又有授曲、教曲之書，皆可謂梨園之圭臬矣。但玩花錄劇而遺譜，懷庭譜曲而廢白，笠翁又泛論而無詞。萃三長於一編，庶非翫觥之上，無慮周郎之顧矣。(Qin 1987, pp.2-5)

Qin's motivation to publish the work is a concern about the mistakes made by actors, and which hopes could be rectified via a text such as the one he is publishing. Further evidence can be gleaned from the 'eyebrow notes' (*meipi* 眉批) written perhaps by the original author above the text columns. For the playlet *Grass Meadow* 草地 from *The Red Pear* 紅梨記, for example, when Xie Zhangqiu and the Flower Maid walk together the author directs the actresses to walk:

Either in front or behind, either straight or diagonal, either facing one another walking, or facing away to sing [...] but don't do the old 'walking the three corners'.

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<sup>60</sup> This is the first documented 'excavation' (*wajue* 挖掘) of a *luzi*, a practice that becomes extremely common during the period of 'arranging the tradition' 整理傳統 in the 1980s, as I shall explore in depth in Chapter Two.

或前或後，或正或偏，或對面做，或朝外訴「…」不動行「…」俗走三角  
(*Shenyin jiangu*, p.360).

Lu Eting here interprets the author as encouraging the actors to be creative in performance rather than ‘walk the same old three corners’ (Lu 1980, p.198), and his reading of the document is thus that it is instructive rather than descriptive.<sup>61</sup>

As an example of the format and the level of detail given in the actual main body text, and cursory evidence to show how it has been adhered to in 20th century performances, we might turn to the dream scene of *Jingmeng* (The Startling Dream) in Tang Xianzu’s *Mudanting*.<sup>62</sup> In the scene, Du Linian, the 16-year-old daughter of the Prefect of Nan’an, has never left the confines of her home, where she receives private tuition. One spring day, Du’s maid Chunxiang urges her to take for stroll in the garden. After the outing, Du returns to her chamber, weary and emotionally affected by the beauty of spring. She falls asleep and dreams of a young scholar who declares his love for her in the garden and takes her to secluded spot, offstage, beyond a fence of peonies.

The stage directions seen in this text are interesting for not just their similarities to contemporary performance but also their differences, which correspond to models outlined in the introduction of how performance has become aestheticized in the 20th century. Observation of such differences are not incompatible with establishing the jussive authority of the directions according to my methodology, but an essential element. As Earle notes ‘the interpretation of a document is, for Derrida, only ever

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<sup>61</sup> Rather than evidence of an overwhelming fixity already in place for this particular play that the author is tired of, ‘walking the three corners’ may also refer to a *chengshi* pattern seen across many plays that the author is particularly averse to and regards something of a cliché generally.

<sup>62</sup> This is a scene I have learned with Nanjing *sheng* performer Qian Zhenrong and publicly performed on four occasions in London, including in June 2014 at SOAS, August 2014 at the Confucius Institute in Edinburgh and July 2015 at the City of London festival.

provisional' and contains an infinite number of interpretation in a future unforeseeable to its author (2015, p.313).

Figure 2: Example page from *The Shenyin jianglu lu*, taken from 1988 reprint (p.554) for *Peony Pavilion* 'Startling Dream'

遍在幽闥自憐姐姐和你那答兒講話去小旦作含笑不行小  
生 嗔牽小旦衣介小旦低問秀才那裏去小生轉過這芍藥  
欄前緊靠着湖山石邊小旦低問去怎的小生輕唱小桃紅和  
你把領扣鬆衣帶寬袖稍兒搵着牙兒苦也下山虎則待你忍  
耐溫存一晌眠小生欲近小旦羞推介合是那處會相見相看  
儼然早難道好處相逢無一言又近小旦笑推急走介小生提  
衣急趨小旦立疑望轉身先進小生緊隨下





Figure 3: Scene illustration from the *Shenyin Jiangu Lu* and contemporary performance of *Jing Meng* (Gong Yinlei & Qian Zhenrong)





The marginal stage directions on lines 1-2 of Figure 2 (indicated by a blue line and the number 1), for example, indicates: 'the *sheng* leads the *xiao dan* by her sleeve' 生牽小旦衣介 (Qin, p.554). Also contained in the miscellany are illustrations of the scenes. In the following illustration (Figure 3), the flower spirit and attendants watch over the lovers, who we see in the bottom right corner as Liu Mengmei takes hold of Du's sleeve to lead her away. In all modern stage versions (like this pictured), Liu deposits his willow branch in a vase on Du's desk before the recitation that leads to taking her sleeve, freeing his left hand to perform freer movements with his water sleeves and (in some versions) the weighted ribbon (*piaodai* 飄帶) hanging from his cap. The marginal text labelled 2 also indicates how the characters go offstage, in a manner quite different to contemporary performance.

[*Sheng*] again approaches. *Dan* smiles and walks away. *Sheng* lifts his gown and rushes towards her. *Dan* stares at him from her distance, then turns and goes offstage first. *Sheng* hurriedly follows her.

又進, 小旦笑推急走介, 小生提衣急趨, 小旦遠立凝望轉身先進, 小生緊隨下

In contemporary versions of this moment, the *sheng*'s lifting up of his gown (in order to rush over) has been transposed and aestheticized into three 'invitation' gestures (*san qing* 三請) to encourage the *dan* to walk away with him. This also involves lifting the up the hem of the gown, but rather than directly rushing over, instead making large a semi-circular stationary step (see Figure 4) with the left foot, then right foot, then left again, intended, apparently, to indicate an invitation to go with him.

Figure 4: The lifted gown as 'three invitations' gesture (from top left clockwise), couple exit stage together



The *dan* responds with three simultaneous water sleeve movements—as the *sheng* approaches her, she casts her sleeves on top of his and he, holding her shoulders, leads her offstage. We see here, an adaption from the templates given in the archive adapted to new interactive environment. The fixity derived from the lifting of the hem, originally to facilitate the fast movement of an anxious lover, later adapted to fit idealised standards of the erudite young scholar. The agency of the archive is clear, should the robe lifting movement not have been present in the text, the three invitations gesture may not have evolved on the 20th century stage.

### **Concluding remarks**

Invoking Derrida's conception of the archive as the determiner of knowledge rather than its record, I have put forward the case that three centuries of miscellanies and musical scores should be perceived not so much as records from which to excavate some primordial and authentic Kunqu practice; rather, they are the means by which to observe the gradual process which has constructed and continues to construct it. However, the relationship between the archive of texts and performance is a complex one, on which the conventions and economies of the publishing trends bring more to the written record than to stage trends. Thus, while early miscellanies were probably intended for reading rather than performance, it was as a consequence of their circulation that audiences were able to expect troupes to also perform in this format.

The ascension of a class of urban theatre-goers, particularly in the cities of Yangzhou and Beijing in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, together with a clampdown in the Yongzheng reign on government officials keeping private troupes, meant that actors found work on the commercial stage. They were thus no longer under the direction of the troupe-owning literati who had in the past interpreted and guided their realisation

of the highly literary works onstage. However, as the actor took over the role as interpreter of *chuanqi* texts in song and on stage—altering their contents according to personal understandings and the taste of the audience—the literati were not simply willing to stand aside. Rather, it became a mission to point out ‘mistakes’ made by actors through publishing through texts such as Ye Tang’s *Nashuying qupu* music notation and the *Shenyin jianglu* choreographic notation.

## 2. Fixed *luzi* in the contemporary repertoire

In this chapter, I turn to the early 20th century to what might be considered a living archive, discussion of the Kunju Chuanxisuo 崑劇傳習所 (Kunju Perpetuation Institute, hereafter referred to as Chuanxisuo) and its teachers and pupils. The generation of students that graduated from this project are crucial figures who will feature prominently throughout this thesis.

I will show that the *luzi* is often presented as the unit of Kunqu's historical authenticity, and therefore one that must be protected in its immutable form. However, I suggest that its historical purpose may have been more as a pedagogical tool to develop competency for creating performance more generally. This historical *luzi* was, I argue, a pedagogical template—like the painting manual—to develop the skills and components necessary to develop both new works and variations on old ones. In the context of global modernity and capitalist structures that link authorship to ownership, the fixed *luzi* (rather than its components, the *chengshi*) have become the most identifiable, and therefore 'protectable' units of Kunqu's heritage.

Over the course of this section I consider how training methods contrast with the later generations in the modern era in which literacy standards, political and economic power structures and the ecology of performance have all altered dramatically. I then survey the current repertoire of *luzi*, paying attention to one particular video archiving

project, *Dashi shuoxi* (Masters' Lectures, 2014) <sup>63</sup> collecting the accounts of representative actors for the playlets 'alive' on the present-day Kunqu stage.

### **The Chuanxisuo as a living archive**

As Derrida argues, the archive is 'a promise' and 'a responsibility for tomorrow' (1998, p.36), and the Chuanxisuo was an organisation self-consciously dedicated to fulfilling that promise by preserving and perpetuating the practice of Kunqu. This was a project first carried out by Jiangnan elites, distinguishing Kunqu as the educated theatre in contrast to popular varieties enjoyed by the masses, but the project was 'consigned' in the Communist People's Republic, in the recognition of Kunqu as an independent genre in the official theatrical classification. These performers were raised as an archive from early youth and then deployed until old age as the transmitters of this archive. This group of actors is an example of what Eisner call a 'living archive'—that an archive need not be confined to a depository of documents but also 'particular combinations of tangible and intangible remains, conventions, practices, beliefs, and genealogies of knowledge which are historically embedded and politically positioned' (Eisner 2013, p.129).

The 'pure singing' master Bei Jinmei 貝晉眉 established the Chuanxisuo in 1919, training ninety boys selected from orphanages, poor families and actors' families between the ages of nine and fourteen. After a year, Bei no longer had funding to continue and the financing of the project was taken over by Mu Ouchu 穆藕初, a wealthy cotton merchant who had returned to China after earning university degrees at the

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<sup>63</sup> Full title *Masters' Lectures on 109 Excerpts, The Performing Art of Kunqu* 藝術百種，大師說戲 (Publisher's own translation).

University of Illinois and the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College.<sup>64</sup> The use of 'Kunju' 崑劇 (the drama of Kun) here suggests that the term Kunqu was reserved by elites as a term for singing practice.<sup>65</sup> This project was, from their perspective, the revivification and in many ways the recreation of a theatre of which only the sung lyric had survived in true form. This was a self-conscious attempt to realise the archive and the true performance it contained. The ideology extended to personal identity: each of the boys was given the character *chuan* 傳 (to transmit/perpetuate) as the second character of his stage name. Together they came to be known as the *Chuan* generation, or *Chuan zi bei* 傳字輩. Unlike previous training schools (*keban* 科班) the students here were not trained as financial investments to make a return. If for the past two centuries the purpose of the opera troupe had been to make money on the commercial stage, the Chuanxisuo was an idealistic and perhaps also an altruistic project.

In practical terms, however, it was private individuals and philanthropists taking the lead in a project that was seen by many at the time as hopelessly idealistic. Noting that 'some enthusiasts actually established a training school for actors,' the modernist Yao Hsin-nung saw little hope in the project: 'as anyone can see, [this] is but the last feeble writhings of a dying man, whose life has already ebbed away' (1936, p.83). Yao's history presents Kunqu as though it were a dynasty, self-contained with a beginning, middle and end; even describing its zenith in the 18th century Qianlong reign as 'not the dazzling splendour of rosy dawn' but the 'dwindling glow' of its 'luminous sunset'.

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<sup>64</sup> Most textual sources on this subject claim that Mu funded the Chuanxisuo from the very start. The version I present here is based on interviews contained in the documentary series produced by the Shanghai Television company *Jueban shangxi, Kunju chuanzi* 絕版賞析·崑劇傳字 produced in 2014 [http://www.56.com/u64/v\\_ODQ5MDYwNjE.html](http://www.56.com/u64/v_ODQ5MDYwNjE.html) (accessed October 2015).

<sup>65</sup> The use of 'Kunju' 崑劇 here rather than Kunqu, reveals to us that the latter was in fact not the name of a stage genre at the time, a point that will be significant later in this thesis.

However, its students were not intended for careers as stars—their purpose was to be the substrate onto which the archive was to be written. For the past two centuries the purpose of the opera troupe had been to make money on the commercial stages of Beijing and Shanghai. Certain actors, such as Mei Lanfang, had built up such stardom, as to enable them to raise their status from among the acting class into top echelons of society. The Chuanxisuo, despite its enlightened figureheads and noble aims (corporal punishment was forbidden, English was to be on the curriculum)<sup>66</sup> was still in practical terms a return to an era in which the actors (perhaps for good reason) were to be instructed in the meaning of texts and how the texts should be realised.

The *Chuan* generation of actors were mostly taught to sing by wealthy aficionados, including Zhang Zidong 張紫東 and Bei Jinmei (Sang 2010, pp. 32-33). Furthermore, a wealth of notation and well-documented ‘rules’ for singing meant that the musical aspect was at least not completely reliant on oral transmission. Preservation and transmission of the stage tradition clearly referred to how these playlets were choreographed onstage, representing—apparently—centuries of accumulated performance knowledge. The school was led by Shen Yuequan, scion of Jiangnan’s most prominent family of Kunqu actors.<sup>67</sup>

The Chuanxisuo in many ways constituted a prescient turn to a new era inspired by modern ideas. Unlike previous generations of professional actors trained in traditional theatre schools (*keban*) or taken as apprentices in rural troupes, these children were

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<sup>66</sup> See Gu Duhuang, 2009: 160. English was later taken off the curriculum but You Caiyun almost lost his job teaching at the school for striking a child’s hand.

<sup>67</sup> The Shen family had been leaders of the Quanfuban 全福班, since the end of the Taiping Rebellion. As the single remaining Kunqu troupe in Jiangnan in the 1910s, its actors made a living touring the waterways of southern Jiangsu and northern Zhejiang, performing on rural stages and giving occasional performances in Shanghai. The Quanfuban, which had already split up and reformed as the latter Quanfuban 后全福班 again split in 1924. Information about the Quanfuban taken from the entry in the Kunju Gazetteer 崑劇志 by Sang (2000, p.595).



being educated to be able to read and engage with the archive themselves, directly rather than under the guidance of the literati class.

I argue that the tradition they were allegedly heir to was in fact one that emerged as a consequence of their education and later constitution as an acting generation. Many of the plays transmitted by the *Chuan* generation are known to have been either changed or created rather than simply transmitted between generations in an unchanging state. This is evident, for instance, from Zhang Jingxian's 张静娴 *Master's Lecture on Xu ge* 絮閣 Discussion in the Chamber', in which Zhang explains that the *Chuan* generation actor Yao Chuanxiang 姚傳薌 would demonstrate the piece he was teaching differently each time.<sup>68</sup> On asking him which way was correct he would reply that 'either are fine as long they fit your understanding of the character'. Clearly, dogmatic ideas of a fixed routine were not of central importance to Yao Chuanxiang.

We can assume that Zhang's special attention to this circumstance, however, marks Yao's attitude as being unusual. She remarks that Yao's method would be more suitable for mature actors rather than young students, as 'having less experience, young actors need a clear model to emulate' (Zhang 2014, p.6).<sup>69</sup> In any event, it is not legitimate to assume that genealogical connection ensures performance similarity: James Brandon describes how four generations of the Izumi school in the Japanese *kyogen* theatre perform in different styles despite the fact that family transmission is seen as of utmost importance. Even brothers are not able to perform the same because their father 'was at different stages of his career when he taught them' (1997, p.97).

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<sup>68</sup> *Masters Lectures* no. 45 (vol 3., p.6).

<sup>69</sup> The issue of which of the current mature generation of female actresses' best preserves Yao Chuanxiang's technique in *Xun meng* 'Searching for the Dream' from the *Mudanting* and *Ti qu* 'Composing Lyrics' from *Jidu geng* (A Cure for the Jealous) is a matter of opinion in Kunqu circles, with various claims made to the title, but little to lay claim in terms of actual choreography.

Shen Chuanzhi was the son of the lead teacher of the school, Shen Yuequan. He describes the process of learning a play as first reciting the complete text off by heart, including all the roles in the play, then learning the singing by heart, followed by the teaching of movements (Shen 1984, p.38). Regardless of whether the text was first learned from a script or via oral transmission, the crucial difference between the *Chuan* and subsequent generations was the quantity of material learned. According to Shen's account, each of the *Chuan* students had memorised one hundred playlets within three years of training (Shen 1984a, p.133). While modern training schools are primarily concerned with building capabilities in movement and sound, the *Chuan* generation were also trained to respond to the demands of audiences, which would often select playlets to be performed on demand. Texts therefore had to be committed to long-term memory—something that began to become unnecessary as both increased literacy and access to printed material became more widespread over the course of the 20th century. Viewing customs also changed, with the practice of scene selection no longer common in the latter half of the 20th century.<sup>70</sup> The students would not always have understood the material—many of these *chuanqi* plays remain unintelligible to educated adults without specialised knowledge, let alone children.<sup>71</sup>

Rather than fixed, unchanging performance being the end product of such a training program, it seems probable that the fixed *luzi* was at an earlier stage the pedagogical

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<sup>70</sup> As a regular student of Kunqu performance under a professional actor, often struggling with the allusive meanings of *chuanqi* lyrics, I found that recitation became reinforced in memory when matched to fixed movements which were indeed taught on a precise step-by-step and move-by-move basis. The field of educational psychology has long emphasised the importance of association in the neuroanatomy of memory. Further research is needed to determine whether associated movements may have had a role in retaining information, especially for students who must learn such a large number of plays in just a few years.

<sup>71</sup> In her autobiography, the famous Jingju *dan* Li Yuru recalls her own difficulty in learning Kunqu lyrics for the first time as child (Li 2008, p.289).

means rather than the performative end. The Taiwanese academic Chou Chun-yi 周純一 notes that with a grounding in so many playlets, the performers of *Chuan* generation were 'able to change the *shenduan* as they saw fit' (interview in Hong 2002, pp. 523-4). The same grounding is still frequently discussed two decades on as being the necessary qualification to not just alter movements in established choreographies, but also to choreograph from scratch, a process called *nie xi* 捏戲 'kneading the drama' (like clay). Taylor makes a similar point in terms of the transmission of 'the repertoire' in general, that actors and dancers 'internalize a concept and repeat, rehearse, and recreate' (2008, p.100). Ding Xiuxun 頂修詢, a researcher attached to the Jiangsu Province Kunqu Theatre, notes that in present generation there are few actors who have learned even twenty playlets,<sup>72</sup> and that many of them have absorbed the influence of Jingju (ibid.). From Taylor's perspective, however, preserving the repertoire does not mean isolating it from change: 'Choreographers might draw from earlier repertoires to re-envision and reinvent new work that honours its predecessors even as it breaks new ground' (ibid.).

A parallel is seen in other Chinese arts such as painting and calligraphy, in which the customary method of learning is to copy the classic paintings or character styles until they can be replicated perfectly. Once able to copy large numbers of the classic paintings, the artist is naturally able to make his own composition, having a feel for how modules or elements should be combined.<sup>73</sup> For the *Chuan* generation, learning movement vocabulary by rote, as it were, generated not only a specific performance *luzi*, but also developed the ability to 'knead' new choreography using same modular components. Shen Chuanzhi's account explained how his father saw the plays as a form

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<sup>72</sup> In the same volume Hu Jinfang reveals she has learnt 30 to 40 playlets.

<sup>73</sup> Painting manuals have been widely published since the mid-Ming. See Park (2012) for a study on this sub-genre of literature.

of family inheritance that could enable his offspring to provide for his own family. Being short and plump, Shen Chuanzhi, was physically unsuited for an acting career. However, with the knowledge of hundreds of *luzi*, he could, instead of making a performance career, surpass all others in his ability to teach and transmit. His father would say: 'You need to have 200 playlets in your belly, that way at least you'll never be hungry' (Shen 1984, p.38).

The metaphor of consumption is extended further as he describes the manner in which he was taught:

He would teach me one playlet a week [...] They were completely force-fed to me [lit. duck-stuffing with a shoehorn 填鴨式的硬塞]. Once I could recite and sing, then he would teach performance. These elements combined, each playlet had to be completely 'swallowed'. [...] Even today, I still remember many plays, only because I was 'force-fed' in this way by my father. (ibid.)

The perceived value of this legacy given to Shen by his father and not to any other students, is perhaps one reason for the shift I identify in which the entire *luzi* has increasingly becomes seen as the unit of Kun transmission rather than its *chengshi*.

The language of consumption, seen above, is often used in connection to the learning of theatre. Words seen here, such as 'eating', 'stuffing', 'swallowing' and having theatre in your 'belly', might be seen as the opposite of donning a mask, or assuming the outward appearance of a character onstage. Rather, these concepts imply the becoming of character (and the repertoire) by a process of ingestion from the inside-out—you are what you eat. The historian and amateur performer Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛 wrote that actors who 'have just learned [to perform]' a playlet should not make changes to a playlet as they have not yet been able to 'digest' it (1988, p.3).

According to Yue Meiti, a female *sheng* performer and one of Shen's favourite students,<sup>74</sup> no one was more capable than Shen Chuanzhi at kneading drama.<sup>75</sup> This ability to create a *luzi* combines digested knowledge and experience with creativity to, as Taylor describes, 'draw from a repertoire of learned, ritualised practices' (2008, p.100), or in this case *chengshi*. Obviously, this complicates the predominant notion that *luzi* are a stable sequence of movements transmitted through time. Because Shen had never actually publicly performed many of the plays he knew, Yue deemed it unlikely that he would be able to remember them with clarity 40 or 50 years after learning them. In addition, at the time of teaching in the 1980s, Shen was himself in his 80s and had already suffered two strokes (Gu 2009, p.170). Yue believes that a number of the playlets he transmitted in the 1980s such as 'The Lotus Song' 蓮花刮目 were probably improvised or re-'kneaded' based on experience rather than being accurate reproductions of remembered choreographies.<sup>76</sup> Yet in the current climate of preserving inheritance, Shen's *luzi* are regarded as the trademark of orthodoxy, with the implication that his choreographies are fixed, strict and ancient.

### **Transmission in state institutions**

The transmission of choreography subsequent to Shen and other members of the *Chuan* generation occurred under the auspices of central government support in the PRC. Even the briefest of biographical sketches will show how *Kunqu* archiving occurred in response to ideology and socio-political conditions, ranging from the early PRC nationalisation and political sanitisation of Kunqu education and repertoire, the attempt

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<sup>74</sup> In Hong 2002 (p.27) Shen mentions Yue as performing 'the most like Kunqu' of his students.

<sup>75</sup> Interview notes 2013.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

to erase the archive in the Cultural Revolution, and the many archiving projects over the last thirty years intended to legitimate, secure, revive and authenticate stage practices.

The oldest of this present generation of actors began training in the early 1950s in Hangzhou, Suzhou and Beijing. Unlike the school environment of the *Chuan* generation, these performers studied under the tutelage of working performers—a return to an older apprentice system common to rural troupes prior to the Republican era. Like the *Chuan* performers, the students in Hangzhou and Suzhou were given a common middle character for their stage names, both of which emphasised transition and continuity. In Hangzhou, this character was 世 (e.g. Wang Shiyu 汪世瑜) and in Suzhou it was 繼 (e.g. Zhang Jiqing 張繼青). At about the same time in Beijing, Hou Shaokui 侯少奎 was also training with his father Hou Yongkui 侯永奎 formerly of the *Kun-Yi banshe* 崑弋班社, which was by this time no longer active.

In 1954, the first Kunqu class was enrolled in a public opera school, by which point it was considered a feudalistic practice (and therefore ideologically anathema) to assign new stage names to children. Instead, they were known collectively as the ‘great Kunju class’ 崑大班 in Shanghai. Only a few years younger than the performers described above, the ‘great class’ performers account for eleven of the twenty-nine masters included in *Dashi shuoxi*, including the *xiaosheng* actors Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁 and Yue Meiti 岳美緹. Born in 1941-2, this generation graduated in 1961, enjoying only five years on stage, between theatre school and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. During this time, all practice of traditional theatre had to stop and a whole generation had to leave the theatre altogether for a decade until the end of Cultural Revolution in 1976.

A third generation, slightly younger, entered the Shanghai (e.g. Zhang Jingxian 張靜嫻) and the Zhejiang schools (e.g. Wang Fengmei 王奉梅) in 1959, and the Jiangsu opera school in 1960 (e.g. Huang Xiaowu 黃小午, Hu Jinfang 胡錦芳 and Shi Xiaomei 石小梅).

This generation graduated just as the Cultural Revolution started, but rather than leaving the stage altogether during that time, they performed revolutionary ‘model operas’ for the first eight years of their careers. There are also a handful of even younger actors included in the collection, who did not enter opera school until after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. These include performers who studied at the Jiangsu school (e.g. Ke Jun 柯軍), the Suzhou school (e.g. Wang Fang 王芳) and the Zhejiang school (e.g. Lin Weilin 林為林).

The end of the Cultural Revolution brought with it a cultural and political impetus for reestablishing aspects of traditional culture lost to a decade of iconoclasm. The second group were mostly taught in the 1980s during a period of cultural and political enthusiasm for excavating and reestablishing traditional culture following the end of the Cultural Revolution. With the *Chuan* generation nearing the end of its lifespan, a renewed anxiety to transmit more repertoire gripped the reformed Kunqu establishment. Some plays were transmitted in individual arrangements between teachers and students in the late 1970s although, for the majority, transmission took place in a series of high-profile public projects in the 1980s. In November 1981, the Ministry of Culture, together with seven other governmental departments, held a 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary event of the establishment of the Chuanxisuo. In March of the following year, the Chuanxisuo was officially re-established, conducting four training projects over the next two years during which 86 playlets were transmitted by *Chuan* generation actors and other senior performers, including Yu Zhenfei and Yang Yinyou 楊銀友 of the Yongjia Kunju troupe in Wenzhou. During this period a number of recordings were made, some of which I analyse in later chapters.<sup>77</sup> In 1984, Yu Zhenfei—who unlike most Kunqu actors was famous outside of Kunqu circles through his success on the Jingju

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<sup>77</sup> For reasons that are not clear the re-established *Chuanxisuo* ceased activity in 1984.

stage—wrote to the state committee requesting that steps be taken to rescue Kunqu. As a result of this, the Ministry of Culture established the Kunqu Revival Advisory Committee in 1986, led by Yu Zhenfei and with participation at committee level by *chuan* actors Zhou Chuanying and Shen Chuanzhi, and Luo Di serving as academic vice-secretary.

During two training periods organised by the committee, the first in Suzhou for six weeks in April and May and the second in various locations over the rest of the year, 106 playlets were taught to actors from all of the then-six troupes, with further videos also made. This was not so much an exercise in reinforcing repertoire suspended during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution as the transmission of that which had never been taught in the relatively short period between 1953 and 1966; a project in ‘excavating’ from the memories of Shen Chuanzhi and other surviving actors of the *Chuan* generation (then in their 80s) *luzi* that had been neither performed nor taught for over four decades.<sup>78</sup> However, at this time the *chuan* generation were already in the 80s, many, like Shen Chuanzhi, in extremely fragile states of health. Furthermore, much of the material being taught had not been performed since before the Japanese invasion five decades earlier. The process of selection of which repertoire to transmit—and in which form—was only one more instance in the continuous process of archival which has produced today’s repertoire.

In order to understand the technical process of this archival, it is necessary to look at how technique was passed on and subsequently expressed. By showing the gaps and turns in the transmission, I demonstrate that the ‘traditional’ *luzi* transmitted by this generation of actors such as Shen Chuanzhi, should not necessarily be considered a

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<sup>78</sup> The *Chuan* generation did perform for a period between their graduation in 1924 and the Japanese invasion of Shanghai in 1942. After the defeat of Japan, the actors returned to Shanghai to discover their costume box had been destroyed by Japanese bombing (Sang 2000, p.103).



reproduction of what they themselves were taught as students. Furthermore, drawing on the example of similar traditions in the learning of painting, poetry and calligraphy, I introduce the significance of the fixed *luzi* as a way of developing artistic sense and the technical ability and aesthetic competence to create *luzi*. Having 'digested' large numbers of *luzi*, the *Chuan* generation were able to change and create new choreography that they felt was not in contrast with the tradition. Archival here is thus the process of setting technical and aesthetic boundaries for a living genre, and should not be misconstrued as a static reproduction of a tradition.

## The current repertoire

In this section, I note that despite being presented as ‘traditional,’ a large proportion of the *luzi* in the current repertoire were either created or significantly changed in the 20th century. This can be demonstrated by an analysis of the *Dashi shuoxi*, in particular the contrast between, on one hand, how it is framed and narrated as an archive created to preserve an endangered performance tradition and, on the other, its actual lecture content, which reveals quite the opposite tendency. Like the Chuanxisuo, the *Dashi shuoxi* started as a philanthropic project. Though not published until the final months of 2013, the project was initiated in 2008, financed by the Hong Kong Kunqu enthusiast Yeh Chao-Hsin 葉肇鑫.

The final words of the general preface read as follows.

Chinese Kunqu is the intangible heritage of all humanity. *Dashi shuoxi* is Chinese Kunqu’s *tangible* heritage. History needs us leave a footprint, now we will take that step.’ (From the ‘General Preface’ *Zongxu*; p. 5) <sup>79</sup>

This reflects a disregard or lack of awareness of Taylor’s critique that rather than preserve intangible embodied practice the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) movement tends to commit it to tangible media. It also seeks to assume or anticipate the authority of a historical record.

Allegedly inspired by attending a series of lectures at Hong Kong City University, which invited many of the same actors to speak to students, hosted by Professor Cheng Pei-kai 鄭培凱 (Yang 2014, p.97), Ye invited 29 of the most senior generation of

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<sup>79</sup> 我們要把這一步走好 It would be tempting to translate this line as ‘put this foot down’ to reflect the didacticism of the very process of archival. However, to do so would of course inaccurately reflect the tone and meaning of the original sentence.

performers to explain and demonstrate how they learned and now perform key pieces of repertoire and why.

As I related in the introduction, Derrida argues that the archive aims to construct a single corpus, in which ‘all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration’—in the case of *Dashi shuoxi*, the configuration is structured as one playlet/ one master/one lecture.<sup>80</sup> In its aim to protect the extended ‘hundred classics’, this format, has, (and despite its undeniable importance as a record) profoundly limiting constraints. The format of the archive naturally determines the narrative and deletes many stories that fall outside its parameters. Like anything else, defining Kunqu in a certain way automatically produces a certain Kunqu—with little trace of everything that lies outside certain (but not very clearly defined) bounds.

Firstly, the majority of playlets are not soliloquies and involved the expertise of more than one important role type performer. We hear, for example, no discussion of how the role of Liu Mengmei is performed in the *Jing meng* 驚夢, or Chen Miaochang in *The Stirring Zither* 琴挑. While the project does not claim to be comprehensive, it clearly is making a claim to being the crucial video archive of living artists. We are told in the general preface that the playlets are selected for inclusion on account of being ‘mature or relatively mature onstage over the last century’ (Ye 2014, p.5). ‘Relatively mature’, as we shall see, turns out to be a euphemism for ‘recent’ while omissions of many genuinely mature staple playlets frequently performed by several troupes is bemusing. Three particularly obvious examples would be *Shu guan* 書館 (The Library) from *Pipa ji*

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<sup>80</sup> Despite the prescription of one playlet to one master in the *Dashi shuoxi*, one playlet, ‘Captured Alive’ is openly included twice, with both lectures by clown actors playing the same role Lin Jifan and Liu Yilong with no authority of one version over the other implied by the archival configuration. This particular playlet contains an important *dan* role in which Yan Poxi comes onstage as a ghost to drag Zhang Sanlang into the underworld. A second presenter for this playlet to discuss this major female role, including the ghost-steps *chengshi* would arguably have been more informative.

琵琶記 (The Tale of the Pipa), *Kao Hong* 拷紅 (Interrogating Hong Niang) from *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (Story of the Western Wing) and *Jia mei* 嫁妹 (Zhong Kui gives his Sister in Marriage) from *Tianxia le* 天下樂 (Joy amid the mortals).

A passage in Ye's postscript argues that the basic skills of Kunqu *chengshi* are mainly contained in several dozen playlets and so 'as long as these 'hundred classics' 經典百種 exist, so too will traditional Kunqu' (Ye 2014, p.262). Though the ambition is to create a standard archive, it demonstrates omissions not only of well-known playlets but of whole role-types. The most obvious case is the older lady *laodan* role-type, whose repertoire (and therefore also *chengshi* conventions) is completely elided with no acknowledgement or explanation. An obvious choice for this role-type's inclusion would have been the *shiju* playlet *Ba yan* 罷宴 (The End of Banquets) in which the leading role is *laodan*, although it is by no means the only example still performed in the contemporary stage. With no *laodan* actresses involved in the project, an entire branch of Kunqu performance, along with its associated lineages and *chengshi* of performance convention is effaced.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, in light of the omissions and Yeh's expressed intentions in his postscript, some of the inclusions are also questionable. Ye makes clear his intention to preserve specifically that which is both exclusively Kunqu and that originates prior to the modern era:

The whole world is paying attention, future generations are prepared to transmit Chinese Kunqu, which basically means Ming and Qing dynasty Kunqu and *not* modern Kunqu, for otherwise it would not carry the title 'heritage' (Ye 2014, p.262).

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<sup>81</sup> The leading *laodan* actress of these masters' generation, Wang Weijian 王維艱, is married to Huang Xiaowu, who contributes four lectures to the project. Together with Huang, she was formerly part of the Nanjing troupe and now teaches the sixth generation of Kunqu actresses at the Shanghai Theatre Academy.

Despite these noble intentions, based on what is learned from the lectures themselves, I identify (of a total of 107 playlets) some 34 that do not fall into this category: including 12 playlets that were transplanted from genres other than Kunqu (including 3 sung in the *chuiqiang* style); and 22 playlets with entirely or mostly new choreography.

While some of the latter have had a ‘comparatively mature’ life on the stage over several decades, others have not; in particular *Chen jiang* 沉江 (The Plunge) and *Ti hua* 題畫 (The Painting) were choreographed in the 1990s and *Ying kao* 硬拷 (The Flogging) and *Yao tai* 瑤台 (The Jade Pavilion) both exist today in choreographies developed subsequent to the UNESCO designation in 2001.<sup>82</sup>

Five of these 22 playlets are described by the masters as having been ‘excavated’ 挖掘, which can have a host of meanings, including being based on either a vague childhood memory of watching a performance (for example Zhang Xunpeng’s *Yao tai* 瑤台) or an interview with an actor no longer physically able to demonstrate the choreography (e.g. Yue Meiti’s *Hu lou* 湖樓) or, in the case of Wang Zhiquan’s *Chu sai* 出塞 (Zhao Jun leaves the fortress), adapted from a marital *luzi* taught by Jingju practitioners. A further fifteen were choreographed from scratch, referred to by Kunqu professionals as ‘kneading the drama’. All are nonetheless presented in the same

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<sup>82</sup> We could address the same issue by using *Kunqu chuan xi* 崑曲穿戲 (The Dressing on the Drama) a text prepared in 1963 (and published after the Cultural Revolution) based on interviews with old actors and aficionados detailing the costume conventions for 440 playlets. There are a total of twenty-four playlets that appear in *Dashi shuoxi* but not in *Kunqu chuan xi*. Since it is presumed that *Kunqu chuan xi* was quite comprehensive, these absences suggesting that they may well be new additions to the repertoire since the 1960s. It was edited and published by Gu Duhuang 顧篤璜 (1928- ) after the Cultural Revolution. In assuming that a playlet has a costume convention it was regularly performed, this is one of the best published list of the performed repertoire available in the late Qing and Republican era. Other resources include performance advertisements in the *Shen-pao* 申報 and other Shanghai newspapers. In the tables of *Dashi shuoxi* playlet in the coming pages, I include a column to indicate whether the playlet is mentioned in *Dressing the drama*.

configuration as part of the 'traditional' repertoire, and in most cases this is how they are perceived by the general public.

Based on information gleaned from a careful analysis of each of lectures, I have arranged the list of repertoire into the following tables, categorising the playlets according to from within each into five classes. Aside from the fourteen playlets that were transmitted from genres other than Kunqu and twenty playlets we are told have new *luzi*, I fit the remainder of the 107 playlets, into one of two categories: 43 playlets with 'pre-1966' *luzi* that were transmitted to the practitioner prior to the Cultural Revolution; and, 31 playlets with 'post-1976' *luzi* that were transmitted the period following the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Table 1: Kun playlets transmitted prior to Cultural Revolution

Playlet	Listed in Gu 1963	Master	information given on <i>luzi</i> , and/or primary teacher
義俠記·打虎 Wu Song kills the Tiger	1	Hou Shaokui 侯少奎	Hou Yongkui
義俠記·挑簾裁衣 Opening the Curtain	1	Liang Guyin 梁谷音	'Ninety percent according to tradition'
十五貫·判斷 Capital Judgment	0	Zhang Shizheng 張世錚	Zhou Chuanying
十五貫·見都 Meeting the Magistrate	1	Zhang Shizheng 張世錚	Zhou Chuanying
十五貫·訪鼠 Investigating the rat	1	Wang Shiyao 王世瑤	1957 altered playscript
十五貫·鼠禍 Rat's Calamity (殺龍)	1	Wang Shiyao 王世瑤	1956 altered playscript
千忠戮·慘睹 The devastation (八陽)	1	Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁	Shen Chuanzhi
搜山打車 Searching the mountain	1	Ji Zhenhua 計鎮華	Zheng Chuanjian
華容道 Huarong Pass	0	Hou Shaokui 侯少奎	Hou Yongkui took on Jingju aspects
單刀會·刀會 The Sword Meeting	1	Hou Shaokui 侯少奎	Hou Yongkui
孽海記·下山 Descending the Mountain	1	Liu Yilong 劉異龍	Hua Chuanhao
孽海記·思凡 Longing for Worldly Pleasure	1	Liang Guyin 梁谷音	Zhang Chuanfang
寶劍記·夜奔 Night Flight	1	Hou Shaokui 侯少奎	Wang Yiyu. Southern luzi
尋親記·茶訪 Conversing tea	1	Zhang Mingrong 張銘榮	Hua Chuanhao
幽閨記·請醫 Bringing the doctor	1	Wang Shiyao 王世瑤	Wang Chuansong
驚鴻記·醉寫 Drunken composition	1	Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁	Shen Chuanzhi (plus Yu Zhenfei)
水滸記·借茶 On the pretext of tea	1	Liu Yilong 劉異龍	Xu Lingyun's <i>luzi</i> taught by 'lady in Beijing'
漁家樂·藏舟 The Hidden Boat	1	Yue Meiti 岳美緹	Shen Chuanzhi (plus Zhou Chuanying)
爛柯山·前逼 The First Ultimatum	1	Ji Zhenhua / Yao Jikun	Shen Chuanzhi / A Jia (director)
爛柯山·後逼 The Final Demand	0	Ji Zhenhua / Yao Jikun	Shen Chuanzhi / A Jia (director)
爛柯山·癡夢 The Foolish Dream	1	Zhang Jiqing 張繼青	Shen Chuanzhi (also Liang Guyin <i>luzi</i> )
牡丹亭·冥判 Infernal Judgment 花判	1	Fang Yang 方洋	Xue Chuangang, Shen Chuankun
牡丹亭·幽媾 Ghostly Romance	0	Zhang Xunpeng	Yan Huizhu & Yu Zhenfei
牡丹亭·驚夢 The Startling Dream	1	Zhang Jiqing/ Hua Wenyi	Several (similar) <i>luzi</i>
牡丹亭·遊園驚夢 A Garden Stroll	1	Hua Wenyi 華文漪	Zhu Chuanming
獅吼記·跪池 Kneeling by the pond	1	Wang Shiyu 汪世瑜	Zhou Chuanying
玉簪記·琴挑 The Stirring Zither	1	Wang Shiyu 汪世瑜	Zhou Chuanying
玉簪記·問病 Visiting the Patient	1	Yue Meiti 岳美緹	Shen Chuanzhi
琵琶記·吃糠 Eating Husks	1	Ji Zhenhua / Zhang Jingxian	Shen Chuanzhi
琵琶記·描容別墳 Leaving the Tomb	1	Liang Guyin 梁谷音	Shen Chuanzhi
紅梨記·亭會 Meeting at the Pavilion	1	Wang Shiyu 汪世瑜	Zhou Chuanying
荊釵記·見娘 Meeting the Mother	1	Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁	Shen Chuanzhi
虎囊彈·山亭 The Monastery Gate 山門	1	Lei Ziwen 雷子雯	Xiao Jiankun 蕭劍崑
西廂記·佳期 The Tryst	1	Liang Guyin 梁谷音	Zhang Chuanfang, plus Yao Chuanxiang

西遊記·借扇 Borrowing the Fan	1	Wang Zhiquan 王芝泉	Zhang Chuanfang
躍鯉記·蘆林 Among the Reeds	1	Zhang Jiqing 張繼青	Hua Chuanhao
鐵冠圖·分宮 Quitting the Palace	1	Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁	Shen Chuanzhi (plus Yu Zhenfei)
鐵冠圖·刺虎 Killing the Tiger General	1	Hu Jinfang 胡錦芳	Wang Chuanqu
長生殿·驚變埋玉 Sudden Change	1	Zhang Jingxian 張靜嫻	Yu Zhenfei
長生殿·迎哭 Seeing the Sculpture	1	Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁	Shen Chuanzhi
雁翎甲·盜甲 Stealing the Armour	1	Zhang Mingrong 張銘榮	Hua Chuanhao
鮫綃記·寫狀 Writing the Appeal	1	Fan Jixin 範繼信	Wang Chuansong
鳴鳳記·吃茶 Tasting Tea	1	Wang Shiyao 王世瑤	Wang Chuansong
	39	<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>



Table 2: Kun playlets transmitted after the Cultural Revolution

Playlet	1963 listed	Master	information given on <i>luzi</i> , and/or primary teacher
千忠戮·草詔 The Rough Order	1	Huang Xiaowu 黃小午	Ni Chuanyue (also exists a northern <i>luzi</i> )
雙珠記·賣子 Selling the son	1	Hu Jinfang 胡錦芳	'80% 'according to Shen Chuanzhi
雙珠記·投淵 Jumping in to the Abyss	1	Hu Jinfang 胡錦芳	Shen Chuanzhi
如是觀·交印 Bestowing the Seal	1	Huang Xiaowu 黃小午	Ni Chuanyue
水滸記·活捉 Captured Alive	1	Lin Jifan / Liu Yilong	Wang Chuansong / Hua Chuanhao
浣紗記·寄子 Delivering the Son	1	Shi Xiaomei 石小梅	Fang Chuanyun
漁家樂·賣書納姻 Selling Books	1	Zhang Shizheng 張世錚	Zheng Chuanjian
爛柯山·潑水 Spilled Water	1	Zhang Jiqing / Yao Jikun	Significant changes by A Jia (director)
燕子箋·狗洞 The Dog Hole	1	Lin Jifan 林繼凡	Wang Chuansong
牡丹亭·寫真 Painting the portrait	0	Wang Fengmei 王奉梅	Yao Chuanxiang
牡丹亭·尋夢 Searching for the dream	1	Zhang Jiqing 張繼青	Yao Chuanxiang
牡丹亭·拾畫叫畫 Picking up the Portrait	1	Wang Shiyu 汪世瑜	Several highly divergent luzi exist
玉簪記·偷詩 The Stolen Poem	1	Yue Meiti 岳美緹	Zhou Chuanying
療妒羹·題曲 Writing lyrics	0	Wang Fengmei 王奉梅	Yao Chuanxiang
白兔記·養子 Bringing up the Child	1	Wang Fang 王芳	Shen Chuanzhi (via Zhu Qiang )
白羅衫·看狀 Reading the Appeal	1	Shi Xiaomei 石小梅	Shen Chuanzhi
紅梨記·醉皂 The Drunken Clerk	1	Lin Jifan 林繼凡	Wang Chuansong
繡襦記·打子 Beating the Son	1	Ji Zhenhua 計鎮華	Ni Chuanyue
蝴蝶夢·說親回話 The Proposal	1	Liang Guyin 梁谷音	Jiangsu version preserves clown arias.
西廂記·遊殿 Touring the temple	1	Lin Jifan 林繼凡	Wang Chuansong
西廂記·跳牆著棋 Jumping the Wall	1	Liang Guyin 梁谷音	Yao Chuanxiang
西樓記·拆書 Opening the Letter	1	Yue Meiti 岳美緹	Shen Chuanzhi. Cuts made to text. 1985
西樓記·樓會 Tryst at the Mansion	1	Yue Meiti 岳美緹	Shen Chuanzhi
西樓記·玩箋錯夢 Playing with the Letter	1	Shi Xiaomei 石小梅	Shen Chuanzhi
連環記·小宴 The Small Banquet	1	Shi Xiaomei 石小梅	Shen Chuanzhi
連環記·議劍 Discussing the Sword	1	Lin Jifan 林繼凡	
金雀記·喬醋 Feigning Jealousy	1	Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁	Zhou Chuanying, plus Shen Chuanzhi
鐵冠圖·別母 Farewell to the Mother	1	Huang Xiaowu 黃小午	Zheng Chuanjian
長生殿·密誓 Secret Vows	1	Wang Fengmei 王奉梅	Zhou Chuanying and Zhang Xian
長生殿·絮閣 Discussion in the Chamber	1	Zhang Jingxian 張靜嫻	Yao Chuanxiang
	28	<b>Kun transmission post-76</b>	<b>30</b>

Table 3: *Chuiqiang* playlets (not Kun music)

Playlet		Master	information given on <i>luzi</i> , and/or primary teacher
百花記·贈劍 Bestowing the Sword	0	Zhang Xunpeng 張洵彭	pre-1966 <i>chuichang</i> musical style
販馬記·寫狀 Writing the Appeal	0	Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁	pre-1966 <i>chuichang</i> musical style
販馬記·哭監 Crying from the prison	0	Zhang Xunpeng 張洵彭	pre-1966 <i>chuichang</i> musical style
<b>Listed in <i>Dressing on the Drama</i></b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>

Table 4: Playlets newly choreographed or significantly changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

Playlet		Master	information given on <i>luzi</i> , and/or primary teacher
			83
玉簪記·秋江 Autumnal River	1	Zhang Jingxian 張靜嫻	Significantly changed, with Shen Chuanzhi
牡丹亭·離魂 The Soul Departs	1	Zhang Jiqing 張繼青	Kneaded with Yao Chuanxiang's assistance
青塚記·出塞 Zhao Jun leaves the fortress	0	Wang Zhiqian 王芝泉	Kun <i>luzi</i> taught to Cai Yaoxian by Zhang Chuanfang
牧羊記·望鄉 Homeward Gaze	1	Yue Meiti 岳美緹	Added choreography. Original emphasises singing
義俠記·誘叔別兄 Inappropriate Flirting	1	Liang Guyin 梁谷音	Significant changes from 華傳浩 version
占花魁·受吐 Collecting the Vomit	1	Yue Meiti 岳美緹	Prior <i>luzi</i> described by Zhou Chuanying
占花魁·湖樓 The Inn by the Lake	1	Yue Meiti 岳美緹	Prior <i>luzi</i> described by Zhou Chuanying
風雲會·送京 Thousand Mile Farewell	1	Hou Shaokui 侯少奎	Kneaded by Hou Yongkui et al.
療妒羹·澆墓 Tending the tomb	0	Wang Fengmei 王奉梅	Kneaded by Yao Chuanxiang
西園記·夜祭 The Nighttime Sacrifice	0	Wang Shiyu 汪世瑜	Kneaded by Zhou Chuanying
寶娥冤·斬娥 Decapitating Dou (金鎖記)	1	Zhang Jingxian 張靜嫻	New <i>luzi</i> . Zhang Jiqing performed original in 1961
長生殿·酒樓 The Inn	1	Huang Xiaowu 黃小午	Added choreography. Original emphasised singing.
長生殿·彈詞 Song of Legend	1	Ji Zhenhua 計鎮華	Little choreography, emphasis on singing
琵琶記·掃松 Sweeping the Pine needles	1	Ji Zhenhua 計鎮華	Kneaded in 1985 from scratch
南柯記·瑤台 The Jade Pavilion	1	Zhang Xunpeng 張洵彭	Loosely based on memory of Yan Huizhu in 1957/8
焚香記·陽告 Appeal in Life	0	Liang Guyin 梁谷音	Kneaded from scratch
牡丹亭·硬拷 The Flogging	0	Wang Shiyu 汪世瑜	Kneaded from scratch
豔雲亭·癡訴點香 Mad Ravings	0	Yao Jisun 姚繼蓀	Kneaded from scratch
桃花扇·題畫 The Painting	0	Shi Xiaomei 石小梅	Kneaded from scratch
桃花扇·沉江 The Plunge	0	Ke Jun 柯軍	Kneaded from scratch
<b>Listed in <i>Dressing on the Drama</i></b>	<b>13</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>

<sup>83</sup> However, Shen Chuanzhi makes no mention of this in his 1992 interview with Hong Weizhu (2002, p.27), saying that his version is the same as his father's, and unlike Zhou Chuanying's version, which is altered. Hong furthermore comments that this had been Shen's father's best piece. It may be the case that Shen Yuequan (rather than Shen Chuanzhi) adapted it from *Chuanju*.

Table 5: Kun playlets transmitted by Jingju practitioners

Playlet		Master	information given on <i>luzi</i> , and/or primary teacher
四平山 Mount Siping	0	Hou Shaokui 侯少奎	Hou Yongkui from Shang Heyu 尚和玉
界牌關 The Border Outpost	0	Lin Weilin 林為林	post-1976 Shen Bin 沈斌
草廬記·花蕩 The Reed Patch (西川圖)	1	Fang Yang 方洋	pre-1966
古城記·古城 The Old City	0	Fang Yang 方洋	pre-1966
雷峰塔·盜草 Stealing Hay	0	Wang Zhiquan 王芝泉	pre-1966 Xia Zhengshou 夏正壽
雷峰塔·斷橋 The Broken Bridge 白蛇傳	1	Zhang Xunpeng 張洵彭	pre-1966 Yan Huizhu . Also Kun transmission.
義俠記·遊街 On the Street	1	Zhang Jidie 張寄蝶	with Jingju instructors
扈家莊 The Hu Clan	0	Wang Zhiquan 王芝泉	with Jingju instructors
雅觀樓 Elegant Tower View	0	Wang Zhiquan 王芝泉	Zhou Qingming (Yu Zhenfei for singing)
Listed in <i>Dressing on the Drama</i>	3	Total	14
彩樓記·評雪辯蹤 Footprints in the Snow	1	Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁	From Chuanju
擋馬 Blocking the horse	0	Wang Zhiquan 王芝泉	From Yangju pre-1966 kneaded by Fang Chuanyun

The above summaries are sufficient to illustrate the complex combination of transmission methods and archiving strategies that make up what is commonly presented in this publication and elsewhere as simply ‘the tradition’. There are a number of important observations made from this analysis. Of chief interest is the various manners by which actors construct or justify their authority over the work, to which I shall dedicate the following section. It is also apparent from a survey of the lectures the trend by which choreographed dance has been added to a number of works which had originally focused on the poetic or virtuosity in expressing it in song. These are referred to by the actors variously as *changgong xi* 唱功戲 (singing skill plays) or, because it was felt such plays had no dramatic interest (prior to being choreographed) *lengxi* 冷戲 (cold plays). The mixed provenances of these performances is largely unknown to casual or even regular audience members, when a selection of four is presented as a single-session program of ‘traditional Kunqu playlets’ 傳統折子戲. The

label of tradition appears as a totalising force in most official and casual Kunqu discourse.

Such an archive must be allied to institutional forces in order to ensure that its version of Kunqu exerts power and influences future generations. The *arcons* that house and authenticate it to future readerships are particularly solid. It is consigned by publishing houses in both Hong Kong and Mainland China (thus endorsed by the organs of state) with further implicit co-endorsement by various parties involved in it. Aside from several of the actors themselves, preface-style ‘attached articles’ 符文 are contributed by Cheng Pei-kai and Gu Lingsen 顾聆森 with a preface (*xu*) by Wang Wenzhang 王文章 the dean of the Chinese Academy of Arts 中國藝術院 and former Vice-minister of the Ministry of Culture. As an archive, true to the Derridean model, *Dashi shuoxi* leaves no trace of its act of omission – only a line to state that each master chosen is ‘the authority’ for each playlet (2014, p.5).<sup>84</sup>

It is, however, well known that many are mastered by more than just one senior practitioner, with inevitably different styles and usually with slightly different *luzi*. By selecting just one ‘master’ for each playlet (with one exception<sup>85</sup>) the *Dashi shuoxi* effectively endorses that person's particular version of the choreography as within its archive.

In her lecture on the playlet *Chi meng* 癡夢 (The Foolish Dream), Zhang Jiqing mentions, in passing, the well-known Shanghai version of the same piece. However, she does so by saying, ‘Our Jiangsu version of *Zhu Maichen’s Divorce* is a little bit different to

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<sup>84</sup> Given what is at stake, there must have been a great deal of negotiation and horse-trading went on behind the scenes to decide who would be the representative actor for each playlet. This is something that we are perhaps offered a glimpse of in Yang Shousong’s book 大美崑曲 (*The Splendour of Kunqu*) in which we are told Ye Zhaoxin had never imagined how ‘complicated’ actors would be (kindle loc. 1678).

<sup>85</sup> Both Lin Jifan and Liu Yilong present a lecture on the playlet *Huo zhao* 活捉 ‘Captured Alive’

Shanghai's *Lanke Mountain*, ours is completely based on tradition' (vol. 1, p.17). *Zhu Maichen* 朱買臣休妻 and *Lanke shan* 爛柯山 are two different names that refer to the same play, which was taught as four scenes (or playlets) to both troupes by Shen Chuanzhi. While most of the scenes in the Shanghai version follow Shen Chuanzhi's traditional *luzi*, the Shanghai version is known for Liang Guyin's contra-patriarchal interpretation of the character Cui Shi 崔氏. In the final scene *Po shui* 潑水 (Spilt Water) she changes the death of the character Cui Shi from suicide to accident, inspired by Ophelia in Laurence Olivier's 1948 Hamlet film, which she discusses at length in her autobiography (2009).<sup>86</sup> Both the provocativeness of Liang's innovations, and her openness about their departure from 'the tradition' mean that she poses no threat to the orthodox positioning of the Jiangsu version.

Schechner defines performance as 'restored behaviour', adding that the origin of the behaviour 'may be unknown or concealed; elaborated, distorted by myth or tradition' (1989, p.35). Despite the Shanghai troupe's reputation for innovation, not all the practitioners of that troupe have always been keen on presenting their work as innovative. In one interview, Yue Meiti expresses the view that the principal measure of success in 'kneading' is for the audience to be under the impression that it is traditional.<sup>87</sup> Even Liang remarks that she 'borrowed this image of the watery grave, though if I didn't say anything, people would probably think that it was traditionally performed that way'. Such approaches bring to mind T.S. Eliot's essay 'Tradition and Individual Talent', one widely read in China after being translated and published in the Chinese journal *Xuwen* 學文 in 1934, a crucial time for intellectual debate around the

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<sup>86</sup> For an excellent study of the various interpretations of this play in Kunqu and other formats see Stenberg (2014).

<sup>87</sup> Interview notes (2013).

notion of Chinese tradition. Eliot argues that new art reshapes and thus conforms to the historical order from which it emerges.

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (1919, p.2)

Applying this model to Kunqu, we see many moments of novelty altering the previous order, subsequently to become accepted within the order and readjusting all relations within it. Each actor's version of a particular playlet forms a new monument in Eliot's terms. Many of these involve subtle enough differences to make re-alignment unobservable. Others involve more substantial change which is, however, readily accepted by modern audiences as remaining within tradition. Rather than 'tradition' as simply given over (*trādere*) from the past to the present, the *chuantong* is that which exists in the present, 'passing' (*chuan* 傳) from the past and being 'unified' (*tong* 統) as a tradition.<sup>88</sup>

Yet in the process of watching the *Dashi shuoxi*, unlike the literati-controlled archival projects, the scant relationship is partially revealed and the myths disclosed. We not only learn that much of this transmitted repertoire is in fact newly choreographed, we also see all the changes made to update and personalise those playlets.

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<sup>88</sup> That the Chinese word, apparently, conveys more fully the ideas surrounding the concept tradition gives credit to the Japanese translators who coined the neologism by combining the two Chinese characters in this way at some point in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (pronounced *dento* in Japanese). Indeed the term may still have been unfamiliar to many Chinese readers of Bian Zhilin's 卞之琳 translation of Eliot's essay when it appeared in the first issue of *Xuwen Monthly* in 1934.

This itself makes the content of *Dashi shuoxi* subversive of the ‘traditional’ archive even as it is created from the same urge. In exposing the fickleness and instability of what Schechner describes as the ‘myth and tradition’, the masters write their own *luzi* into the archive as the origin not of what was, but of what will be. This may not even be an intention of the master to change the tradition in the future, it is nonetheless crucial for that master’s future lineage to be able to demonstrate in their own choreography their own claim to authenticity through that lineage.

In recent years, at the direction of the Ministry of Culture, but initiated by celebrity author Pai Hsien-yung, there has been encouragement for troupes to formalise teacher-pupil relationships with formal *baishi* 拜師 ceremonies, involving bowing by the students to the teachers, and the presentation of gifts by both students and mentors (for Pai’s initiative see Lei 2011, p.108). In these situations, there is a clear expectation that the student follows the choreography (and sometimes the singing) of the teacher to whom they are formally attaching themselves.<sup>89</sup> In one such example, a change to the *luzi* during the aria *Shanpo yang* in *Jing meng* (for a full analysis of the aria see chapter five) had been made to the ‘traditional’ *luzi* by Zhang Jiqing on account of (by her own explanation) being more suitable to her figure (Zhang 2004, p.309). Yet this change is adopted by her disciple Shan Wen 單雯 after entering into a formalised mentorship with Zhang, despite the fact that the latter is noticeably taller (see Figure 5).

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<sup>89</sup> The Jiangsu troupe *xiaosheng* actor Qian Zhenrong 錢振榮 explained to me that when, on occasion, he became aware that the pronunciation of a particular word-character in song was ‘incorrect’ in terms of the system of singing in Kunqu, he would elicit the view of his teacher, Shi Xiaomei, on the matter, before proceeding to make a change.

Figure 5: Publicity shot taken following official establishment of teacher-pupil relationship between Shan and Zhang



The alternative system to satisfy Hobsbawm's conception of tradition, which depends on its invariability, is when change does not overwrite the old but becomes a new 'tradition' in its own right. In many Chinese cultural forms, the emergence of several, what might be considered 'equally valid directions', of change have led to the development of new categories of validity, or schools (*pai* 派), for example in painting or calligraphy. In the case of Jingju, there are alleged to be 85 such *liupai* 流派 of performance, each named after the person or place that developed what is ostensibly a new style. In terms of Hobsbawm's formulation, the system of *liupai* circumvents the need to acknowledge change, as change results in the creation of what is in effect a new tradition. The star Jing-Kun actress and teacher in the Shanghai theatre school, Yan Huizhu 言慧珠, advised Liang Guyin about her performance of *Si fan*:

Act it boldly. The four famous *dan* of Jingju have all formed *liupai* [for this playlet]. It will be very difficult for us to surpass them, but Kunqu has a glorious peak waiting for all of you. You need to act in your own style, to make your own *liupai*' (Wang, 2014, p.30).



However, many others do not even acknowledge competing choreography. For instance, Wang Shiyu (who is on the editorial committee of the project) does not acknowledge the competing *luzi* of *Shihua*, of which there are many.<sup>90</sup> While the acknowledgement of belonging to a certain school of performance is standard for a Jingju actor, such terminology has continually been resisted in Kunqu.<sup>91</sup> In terms of contemporary performance the only instances under which *pai* are acknowledged in Kunqu refer to *luzi* belonging to the former Kun-Yi troupe 崑弋班 in Beijing, partially integrated into what is now the Northern troupe.<sup>92</sup> Jiangsu troupe actor Huang Xiaowu 黃小午, for example acknowledges there is a ‘northern school’ (*beipai*) version of *Cao zhao* 草詔 (The Rough Order) (*Dashi shuoxi* 2014, vol. 5, pp.242-3). Hou Shaokui’s *Ye ben* 夜奔 (Night Flight) also falls under this category, and much of his repertoire has southern Kunqu equivalents, for example, so that some of his performance practice known as the

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<sup>90</sup> Chapter Five is centrally concerned with the transmission of this scene.

<sup>91</sup> This is ostensibly because the notation of Ye Tang and other literati leave limited room to develop a personal interpretation in singing in Kunqu compared to the flexibility the *pihuang* musical style leaves for phrasing.

<sup>92</sup> In 1862, the Prince Chunqin 醇亲王 (1850-90), whose ornate opera stage on the south bank of Houhai lake in Beijing is open to the public, established a personal company of mostly Kun actors to perform Kunqu and *Yiyang* 弋陽 styles (*Yiyang* was another southern musical style considered ‘orthodox’ by the court in the mid-Qing). When the Prince passed away in 1890, some of the actors from his company established their own *Kun-Yi* troupe. Destitute and lacking a solid market demand for Kunqu in a city now engrossed in the *pihuang* style, they set up base in the countryside, at Daodizhen in Hebei. They performed in the villages and trained two generations of actors, including Han Shichang 韓世昌 (1897-1976) mentioned above, who led the troupe in regular performances in Beijing and Tianjin from 1917 onwards. In 1956, the Kun-yi troupe became the Northern Kunju Troupe (Beifang Kunjuyuan 北方崑劇院), however following the Cultural Revolution and the death of many of its northern school stars it performed the majority of civilian *wen* 文 repertoire according the southern style 南崑. Note that Kunqu *luzi* performed by the *Huiban* troupes from their entry into Beijing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century until in the late Qing and Republican period, represented by Mei Lanfang, are considered to be a northern derivative more representative of the southern tradition than the Kun-Yi (Ding, qtd. in Hong 2002, pp. 521-8).

'Hou school' *houpai* 候派 of performance. But this is exceptional in Kunqu, rather than the rule.

At an November 2013 Nanjing event commemorating the tenth anniversary of the passing of Wang Zhenglai 王正來, a singing teacher of the second generation of actors at the Jiangsu Province Kunju Troupe, one of his students, the prominent actress Gong Yinlei 龔隱雷, spoke about the relationship between form and personal style in singing.

There are people who say (and I am also of the same opinion) that Kunqu has no *liupai*. But that's not to say if there's no *liupai* there is no personal style. Perhaps everyone has a personal singing style. But I believe that in the singing style of Kunqu, you can't deliberately lean towards your own characteristics, to exhibit yourself, and your ability [...] All this must be expressed within the characteristics of Kunqu. Every person sings differently, even if taught by the same teacher. There are the natural conditions of your voice, your understanding of the aria, your own musicality, the abilities that you have acquired. So when each person sings, of course they do *have* their own personal style, I am saying they should not lean towards expressing that personal style. (Personal notes, 2013)

Gong's perspective seems to accept variance but only in the pursuit of non-variance. The denial of *liupai* might be a defensive act for what was a corpus performed by troupes across vast geographical area to retrospectively give it credentials as a performance genre rather than just a musical style. But it would also seem to leave the Kunqu practitioner chained, as it were, to the 'tradition' without room to create their own tradition, or *liupai*.

Liang Guyin frames this contradiction between tradition and innovation in the following way, explained in her lecture about *The Butterfly Dream*:

When Tian Shi appears on stage, whatever you do, don't come out in the traditional way, if you do it like that it will have no flavour 味道 and we need to give a feel of the present. I believe this is what we mature actors need to pursue.

For young actors, hands, eyes, posture and steps need to accord with traditional standards, you shouldn't change anything, because you haven't the ability to change it. Once you've been performing for twenty-something years, you need to make it into something of your own, you need to stand out from the crowd (*Dashi shuoxi* 2014, Vol. 4, p.213; DVD 24:01).

The question that remains unaddressed by Liang are: when does the change becomes the standard? Which version does the young actor accord with? And, is the audience expected to recognise this 'standing out from the crowd' as a change or as the new standard?

The archival impulse of the *Dashi shuoxi* project itself is at its strongest in its basic configuration, making each playlet the domain of one appointed practitioner.<sup>93</sup> I do not wish to make the claim that this particular publication alone has had, or will alone have, the influence to establish this relationship between specific actors and repertoire, yet it is however an excellent example of the sort of projects that do. Moreover, its patronage is extremely wide, bringing together professional, enthusiast, academic, overseas and governmental agents in joint support of its production—the convergence in Derridean terms of these signs of authority in one place enshrine this archive, and endow it with a resilience that may make it a source reference for future generations of Kunqu performers, scholars and artists.

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<sup>93</sup> There are a total of 110 DVDs in a format that is ostensibly one practitioner for each playlet, however because a few DVDs are not limited to one playlet, and a few playlets are not limited to one performer. Although the set is advertised as 109, accounting for the two lectures on *Taken Alive*, the full-length play *朱买臣休妻* is in fact the same as the four *烂柯山* playlets individually counted. Similarly I consider the two titles containing *吃糠* from *The Pipa* to in fact cover the same material. Thus placing the total number at 107.

## The traditionalised *luzi*: *Si fan*

I now address how the current generation of performers seeks to establish a position as representative of the *luzi* for various playlets, by situating themselves in a prestigious lineage. In this section I draw on Richard Bauman's conception of performance as discursive practice, showing how the actor invests authority in their own *luzi* by traditionalising it. This is done in order to establish the actor as the singular authority of the playlet, as either the creator or legitimate authenticator of its tradition. By analysing *Dashi shuoxi* I am able to assess both how the current *luzi* are presented to relate to 'the tradition' and to comment on some of the strategies that performers employ in order to situate themselves as mediators of the tradition. I demonstrate that this is done by a combination of two methods, one of tracing its origin and sourcing lines of transmission and a second of highlighting what I term 'markers' of their own innovative contributions. In the current section I focus on the first of these.

Bauman describes the act of 'traditionalisation' as a process 'of endowing the story with situated meaning' (2004, p.26). Actor-centred archiving projects, such as *Dashi shuoxi*, university-hosted lecture series and the large number of actor 'explanations' *koushu* 口述 of their performance practice published as books, have all given actors an opportunity to endow their *luzi* with legitimacy. I will dwell for a moment on the example of the lecture on the playlet *Si fan* 思凡 (Secular Yearnings), presented in *Dashi shuoxi* by Liang Guyin of the Shanghai Kunju Troupe. This is a monologue playlet (*dujiao xi* 獨角戲) in which a young nun, Sekong 色空 ('Desire-is-empty') longs to leave monastic life.<sup>94</sup> As Mei Lanfang notes in his memoirs, unlike other dense works, this play

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<sup>94</sup> In his *Nashuying* musical scores published 1792, Ye Tang classified it *Meeting between Monk and Nun* (*Sengnihui* 僧尼会) as a 'Play of the Times' (*shiju* 時劇), differentiating it from the high literary *chuanqi* works that form the bulk of his scores.

is written in simple language understandable to anyone (Mei 2013, pp. 297-8).<sup>95</sup> Comparison between a 1670 century choreographic score<sup>96</sup> and three stage versions from the 20th century reveal remarkably similar patterns of performance for some sections and not others. There are two moments in the *luzi* that I wish to draw attention to, to demonstrate how one actress, Liang Guyin 梁谷音, frames her own *luzi* in reference to previous masters, in order to ‘traditionalise’ her own ‘creation’.

At the beginning of the lecture she makes a distinction between *luzi* and ‘acting’. Her *luzi*, she says, is ‘ninety percent’ according to the *chuan* generation teacher who taught it to her, Zhang Chuanfang, and ten percent according to her own innovation, while her acting is ninety-nine percent according to Shen Chuanzhi, who after seeing her perform it in 1962 and, feeling ‘the audience might fall asleep’, helped her bring out the nun’s feeling through the *luzi* (*Dashi shuoxi* vol. 1, p.28). In her biography, written by Wang Yueyang 王悅陽 (also the principle editor of *Dashi shuoxi*) we are told that Shen once said that she was his ‘favourite student’. We already see here at the play the process that Bauman calls traditionalisation, ‘an act of authentication, akin to the antique dealer’s authentication of an object by tracing its provenance’, the actress must establish the authenticity of her mediation by demonstrating her closeness to the source (2004, p.27). As Bauman continues (in the example of Icelandic storytellers relating the tradition of shamanistic poets) the ‘legitimacy and strength’ of the storytellers’ claim is

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<sup>95</sup> Goldman provides a textual genealogy for the story as an independent work in the operatic tradition from the Yuan dynasty through the Qing that results in a version in a mid-17<sup>th</sup> century collection which is textually very similar to that used by performers today. In the *Zuiyiqing* 醉怡情, it appears as a Yiyang playlet taken from a larger work, *Ocean of Sin* 孽海記 (2001, pp. 90-2). Li Dou claims in *Yangzhou Huafang Lu* (scroll 8) that the play spread from Kunqu to other forms, but Goldman demonstrates it was in fact the reverse.

<sup>96</sup> Although this is 122 years before Ye Tang’s musical score was published, a comparison of the *gongche* notation reveals the Kunqu style, countering the common assumption that it was Ye Tang who brought it into the Kun repertoire from Yiyang performance.

built by 'locating himself in a direct line of transmission, including lines of descent through kinship' to a magical poet himself. As we have seen earlier, Shen Chuanzhi represents the strongest familial link to the tradition. Furthermore, although Shen taught *sheng* roles at the Shanghai school, his lack of tall stature meant that his training at the Chuanxisuo had been as a *dan*.<sup>97</sup>

Liang also draws on several sources as what I call 'markers' to highlight her original contribution by way of reference to other sources. In a recent article, Ashley Thorpe (2011) describes a discussion he had about innovation and personal style with the well-known *Jingju* actor of the older man (*laosheng*) role, Tong Qiang from the Shanghai Theatre Academy:

I asked Tong how an actor develops a personal style. He suggested that students must learn from a number of teachers, not just one. In particular, he felt that students needed to be open enough to absorb the best techniques from each teacher, and sufficiently talented to be able to combine them in a unique way. As such, the performance of any actor is never 'original', but a conscious (and sometimes unconscious, exploratory) blending of pre-existing techniques in a new way, which has the approval of experienced artists. (Thorpe 2011, p.285)

Tong's explanation can be related to Liang's lecture, during which she makes reference to several influences outside her immediate circle. The first is for versions of the playlet in other genres, including Sichuan opera 川劇 version by Chen Shufang 陳書舫 and the famous *Jingju* performer Li Yuru 李玉茹.<sup>98</sup> Li's autobiography reveals that she studied

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<sup>97</sup> Like all the *dan* of the *chuan* generation, aside from the *chuan* 傳 character, Shen's other given name zhi 芷 contains the component for grass (or flower) 艹. The *sheng* of the *chuan* generation contained the component 王 denoting jade, e.g. Gu Chuanjie 顧傳玠 or Zhou Chuanying 周傳瑛

<sup>98</sup> Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate a video of her version.

the play with Zhu Chuanming, indicating that her *luzi* originates with the same performer as Liang's.

While the Sichuan version is sung in *gaoqiang* 高腔 and thus completely different musically and in terms of pace, there is no fundamental difference musically between Liang's Kunqu and Li's 'Jingju' version. However, Chen's *Chuanju* version, Liang tells us, gave her a sense of 'wildness' (*ye* 野), which was inspiring for its closeness to real life. For the Jingju version, Liang describes Li Yuru's ability to capture the audience's attention, in particular her ability to express the character's naivety and foolishness.

The following diagram, where solid lines indicate primary teacher-pupil relationships and dotted lines indicate secondary ones, are based either on biographic record or observation from performance itself. Influences (rather than teaching relationships) are indicated with arrows. Outlined boxes indicate that there is video footage and those with squared edges indicate a performance account or choreographic notation but no video.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> A choreographic notation exists for the first aria only, written by an aficionado student of Ding's in Shanghai, Ye Xiaohong. It is collected in Kunqu *Cidian* edited by Hong Weizhu

Figure 7: Lineage and influence of iconic performances of *Sifan*

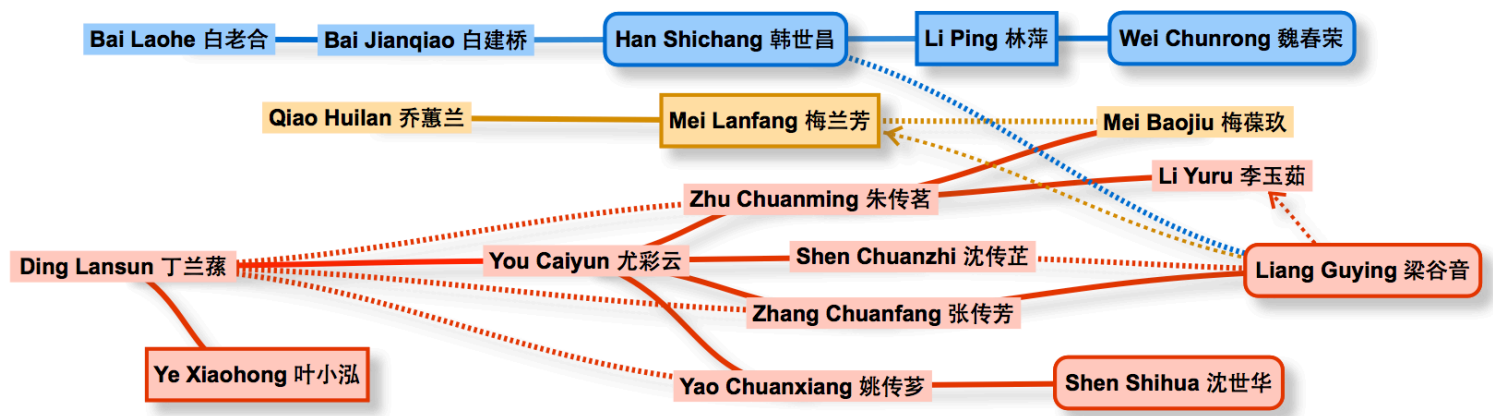


Figure 6: Liang Guyin strokes her fly-whisk as hair, an element of Mei Lanfang's *luzi* brought into her own





In specific moments of her *luzi*, it can be seen from performance recordings that Liang ‘cites’ (choreographically) her influence from a further two separate sources, as can be seen on the chart. The first is Mei Lanfang and the second Han Shichang, the *dan* performer of the former Kun-Yi troupe in Beijing and latterly the Northern Kunqu Theatre in Beijing, with whom Liang spent a month training in 1961.<sup>100</sup>

Liang explains during her lecture that during the aria *Shanpo yang* she adopts a movement from Mei Lanfang’s version on the suggestion of Mei’s secretary (and writer of his memoirs based on oral account) Xu Jichuan 許姬傳. On the words ‘had my hair shaved off by my master’ 被師父削去了頭髮, rather than stroking imagined hair Xu recommended she adopted Mei’s technique of stroking the horse-hair flywhisk 拂塵. Secondly, she praises the ‘earthy cuteness’ 土的可愛 quality of Han Shichang’s performance, particularly the ‘lifelike’ steps in the final lines of the playlet as Sekong escapes the monastery—which Liang combines with her own version (*Dashi shuoxi*, vol. 1, p.37).

We can therefore see that the network of teachers, relationships and inspirations that connect Liang’s *luzi* play an important role in securing authority as the current-day heir to tradition. The very act of mentioning these references in lectures and biographical material helps Liang traditionalize her performance in this manner. However, perhaps more important is to include these markers of past masters in the *luzi* itself. These are foremost recognised by the insiders of both the actor and amateur communities and, as video streaming becomes an aspect of preparing to go the theatre, increasingly also by audiences.

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<sup>100</sup> There is both video footage of Han’s performance recorded in 1960 and notes and a written description of the *luzi* by his student Li Ping.



## Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how all Kunqu performance seeks its legitimation in teaching genealogies, and that any amount of innovation—acknowledged or elided—can be incorporated into performance, as long as the archive is deemed to have conferred approval. Large-scale projects such as *Dashi shuoxi* constitute a heavy institutional involvement in generating and defining the archive, while a *luzi* (like Liang's version of *Si fan*) mines and defines the archive to embolden its own legitimacy.

In the short term, however, the authority of the archive does not prevent a diversity of practice. The historical purpose of a fixed *luzi* may have been like the classic flower paintings to be copied in painting manuals published from the Ming dynasty until the current day. By copying the masters as a student, actors build the tools 'knead' *luzi* themselves. This process is approved by the archive, and seldom considered in detail outside of the actors' own professional or aficionado circles. The façade of a single and traditional repertoire is thus unharmed.

A survey of modern performance reveals that roughly a third of the current repertoire was indeed 'excavated', 'kneaded' or adapted. I identify a tension in Kunqu, in that diversity of performance style is seemingly paradoxically paired with a rejection of *liupai*, the system of schools of performance that have distinguished genealogies of performance in 20th century Jingju. Asking the questions of when and how the standard for performance is set, I consider the practitioner's quest to both build a personal style and, under the encouragement of archival projects such as *Dashi shuoxi*, become *the* authorised mediator of a playlet. This, I demonstrate, is not so much the faithful adherence of practitioners to their teachers, but the very process of the *luzi* becoming fixed in the current day. In order to establish a position as the mediator of tradition, even of an invented tradition, the actor authenticates the *luzi* by sourcing lines of

transmission. This authentication can take the form of traces of past masters in the performance itself, affirmation of genealogies, or favourable comparison with alternate *luzi*.

### 3. The florid and the elegant: contending typologies and patronage

In this chapter I address how Kunqu has been accommodated within global categories in the 20th century. As a performance category, 'Kunqu' has been reframed by various parties and interests over the academic, social and political shifts of the last century. As discussed at length in the introduction, the assignation of categories is one of the powers of the archive. I propose that the multiplicity of overlapping and interconnected categories that Clunas observes in Chinese intellectual discourse of the Imperial period was challenged in the May Fourth era with the influx of Western ideas and categories that came into China via Japan, from where a global discourse of intangible heritage originates.

Although other examples could be formulated, I present three ways here in which this archival categorisation has proceeded. The first is the assertion of a historical distinction between Kunqu's position as the *yabu* 雅部 (elegant section) in comparison to the *huabu* 花部 (florid/assorted section), equated in contemporary terms with Jingju. I reassess how these terms have been constructed in Chinese theatre history and the impact this has had on defining contemporary Kunqu.

Secondly, in emphasising Kunqu's insulation from the apparent excesses of a 'star system'—by which star actors could redefine traditions on the basis of their ability to draw an audience—Kunqu traditionalists such as Gu Duhuang have been able to present Kunqu as non-commercial and thus more authentic than Jingju, governed by venerable tradition rather than star actors. While the *luzi* of contemporary Kunqu has become seen as an artistic work in itself, it is not one that has recognised as attributed to a specific actor.

Thirdly, while the national drama movement recognised the perceived value in global terms of Jingju performance emphasising above all else beauty, Kunqu has presented itself as even more beautiful than Jingju. This placed the *luzi* and its choreographed dance routines, performed in close interrelation with singing (*zaige zaiwu*), to an elevated position, as something which, it is said, Jingju lacks.

### **Transnational scholarship and global heritage**

In the early 20th century, following the fall of the Qing dynasty, Chinese intellectuals, particularly those who had studied overseas, began to consider Chinese cultural categories in terms of global norms, just as Japanese had done in the Meiji restoration. As Patricia Sieber remarks, 'Chinese intellectuals now borrowed Euro-Japanese concepts and came to believe that belles-lettres defined the nation's identity' (2003, pp. 3-4), with theatre playing an important part in this discourse.

While China's urban theatre scene was at the turn of the century experiencing a period of popularity and growth both commercially and at court, it was not however considered a serious matter for study or scholarship in the same way as traditional subjects of erudition such as the song lyric (*quxue* 曲學). Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927) heralded a shift in which dramatic literature, at least, came to be considered a serious subject of study. Wang was a prominent intellectual whose initial studies and interest were in Western thought, and whose approach to Chinese drama was inspired by the respected position accorded to drama in the European tradition. His seminal study, *Song-yuan xiqu shi* 宋元戲曲史 (An Examination of Song and Yuan Drama) was written from the detached environment of Kyoto University, where he (a Qing loyalist)

had exiled himself as the dynasty collapsed in 1911.<sup>101</sup> Sieber argues that Wang's choice of early-period drama was at least partly from his awareness of the long translation history of Zang Maoxun's compendia of Yuan dynasty plays in Europe (2003, p.5). It was, she argues, common for China's educated elites to take an 'active part in reformulating the often Orientalist or ethnocentric paradigms with which they found themselves confronted in European and Japanese writings' (ibid. p.4).

It was perhaps for this reason, then, that Wang was no proponent of the *chuanqi* texts of the Ming dynasty that make up the foundation of the Kunqu repertoire. Rather, he hailed the Yuan dynasty playwrights who managed to integrate vernacular language into rigid structures of *qu* composition, and it was this that he saw as representing the pinnacle of Chinese dramatic achievement in global terms. However, Wang, great textual scholar that he was, had no interest in performance. In fact, according to his son, Wang never even attended the theatre, at least while in China.<sup>102</sup> West and Idema note that Wang was in this sense the 'last in a long line of elite writers' in China who had for centuries 'privileged text over performance' (West & Idema 2014, p.33). To Wang, *xiqu* 戲曲 (song-drama, a term he re-introduced into Chinese discourse<sup>103</sup>) was a form in which the text should alone be sufficiently powerful to transmit drama. Lesser texts, which depended on the combination of language with movement, Wang labelled (probably with pejorative intent) as *xiju* 戲劇 (stage-drama) (Ye 2005, p.516).

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<sup>101</sup> His work was circulated in *Eastern Miscellany* 東方雜誌 in 1913-14 and published numerous times including 1915, 1922, 1927 and 1949.

<sup>102</sup> *Minguo Wenlin* (2014, ch. 4).

<sup>103</sup> This word *xiqu* was re-introduced into Chinese by Wang, adapted from its contemporary usage in Japanese (*gikyoku*) where it simply meant theatre (Sieber:23). In imperial China, the word *xiqu* can be found in just a handful of sources as early as the Song-Yuan transition to denote a distinction in lyrics (*qu*) written either specifically for drama (the *qu* of *xi*) rather than as standalone poetry *sanqu* 散曲 (Chen and Ye 1987, p.32).

It was left to a young Japanese scholar, Aoki Masaru 青木正児, to elevate the status of Ming dramas and, furthermore, performance as an object of intellectual interest. Aoki had worked with Wang Guowei at Kyoto University, though their ideas on drama were quite different. Described by some as the best Japanese sinologist of his generation and a ‘mediator par excellence’ of China to his Japanese audience (Sakaki 2006, p.78), Aoki saw his aim as to carry on from where Wang had left off. In his preface, Aoki relates how Wang Guowei had ‘coldly’ dismissed Ming and Qing lyrics ‘as dead literature’. To this, Aoki counters (in his preface) that Yuan plays are ‘dead theatre’ and that drama on stage is ‘true drama’ (Aoki 1930, p.2). For the study of Kunqu, Aoki’s *Shina kinsei gikyoku shi* 支那近世戲曲史 (History of Early Modern Chinese Theatre<sup>104</sup>) was a seminal starting point unmatched until Lu Eting’s *Kunju yanchu shigao* 崑曲演出史稿 (Draft history of Kunju performance, 1980). Testament to the high standing of Aoki’s work is the praise given by Wu Mei 吳梅, a renowned scholar of *quxue* at the time.<sup>105</sup> In a preface to Wang Gulu’s 王古魯 translation, Wu notes that Aoki’s capacity for painstaking textual research was remarkable and that he had made a number of valuable insights that neither he himself nor Wang Guowei had previously considered (Aoki 2010, p.3).

Although Aoki primarily deals with text rather than performance, his history defines Kunqu within cultural categories that carry important implications. The defining elements of Kunqu, its texts (mostly *chuanqi*) and musical style (mostly *Kun-qiang*) exist in various categories of cultural production, including, in Aoki’s own era, the itinerary

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<sup>104</sup> The original book in Japanese was published in 1930. The first Chinese translation by Zheng Zhenjie 鄭震節 was published in 1933 and the more commonly cited translation by Wang Gulu 王古魯 in 1938.

<sup>105</sup> e.g. Sieber (2003, p.24) Wu Mei was both a highly respected and prolific scholar and a pure-singing expert and amateur performer. He taught singing not only to students at Peking University, but also the students at the *Chuanxisuo* as well as the stars of the commercial stage, counting among his pupils Mei Lanfang.



troupes of the Jiangnan canals, the self-styled aficionados of the literati class and the commercial *Huiban* companies and star actors of the Beijing and Shanghai theatre scenes. In this way Aoki's history can be seen as not so much reflecting the of the past or (then) present, but the creation of Kunqu as a singular performance category for the future.

Aoki's distinctions between low-brow and high-brow which frame his scholarship belie his interest in discovering, promoting and thus protecting Kunqu as true cultural heritage. Seeing the new generations of actors training at the Chuanxisuo in 1926 was like, Aoki relates, 'the quenching of a lifetime's thirst' (Aoki 1938, p.2).

As Sieber suggests, his desire may have stemmed from similar processes taking place in Japan, such as a new intellectual valorisation of the Japanese *jōruri* puppet theatre (2003, p.34). Aoki was much attached to this genre, alluding in the Preface of his *History* to his childhood love for Japanese *jōruri* puppet theatre (ibid., p.36) Sieber notes that by the inclusion of some of its repertoire in Mikami and Takatsu's 1890 *History of Japanese Literature*, scholars a generation older than Aoki had repositioned *jōruri* as 'a respectable literary genre'. In 1933, a bill was passed to provide financial support to *bunraku* (one branch of *jōruri*) marking the first piece of legislation recognising a commercial performing art as a 'national treasure' 國寶 (Ortolani 1990, p.214). The expansion of this type of legislation with the 1950 *Law for the Protection of Cultural Property* (*Bunkazai hogoho*) was designed to preserve both tangible and intangible cultural heritage deemed essential to Japan's distinctiveness. A 1954 revision to this law further created a legal distinction between 'classical' (*koten* 古典) and 'folk' (*minzoku* 民俗) genres of intangible cultural heritage (*mukeyi bunkazai* 無形文化財) (Shino:184), with *bunraku* assigned to the former.

China's more recent foray into the promotion of intangible cultural heritage would seem to be modeled on Japanese precedents, and is similarly concerned with preserving

a Chinese national heritage in the face of a globalized western modernity. However, China has been a strong proponent of the Japanese model being adopted under a global UNESCO authority. Kunqu diarist Yang Shousong 楊守松 describes the process ‘Behind the curtains of the “Masterpiece”’ of applying for the UNESCO distinction undertaken by Chinese National Academy of Arts 中國藝術研究院 by explaining that China was in fact a key promoter of the idea that there should be ‘masterpiece’ designations in the first place (2014, p.43). Kunqu’s recognition is thus ‘to some degree a self-fulfilling prophecy’ (Stenberg 2015b, p.70). Tan notes that by 2009, China had ‘by far the greatest number’ of inscribed items on the UNESCO representative list of the intangible cultural heritage than any other country and had allocated more than 1.13 billion renminbi to the initiative (Tan, 2014).

It is worth enquiring to what extent equivalences in cultural heritage strategies with Japan had been explored by China from the very inception of its ICH program. Shino notes that ‘classical’ forms in Japan were classified as such because they are ‘performed by professionals’ whereas folk forms consist of ‘traditions of amateurs in local communities’. *Bunraku* was, for example, the name of a professional troupe in Osaka.<sup>106</sup> There were in fact more than one hundred puppet play traditions in Japan, mainly performed by amateurs, including sixteen later designated as important intangible folk cultural properties’ (Shino 2012, pp. 190, 194). In China, however, Kunqu’s classicism derived from precisely the opposite, from its amateurs—the intellectual elites whose grasp of difficult *chuanqi* texts and ‘correct’ enunciation of words in song distinguished them from professionals. In China, this has allowed the elites to remain the mediators and authorities of the tradition, rather than the professional performers. Scholars such

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<sup>106</sup> Bunraku operated a theatre in Osaka between 1868 to 1926 before a devastating fire. Another ‘*bunraku*’ theatre was reopened in 1929 with a number of contemporary-set plays attracting patriotic support in the lead up to World War II as a ‘purely Japanese’ form (Ortolani: 214-5).

as Wu Mei remained the authorities in Republican China on how to pronounce certain *zì* in song, and many stars of the stage, including Mei Lanfang would go to him for direction.

Indeed, the elevated status of actors in Republican China at least partly derives from international (initially primarily Japanese) attention. Ye Xiaoling makes the point that Mei's international recognition was the single most important factor in raising the social status of actors in Republican China (2003, p.84). Mei Lanfang's first tour abroad to Japan in 1919, was said by Qi Rushan to be preparation for his US tour decade later (Goldstein 2007, p.267).<sup>107</sup> An article in the *China Review* in 1922 notes how Japanese and western audiences in Tokyo 'responded so well to the feminine blandishments of this clever young Chinese actor, sometimes called the Sarah Bernhardt of China' (Bush 1922, p.100).

In 1928, Aoki invited the Beijing-based *Kun-Yi* actor Han Shichang 韓世昌 to perform in Japan. In his account of the trip, Han records that the common programme would be his performance of a playlet, followed by a musical interlude and then another such performance (Han 1985, p.46). Japanese hosts did not wish to watch performances by painted-face characters, older male roles, physically dexterous martial actors or even clown performances. This reveals the cultural category into which the diverse traditions related to Kunqu were being channelled—as primarily the interactions of young scholars and young maidens (*caizi jiaren*). This became the style of Chinese drama that found a niche in Japanese and global categories.

Considerations of which repertoire to play for foreign tastes was also a key factor for early tours to the Western world or the Soviet Union. Mei's role as cultural

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<sup>107</sup> See Min Tian's (2008) in depth study for an exploration of how these practitioners and others created new theatrical forces by their interpretations and misinterpretations of Mei's art.

ambassador took him to the United States in 1930 and Europe and the Soviet Union in 1935. The latter trip provided the opportunity to meet and perform for members of the global theatrical elite such as Brecht, Meyerhold and Gordon-Craig. These encounters would lead to a number of enthusiastic interpretations of Chinese performance that would dominate practitioner discourse in relation to *xiqu* for the 20<sup>th</sup> century and also feed back into Chinese theory. Part of this success with foreign observers was premised on Mei's performances of Kunqu, not Jingju. Mei's secretary and biographer, Xu Jichuan, writes that Mei opted to perform Kunqu for foreign audiences in 1950, based on his experience that they preferred its less noisy sound (Mei & Xu 2013, p.146).

In Aoki's work, which emerges at around the same time as Mei Lanfang became internationally preeminent, a number of separate categories of cultural production are grouped under two neat historical categories, the *yabu* (elegant section) and the *huabu* (the florid/assorted section). In doing so, Aoki presents the principal trend of late imperial theatre as a contest between the elegant and floral genres, by which the *huabu* had 'stolen the banner' of the once dominant *yabu*. Aoki was not the first to adopt these flexible and overlapping categories to construct a historical narrative. A 'mini-history of Kunju's decline' 崑劇衰微史 appeared in Shanghai's *Shenpao* 申報 newspaper as early as 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, linking the rise of *pihuang* to the demise of Kun *qiang* (Zhu 1992, pp. 14-15). However, with Aoki's training within the Japanese academy and his writing for a Japanese audience, it is hardly coincidental that Japanese categories of cultural production—where certain commercial theatres were being raised from near extinction to the status of 'classical' art forms—influenced his interpretations.

The Japanese ritual court dance is called the *ya* (elegant) music (*gagaku* 雅樂). While 'classical' and 'folk' performance was not a legal distinction in Japan until the 1950s, the special cultural position of *gagaku*, as a choreographed ritual court music, was nonetheless a distinctive 'classical' cultural category. Following the 1954 revisions

to the law, this classical status was to be shared with previously commercial forms such as *bunraku*, *noh* and *kabuki*.<sup>108</sup> Aoki was perhaps seeking to stabilise the use of *ya* to establish a connection between the Chinese context and his Japanese readership. The Yiyang and Kunshan styles were the only two officially sanctioned by the court, as attested by a 1785 edict (Goldman 2013, p.115) and elsewhere. Yiyang was also the style used for a significant number of ceremonial dramas 儀典戲 at court (Chen 2012, p.28). For Aoki, the *yabu* perhaps found an implicit resonance with the 'elegant' *gagaku* of the Japanese court.

As Sieber notes, Aoki's text coincided with Japan's attempts to establish its empire, a time when Japanese Asianists viewed Chinese heritage as central to a collective civilisation of which Japan was the inheritor (2003, p.35).<sup>109</sup> Sieber contends that by his choice alone of the term *Shina* 支那 in his title, rather than *Chugoku* 中国, Aoki betrays a covertly imperialist discourse.<sup>110</sup> The choice also to describe the Ming and Qing period as 'early modern' (jp. *kinsei*) 近世, she notes, consciously paid homage to Naitō Konan (1866-1934), one of the founders of Sinology at Kyoto University (Sieber 2003, pp. 34-5). Naitō argued that the renaissance-like 'early modern' *kinsei* period began in the Song

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<sup>108</sup> *Gagaku* includes 'Tang music' 唐樂 claimed to be 'preserved' by Japan from Tang China but long extinct in China itself.

<sup>109</sup> A great number of momentous archival projects were undertaken by Japanese academics, including Tokiwa and Sekino's *History of Chinese Buddhist Monuments (Shina bijut-sushi, 1925-31)*; Ryuzo Torii's *Study of Liao dynasty architecture* (1929) and Mizuno and Nagahiro's vast survey of the Yungang cave temples (1951-6). For an overview of Asianism in pre-war Japanese sinology see Xu (2014)

<sup>110</sup> Following the Second World War, the term *Shina* was despised within China, as it came to represent Japan's colonialist ambitions. Aoki himself claimed in an article in the *Asahi Shinbun* to be struck by this sudden change in Chinese feelings about the word after the war, arguing that the word itself implied praise rather than derision for China (Fogel, 9). The term *Shina* corresponded to Western use of 'China', and had a history in Japan (and indeed China itself) as a re-transliteration of a Sanskrit approximation of either 'Qin' empire 秦 or 'Jing' state 荆. See Su Zhongxian (1979) for origins of the term in China. Since the fall of the Qing, China has generally been referred to by the Chinese and Japanese both as *Zhongguo* 中國 (jp. 国) or *Chugoku*, 'the central state(s)'.

dynasty (960-1279) in China (Fogel 2012, p.11) to which Japan was considered the true inheritor, while China itself was seen to have fallen into a stagnation and decline in the Ming and Qing (Sieber 2003, p.35).

During Han Shichang's tour of Japan, Aoki declared to the Japanese audience the urgency for research into northern Kunqu, a genre which had been 'suppressed' by Jingju,<sup>111</sup> a cultural phenomenon that he pointedly associated with Manchu rule.<sup>112</sup> Just as commercial performance such as *bunraku* was elevated to the same cultural status as the *gagaku* in Japan, Aoki's work promoted Kunqu to a cultural status higher than other categories of theatre in China—part of this, it seems would require removing from Kunqu (particularly northern Kunqu) those elements that it shared with the Jingju (or more accurately) the commercial stage, such as those other, less beautified and elegant, role-types.

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<sup>111</sup> Zhang & Li (145) based on the following report Shanghai-based newspaper *Beiyang Huabao* 北洋畫報: 'Kunqu has, since the Jiaqing reign, been suppressed by *pihuang*. In order to halt Kunqu's further decline, it is of utmost importance to research the *beiqu* [northern lyric], and Han Shichang school is the Kunqu of the northerners, and the most appropriate place to start.' 崑曲自清嘉慶以來，為皮黃所壓倒。欲挽回崑曲之衰頹，則研究北曲為必要，而韓世昌一派，為北人之崑曲，自為極適宜之研究 Aoki's understanding here appears to be that northerners sing northern *qu* and and southerners southern *qu*, and that the poor market conditions for Kunqu in Beijing at the time contrasted with Shanghai where the *chuan* generation were attracting audiences meant that the northern *qu* were in danger. This would betray a significant misunderstanding, as both northern and southern traditions contain 'northern' and 'southern *qu*,' though it could also be a misquote/mistranslation by the newspaper. Han Shichang and the (northern) Kun-Yi tradition was however distinctive (as noted elsewhere in this thesis) in terms of its repertoire and *luzi* compared to the Suzhou style of Mei Lanfang and other 'Jingju' actors (e.g. Ding Xiuxun interview in Hong Weizhu *caifanglu*).

<sup>112</sup> Sieber notes that in his *History* Aoki's draws an analogy between the Warring States era, 'suggesting that another Han emperor was needed to stem the vulgarization of the theatrical repertoire brought on by Manchu rule' (p.35).

## Contesting the elegant and florid sections

Aoki charts what he calls the ‘decline’ of Kunqu, as the *yabu* 雅部 is or ‘elegant section’ with the rise of the *huabu* 花部 ‘florid’ or ‘assorted’ section. His association of the rise of the florid with the decline of the elegant has led to one of the major constructs in 20th century theatre historiography, characterised as a Marxist dichotomy positing a class-based ‘struggle’ between the two. This narrative is a central factor in the distinctions between Kunqu and Jingju as separate and autonomous genres, a separation in the archive which has had profound implications for repertoire, funding, and status.

The term *huaya zhizheng* 花雅之争, or ‘struggle between the elegant and florid sections’ is now a staple in Chinese theatre history, usually attributed to Marxist historians Zhang Geng and Guo Hancheng in 1992 (Li 2010, p.18). However, it is perhaps testament to how clear a lead Aoki’s work provided that the first use of the word ‘struggle’ (in English) was in fact by prolific translator Yao Hsin-nung in his 1933 essay the *Rise and Fall of the K'un Ch'u* (1933, p.81), attributed mostly to Aoki’s research.<sup>113</sup>

The notion of a struggle has featured in Chinese theatre histories since. Chen Fang identifies three ‘battles’ in this struggle. The first occurred in Beijing during the Qianlong reign from 1779 to 1785 between Kunqu and Qin *qiang* actors arriving in the capital from Sichuan. The second, beginning in 1790, occurred when the Huiban troupes entered Beijing performing a number of styles (including Kun) on the same stage. The third, towards the end of the 19th century, started when the Huiban troupes became popular also on stages in southern cities of Shanghai, Suzhou and Yangzhou (Chen 2007, pp. 9-29).

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<sup>113</sup> Yao writes: ‘The contest lasted for about half a century, approximately from 1796 to 1850, ending in the ultimate fall of the “elegant” and the rise of the so-called Peking opera’.

Even accepting the terminology of genres, it is possible to question the narrative of struggles. Regarding the first of these struggles, Xie Yufeng and He Cui argue that increased mobility during the mid to late Qing increased the demand for florid genres in urban centres, and that this did not necessarily detract from Kunqu audiences who, they argue, were a different market. Furthermore, they point out that in most cases both styles of music were provided by the same troupes and actors (Xie & He 2008, p.31). But even the basic generic terminology warrants further investigation, for it shows evidence of archival intervention.

The emphasis on these terms following Aoki's history is one factor that leads to Kunqu being segregated from the florid section as an elegant genre of performance as opposed to other genres. In fact, the source of the terms are distinctly finite, originating in eight sources from the early to mid-Qing dynasty. All define the 'elegant' *yabu* as Kun music and *huabu* as all other musical styles.<sup>114</sup> Consider, for example, Li Dou's 1795 *Yangzhou huafang lu* 揚州畫舫錄 (Records of Yangzhou Pleasure Boats), perhaps the most important document for theatre historians in this period:

The *yabu* is Kunshan *qiang*. The *huabu* is Jing *qiang*, Qin *qiang*, Yiyang *qiang*, bangzi *qiang*, luoluo *qiang*, *erhuang diao*. These are called 'luantan' [messy/uncategorised strumming].<sup>115</sup>

雅部即崑山腔；花部為京腔、秦腔、弋陽腔、梆子腔、羅羅腔、二簧調，統謂之「亂彈」 (Li 1960, p.107)

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<sup>114</sup> Most commonly cited is Li Dou's *Yangzhou huafang lu* (scroll 5, 1795). For a full list see note 1 of Chen (p.23).

<sup>115</sup> Although this may also appear a derogatory term on its conceptions, like the *huabu* such terms do not necessarily hold negative connotations in future generations. Indeed, in 2006, *Luan tan* was featured on the first list of nationally protected intangible cultural heritage 国家级非物质文化遗产名录.



The word *hua*, or ‘florid’, is normally understood by theatre scholars in terms of its derogatory meaning, more as ‘vulgar’, ‘gaudy’ or ‘showy’ and a lurid connection with feminine charms or visual spectacle. However, the word itself can also simply mean ‘assorted’ or ‘miscellaneous’. Another source, *Yanlan xiaopu* 燕蘭小譜 (The Orchids of Yan) by Wu Changyuan 吳長元,<sup>116</sup> explains that although in previous times *hua* referred to these ‘floral’ aspects of performance, it was (by 1785) purely a musical distinction:

In the Yuan dynasty, actors wearing make-up, those who did slapstick and dancing girls were [known as] the *huabu*. Those who wore no powder and only sang were ‘orthodox’, according to the stipulations of ceremonial music of the Tang court. Today the Yiyang, *bangzi* and other musical styles are called the ‘assorted section’, Kun *qiang* is called ‘the elegant section’. [In order to preserve] their respective charms, these [types of music] cannot overlap’.

元時院本，凡旦色之塗抹、科譚、取妍者為花，不傅粉而工歌唱者為正，即唐雅樂部之意也。今以弋腔、梆子等曰花部，崑腔曰雅部。使彼此擅長各不相掩。  
(In Zhang 1991, vol.1 p.6)<sup>117</sup>

We see from these sources, then, that the 18th century distinction seems to have been specifically directed at musical style rather than staging. There was surely an association developing between certain musical styles and their manner of performance (most notably Qinqiang, which was banned from the capital 1785). However, it is also true to say that within the Kunqu style there were performances considered both florid and elegant. This is evidenced both by the popularity of Kun *qiang* repertoire in Jingju troupes (the 20th century evidence for which is outlined in Chapter Two) and, indeed,

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<sup>116</sup> *Orchids* is a 1785 ‘flower register’ 花譜 cataloguing the charms of actors in Beijing

<sup>117</sup> Should the author be considered the subject of this sentence and the ‘sections’ rival troupes of actors rather than different styles of music, the following reading is also possible: ‘We must allow the charms of both the *huabu* and *yabu* to prosper and not extinguish the other’.

the perceived inelegance, as Goldman notes, of all commercial theatre when contrasted with poetry and pure-song traditions: 'Recital singing, the ultimate expression of *ya*, was the antithesis of popular commercial performance (2013, p.130).

Goldman, however, contests the perceived fixity of the terms *huabu* and *yabu* in the connoisseurship of public performance in Beijing, suggesting they may not have been absolute categories but rather 'the response of educated observers of the time to the multiplicity and fluidity of performance styles' (2013, p.119). Goldman is surely correct to counter the notion that there was an apartheid on the commercial stage between genres for the elites and lower classes, but not that the distinction was fluid. Lu Eting also argues that as Yiyang and Kun would in later times frequently perform on the same stage, so in terms of a competition Yiyang could be conceived as Kun competing against the *luantan* (1980a, pp.173-4).<sup>118</sup>

I propose that the categories corresponded not to types of performance but to musical style and repertoire, while performances of Kunju may have been inelegant, musically Kun singing was judged incompatible with the hybridity of others. This is a judgment that rings true up to and including the current day. Aside from orchestral accompaniment and the interaction between instrument and voice, the most fundamental musical incompatibility between Kun and the other varieties stems from its strictly regular, significantly slower tempo and use of melisma, allowing single character-word syllables to be stretched over several notes in order to clearly articulate

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<sup>118</sup> Aoki, however, makes it clear that it is a matter of some regret to him that the sources do not consider Yiyang *qiang* also a member of the 'elegant' category (1938, p.327). In a interesting insight from Han Shichang's report from his performance trip to Japan, the actor describes watching Noh theatre, which he describes as being very similar to *gaoqiang* 高腔 in China (1985). Rolston notes that in four volumes are reproductions of play scripts from the Qing palace held either in Japan or Shanghai published privately in Sendai, that in the plays of the second and third volume some scenes are performed in the Kun *qiang* and others in Yiyang *qiang*. The ratio for Kun:Yi is 5:13 for the play in volume three and 7:11 for volume four (Rolston 2015, p.191).

the ‘head’, ‘body’ and ‘tail’ of each character-word in southern-inflected northern Mandarin Chinese. Supposedly, this allows words to remain intelligible to literati across the various dialect areas of Jiangnan and further afield; a core principle said to be the innovation of Wei Liangfu.

In Qing terminology the ‘elegant section’ (*yabu*), was, I propose, not a fluid term but one quite specific referring to the musical divide between Kunqu and other more mutually compatible musical genres, without necessarily inferring a qualitative judgement on the ‘elegance’ of the dramatic material or its performance. The distinction between *yabu* and *huabu* is therefore not to be thought of as one and the same as the binary distinction of ‘elegance’ *ya* (rather than *yabu*) and ‘commonness’ *su* 俗 as qualities more generally. It should be remembered that the contrast between *ya* and *su* is one that was drawn *within* the Kun-*qiang* repertoire of the *yabu*—in which, as with Shakespeare plays or Noh/Kyogen programs, clowning scenes would be interspersed with more serious ‘elegant’ ones.

However, led by Aoki’s interpretation, the late imperial stage has been envisioned as highly genre-delineated, with Kunqu an ‘elegant’ theatre threatened by the star-centred commerciality of the ‘florid’ genres. These ‘florid’ genres moved into a new arena of the playhouse in the commercial cosmopolitan centres of Suzhou, Beijing and Yangzhou. Aoki conceives of Kunqu as an elegant dramatic form that suffered a decline as the vulgar genres of the *huabu* rose to prominence. This direct relationship between the rise of one and decline of the other,<sup>119</sup> remains a core assumption at the heart of Chinese theatre histories, generating a variety of contingent theses that have created a coherent but insufficiently documented narrative.

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<sup>119</sup> The idea was itself not new in popular discourse however it enters literary scholarship with Aoki. A ‘mini-history of Kunju’s decline’ 崑劇衰微史 that also links the rise of *pihuang* to the demise of Kun *qiang* appears in Shanghai’s *Shenpao* 申報 newspaper on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916 (Zhu Jianming 1992, pp.14-15).

Luo Di argues that ‘whichever kind of drama, whichever script, performed in whichever way, was from the perspective of the actor a matter of complete irrelevance’ (2007, p.115). As I have already argued, the 18th century distinction was clearly not between two different types of performance but one type of music (Kun) that was judged incompatible with the hybridity of others. The two ‘sections’ may not necessarily refer to distinct troupes of actors, nor a fluid terminology, but simply the division in musical repertoires. These repertoires might be performed by the same troupe and enjoyed by the same audiences. The last Kun-only troupe in Jiangnan, the Quanfuban, for example, performed both Kun *qiang* and *chuiqiang* 吹腔, a musical style associated with Jingju.<sup>120</sup> Equally, it was also not always the case that the literati shunned the *huabu*. In 1819, the literatus Jiao Xun 焦循, for example, proclaims his passion for the *huabu* and complains that little of the Kun repertoire is moral or honourable (qtd. in Fei 2002, 91).

While the *yabu* and *huabu* struggle has most obviously visibly been packaged in Marxist terms as a question of the privileged *yabu* against the downtrodden *huabu*, it has also in specific corners of academic and aficionado discourse been reconfigured as that of ‘traditional’ values of *ya* against the capitalist global modernity represented by the *hua*, specifically the stars of Jingju. Ironically, thus it has in fact been Jingju, (as the *huabu*), that has been linked in more recent writing to a Westernised ‘star-system’ that contrasted with the purer more ‘Chinese’ values.

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<sup>120</sup> However, like the Kun style it shares the bamboo *dizi* flute as its lead instrument. Five *chuiqiang* scenes remain in the current ‘Kunqu’ repertoire, including four from *The Horse Trader* 反马記 plus *Princess Baihua bestows the Sword* 百花贈劍. They were taught to the *chuan* generation not by the Quanfuban actors but by Jingju actor Jiang Yanxiang 蒋砚香 (Sang 2000, p.244) however the Quanfuban also performed these and others now lost to the repertoire such as *The Kunshan Tale* 崑山記 (ibid, p.245).

## Star-system and state subsidy

Yao links the ‘decline’ of Kunqu to the suppression of the Taiping Rebellion of the 1850s around Yangzhou and the Jiangnan region, which, decimated the region and class of people that were its main market.<sup>121</sup> Mackerras also describes it as a ‘deathblow’ for the genre (1976, p.494).<sup>122</sup> Both Li (2010, pp. 41-55) and Goldstein (2007, pp. 17-89) have written at length about the development of Shanghai as the new economic centre of the South as a crucial moment in the development of Jingju. As refugees from across the Yangtze river delta fled towards the protection offered by foreign-occupied treaty port of Shanghai, this once-unimportant town became the economic hub of the China and the country’s most dynamic theatre scene. All four of Suzhou’s Kun troupes fled to the protection of Shanghai in 1860. By the year 1870s Shanghai had already a dozen

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<sup>121</sup> Prior to the Taiping presence in Jiangnan the economic and cultural centres of Suzhou, Yangzhou and Nanjing were closely linked to the capital. A steady flow of actors made its way North to supply not just Kunqu but also the *huabu*. Since the Ming dynasty, the Suzhou region was the area in which actors and apprentice actors were traditionally sourced.

<sup>122</sup> Zhang Chonghe’s memoirs of travelling with the Quanfuban 全福班 troupe on the Grand Canal and tributaries provide a story from this period that links to Shen Chuanzhi 沈傳芷. The Quanfuban are the only line of transmission linking pre-Taiping Suzhou to the present day. Shen Shoulin 沈壽林 was the father of Shen Yuequan 沈月泉, principal teacher to the Chuan generation, and grandfather of Shen Chuanzhi, the principle teacher of Yu Zhenfei and the current senior generation of actors from Jiangsu and Shanghai. When the Taipings entered Suzhou, Shen Shoulin was just 13 years old, he went with the Taiping army to Nanjing as a personal servant 小親隨 to Hong Xiuquan. 洪秀全, ‘Heavenly King’ of the Taipings, the man who famously considered himself the brother of Jesus Christ. Zhang claims that in 1864, when Hong Xiuquan was aware that his power was on the wane, he gave Shen Shoulin some money, telling him ‘Little Lin, go back, get married and establish your trade. Whatever happens, leave me an heir!’ (p.29). When, much later in life, Shen became head of the Jufuban 聚福班, he replaced the first character Ju with Quan 全 in honour of the Heavenly King’s name. He also included the character *quan* 泉 in two of his sons names and in his student 周釗泉. At the time, alleges Zhang, no one knew why, for it would have been a dangerous to display any connection to the failed rebellion. Only later, when he assigned a special ship’s berth reserved for the lead painted-face actor (at the time, himself) called the ‘Heavenly King Berth’ 天王鋪 did the connection become apparent.

teahouses performances modelled on Beijing forebears, the smaller of which hosted Kunqu performances (Goldstein 2007, p.61).

As the theatre scene developed, an invitation system evolved during which Shanghai's theatres paid incredibly large sums of money for the biggest names of the Beijing stage to perform in the city (ibid, p.92). In order to attract the best actors from Beijing, theatres in Shanghai paid large sums of money. Goldstein notes that while Peking Opera *laosheng* Tan Xinpei 譚鑫培 was making 30 yuan a month in Beijing, he was commanding 250 in Shanghai in the 1880s (2007, p.48). The dramatic emergence of Shanghai had meant that actors could become not just famous, but also were able to dictate salaries and conditions of employment. These developments on the Jingju stage caused tensions within professional Kunqu communities which still echo in the current day. While this invitation system led to the rise of the Jingju star, the professional Kunqu actor, however, has remained a craftsman who struggled to be seen as the locus of his 'art'.

The successes of the Republican-era Jingju have been criticised by some Kunqu writers as the product of a Westernised star-system, in which flair and personal style became more important than fidelity to text or tradition. This, they claim, is a trend which has infiltrated Kunqu and continues to threaten its purity. To take this line, however, elides a historical star system in Kunqu performance as documented in Qing dynasty texts such as Li Dou's *Yangzhou huafang lu*, as can be seen in the following passage:

The *xiaosheng* Chen Yunjiu, at the age of 90, sang 'Taking off the shoes'<sup>123</sup> from the *Splendid Colours* with abundant flair, [and] natural skill. Dong Meichen could not surpass Chen Yunjiu, but through his pupil Zhang Weishang [created a style] known as the Dong school. Meichen's excelled at *The Palace of Eternal*

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<sup>123</sup> The scene is now commonly known as 'Drunken Li Bai Composes a Poem' 太白醉寫

*Life*, [while] Weishang excelled at *The Western Chamber*. When Weishang travelled to the capital, he became known as the ‘top-scholar *xiaosheng*’ and subsequently joined the Hongban [a famous troupe in Yangzhou].

小生陳雲九，年九十演《彩毫記》吟詩脫靴一齣，風流橫溢，化工之技。董美臣亞於雲九，授其徒張維尚，謂之董派。美臣以《長生殿》擅場，維尚以《西樓記》擅場，維尚游京師時，人謂之《狀元小生》，後入洪班。(Li 1795, Vol. 5 passage 33)

Yet in the current era, traditionalists such as Gu Duhuang 顧篤璜<sup>124</sup> argue that Kunqu culture prohibits any performer from wooing audiences with personal skill that exceeds the performance tradition for the particular playlet (2001, p.180). Gu argues that the star-system that emerged from the Jing troupes in Shanghai during the Republican period has had a negative influence on Kunqu’s purity and is a result of market economy and emulation of Western systems. Gu states that Kunqu has never been organised according to a ‘star system’ 明星制 (also elsewhere referred to as 角兒制).

In Kunqu’s traditional stage art, there is absolutely no such thing as the actor’s individual artistic spectacle, [the purpose] is rather to pursue every dramatic occurrence as a whole presentation’ (2001, p.180).

Gu’s disdain for spectacle seems to share Isabel Wong’s observation, noted in the introduction, of the dichotomy between the ‘whims’ of the public and orthodox handling of plots and musical details (1978, p.2). Between 1989 and 1993, Gu teamed up with Professor Zhou Qin at Suzhou University, trying to tackle this perceived problem by establishing a Kunqu training programme for pupils who had already completed secondary education rather than in early adolescence, as is still the norm:

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<sup>124</sup> The former cultural official and inimitable Kunqu traditionalist Gu Duhuang, who has authored and edited a series of books, was deputy director of the Suzhou Cultural Bureau between 1957-72 and led the Suzhou Kunqu troupe from 1973. Born in 1928, Gu is a descendant of a wealthy literati family who owned the Garden of Contentment (Yiyuan 怡園) in Suzhou. His father was a noteworthy avocational performer of Kunqu.

Our intake come in after graduating from high school, their cultural nourishment (*wenhua suyang*) is higher when they perform opera they have a bit more 'cultured air' (*shujuan qi*) (interview in Hong 2002, p.627).

However, this project, motivated by a dogmatic view of the genre's characteristics and its historical development, did not generate a single student who actually went on to pursue a career on the stage (Zhu 2010, p.82).

Gu takes aim at what he claims is the adoption from Jingju of a Westernised 'star system' in Kunqu. In one article he draws a comparison with Hollywood and explores the metaphor by introducing the notion of the film director, Hollywood's way of maintaining order:

To have stars and be governed by them are two different concepts. It's like in films, in which the influence of stars is the most important thing, but film creation is a director-centred system. (2009, p.180)

These comments are perhaps at least partly derived from a damaging confrontation within the *Chuan* generation that led to the end of regular Kunqu performance in Shanghai or two years between 1931 and 1933. The organizers of the *Chuan* generation's performance organization at the time, the Xinyuefu 新樂府 theatre broke the so-called 'industry rules' by not treating all actors, leading and supporting roles, equally. Two of the newly graduated students seen to have the best prospects were Gu Chuanjie 顧傳玠 and Zhu Chuanming 朱傳茗, performing respectively the male and female romantic leads (*xiaosheng* and *guimen dan*). Having already been given extra earnings, the rest of the troupe became particularly indignant one evening in 1930 when only the two would-be stars and another student, Hua Chuanping, were gifted



expensive leather overcoats by Yan Huizi 严惠字 and Tao Xiquan 陶希泉, the two investors behind the troupe. The remaining *Chuan* actors threatened to strike and demanded to be allowed to set up independently prior to the end of the two-year contract signed. The response from the Xinyuefu was that it would in that case need to recoup the costume box it had invested in. The troupe had no choice but to see the contract through, unhappily, and without renewal in 1931 (Sang 2000, p.74). The result was that *Chuan* generation did not regularly perform in Shanghai until the *Xianni she* 仙霓社 performances 1933-5.<sup>125</sup> It is perhaps as a hangover from the event, that a 'star system' is seen in recent history as a potentially destabilizing force, and claims to stardom are treated suspiciously by conservative aficionados.

This 'code of conduct' within Kunqu troupes of equally treating all actors, leading and supporting roles, was allegedly inherited from the Quanfuban.<sup>126</sup> However, the Quanfuban had been touring the rural waterways of Jiangnan in times of dire poverty following the cataclysmic wars of the Taiping period. In the early 20th century, by maintaining the status of all actors at one level, Kunqu—be it presented as either a literary or performance tradition, or both—could remain under the control of its gatekeepers rather than one or two actors who commanded its box office receipts. While the profiles of certain Kunqu stars have since the 1980s invited large followings, thus creating new centers of mediated power, literary elites are able to appeal to

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<sup>125</sup> For more details on these events see Sang (2000, p.73-4).

<sup>126</sup> Modern troupes are still run in the same manner. I am told by various members of the Jiangsu troupe that performance fees (which are paid on top of a low-level monthly retainer) are roughly the same regardless of the seniority of the actor or whether the part played is a leading role or otherwise. While it may be tempting to see the roots of such an arrangement in the communist apparatus alone, we see it is in fact also a continuation of a Kunqu 'tradition'. In the current system there are also other revenue streams open to actors, including taking managerial and party positions, increasing their national ranking, teaching classes and being involved in particular performance projects with added bonuses. Many actors also undertake private engagements outside of the troupe to top up income, not necessarily in performance.

familiar attitudes that dismiss actors as insufficiently educated. Furthermore, a new discourse of transmission disparages actors who are seen to seek to discard 'tradition' in the search of personal glory.

In this subsection I have elaborated on the tension between elites and actors and how this has itself strengthened the authority of the traditional *luzi*. Pure-singing elites and aspirational devotees, like the literati of the late Qing, continue to assert an authority over the 'Kunqu' tradition. While the historical *luzi* were pedagogical templates to develop the skills and components necessary for rules-based improvisation, I argue that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the *luzi* effectively became the work itself, a product designed by tradition rather than the performer. In the context of global modernity and capitalist structures that link authorship to ownership, the fixed *luzi* (rather than its components, the *chengshi*) have therefore become the most identifiable, ownable and therefore protectable units of Kunqu's heritage.

### **The PRC and *juzhong***

During the early years of the PRC, Kunqu was considered a local opera form, certainly not enjoying the same status as Jingju as a 'national opera.' This was troublesome for those who wished to promote Kunqu as China's elite national form, and who were bolstered by continued practice of Kunqu amateur societies in Taiwan, Hong Kong and the United States. Although the *juzhong* system of the early communist years, that I shall outline here, in one sense demoted Kunqu to the status of a local form, it also repositioned its place in the archive as distinct and separate from the commercial stage i.e. Jingju. If Kunqu playlets had instead been performed by Jingju troupes, or even classified as a subgenre of Jingju, it is difficult to imagine them receiving the amount of critical or popular attention that they now receive.

The Chuanxisuo thus received its grandest endorsement several decades after it had closed, when the newly founded communist People's Republic set about folding all theatre into the framework of the state apparatus by registering, categorising and domiciling performance troupes and personnel. Over the course of a few years, the country's troupes were categorised into genres, or *juzhong* 劇種, whose number would eventually exceed three hundred. Kunqu was to become one of these—unfitting from an elite perspective which, as we are frequently told, saw it as not one more genre but the 'mother of the hundred theatres' 百戲之母. But such objections would have had no place in the era's political discourse. Quite the contrary, it was fortunate to receive classification, since, as an elitist 'genre' associated with reactionary intellectuals and valued in non-Communist Chinese communities, it might instead have been deliberately suppressed, given the ideology of the political revolution.

Much has been written about the political impact on theatrical scripts in the Communist era (see, for example, Tung and Mackerras, 1987). Less however has been said about how the practicalities of the *danwei* work system influenced the creation of so-called theatrical genres (*juzhong*). In the early years of the PRC, local administrations were tasked with registering all trades, including performing troupes. Prior to 1949, the country had been involved in state war or civil war for decades, and very few performers had made a living from theatre during this period. The process of registering genres was analogous to that which occurred with the registering of different 'ethnicities', *minzu shibie* 民族识别 in China, resulting in rather more ethnicities than were previously known to have existed (e.g., Brown, 2001), not least because to be able to declare an ethnicity meant a large number of supportive policies and protection from government. A similar dynamic was at work in theatre, in that genres were competing to acquire a prestigious portion of the pie. In practice, this meant that troupes were given

the opportunity to come forth and submit an application to register and obliged to state the *juzhong* they belonged to.

For many it was first and foremost a first opportunity to make a secure living. Many of the *chuan* generation had died during the war from starvation or illness, while others managed to scrape a living from itinerant performance. In 1943 Zhou Chuanying 周傳英 and Wang Chuansong 王傳淞 established the *Guofeng Suju* Troupe 國風蘇劇團 in Hangzhou.<sup>127</sup> Luo Di's description of the moment of nationalisation illustrates the significance of the change:

One day, the Zhejiang provincial government culture bureau sent someone to the Guofeng troupe to hold a meeting, announcing that Guofeng was to become a government-funded local enterprise and would receive 1,500 yuan to purchase new costumes. They requested the troupe stop performance for 40 days in order to study the new drama reform policy, and culture. During this time the state would provide food for meals, and for each person regardless of age, a pocket money allowance of 2 *jiao* (0.02 yuan) per day. Zhou Chuanying and the others couldn't believe their ears. They started crying. (Luo 2006, vol. II, p.25)

有一天，浙江省文化局派人到“國風”開會，宣佈：“國風”實行民營公助，給一千伍佰元錢添置服裝。叫劇團停演四十天，集中學習，學習戲改政策，學習文化。學習期間，國家發伙食費，不論大人小孩，每人每天二角錢零用。周傳瑛等全團人員都聽傻了，都哭了。

Similar processes were occurring throughout the country. Luo Di himself (a composer of folk music at the time) remembered contributing to the 'creation' of two local operatic genres, including *Muju* 睦劇 in Jiangxi province and *Wuju* 婺劇 in Zhejiang, arranging and often creating their signature 'traditional' melodies and even plays (in interview

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<sup>127</sup> *Suju* is the Suzhou variant of *tanhuang* 滩簧, a family of popular folk operas common across the Jiangnan region.

with Hong, p.530). It is not an underestimation to say that the entire unwieldy matter of *xiqu* submitted to classification and institutionalisation.

Judging from this account, it is possible that many of the categories now established as *juzhong* originated in this manner. Performers may in many instances have had no opinion of where their performance stood generically, other than their locale (assuming that title hadn't already been registered). While the common vocabulary used to categorise troupes that had travelled to the urban centres of Beijing and Shanghai was by locale, this was seldom how they were known at home. On the contrary, regional associations were often played down. Henan opera, Yuju 豫劇, for example, was not known within Henan as Yuju prior to establishment of the PRC, and if referred to as a genre (rather than simply by troupe name) then the term in use was *bangzi* 梆子 ('clapper opera'). In many areas the local troupes would simply be called *benqiang* 本腔 'local melody'. Based on the list of historic troupes contained in the *Kunju Da Cidian* (ed. Wu Xinlei), even the names of Kunqu troupes for example do not contain the word 'Kun' until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Those that do are either in areas far from Kunqu's heartlands (Suzhou-Jiangnan-Beijing) that do, such as the Kunwen Xiuban 崑文秀班 in Guiyang 桂阳 in Hunan (est. 1874) or in combined troupes that performed both Kun and Yiyang styles including Quanfu Kun qiang keban 全福崑腔科班 in Beijing (est. 1873), (the Kun-Yi Xiaoruizhi troupe 崑弋小蕊芝班 in Shaoxing (est. 1894).

Kunqu's place in the *juzhong* registration system has been awkward. For one thing, most of the troupes who had performed *Kunqu* in the public theatre, had also performed non-Kunqu pieces. In fact, the most important *Huiban*<sup>128</sup> troupes of the late Qing and early Republican era Beijing, such as the 'Four Pleasures Troupe' 四喜班 or 'Three

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<sup>128</sup> Known by their province of (ostensible) origin, as the 'Anhui troupes' or Huiban 徽班. Rather than a musical or performance tradition that originates from Anhui, these are considered to be troupes financed by merchants originating from Anhui (Li 2010, p.7).

Celebrations Troupe' 三庆班, sang mainly *pihuang*, but also sang in a number of other musical styles including Kunqu. For them, Kunqu had become less important from a commercial perspective, but were crucial to the social status of not just the troupe but also individual actors. Heng Shifeng notes that actors who could not sing Kunqu were looked down upon (1927, p.241). Kunqu repertoire was thus substantially embedded in Jingju.

However, after the establishment of the *juzhong* system, the legacy of these troupes fell completely under the category of 'Jingju', a term related to *Jingxi* and *Jingdiao*, and which had been used primarily in Shanghai to refer to the *pihuang* that had developed in Beijing. Chen Tian argues that the designation of the Huiban troupes—carriers of more than 200 Kun *qiang* playlets—as 'Jingju', accelerated the focus on only *pihuang* plays, ultimately creating a crisis, he argues, for Jingju as a genre in the face of a resurgence of an 'independent' Kunqu (2007, p.17).

This process of separation has hidden a great deal of interconnection between the Jingju and Kunqu even in the early communist period. For instance, the standard of physical performance of Kunqu, particularly for martial roles, was stimulated by the level of technical ability achieved by Jingju actors in this period. The Taiwanese scholar Wang An-chi points out that in studying 'tradition' no Kunqu actor has been willing to sacrifice their own creativity or artistic identity and has naturally therefore absorbed the influence of Jingju (2012, p.113). The painted face role-type actor Shao Chuanyong 邵傳鏞 of the *Chuan* generation, for example, admits that 'before we didn't really do martial training. It was after we graduated and saw Jingju performance and were inspired by it. That's when we realised that martial training is important' (interview in Hong 2002, p.115). Observations such as these seem to counter the common mantra that the physical ability has been diminishing with each generation rather than improving, a narrative that I argue has been propagated to position Kunqu as under

threat. In fact, this is more likely derived from a situation relating to the diminishing standards of Kun *qiang* martial repertoire by 'Jingju' (*Huiban*) troupes.<sup>129</sup>

Kunqu, meanwhile, had now been granted a status in the archive as its own '*juzhong*' truly independent of the popular, commercial stage—the pristine tradition that had been coveted by the literary elites was now 'rescued' and consigned in the national archive of operatic genres. This was, however, an archiving process that deliberately overlooked the complexities of the genre's history in favour of taxonomical neatness. Though the style of singing originated in or near Kunshan, is not sung in the dialect of the region but rather in a standardised version of official, northern-based official language. However, it was beneficial to emphasise local roots over elite ones in the early communist period, and perhaps the dialect used by the clown roles could be counted on to provide more legitimacy. Its alternative appellation Kunju integrates more easily into the *juzhong* system in that it appears terminologically to mean something like 'the local theatre of Kunshan' in analogy to other genres' (often new) names. The example of the name of the first official Kunqu troupe to be established during the communist period can serve as an illustration.

In 1956, Zhou Chuanying was approached by party officials to produce a new version of the play *Fifteen Strings of Cash* 十五貫, a production watched by both Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai and heralded by the *People's Daily*, as the play 'that saved a whole *juzhong*'. From then on the troupe's name gradually evolved from Guofeng Suju Tuan, to Su Kunju Tuan 蘇崑劇團 and finally to Zhejiang Kunju Tuan 浙江崑劇團. Only once the troupe had the security of political support from the top reaches of the Party

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<sup>129</sup> Similarly, in the case of Japan, Everett points out that in the Noh theatre of today, performers have a much higher technical level of performance compared to fifty years ago, reporting that 'Many performers suggest that it has never been higher' (1997, p.20).

hierarchy was it possible to emphasise the national connotations of 'Kun' and drop the political safety of the more local 'Su'.

The fact that Kunqu was considered a local opera form, certainly not enjoying the same status as Jingju as a 'national opera', has been troublesome to those who wished to promote Kunqu as China's elite national form. In a 1992 interview, Luo Di explains that he was against the idea that Jingju be thought of China's 'national drama' (*Guoju* 國劇) arguing that 'if there is to be something called "national drama" then only Kunqu could take on that mantle' (qtd. in Hong 2002, p.532). It is of course no secret that, then and now, many people involved in Kunqu believe it is more deserving of such a status than Jingju.

Although the *juzhong* system of the early communist years had in this sense demoted Kunqu to the status of a local form, it had also repositioned its place in the archive as distinct and separate from the commercial stage, separating Kunqu definitively from Jingju. This process of archivism was the first conducted by a modern and centralised state, and consequently has been extremely powerful, not just in assuring the livelihood of genre-dedicated Kunqu actors, but also a category available for UNESCO recognition.

## **Kunqu as dance**

Those wishing to elevate or recover Kunqu as the national high-prestige or classical theatre had to consider also what characteristics set this genre apart. This impulse, to provide uniform characteristics and a traditional or traditionalised choreography for every playlet, has been at the heart of Kunqu discourse since the 1950s.<sup>130</sup> This has

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<sup>130</sup> It is for example discussed at length by the China Theatre Association in November 1957, including its members Beijing Kunqu actors Bai Yunsheng and Han



privileged a claim that singing-while-dancing is particularly characteristic of Kunqu. In contrast to the *pihuang* singing style's fast-paced rhythms, which made it impractical for actors to match words to movements and caused dance and action to generally only occur outside of aria singing, Kunqu was characterised as being constantly accompanied by movement *simultaneously* to singing (*zaige zaiwu* 載歌載舞). However, a survey of the sources shows that its importance, particularly in carving an identity to contrast with that of Jingju, has been promoted most strongly since the 1980s, and often with a view to ICH and international status. Cai Zhengren (Shanghai troupe leader at the time) in 1999 identifies *zaige zaiwu* as a major draw to foreign audiences, 'without the need for any explanation' (Cai 1999, p.37).

Kunqu's development of *zaige zaiwu* is often explained as due to the highly allusive language of the *chuanqi* lyric. Mackerras translates the following point made by Zhou Yibai in 1958, who does not himself quote any primary sources for it:

Because *K'un-ch'ü* [Kunqu] was often difficult to understand, great expression had to be given to the actions to make the sense of the drama clearer and more easily understandable to the audience. This process began in the Ming but was not fully developed until the *Ch'ing* [Qing]. (Mackerras 1971, p.77).

Such arguments, however, seem ill-founded, since many of the most lyrical repertoire pieces— such as 'The Inn' 酒樓, 'Zhao Jun crosses the Frontier' 出塞 or 'Searching for the Dream' 尋夢—are originally 'singing-orientated' (and movement-light) playlets 唱功戲. These later acquired *zaige zaiwu* choreography at various points in the 20th century, in particular the 1980s, as I outlined in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the texts being

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Shichang and the Jiangnan aficionado Xu Lingyun. See Chinese Theatre Association (1957, p.76).

performed were standard repertoire from the late Ming onwards and by the mid-Qing the stories and the lyrics would most likely be familiar to playgoers.

Other arguments foreground the elegance of Kunqu movement. Swatek summarises a perspective advanced by Lu Eting in a 1991 article:

Movement was another cornerstone of this high aesthetic, and its standards were as exacting as those for singing arias [...] the performer had to bend the waist so many inches, the hands so many, and place the feet just so. Movement that was precise (*you chicun*) created the aura of cultivated refinement (*shujuan qi*) prized by connoisseurs as the essence of the Kun style 崑味. (Swatek 2002, p.158)

Certainly, this attention to detail could indeed describe current training and rehearsal practices. This level of fixity and precision certainly reflects the approach that I have witnessed attempting to learn Kunqu movements myself. But what is the historical progression of Kunqu choreography?

The present perception and indeed practice may result in the archival tendency to construct Kunqu and Jingju as diametric opposites, a process which oversimplifies both. The two genres are most easily distinguishable by distinct musical styles and textual repertoire, but new audiences whose interest in theatre comes not from literary or musical connoisseurship are often directed towards Kunqu's holistic package of authentic performance, particularly its dancing-while-singing (*zaige zaiwu*). However, it is debatable for how long this degree of precision has been present. On one hand, it is argued by Lu and others that the finesse of Kunqu's movements are a relatively recent (Qian-Jia) creation, the result of the need to compete with the *huabu* on the urban commercial stage. On the other hand, it is claimed that the centuries-old choreographic tradition of Kunqu was a crucial influence on Jingju.

The legacy of Qi Rushan's 'aestheticisation' and 'dancification' of Jingju during the National Drama *guoju* movement also exerted a considerable influence on Kunqu. These concepts have been particularly emphasised by Kunqu scholarship of recent decades, albeit with no reference to either Qi Rushan or Jingju by those intellectual and political elites who wished to separate Kunqu from its connection to Jingju in the archive. Nonetheless, Kunqu's development followed Qi's model at least just as closely as Jingju does.

Kunqu has, like Jingju, been 'aestheticized' for global audiences but further reframed as a comprehensive performance art in which singing and dancing occur simultaneously. I have shown above how, just as Qing elites had sought to elevate pure-singing in the Kun style to the literary status of the Yuan lyric, a narrative of intangible heritage originating in Japan sought to elevate Kunqu as performance in a way that at least reflects the same high status as Japanese court dance. By assigning the term 'elegance' to the whole performance rather than just song, the choreography of Kunqu became an asset in itself. This was part of a more general movement seen in many parts of Asia at the time, by which theatre arts were reframed as dance in order to gain entry to the world stage.<sup>131</sup>

One result of this shift has been that many singing-focused playlets in Kunqu for which *luzi* were transmitted in which there was once very little movement were subsequently heavily choreographed. In response to pressures to be 'comprehensive' and therefore danced as well as sung—these being now the hallmarks of Kunqu—these scenes became danced. Another legacy of this shift has been the criticism of certain performers or lineages for not demonstrating the characteristics of Kunqu as

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<sup>131</sup> For how Qi Rushan's experiences as a theatre-goer in Paris influenced his reframing of Mei Lanfang's Jinju as dance see Catherin Yeh's forthcoming paper 'Peking Opera and Modern Dance: Mei Lanfang's The Goddess Spreads Flowers and the Inherent Ambiguity of Modernism'.

formulated by the gatekeepers. Gu Duhuang, for instance, is critical of the performance of the archetypal educated actor, Yu Zhenfei, whose Kunqu, he claims, is 'Jingju-flavoured' (in Hong 2002, p.27).<sup>132</sup> Yu's movements, argues Gu, were too large, noting that Yu himself advised students not to learn *xiaosheng* steps from him but from the aficionado/teacher Song Xuanzhi.<sup>133</sup> Gu draws the following comparison between Jingju and Kunqu movements. While he notes that there is no fundamental difference between the 'outward shape' of Jingju and Kunqu movements, there is a difference in the placement of energy within them (*neihan de jintou*) (2013, p.117):

In comparison to Jingju movements, [original] Kunju movements appear more lifelike and natural and are not quite so deliberately statuesque 刻意雕琢 and sharp-edged 見棱見角' (ibid, p.118).<sup>134</sup>

Lu's notion of precision, one that he argues has developed 'gradually' since the late Ming, can perhaps be reconciled with Gu's notion of naturalness. Indeed, it is my

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<sup>132</sup> Son of the pre-singing master Yu Sulu 俞粟廬 (1847-1930), he was initially forbidden from acting onstage, but went on to become perhaps the most admired *xiaosheng* actor of living memory. Yu won such accolade that he was propelled into a hugely successful career on the Jingju stage (where the money was) frequently acting alongside its male *dan* stars, including Mei Lanfang.

<sup>133</sup> One major issue he raises relate to the disappearance of Kunqu's original softer percussion. The current adoption of the Jingju percussion has, he argues, changed the energy of Kunqu performance (2013, pp.121-8). Jingju percussion was developed from Kunqu but has, Gu argues, over the course of the last century developed as evermore vigorous and brittle (*cuijin* 脆勁).

<sup>134</sup> Gu makes the point that the *Chuan* generation actors were influenced by Jingju in Shanghai in the 1930s (2013, p.115). His experience of how 'traditional' Kunju movements used to be, is presumably from his contact with aficionado performers, in particular Xu Lingyun, Song Xuanzhi and Song Hengzhi, with the exception of one professional actor, the *Chuan* generation teacher You Caiyun, whom he met in 1949 (2009, p.162).

experience that many of the most ‘natural’ looking movements on the Kunqu stage involve the greatest degree of mastery and precision.

How is it then that refined and precise movement has come to be regarded as Kunqu’s contribution to contemporary Jingju? Mei Lanfang, for example, wrote in his memoirs:

The blood and sweat of previous generations went into creating the movements of Kunqu. It is only through being developed and improved over many generations of actors that they contain so much of the essence of art. (Mei 2013, p.151)

Little, however, is said of the reverse—the basis that contemporary Kunqu performance has in the *Huiban* and hybrid troupes of the 18th and 19th centuries and the technical training by Jingju professionals in the 20th century.

Much of the present-day Kunqu corpus was, for example, transmitted through hybrid troupes and preserved (or resurrected) on the Jingju stage before returning to Kunqu. This includes martial (*wu* 武) plays such as *Night Flight* 夜奔, *Zhong Kui Gives his Sister in Marriage* 嫁妹 and *Bidding Mother Farewell* 別母亂箭. These are playlets that are sung to Kunqu music, even when performed on the Jingju stage by ‘Jingju’ actors. Even prior to 1949, members of the *chuan* generation also learned complete *luzi* from Jingju. For example, Hua Chuanhao, 華傳浩 learned *Stealing the Chicken* 偷雞 from Jingju actor Wang Hong 王洪 (Zhu, p.2010), and also advised his own student, the marital clown actor in the Shanghai troupe, Zhang Mingrong, to learn it from Jingju actors.<sup>135</sup> Even Gu Duhuang, who campaigns against the ‘Jingju-isation’ 京劇化 of Kunqu, notes that single musical-style ‘Kunqu troupes’ are largely a recent phenomenon (2009, p.6).

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<sup>135</sup> see Zhang Mingrong, Chinese Civilization Centre, City University of Hong Kong Lecture.

Moreover, many of today's Kunqu actors underwent their basic-skills physical training with Jingju teachers. Because the *chuan* generation of actors were taught mainly civilian (*wen* 文) plays, the first and immediately succeeding generations to have been in trained in Shanghai—including Liang Guyin, Zhang Mingrong, Fang Yang and others—were all taught martial (*wu* 武) plays and basic martial physical training (required of all young actors) 武功 not by *chuan* generation performers, but by Jingju actors (Wang 2012, 114). Similarly, all but one of Shanghai Kunju Troupe martial *dan* actress Wang Zhiquan 王芝泉 playlets were taught to her by Jingju actors, or created from scratch with their assistance.<sup>136</sup> Similar patterns can be observed in other troupes. The star *dan* actress Hu Jinfang 胡錦芳 was, for example, trained at the Jiangsu Province Opera School in the early 60s, with some movements taught by Jingju actress Li Yanyun 李豔雲 (interview in Hong 2002, p.336).<sup>137</sup>

Kunqu's movement vocabulary is thus not easily separated from Jingju and the beautification of Kunqu, originally focused on singing, has in fact developed from a trend in the National Drama movement that is usually used to describe Jingju.

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<sup>136</sup> For more information on Wang's choreography see her lectures in *Dashi shuoxi* (2014).

<sup>137</sup> Singing was taught by the former Tangming 堂名 singer Wu Xiusong 吳秀松

## Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have considered the 20th century establishment of the *luzi*, an analysis which led me to reinterpret major debates in Chinese theatre studies. I demonstrated the impact that Aoki Masuri's history had on later scholarship, in particular how his connection between the Kunqu's 'decline' and the rise of *pihuang* (Jingju) became a staple understanding, despite the prevalence of hybrid troupes. Furthermore, I have suggested that the so-called decline of Kunqu may in fact have been a function of the social posturing of archivists who criticized actors' ability to sing Kunqu, rather than owing to a shift in tastes or the after-effects of the Taiping rebellion.

I demonstrate how choreographed dance routines, performed in close interrelation with singing (*zaige zaiwu*) have played an important role in an effort to elevate Kunqu to a higher position than Jingju, and to make Kunqu a viable contender for the title of China's National Opera. I further argue that the increasing fixity, or notion of fixity, has been created by modern social and political elites acting from the same instinct as the literati of the late Qing; seeking to establish that creative ownership of this choreography belongs to an anonymous tradition rather than with a particular actor or their lineage. In the context of global modernity and capitalist structures that link authorship to ownership, the fixed *luzi* have become the most identifiable, ownable and therefore protectable units of Kunqu's heritage.

I have shown how the terms 'elegant section' (*yabu*) and 'florid/assorted section' (*huabu*) have been equated to contemporary opposition between Kunqu and Jingju. Because Kunqu's close interrelation with singing (*zaige zaiwu*) is said to be something Jingju lacks, this has placed the *luzi* and its choreographed dance routines in a defining position for Kunqu. However, this has occurred despite the fact that Kunqu and Jingju are highly inter-related in performance not just in the past when hybrid troupes were

the norm, but in the present day in which most performers, or their teachers, were taught basic skills by Jingju practitioners.



## 4. The archive as constructed heritage

Part of Kunqu's claims of pre-eminence over Jingju come from the pedigree advocates have given it. Jingju, it is said, is only two centuries old, as a hybridity of forms from across China developed in the capital in the late Qing. Kunqu, however, leverages the archive to highlight the maturity of its musical style, reinforcing its status as the 'ancestor of the hundred dramas' (*baixi zhizu*).<sup>138</sup> A significant body of research both in the mainland and Taiwan had been dedicated to tracing a Kunqu genealogy, two aspects of which I shall tackle in this chapter.<sup>139</sup>

A second, growing, body of literature tackles the study of historic manuscripts seeking to trace genealogies of choreography. I examine the genealogies themselves to trace to raise a number of methodological problems with this approach. Despite these, this approach of archive assemblage is made viable through the broader ideologically objective of affirming Kunqu's antiquity, consigned at the highest level by UNESCO.

### Wei Liangfu and Kunqu mythology

Just as contemporary Kunqu practitioners traditionalise their performance with references to known masters or the attribution of the 'traditional', the Kunqu establishment is committed also to a genealogy of the genre. This has created a pantheon of Kunqu sages who, the principal of which is Wei Liangfu 魏良輔. In modern

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<sup>138</sup> Less is said, as outlined in the previous chapter, of the fact that staged Kunqu performance owes its debt to the Kun *qiang* repertoire of the Huiban troupes, who subsequently became 'Jingju'.

<sup>139</sup> Contemporary Kunqu troupes have reinforce their links with antiquity by producing adaptations of pre-Kunqu *nanxi* scripts like *Zhang Xie Zhuanyuan* 張協狀元 (Stenberg 2015, p.41) or the Yuan *zaju* classic *Dou E Yuan* 竇娥冤.

times, Wei has become an important part of the shared mythology between the aficionado pure-singing and professional performance communities. I take a recent production mythologizing Wei Liangfu as the point of departure for this chapter.

In October 2015 the Jiangsu Province Kunju Theatre premiered its production of *Wei Liangfu: The Sage of Singing*, a full-length opera that brings Kunqu's creation myth alive onstage. The show was performed later that month at the closing ceremony of the sixth China Kunju Art Festival 中國崑劇藝術節, in Suzhou—the Ministry of Culture's triennial performance series and industry meeting. Contemporary acting 'legends' are deployed to reinforce the connection, first among them Cai Zhengren 蔡正仁, the high-profile former leader of the Shanghai troupe and member of the first generation of Kunqu stars educated at the theatre school in the 1950s. He starred as Wei Liangfu, the creator of Kunqu's 'water polished sound' 水磨腔.<sup>140</sup>

With a script penned by the prominent Taiwanese academic Tseng Yong-yih, the show reflects and reinforces popular mythologies of Kunqu's history. It also generates some new fictions, including an encounter between the first Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang and Kunshan singer Gu Jian (of whom more below) in which the emperor is so impressed that he commands him to spread the Kunshan style far and wide.<sup>141</sup>

Not much is known about Wei's life. Originally from Yichang (present-day Nanchang) in Jiangxi province, Wei did not actually live in Kunshan but twenty kilometres northwest in the far larger city of Taicang 太倉, at the time the principle port on the Yangtze river. His exact date of birth and death are not known, but according to Shen Chongsui 沈寵綏 (d. 1645), writing at a half-century's remove, he was active

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<sup>140</sup> I myself was responsible for the English subtitle translations.

<sup>141</sup> The Hongwu emperor's attitude towards the theatre was rather more complex than this (see Tan's 2008 article).

between 1522 and 1572, during Jiajing and Longqing reigns (Koo & Yue 2006, p.42).<sup>142</sup> The literatus Yu Huai 余懷 (1616-1696) writes that Wei 'first learned northern *qu* and was outclassed by the northerner Wang Yu-shan. He gave it up and devoted himself to southern *qu*, studying so hard that he did not even 'come downstairs' from his studio for ten years (qtd. in Yao Hsin-nung 1936, pp. 65-66). This strange notion of his not coming downstairs remains the major biographical information available about him. He is however credited in the early Kunqu writings by Shen and others with 'reforming' the Kunshan style of singing (ibid. p.36) and (by Shen) with standardising the disparate folk melodies of the South rhythmically and instrumentally, into his particular aesthetic.

The *History and Comprehensive List of Southern Qu*, a book normally attributed to Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-?), describes the Kunshan music as follows:<sup>143</sup>

At present in Kunshan they sing southern *qu* with *dizi* [flute], *guan*, *sheng* and the *pipa* to keep rhythm. Although [their] *zi* [pronunciations] do not quite correspond to the melodies, the combination is well balanced, it is worthy of a listen.

今昆山以笛管笙琵琶，按節而唱南曲者，字雖不應，頗相諧和，殊爲可聽 (Xu 1989, p.3)

It is unknown if this passage describes Kunshan music before Wei Liangfu's endeavours or after them. If prior to them, this would infer that his reforms were perhaps not quite as revolutionary as is often portrayed. If after them, the critique of the relationship between *zi* and melody sits uncomfortably as an appraisal, as Wei's celebrated third

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<sup>142</sup> Little is known about Wei's exact professional status. Isabel Wong describes him as herbal doctor, but doesn't reveal her source. Chinese academics have written papers discussing his exact position in the official hierarchy.

<sup>143</sup> It is not known if Wei had read Xu's book.

principle of singing states that the *zi* must always be sung in the correct tone. To deal with conflicts between the tone of words and the underlying melody, Wei instructed singers to ‘twirl the sounds’ 轉音 (Koo and Yue’s translation), so that word-tone could be perceived clearly on top of the melody tone.<sup>144</sup>

This has however always been a principle of *qu* singing in which the tonal characteristics of *qu* lyrics were ‘filled-in’ (*tian ci* 填詞) by the poet to a pre-existing melody (*qupai* 曲牌). It was the singer’s job to realise these in a process that Wong calls ‘tune accommodation’ (Wong 1978, p.100). The difficulty comes in the lack of standard of how tones are articulated across dialects in the South, let alone in song. Yet this is not something addressed directly by Wei,<sup>145</sup> who comes closest to indicating standard by his high praise for Gao Ming’s *Pipa ji*.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, Wei’s reputation for influence on Kunqu

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<sup>144</sup> For this reason, Kunqu has a slow, regular metre that allows one word to be stretched over several notes and changes of breath. A one-syllable character-word is broken up into three sounds, a *head*, *belly* and *tail*, in which the tone of the word itself can be articulated in the head and then its body merged into the pitch of the melody governed by the underlying *qupai*. While this approach was born out of a linguistic necessity it has since become equally important as a stylistic trait.

<sup>145</sup> Later writers including Shen Jing promoted Zhou Deqing’s 周德清 *Rimes of the Central Plain* (*Zhongzhou Yinyun* 中原音韻 preface dated 1324) a riming manual for the composition of northern songs *beiqu* 北曲.<sup>145</sup> In his introduction, Zhou remarks that ‘despite the fact that the nation had been united for some time and the language of the central plains had spread throughout the nation, too many people were still relying on outdated books such as the *Guangyun*’ (qtd. in Schlepp 1991, p.229). It contains more than five thousand characters, arranged according to end sounds of each one-character syllable. The characters are divided into nineteen groups, which are named according to two characters of each rhyme group, for example *han-shan* 寒山 with both end ‘an’. In this category are arranged all the characters ending ‘an’ according to four subcategories, corresponding to the four tone categories of present day Mandarin. Each character-word (*zi* 字) character sound is then divided into four tones. Either one of two ‘level’ tones: *yin-ping* 陰平 or *yang-ping* 陽平 (corresponding to tones one and two of *Putonghua*); or one of two ‘oblique’ (*ze* 仄) tonal progressions: rising (*shang* 上) or departing (*qu* 去).

<sup>146</sup> Gao Ming was a frequent visitor at Gu Ying’s house and it is therefore likely that his play was sung to a Kunshan style.

singing primarily relies on Shen's word, with little else to corroborate.<sup>147</sup> We see then that the inclusion of this document in the *Yuefu hongshan* and other texts has given the archive capacity to claim Kunqu's emergence in the Yuan dynasty, with a sage-reformer-ascetic to credit as its reformer.<sup>148</sup>

### **'Six hundred years'**

The apparently earliest written edition of Wei's *Rules* was uncovered by Wu Xinlei in 1960, the *Nanci Yinzheng* 南詞引正 (The Correct Way of Singing Southern Arias), a Qing dynasty copy of a manuscript dated to 1547. This copy contained two sections omitted in the 1547 manuscript, drawing a link between the Kunshan *qiang* the Tang Emperor Xuanzong's court:

Kunshan singing is the only correct way of singing, for it had come down from the Tang dynasty from Huang Fangchuo who had served Emperor Xuanzong.

惟崑山為正聲，乃唐玄宗時黃幡綽所傳 (Qian 1961, p.60)

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<sup>147</sup> It is significant that the first miscellany to contain a significant proportion of southern *qu*, the *Yuefu hongshan* 樂府紅珊, (Red Coral Ballads, 1602 preface) contains an unattributed version of Wei Liangfu's 魏良輔 *Rules of Prosody* (*Qulü* 曲律) as its 'readers' guide' (*fanli* 凡例) (Wang 1990, p.14). Wei's *Rules* were not independently published but included and attributed in various other early anthologies and the *Duqu Xuzhi* 度曲須知 (Fundamentals of Song Recital, 1639 preface) singing manual written by Shen. Aside from *Yuefu hongshan*, these include *Wuyu Cuiya* 吳歙萃雅 (Outstanding Songs from Wu, 1616 preface), *Cilin Yixiang* 吳歙萃雅 (Tranquil Song Forest, 1623 preface) and *Wu Sao Hebian* 吳騷合編 (Collected Wu Poems, 1637 preface). As a result of these publications the techniques for *qu* singing associated with Wei (whether or not they were, as the archive would have it, indeed his invention) became synonymous with Kunshan 崑山 the place, rather than nation-wide pursuit of *qu* practice of the literati in general.

<sup>148</sup> Wei can be seen to provide the musicological counterpart to Tang Xianzu, the playwright who wrote the *chuanqi* plays generally held to be of the greatest literary merit, and at the core of Kunqu repertoire. It is thought unlikely, however, that Tang actually wrote with the Kunqu melodic system in mind.

However, between the emperor Xuanzong and Wei Liangfu there is a gap of roughly eight centuries. Filling in this genealogical gap, in *Nanci Yinzheng* a further legendary singer is mentioned in the Yuan dynasty from Qiandun village in Kunshan, by the name of Gu Jian, from whom originates the claim to a 600-year history:

In the Yuan dynasty a certain Gu Jian, living in Qiandeng about thirty *li* from Kunshan, could reveal the wonders of Southern songs and was adept with ancient poetry [the Mongol general] Köketemür heard that he was good at singing, and invited him several times [to perform] but he refused. With friends Yang [Weizhen] the iron flute player, Gu Ying and [painter/singer] Ni [Zan] Yuanzhen, he called himself the 'Moonswept Saunterer'. He wrote the ten scrolls *Collected Porcelains of the Wilderness* and the nine scrolls of the *Musical Archives of the Moonswept Wanderer*. He could express the full profoundness of Southern *qu*, and that was how the term Kunshan-*qiang* became known during the early years of the present dynasty.

元朝有顧堅者，雖離昆山三十里居千墩，精于南辭，善作古賦。擴廓帖木兒聞其善歌，屢招不屈。與楊鐵笛、顧阿瑛、倪元鎮爲友。自號風月散人。其著有《陶真野集》十卷、《風月散人樂府》八卷行於世。善發南曲之奧，故國初有崑山腔之稱。(Qian 1961, p.60)

Based on circumstantial evidence, Wu deduces that Gu Jian would have been active at some between 1324 and 1367 (2002, p.327). The figure of Gu Jian and his apparent friendship with Gu Ying allows the construction of a genealogy giving Kunqu credentials stretching six centuries, rather than just four. This has spurred an industry of both tourist sites, popular histories and television documentaries glorifying Kunqu's vintage.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> For example, *Kunqu liubainian* 崑曲六百年 (Jiang, 2009) and the 2008 CCTV documentary, *600 Years of Kunqu Opera* 崑曲六百年 that received primetime slots and was also translated for CCTV's English channel.

The intermediary figure of Gu Jian, however, is no more than a shadow in the historical record. Luo Lirong has recently determined in the collected works of Gu Ying there is not one single reference to Gu Jian, a finding which casts doubt on whether they were indeed collaborators (Stenberg 2015a, p.42).<sup>150</sup> There is indeed no record of him at all other than the *Nanci yinzheng* (more than two centuries after he supposedly lived) posing the question of whether he even existed.<sup>151</sup> Even if Gu Jian did exist, we know little beyond that he liked to sing. Attempts to extend Kunqu genealogy beyond this point are chimerical, and determined by an ideological necessity to legitimate cultural heritage by counting

### Hand-written *shenduanpu*

One good source of genealogies from an acting perspective might seem to be the old play-scripts extant in manuscript form. Like the printed miscellanies discussed in

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<sup>150</sup> Despite the mystery surrounding the particular identity of Gu Jian, Gu Ying 顧英 does seem to have built up an expansive network by the early Ming. He records a visit by Gao Ming 高明, the author of the early *nanxi* work *Tale of the Lute* 琵琶記 in August 1349 (Hu, p.17). The date on which Gao's famous work was completed is however unknown, as too is whether he sought Gu Ying's advice on musical matters.

<sup>151</sup> Yet to the government of Suzhou, and in particular, Kunshan, Gu Jian has become a historical anchor. Whether the success of Kunshan *qiang* was due to the local folk melodies that underlie it, or the result of work systematizing melodies from all across the South that happened to take place in Kunshan is highly contested. There is some evidence to show that the reputation of the Kunshan's own *qiang* was established well before Wei carried out his work. For a start, as Lu Eting points out, it would be odd that Wei's invention be named after Kunshan, rather than Taicang where he actually lived. Secondly, Zhou Xuanwei's 周玄暉 (?-1615) *Extended Record of Jinglin* 涇林續記 records that Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-98), the first emperor of the Ming dynasty, was apparently familiar enough with the reputation of Kunshan melody to ask the centenarian Zhou Shouyi 周壽誼 to sing it for him. A large memorial museum is open to tourists in Qiandeng to mark him as the creator, or 'originator' *bizu* 鼻祖 of Kunqu. To elevate Gu Jian such a position, does however counteract the other (equally hazy) claim of the *Nanci Yinzheng*, that Kunqu is based on the theatre of the Tang court, positioning it as a national form that happen to end up in Kunshan.

Chapter One, these sometimes contain choreographic notation which scholars have used to draw connections with the living theatre.

It has on this basis been argued by Chen Fang (2006, 2010) and others that a process of ‘fixing’ occurred in Kunqu performance during the Qian-Jia period, from which modern performance is derived. Li Xiao proposes that as particular performance routines became popular with the public, they became retained in the corpus in a relatively ‘stable’ state and transmitted down over subsequent generations’ (1997, p.89). This reflects, he argues, a Qian-Jia ‘tradition’ of which current day performers are the ‘final lingering strain’ (ibid, p.90). Wang Kui interprets the appearance of choreographic notations as evidence that the system of *liupai*, existing in texts of performance notes such as Li Dou’s *Yangzhou huafang lu*, had receded into an agreed standard of performance, commonly referred to as ‘Suzhou style’ (*Gusu fengfan* 姑蘇風範) (2010, p.151). While the *Shenyin jianglu* and other block printed collections tell about the archivist activities of the Qing dynasty, hand-copied documents tell us more about the archival impulse of the present day.

Manuscript copies were primarily utilitarian, serving the purpose of ‘preservation or performance’ rather than that of ‘communicating with a public’ (Carlitz 2005, p.284). Some consist of highly detailed information about the *luzi* and specific *shenduan*. Such detail and knowledge of performance vocabulary would unlikely have been jotted down during a single performance, a feature which suggests they were written by actors themselves. Moreover, the lack, in most cases, of names attached to the documents makes it seem unlikely they were intended to promote the author’s *luzi* to the wider world. One might therefore posit that the motivation for an actor to record movement may have been as instruction material for an actor’s children or disciples and not as a *luzi* intended for common usage. Moreover, to make such manuscripts fit the bill for a genealogy which traces contemporary practice to the era of their composition, the



presumption would have to be that they describe a fixed choreography, common to several lines of actors.

This is unlikely for several reasons. Most obvious among these is the fact that actors regarded performance practice as property, and texts disclosing such property would not have been meant for wide circulation. Lindy Li Mark notes that play scripts were closely guarded trade secrets and transmitted only from master to specially-favoured disciples or family members, who were expected to continue in the profession' (2013, p.237). Mackerras notes that actors often burned texts in order to preserve secrets of their performance from competitors (1972, p.246). Later sources show also how *luzi* were treasured as a store of value for *xiqu* actors. For instance, several sources record that Shen Yuequan, the leading actor of the final Kunqu troupe, the Quanfuban, for example, did not teach the 'real stuff' to anyone but his son, Shen Chuanzhi.<sup>152</sup> According to the younger Shen's own account:

My father said to me: 'You now have two pairs of small shoes under your bed.<sup>153</sup> I have no family inheritance to pass onto you, I just have a few playlets' (1984, p.38).

We can see that these *luzi* were intellectual property guarded as family inheritance and were distributed carefully.<sup>154</sup>

The fact that there is little commentary or information surrounding these manuscripts confirms that they were probably not circulated widely, if at all. They have

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<sup>152</sup> For example, from Wang Zhenglai's interview in Hong (2002).

<sup>153</sup> E.g. his wife's and his child's shoes.

<sup>154</sup> Another possible line of enquiry into the origin and purpose of handwritten *shenduanpu* may be the notes made (in secret) in order to steal a 'traditional' *luzi* from another troupe.

been made public, when at all, only from very recent initiatives.<sup>155</sup> Some 683 playlets with *shenduan* annotation from handwritten scores have been indexed by Wang Kui (2014, p.5), however only seventy-six of these are identified with a named individual.<sup>156</sup> Of these, almost two-thirds of these are connected with a single lineage of actors with the surname Cao. The Cao family was connected to the Huiban (later known as Jingju) troupes in Beijing and originally came from Huaining, in Anhui province. In particular, a large number appear to be connected to Cao Wenlan's 曹文瀾 grandson Cao Chunshan 曹春山, a famous performer from one of the four great Huiban (Jingju) troupes in Beijing, the Sixiban 四喜班. Cao Chunshan apparently excelled at many role-types in the

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<sup>155</sup> The possible exception to this statement are the copied manuscripts produced by the 'Hundred-scripts Zhang', or Baiben Zhang 百本張 publishing enterprise based in Beijing from the Qianlong reign until the end of the dynasty. According to collector Fu Xihua, Baiben sold texts of various performance genres including Kunqu at temporary bookstalls at Huguo temple 護國寺 on the seventh and eighth day of every month and Longfu temple 隆福寺 on the ninth and tenth (2007, 348). Goldman argues that there is clear evidence to suggest that Baiben's scripts were at least intended to be accurate portrayals of performance, with claims on the title pages such as 'the actual words of Yu Ruifeng' and 'the authentic script of the famous Thirteen Year-Old Dan!' (Goldman 2001, p.78). She turns to the memoirs of opera enthusiast, Chen Moxiang (1884–1943) who notes that a lesser variety of theatre connoisseur who 'buys a handful of hand-copied play scripts from Baiben Zhang and then, without any attempt to differentiate, he treasures them as though they embodied the rule of law, and then, ass-backwards, he starts criticizing this and pontificating about that' (qtd. in Goldman 2001, p.78). Although Baiben Zhang is not mentioned in Wang Kui's overview, it is possible that a number of those he tallies may be Baiben editions. Goldman mentions that a number are contained in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyansuo suocang suqu* (Popular songs stored at the Academia Sinica Institute of History and Philology) collection (2001, p.76). That this resource is not mentioned by Wang suggests it is left out of his tally, which is based mostly on holdings at the China Art Research Institute 中國藝術研究院. A great number of these are unfortunately permanently lost. Fu Xihua writes that he discovered more than eighty *bao* of Baiben Zhang's manuscripts at a bookshop in Liulichang in Beijing in 1929, in which he noted there were 460 Kunqu or Yiyang-*qiang* playlets. On his recommendation the entire stock were purchased by the National Research of Linguistic History 中央研究歷史語言研究所. On their later transportation from Beijing to Nanjing during the Second World War, the boat carrying them was sunk (Fu 2007, p.354). More research is required to establish the circulation of Baiben's manuscripts and the usefulness of their choreographic notes to research.

<sup>156</sup> I am very grateful to Tsai Hsin-hsin for making Wang's paper available to me.

Kunqu repertoire. It is, however, not clear from the documents whether they are written by him, about him, or copied by him. His son Cao Xinquan 曹心泉 (1864-1938) became a pure-singing practitioner and a publishing playwright and commentator on the theatre.<sup>157</sup>

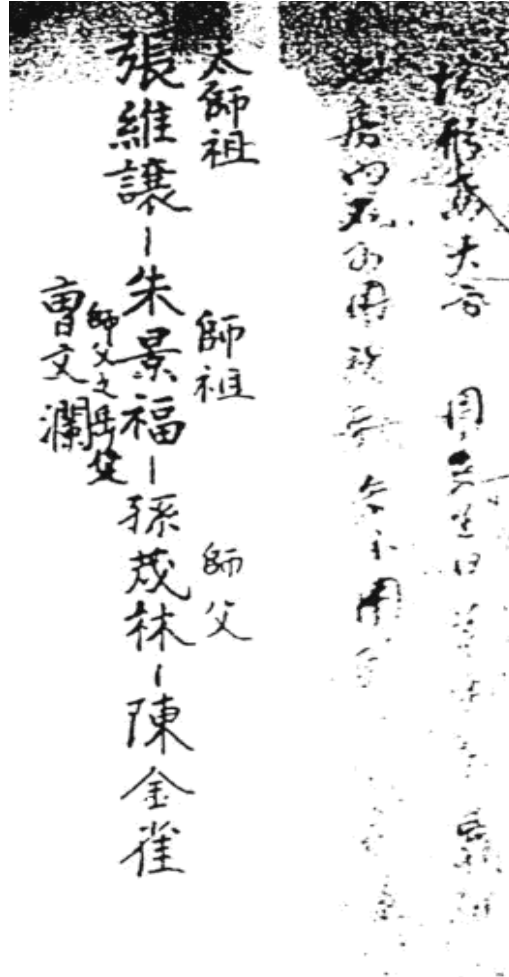
These manuscripts associated with a particular actor and lineage theoretically offer an exciting opportunity to trace performance notation from the past with existing *luzi* in the present. In the case of one notation for 'The Study' *Shuguan* 書館 from *Pipa ji* 琵琶記 (*The Tale of the Pipa*) a teaching lineage for Chen Jinque 陳金雀 (1800-1877) is drawn on the back of the score.<sup>158</sup> This lineage includes the name of Cao Wenlan 曹文瀾, described here as Chen's father-in-law.

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<sup>157</sup> Biographical information taken from *Kunqu Dacidian* (ed. Wu) and *Kunqu Cidian* (ed. Hong)

<sup>158</sup> This document is a part of the *Kun-Yi Shenduanpu* housed in the Shanghai Library

Figure 8: Teacher lineage diagram for the *xiaosheng* actor Chen Jinque written on the back of the score for playlet 'The Study'



This scribbled lineage brings rise to the possibility that two links that can be traced to other important documentary evidence. The first is to Cao Wenlan, a literate actor in the court whose name appears on many manuscripts (Wang 2000, p.211), including several with choreographic notation. The second is with Zhang Weishang 張維尚 (讓), an actor mentioned in Li Dou's *Yangzhou huafang lu* (1795) as a pupil of the Dong school 董派 of *xiaosheng* actors in Yangzhou.

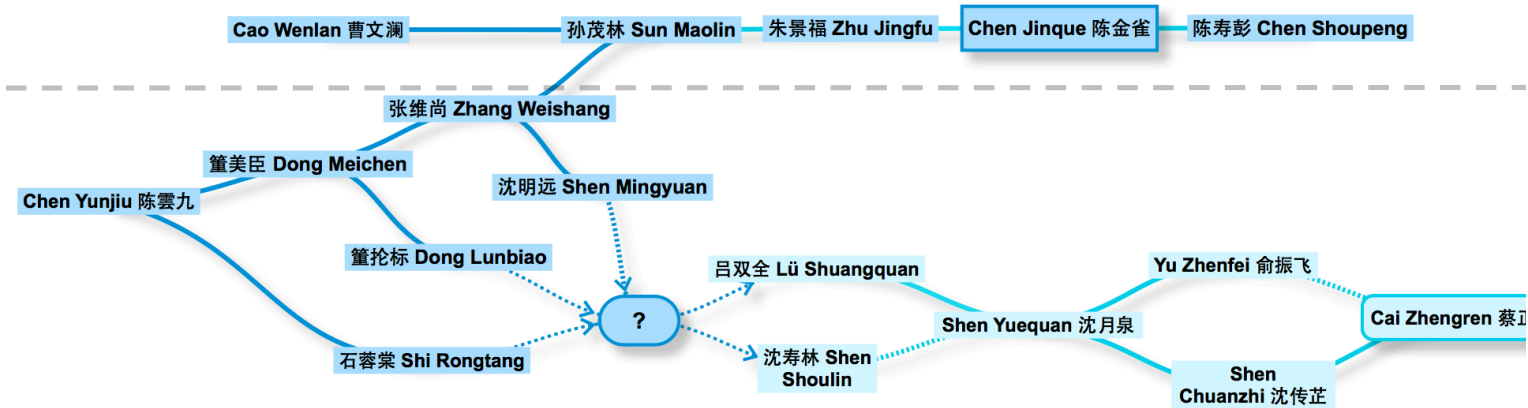
Wang Shih-pei argues that these annotations would not have appeared had performance not reached a certain level of standardisation. If the actor whose movement was recorded did not perform it in the same way each time, she argues, it would be difficult to fix in writing and, secondly, there would be no need to pass this information down in the first place (1999, p.213). However, as Wang notes, the choreography as recorded is not really that similar to current day *luzi*. A comparison between the choreographic score for the scene 'The Study' from *The Pipa* contained in the *Kun-yi shenduanpu* and current day performance by Cai Zhengren of the Shanghai troupe reveals a few exciting similarities but far from many (see Wang's analysis pages 249-251).

Methodologically, however, it is surely necessary to establish for certain secure intergenerational connections in order to prove either that stable *luzi* were transmitted or that they were not. A further exploration of documented genealogies reveals that not only are many links in the chain missing, but that we are looking at two different branches of a genealogical tree. This is furthermore a disconnect we would expect to see in most examples, for the reason that most notations originate from the *Huiban* in Beijing while most transmitted performance routines from the Quanfuban, a Suzhou troupe that performed around the waterways of Jiangnan. The lineages of *xiaosheng* actors and their relationship to current-day lineages are illustrated by the following diagram.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> The historical relations presented on this chart are taken from the *Yangzhou Huafang Lu*, *Xiangyan Congshu* and a note found on the *Kun-Yi shenduanpu*. There is no specific account of the transmission of this play between Shen Yuequan and his two teachers.

Figure 9: Xiaosheng lineages for the playlet 'The Study'



Equally important is the fact that the lineage written on the score—the only lineage recorded on any extant *shenduanpu*— cannot be connected to any 20<sup>th</sup> century actor genealogies, even presuming that choreography or technique could be substantially passed on over a century and a half. Crucially, we are able to link that to the choreographic score that written by Chen Jinque<sup>160</sup> (indicated with a square box) with the guide of the lineage diagram taken from the *Kun-Yi shenduanpu*.<sup>161</sup>

Two important conclusions emerge from a study of the performance history of this playlet in relationship to the choreographic score. The first is that Chen Jinque's choreographic notation could only be distantly related to current day performance lineages, and more likely there is not any link at all. I have been unable to find record of

<sup>160</sup> Chen was an actor based in Beijing, who performing regularly at the Manchu court. His daughter was Mei Lanfang's grandmother.

<sup>161</sup> The earliest record of lineage we have is from Chen Yunjiu, as detailed by Li Dou. Chen Yunjiu's other pupil Shi Yongtang is mention in the *Yangzhou huafang lu* (Li 1960, vol.5 p.124) as is Zhang Weishang's other pupil Sheng Mingyuan is mentioned in Li Dou (ibid. p.126).

any teaching relationship or shared troupe between the ancestral teaching relationships working backwards from Chen Jinque and those of the current day. If such a link exists, it would mean that any similarities would derive from a common ancestor in the mid to early 18th century. Any fixity common to these and current-day performance derived from the Quanfuban and *Chuan* generation in the South would therefore have to have been in place by the 18th century, resisting any changes both in the south and in Beijing prior to the act of recording. This implies that a fixity is present not just within lineages but between them—and even greater claim.

The second important conclusion is the probable extinction of the particular lineage in which the notation is linked. Similarities or differences between the choreography of the *Kun-Yi shenduanpu* and the present-day must therefore be considered not on the basis that they relate to the modern performance tradition, but rather that they may share a possible ancestor several generations back. Post-UNESCO scholarship in particular glosses over such methodological gaps in order to assert a teacher-pupil transmission of *luzi* to the current day based on fragments of historical evidence, despite there being almost no observable correspondence between it and what is onstage today.

On observing no such similarities between the *Kun-Yi shenduanpu* and 20th century versions of the playlet *Searching the Mountain* 搜山, Chen Fang, for example, concludes that teacher-pupil performance transmission must be on the level of ‘spirit and meaning’ 精神内涵 (2006, p.72) rather than actual choreography. This interpretation begs the question. It seeks to derive evidence of transmission from a position presupposing that all ‘Kunqu’ performance is, for certain, inherited. Such assumptions have only been emboldened by the status granted by UNESCO in its jussive role as the endorsed archivist of world heritage. Similarly, Chen’s analysis of *Shi hua* 拾畫 from *Peony Pavilion* 牡丹亭 claims that the differences between scores is evidence of a

transmission of 'spirit' 神 rather simply of 'form' 形. In the absence of any explanation of how such a 'spirit' might operate or what it contains, it seems simply a way of asserting genealogical connections in the absence of evidence.

With even the most traceable of these scores, there is no established relationship with the current lineages. Should there indeed be such a relationship, it would be based on a distinct 'shared ancestor,' and the connection to contemporary theatre would remain nominal. Attempts to draw conclusions based on these documents without acknowledging the remoteness of the connection reflect a tendency in post-UNESCO scholarship to further participate in an archaeological treasure-hunt that draws unsystematic conclusions from fragments of evidence. These scripts are then connected to present-day lineages, despite an absence of evidence suggesting that present-day performances descend from these sources. The archival impulse to trace, lionise, and enshrine an immutable tradition effaces both the complexities of transmission and the substantial elements of creation and innovation which inform the performance of any given playlet.

## **Concluding remarks**

The ways in which the archives have been mined for fragments to mythologise and traditionalise Kunqu the genre, both in singing and movement, highlights another of the facets of archive fever particularly prominent since the UNESCO designation.

The methods by which such claims are established are of course deeply symptomatic of a *mal d'archive*. Similarities or differences between the choreography of the *Kun-Yi shenduanpu* and other manuscript notations are compared to the modern performance tradition despite being derived from a separate branch of genealogical tree. Post-UNESCO scholarship, in particular, glosses over such methodological issues in



order to assert a teacher-pupil transmission of *luzi* to the current day based on fragments of historical evidence, crucial to enforcing Kunqu's pedigree as both 'inherited' and older than Jingju.

## 5. Performance as a multiplicity of *luzi*

In this chapter, I turn to the archive of audio-visual material that has surface over the last few years to conduct comparative analysis of performances of two major monologues from *Mudanting* 牡丹亭 (Peony Pavilion) across generations and lineages. My analysis shows that, rather than giving absolute deference to tradition in their performance practice, Kunqu actors continually carve out and maintain competing artistic identities by choosing to either adopt, adapt or replace inherited *luzi*.

The principal material on which this thesis is based is my fieldwork over several years in China watching live performance and learning to sing and perform in an amateur capacity. However, as my research asks how performance has (or has not) changed over time, I take advantage of the mass of audio-visual materials recording performance since the 1960s and especially 1980s, much of which have only recently become available, and none of which have been methodically studied. Using audio-visual recordings and screenshots allows me to make detailed comparisons of actors' renditions.

Despite the limitations inherent in basing performance analysis on audio-visual material (outlined in the introduction to this thesis), it must also be acknowledged that recorded Kunqu performance now plays an important role in building audience knowledge, influencing the positions in between the sequence of dialogues between the performance and a source of origin and another between the performer and the target audience described by Bauman (2004, p.130). The audience has increasing access to both the origin dialogue and the target dialogue, thus allowing for 'observational confirmation' of the expectations they bring to the theatre (ibid, p.131). Knowledge of famous performance routines derives to a large extent from streamed online video.

Omissions of particular movements by other mediators are more likely to be recognized and become particularly important tags of origin, pedigree, interpretation and style that define this dialogue between actor (mediator) and audience (target).

## The Startling Dream

I now make a comparison of the audio-visual record of different 20th century performance versions of Du Liniang's soliloquy from the playlet *Jingmeng* 驚夢 (The Startling Dream) from *Mudanting* 牡丹亭. My choice of this playlet is specifically because of its apparent fixity and its iconic position within the Kunqu traditional repertoire. The scene is the most often performed playlet from *Mudanting* on the contemporary stage, and perhaps also the most frequently performed in the entire Kunqu repertoire.<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, this particular playlet is a staple for the *dan* role-type's basic training.<sup>163</sup> In it we see that, because of the nature of teacher-pupil transmission of specifically choreographed moves, characterisation and dramatic tension are derived not just from the performance, but the relationship of that performance to convention as established at a very precise level. The actor's personal interpretation must also reach a compromise within the Kunqu convention. By making small variations to the performance tradition, the actor generates a personal interpretation of the character. It is in these glimpses of difference within overriding

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<sup>162</sup> Lu Eting demonstrates that this has however only been the case since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. (2014) *Jing meng* There is no choreographic information contained in the *Reflections of Sound* for this section apart from at the end of the aria 'stretch and sleep' 伸腰睡介.

<sup>163</sup> Many have undergone the same initial training at opera school, for example Shan Wen and Luo Chenxue 羅晨雪, only to form different teacher loyalties, and implicate themselves in different lineages, upon graduation. Shan Wen formalised her relationship with Zhang Jiqing as her mentor 拜師 in 2008) while Luo Chenxue, who studied many plays with Hu Jinfang, chose to leave the Jiangsu troupe for the Shanghai troupe in 2013.

similarity, that the character comes vividly to life—and, by the same token, the performer builds his/her reputation.

Du Liniang, the daughter of the Prefect of Nan'an, is a sixteen-year-old maiden who has never been permitted to venture outside the confines of her home, where she receives private tuition. In the previous scene, *Youyuan* 遊園 (The Garden Stroll), Du's maid Chunxiang urges to take for stroll in the spring garden, where she has never before been. During the outing, Du marvels at the beauty of spring but laments that it will soon pass. Then, she returns to her chamber, weary and emotionally charged. This is the start of *Jingmeng* (the scenes are often performed together and were one in the same in Tang's original *chuanqi*). She falls asleep and dreams of a young student of the imperial examinations who declares his love for her and takes her to secluded spot in the garden (offstage), 'beyond a fence of herbaceous peonies and mound of weathered Taihu rocks' where he, in Cyril Birch's translation (which I shall continue to adopt unless otherwise stated), promises to:

Open the fastening at your neck/ loose the girdle at your waist/ while you/  
screening your eyes with your sleeve,/ white teeth clenched on the fabric as if  
against pain,/ bear with me patiently a while/ then drift into gentle slumber.

和你把領扣兒松,衣頻寬。袖梢兒揼著牙兒沾也。則待你忍耐溫存一晌眠

The garden's flower spirit, the *huashen* 花神, wakes Du Liniang with falling petals. In reality, to Du's dismay, she is being woken by her mother.

The period over which I make my study is determined by the availability of the audio-visual archive. The earliest example is Mei Lanfang's film version of *Youyuan Jingmeng* filmed in 1960. Like other *xiqu* films, however, this exchanges the actors' red carpet for an ornate set. During the aria *Shanpo yang* Du Liniang's chamber includes a

door and window giving him 'more to play with'. Unlike the standard stage performance, Mei does not sit down, instead wandering around the room and looking longingly out of the window. This means that there are significant departures from his stage *luzi* for the purposes of the film medium. For the moments when this is clearly the case, for example during the recitation when Mei goes to look outside the window, I do not seek to find comparisons with other actors, as my primary interest is in stage *luzi*, transmission and the interaction between *luzi* of varying degrees of difference.

A stage version of the same piece from a similar time, by Han Shichang of the northern Kunqu troupe, was recorded in 1962. While the poor quality of this video makes it a challenging source to analyse, particularly in the apparent inconsistencies in how the sound is tracked onto image, it offers a rare and valuable glimpse of a *luzi* that is far less aestheticized than other available versions.

Zhang Jiqing's 1986 film version of *Mudanting* employs a much more simplistic set, on which she employs her stage *luzi* throughout. I contrast this version with a recording of Hua Wenyi's stage version from the same year. The contextualised earlier generation recordings of Mei Lanfang and Han Shichang's and various examples from the following generations Kunqu including Zhang Zhihong 張志宏 and Wang Fengmei 王奉梅 of the Zhejiang troupe, Gong Yinlei 龔隱雷 of the Jiangsu troupe in Nanjing and Shen Fengying 沈豐英 (1979-) from the Suzhou troupe, a student of Zhang Jiqing's and an actress in Pai Hsien-yung's *Young Lovers' Edition*. When observed in comparison, I am able to demonstrate how performers shape their own work within the restrictions of a fixed *luzi* to make it their own.

The recitation and aria at the beginning of this scene are particularly famous, describing the character Du Liniang's state of mind before her oneiric and erotic encounter with Liu Mengmei. This has made them the focal point of debates about both free marriage and female desire. The emotions expressed in this aria explore Du

Liniang's sexual awakening, which, as Swatek notes, is 'a particularly sensitive area for the performer of the *guimen dan* role' (2002, p.174). The traditional *luzi* is often seen by actors and audiences as an important guide as to how to deal with this challenging scene. The actor must seek to convey how a Song dynasty prefect's daughter might deal with these emotions, pitted against the need to express them in a way that contemporary audiences can relate to. As Mei Lanfang puts it:

it is precisely because the character has these types of feelings that the traditional choreography is the way it is. Whether it's southern or northern [tradition], [movements] must all be highly descriptive. This way, those actors whose expressive ability is insufficient can use these fixed methods to portray her. (Mei 2013, p.159)

Despite the apparent strictures of traditional performance, both Zhang Jiqing and Hua Wenyi are famous for their distinctive versions of this playlet. Hua's performance as part of the Shanghai Troupe's evening-length version of *Mudanting* premiered in 1982. Hua also became something of a cult figure in mainland Kunqu circles, not just because of the perceived provocativeness of her performance but on account of the fact that she 'defected' to the US during a June 1989 performance tour which coincided with the events in Tiananmen Square.<sup>164</sup> Unable to perform again in the mainland for over two decades, she collaborated with the Jingju *sheng* actress Kao Hui-lan 高慧蘭 to perform

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<sup>164</sup> Hua's admission into the *Master's Lectures* archive at all may have been an issue of political contention. In a similar incident in 1986, another important actor, the *sheng* Dong Jihao 董繼浩, a member of the *Ji* generation at the Jiangsu Troupe, defected to West Germany when on tour with the Jiangsu troupe, including Zhang Jiqing. Although considered by many the best *sheng* of his generation, his name has not been included in any comprehensive work on recent Kunqu history since. In Zhang's lecture on 'Jing meng' after she says the words 'Over my career I have collaborated with ten *sheng*' the editing noticeably skips directly to her discussion of the final *sheng*, Wang Shiyu.

*Mudanting* in Taiwan in 1992 and 1993, a performance which is credited with igniting the wave of ‘Kunqu fever’ 崑曲熱 in Taiwan in the 1990s.<sup>165</sup>

Zhang, on the other hand, is perceived to have the most authentic link to this play and others through her teacher-pupil relationships, which are said to stretch further than any other lineage (Zhao, 82), a question I shall examine shortly. The commonly repeated appendage ‘Zhang’s three dreams’ (*Zhang san meng* 張三夢), denotes three playlets in which her performance is apparently considered canonical: ‘Jing meng’, ‘Searching for the Dream’ and ‘The Foolish Dream’. The competing authority of both Zhang’s and Hua’s versions of the playlet seems to have presented a challenge to the editors of *Dashi shuoxi*, addressed by presenting Hua’s contribution to the archive as a combination with the preceding scene in the play, *A Garden Stroll/Jing meng* (*Youyuan Jingmeng* 遊園驚夢).<sup>166</sup>

As with many playlets, *Jing meng* has a complex transmission history, involving many performers and several *luzi*. I have constructed the diagram below, based on biographical sources and oral accounts to provide a basic outline of these.<sup>167</sup> The names contained inside coloured boxes are those performances I shall be directly comparing, either through video analysis (rounded boxes) or a written practitioner’s account

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<sup>165</sup> Mentioned by Hua in her own lecture (*Dashi shuoxi* vol.4 p.39) and also by Taiwanese accounts, e.g, <http://in.ncu.edu.tw/ncu7006/ch/news/502> (accessed 18/12/2015) The input of Taiwanese audiences, scholars and cultural figures would play an important part in Kunqu’s post UNESCO revival on the mainland.

<sup>166</sup> This is in many ways counterintuitive, as it is Hua’s version of *Jing meng* that is particularly noted. Furthermore, *You yuan* appears tacked on. It may well be that the editors had to try to balance the desire to allot *You yuan* to Zhang and *Jing meng* to Hua but were unable to refute the authority of the three words ‘Zhang’s Three Dreams’, a slogan now deeply consigned in the Kunqu archive.

<sup>167</sup> Sources for this chart: Wei 2011, Sang 2010, Hong 2002a/b, Mei and Xu 2013, Wu 2002, and Lu 1980.

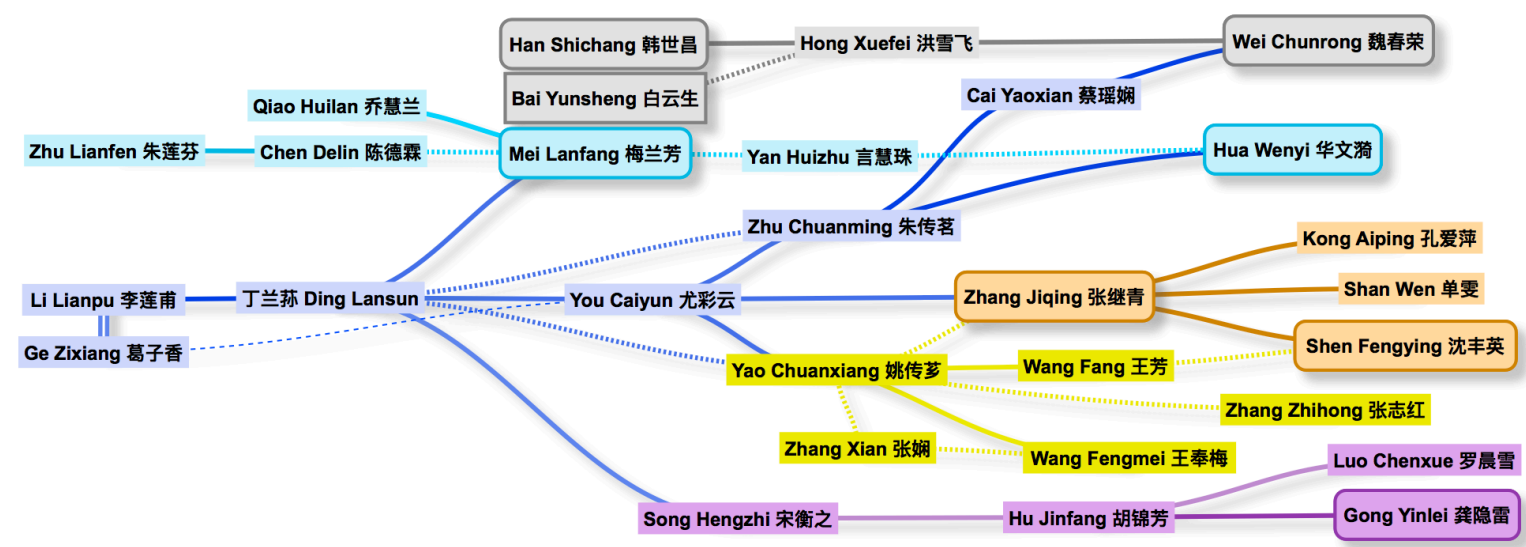
(square-edged boxes).<sup>168</sup> Solid lines indicate principal teacher-student relationships, while dotted lines represent secondary teacher-pupil connections, i.e. those in which the actress acknowledges the input of a certain teacher who is not her principle mentor. As this is one most important skills building playlets, it is learned by most actors in initial training at a young age. Initial mentors are thus often teachers at theatre school and themselves not active stage performers. For instance, one can note on this diagram the presence of Song Hengzhi at the Jiangsu Opera School, an aficionado turned instructor who sought training in stage movement from a professional actor.

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<sup>168</sup> There are of course many other key performances that I have had to omit from this analysis, some of which are mentioned in the chart but not in my analysis. My selection criteria has focused on actresses whose careers have centered primarily on the performing the *guimendan* role-type. For this reason I have omitted Liang Guyin's rendition, which as Swatek notes, veers towards her principle role-type as a *tiedan* to 'mixed reviews' (Swatek 2002, p.176)



Figure 1: Some documented teacher-pupil relationships for *Jing meng*



This diagram highlights several important points. Firstly, it challenges the idea that a certain actress' *luzi* is older (and thus more authentic) than any other. Zhao Tianwei notes that the universally acknowledged pre-eminence of Zhang's *luzi* is attributed to her direct teacher-pupil relationship with You Caiyun, whose transmission lineage extends to Ge Zixiang (Zhao: 83). Rather than being 'watered-down' through the mediation of a *chuan* generation teacher, Zhang's transmission is perceived to contain the most original 'stock', thus the most authentic flavour (*yuanzhi yuanwei* 原汁原味). These claims are emphasised less by Zhang herself, who speaks in her *Dashi shuoxi* lecture more of Yao Chuanxiang than of You Caiyun, drawing attention to several movements taught by Yao when he came to Nanjing to work on *Mudanting* with the troupe.

However, Zhang herself admits she cannot clearly recall how You Caiyun taught the *luzi* (Chen 2013, p.31). Furthermore, we will note that almost all of the actresses of Zhang's generation (Hua Wenyi, Hu Jinfang, Wang Fengmei) have through their own lineages the same degree of separation from You's own teacher Ding Lansun. Although You Caiyun had direct training with Ding's teacher Ge Zixiang, Lu Eting's research into the playlet shows that Ge Zixiang did not act the character Du Liniang but rather the accompanying role of maid Chunxiang (Lu 1980, 174). This means that Zhang's lineage is in fact like Hua's and Hu's, all of them being at one degree of separation from Ding Lansun whose lineage extends to Li Lianpu 李蓮甫 who played Du Liniang to Ge's Chunxiang. Thus the various lineages for the Du Liniang role in fact all trace back to Ding Lansun who directly taught the *Chuan* generation *dan* (and probably also Song Hengzhi) and also, latterly, Mei Lanfang.

Secondly, the diagram shows the presence of the Jingju actor Mei Lanfang and his lineage on transmission on this playlet. Although Mei is not her principal instructor, Hua's supporters have set her up as the inheritor of Mei's *luzi*. This relates to her

relationship through one of her teacher's, Yan Huizhu, a well-known supporter and one-time student of Mei Lanfang. Just as Zhang's 'three dreams' make a claim at canonicity, Hua's nickname of 'little Mei Lanfang' 小梅蘭芳 inscribes her in another popular lineage.<sup>169</sup> The American director Peter Sellars took this further, giving her the accolade of 'the living Mei Lanfang' and 'Mei Lanfang's last pupil',<sup>170</sup> a claim Hua does not herself make, beyond expressing her admiration of Mei's performance in the lecture. Thirdly, the chart highlights the interrelatedness of modern lineages.

But how do performers shape their own work within the restrictions of a *luzi*? Swatek notes that this section is crucial in the portrayal of Du Liniang, as it is the first (and one of the few) in which she appears without a supporting actor. She is normally supported by her maid, Chunxiang, or her match, Liu Mengmei. Her characterisation is thus often etched in contrast to her vivacious maid, played by the *tiedan* role-type. Now that Liniang is on stage alone, the actress is confronted with the challenge of conveying Liniang's increasingly troubled state of mind, yet maintaining the grace and elegance ascribed to a prefect's daughter, reflected in the *luzi*. At this point, not only does the absence of Chunxiang intensify matters, so too does the language in the scene, switching from the veiled metaphor of the garden to direct expression of her emotions. As Mei Lanfang explains, the performer must situate him/herself 'between deliberately and accidentally exposing' the character's inner emotions (Mei 160).

So suddenly returned from my spring excursion,  
Having had but a moment to try out my spring complexion.

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<sup>169</sup>E.g. her profile page on Baidu ([http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=3dmtV1WtbcE-Rt5lGaYqrdvviPZ0qRkD4AcOYTjn43hKW55GJP3e0lh\\_jUd4K5eSCSsCufaK2co07EpGrkA6s8Mu5MoMts2143ibV8aEUeK](http://baike.baidu.com/link?url=3dmtV1WtbcE-Rt5lGaYqrdvviPZ0qRkD4AcOYTjn43hKW55GJP3e0lh_jUd4K5eSCSsCufaK2co07EpGrkA6s8Mu5MoMts2143ibV8aEUeK)) Accessed 18/12/2015

<sup>170</sup> Peter Sellars. *Chinese Kun Opera: In Conversation with Peter Sellars and Hua Wenyi*. N.p. Film. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh1s352OHRc>

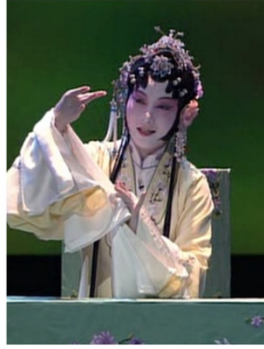
驀地遊春轉。小試宜春面。

On the words 'my spring complexion' most actresses indicate their embarrassment by slightly shielding their faces. I take the following four examples:

Figure 10: 'My Spring Complexion'



Zhang Jiqing



Shen Fengying



Gong Yinlei



Hua Wenyi

Although she is commonly perceived to be the most conservative performer (Swatek 2002, p.176), Zhang does not shield her face at all at this juncture. She moves her hand slowly into her position for the next section, ('Ah Spring!') bringing her right hand up to her cheek.<sup>171</sup> Hua Wenyi appears to make enough of the movement to indicate that she is shielding her face, yet her hand does not rise high enough to fully achieve this and her eyes remain fixed and determined in the direction she shields from, giving instead the impression almost of boldness rather than shyness. By retaining a general outline of the coy movement appropriate for a girl such as Du, but contrasting it with a facial expression that portrays Du's assertive nature, Hua creates a stark contrast.

Swatek comments that Hua's performance is 'more provocative' but remains within the 'limits of decorum for this role' (p.176) perhaps underplays the significance of her interpretation, immortalised in film, as viewed from the 21<sup>st</sup> century in which notions of 'traditional Chineseness' arguably constitute a much larger part of what audiences look for in Kunqu performance. Hua's direct gaze in these moments is seen an untraditional behaviour for a girl of Du Liniang's age and position in society.

By abandoning the shielding movement altogether, Zhang, on the other hand, neither replicates the move, nor exposes Du Liniang's inner feelings. Economy of movement, particularly in moments such as this, corresponds to performance by pure-singing. Its advocates might argue that this allows one to focus on the text rather than performance of it. Zhang's consultations with Kunqu scholars such as Hu Ji (who designed her film version) and Gu Duhuang may have influenced her decisions in moments such as this.

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<sup>171</sup> This move, she explains to us, was taught to her by Yao Chuanxiang (Zhang 2014, p.308). Follow their face shielding, it is also a move also adopted by other Nanjing performers including Gong Yinlei and Zhang's student with the Suzhou troupe, Shen Fengying.

As the recitation continues, Du enters into dialogue with a personification of 'Spring' itself:

Ah spring, Spring! I have formed so strong an attachment with you.

When spring passes how shall I get by?

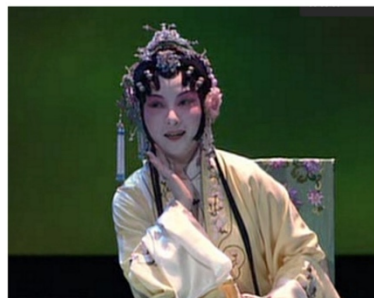
春哪春! 得和你兩留連。春去如何遣?



Gong Yinlei shields Du's 'spring complexion' from an onlooker to the left, and address Spring to the right



Wang Fengying shields herself to the left and then stands up to address Spring, in the same direction but in sky.



Shen Fengying both shields herself and addresses the right hand side, suggesting Du's complex attitudes towards her own spring.



For most actresses, this personified spring is addressed in the same direction as the direction from which Du had just shielded her face. Wang Fengmei, however, begins to stand up at this juncture, addressing a Spring that seems to be located high up in the air, perhaps in trees or birds of the garden outside. This (perhaps deliberately) recalls Mei Lanfang's film version in which he stands next to a window to address Spring. Shen Fengying both shields herself from 'the spring' and then addresses the same 'Spring' from the same direction. This is perhaps a suggestion of complex feelings, flipping on one hand between embarrassment at her own spring passions, and a longing to act upon them.

Gong Yinlei, however, while previously shielding her face from the imagined onlooker to the left, then interacts with Spring itself to the right, distinguishing between 'the spring' that imbues her with a vernal complexion from the personified 'Spring' whom Du addresses. The effect of switching the orientation of the monologue from the left to right side (a physically taxing move when carried out in the sitting position within the formal aesthetics of the repertoire, requiring tight control of the muscles in the small of the back, the *yao*) emphasises the tension between desire and decorum.

Both Hua Wenyi and Zhang Jiqing look forward, but with characteristically divergent effects. Zhang's approach in handling these lines is, as she describes it in one account, is to be 'a little hazy' (*menglong yidian* 朦朧一點). With her hand near her cheek, it is difficult to ascertain whether her glance is directed towards the ground or the sky. Hua Wenyi, however, maintains a direct and unabashed gaze towards the middle stage-right. Her slow arm movements and orchid-hand gestures act to accentuate the stillness of her facial expression and the fixed direction of her gaze. At '*he ni liang liu lian*', rather than accentuating her recitation, Hua draws a circle on the table with her right forefinger, looking to the circle she draws, and drawing her eyes slowly up again.



Figure 11: Detail of Hua Wenyi's (left) direct gaze on drawing a circle with her forefinger and looking up towards the audience rather than down towards the ground or the side. Contrasted with Zhang Jiqing's (right) drowsy forward pose.

While any photographic image showing Hua's facial expression at a given time fails to convey the precise nature of the movement in performance, its speed or its relationship to the music, it is clear from the shot that Hua's eyes are not looking at her own finger movements, nor is her gaze directed in any way downward. This direct gaze distinctly emphasises Du Liniang's determination rather than her shyness—she appears obsessive in the face of Spring, rather than embarrassed.

In a 1982 article, Hua Wenyi emphasises the use of the eyes to convey her inner character, but, paradoxically, seems to play down the effect of her own distinctive performance:

Du Liniang is an unmarried girl brought up within the bounds of strict Confucian feudalism, an innocent and naive young lady experiencing her first awakenings of love, concealed from her parents. She secretly goes to visit the grand garden; her emotions are both agitatedly excited and fearfully coy. Merely expressing her excitement would be too much of an exposure. (p.8)

Hua's comments correspond to many performances of Du Liniang, but not her own, which in comparison to Zhang's is highly exposed. We should therefore question whether to take this article entirely at face value. Published in a conservative periodical, it may have been written by Hua, who was at the time the leader of the Shanghai troupe, as mitigation against her potential critics who might accuse of her creating a too-licentious portrayal of Du. Furthermore, while the correct decorum for such a character would indeed be coyness, Du Liniang is a character obsessive to the point of dying from lovesickness incubated in a dream. In the context of the character's entire profile, I argue that Hua's portrayal gains greater credibility.

The aria following the recitation, sung to the tune *Shanpo yang* 山坡羊, describes Du Liniang's state of mind before she dreams of her lover and their erotic encounter. The first two lines are translated by Birch as follows:

In the midst of turmoil, spring feelings are hard to banish,  
Oh with what suddenness comes this secret discontent.<sup>172</sup>

沒亂裡春情難遣,  
驀地裡懷人幽怨

Mei Lanfang writes that 'there cannot possibly be very many movements here' (160). In her *Dashi shuoxi* lecture Hua Wenyi explains that she, at this point, 'stands up, then sits down again, to indicate her physical weakness and emotional fragility' (48). This is observed in all versions and echoes the indecisiveness seen in Du's dealing with Spring. A desire to stand up and walk away is met with a heaviness that brings her back down into decorum.

The words *mu di li* 墓地裡 or 'suddenness' are marked differently, illustrated here by the following comparison of four practitioners:

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<sup>172</sup> This line comes from Birch's translation (46), the rest are my own

Figure 12: 'With what suddenness' from left clockwise: Zhang Zhihong, Hua Wenyi , Han Shichang and Mei Lanfang


















Zhang Zhihong (and most other performers of the Yao Chuanxiang lineage) indicates 'sudden discontent' with a raised left hand in a moon crescent shape. Zhang's movement is highly aestheticized and seems to word-paint 'suddenness' more than respond to the meaning of the text with psychological realism. For Han Shichang, however, it causes Du Linian to collapse onto the table. Han Shichang's movements (which Liang Guyin earlier praised for their 'lifelikeness' *shenghuohua* 生活化) are sudden and resemble how one might imagine a resentful 16-year-old girl would express her discontent. Hua, as she states above, focuses on emotional and physical frailty, marking these words with two hands on the table to lift herself up.

I borrow the term word-painting from European music study. Just as the lyrics about mountains or elation in sixteenth century madrigals are illustrated 'literally' by being sung to higher notes, words sung in Kunqu are occasionally accompanied by a mimetic act that responds literally to the word itself rather than the context in which the word is situated, or indeed the implications of the narrative moment for the character's psychology. A similar moment, perhaps more illustrative, is apparent in a comparison of movements in the next line (my own translation).

A young beauty such as I,  
Will be chosen for some noble house.  
A methodically selected heavenly match.  
But for what happy fate is my youth to be thus cast away!  
則為俺生小嬋娟  
揀名門  
一例一例裡神仙眷  
甚良緣把青春拋的遠

All actors accompany the first line with a similar movement, now standing to the side of the table with hand holding it and the other hand swinging together with the left foot, indicating a certain pride on the words 'young beauty'. However, on the subsequent lines there are some differences in the *luzi*, as can be seen:

Figure 13: Zhang Jiqing's movements compared to 'traditional' *luzi* represented by two actresses

	Chosen for Some noble house	A methodically selected	heavenly match	But for what happy fate	my youth to be thus cast away
Zhang Jiqing	 <p>则为俺生小婢媚</p>	 <p>名門一例一例里神仙</p>	 <p>門一例一例里神仙</p>	 <p>甚良緣</p>	 <p>把青春抛的远</p>
Hua Wenyi	 <p>名門一例一例裏神</p>	 <p>名門一例一例裏神</p>	 <p>名門一例一例裏神</p>	 <p>甚良緣</p>	 <p>把青春抛的遠</p>
Gong Yinlei	 <p>拣名門一例</p>	 <p>一例里神仙眷</p>	 <p>一例里神仙眷</p>	 <p>甚良緣 把青春抛的</p>	 <p>甚良緣 把青春抛的</p>



Zhang explains in her *Master's* lecture (Zhang 2014, p.308) on the play and elsewhere that she makes two changes here. The first, designed by Yao Chuanxiang, she adopts on the basis that she believes it better suits her figure than the 'traditional' approach. Rather than approaching front-stage left with one finger on the left hand extended indicating 'methodically' [lit. 'one by one'] '*yi li*' and then the right hand indicating the second '*yi li*' as performed by the others, she rotates to face the table, putting her right hand on its right side then continuing to rotate so that her back faces the table, and rotating again so to now face the audience and her left hand now on the left corner of the table. She stands still and casts out her water sleeves on the left and right. Adopting this move she says that although it is better for her, the original is 'perhaps more beautiful'.<sup>173</sup> However Shan Wen, whom she officially accepted as her pupil in 2008, has also adopted the move. Shan Wen is noticeably taller than her teacher, (see figure 7) and the common move can be seen rather as a signature of Zhang's tutelage than, as it originally was, a compromise to physical stature. The marker of lineage itself becoming part of the visual significance of the *luzi* as traditional by belonging to Zhang rather than because it is the original *luzi*.

The second change she makes is to use her hands to reject the 'happy fate'. In Cheng Pei-kai's book, Zhang reveals that Gu Duhuang explained to her that '*yi li, yi li*' referred to the *bazi* 八字 process of selecting a marriage match by according to geomancy based on her birth date, name and other information (2013, p.31). By rejecting this supposedly happy fate with her hands, Zhang shows the audience that Du Liniang does not wish to have an arranged marriage.

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<sup>173</sup> However, Shan Wen, whom she officially accepted as her pupil in 2008, has also adopted the move. Shan Wen is noticeably taller than her teacher, (see figure 7) and the common move can be seen rather as a signature of Zhang's tutelage than a compromise to physical stature—again we see the lineage itself becoming part of the visual significance of the *luzi*.

Figure 14: 'What happy fate?' Clockwise from top left: Gong Yinlei, Hua Wenyi, Mei Lanfang, Zhang Jiqing



Obscure and polysemic references such as these make *chuanqi* lyrics notoriously difficult to narrowly interpret (or translate). While the line ‘But for what happy fate is my youth to be thus cast away’ is immediately comprehensible. A common interpretation of why Du asks this is that she feels she has been made to wait too long for marriage. Gu’s interpretation adds to this the idea that Du is in fact against the idea of her fate being decided in this manner; that she is unhappy with both arranged marriage and the selection method for it. In Zhang’s film version, to which I have referred thus far, she has not made the change, indicating that this conversation likely occurred after 1986. Hua Wenyi had however already adopted the moves in her video (also circa 1986), that Zhang would later use in her routine; a wrist rotation to change from two index fingers converging to shaking hands that ward off the prospect. Mei Lanfang also indicates Du’s aversion to the prospect by turning his away in despair. Gong Yinlei, however uses the ‘traditional’ version, looking at her fingers not in horror at the idea of an arrangement marriage but in sadness that she has not found a match yet. A contrast between Hua, Zhang and Gong’s ‘happy fate’ shows the particular emphasis used by Hua, who sacrifices some of the gentle demeanour of the boudoir *dan* to express her repulsion to an arranged marriage.

The contrast between Han Shichang’s movements and the beautified choreography of the subsequent generations illustrates perhaps how an original *luzi* has become traditionalised. In the final exclamation, ‘my youth to be thus cast away’, all actors cast out the water sleeves to illustrate this sentiment. While the latter generations do this in a minimal and controlled manner, elegantly to the side, Han Shichang casts his sleeves upwards into the air in a manner that evokes a considerable sense of despair. This movement stands out in comparison to modern renditions which foreground an elegance and beauty above all else, illustrating perhaps the influence of the Republican-era emphasis on beautification and refinement.

Figure 15: Han Shichang illustrates youth being cast away contrasted with current generation actresses (from left) Luo Chenxue, Zhang Zhihong and Gong Yinlei



Han casts the left sleeve upwards and outwards rather than downwards. Then after taking a step backwards, the right sleeve and after another step, both sleeves, are again cast out in a lifelike rather than aestheticized manner. This is contrasted with the careful controlled elegant tossing of the sleeves seen by all the performers of the current generation but best illustrated in these three stills. While this difference is often attributed to a 'northern style', it is my contention that prior to this period reform some of the more direct, and less aesthetically sculpted, manners of expression would have been more common to performance. This is a point I first raised in Chapter One, with the change from the directions in the *Shenyin jiangu lu* specifying that the *sheng* lifts up his hem and rushes over to the *dan*, and the now conventionalised 'three invitations' movements, by which the *sheng* caricaturises the act of walking in order to communicate a request that Du join him off-stage.

The following section is the most sexually suggestive in the scene. A double entendre offers another opportunity for instructive analysis:

Who will see my expression as I sleep?  
According to custom, a coy face  
in secret dreams, by whose side do I lie?

俺的睡情誰見

則索因循靚腆

想幽夢誰邊

The word *shuiqing* 睡情, which I have translated above as 'my expression as I sleep' could also be understood as 'dormant passions', as translated by Birch (Who may perceive these passions that lie dormant: in my heart?). This particular piece of

wordplay hinges on the two branches in the meaning of *qing* as either state/situation or feelings/passion. If we assume the preceding 'sleep' is modifying *qing*, then it is 'sleeping passions'. If, however, we assume *qing* is modifying sleep, then this can be taken as the facial expression (*biaoqing* 表情) as she sleeps. However, by assuming a 'coy face', a state of wakefulness implies that 'sleep' is a broader description for other activities on the bridal bed. Birch on the hand renders this line as 'coy delaying'. There is an appealing irony in the Birch's implication that her 'dormant passions' only come to life in her sleep, but this does seem at odds with the performance convention, at which point the actress holds a water sleeve in front of her face and peeks out. Wordplay such as this poses an interesting challenge for the performer, who must either choose one interpretation or try to convey both.

Mei Lanfang neither acknowledges nor dismisses the sexual undercurrent here. Bai Yunsheng, of the Northern troupe, however emphasises the need for shyness expressed by the actor's eyes:

The words 'coy face' need to deeply express shyness. At this moment, the actor's eye expression is most important. The speed of the rise and fall of the water sleeve needs to be handled carefully and seen clearly by the audience. If the eyes are closed too quickly there is no way of seeing the inner emotions, if they are closed too slowly, it is not coy enough.

“則索要因循腼腆”，這時候演員的眼神最重要；水袖上下的快慢，要掌握得有分寸而使觀眾看得非常清楚，因眼睛如閉的太快則看不出內心的情感，閉得太慢則腼腆情感不夠。(Bai 1986, vol. 2 p.1233).

In performance, all the actors hold a water sleeve in front of the face and peek out from it, a common gesture in the physical vocabulary of the *guimen dan*.

Hua Wenyi does close her eyes relatively quickly. But she also gives an intense distinctive smile, shown above, which is in sharp contrast to her otherwise serious facial

expressions. Zhang Jiqing's gaze, by comparison, is diverted to the ground, which appears distinctively coy.

Figure 16: Hua Wenyi (left) and Zhang Jiqing singing 'coy face'





The climactic moment of this scene before Du Liniang falls asleep is perhaps the most divisive in terms of acting decisions. Du sings the following lines (by Birch's translation):

-hidden longings roll with the spring's welling stream,  
lingering  
where to reveal my true desires!  
Suffering  
this wasting  
where but to Heaven shall my lament be made!  
和春光暗流轉  
遷延  
這哀懷那處言  
淹煎  
潑殘生  
除問天

For the traditional movement to accompany the word 'lingering', sung over several notes, Du Liniang faces the audience with her back to the table and hands on the table-edge behind her body, then sinks down before rising back up and down again, described here by Mei:

The actor must lean against the table. From its side he turns his body to the centre, at which point he slowly sinks down, then rises, sinking down another time. This sinking down and rising up, performed two or three times, is the movement that depicts her feelings in the most pointed way. It is an old movement common to both the northern and southern Kun traditions.

(Mei 1983, p. 73)

Bai Yunsheng, describes it thus; similar but more detailed and with only one 'sinking' rather than several (a difference reflected in modern performances):

The melody on these two words is contorting and seems both and continuous and breaking. Following the tune, lean on the table and rotate the body. With the right hand on the table, back close to the table edge and left hand put in front of the chest with the body slanting to the left, slowly crouch down. The eyes should open up a bit. Effort is needed to make the inner feelings penetrate outwards. (Bai, p.326)

Mei Lanfang argues that the movement should not be seen as sexually suggestive and is at least intended to convey Du's sense of anguish and entrapment:

It expresses the frustration and constraints young girls suffer because of their families and the old Confucian morality. This thirst for freedom in love is a feeling that is no different, then or now. [...] All we can do is to think of it as the product of Liniang's imagination; in no respect is this the behaviour of a woman who is licentious and without morals. (Mei 2013, p. 160)

Mei published this excerpt in the early communist period. The fact that Mei feels the need to make this case, indicates that it might indeed be seen as licentious, or vulnerable to attack for being so. Bai Yunsheng (whose remarks were published only after his death in 1972) is especially clear on the importance of emphasising this moment in performance, 'because at this moment Du's unhappy spring emotions reach their highest point'. Mei Lanfang, however, explains here his own decision to 'tone down' the movement:

These are a young girl's 'spring sorrows', which should be distinguished from her 'thoughts of love'. I didn't necessarily want to depict them in too bare and exposed (*lugu*) a way, so I decided to keep the words but tone down the movements.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Swatek's translation (2002, p.175). Taken from Mei, *Wutai shenghuo sishinian*, p.175-6

Mei's argument for the innocence of the move suggests that his decision not to use it was essentially for fear that audiences of the late 1950s would misinterpret it as unacceptably sensual. His concern to make this point may partly have been that, if there was any perception that the scene was designed to titillate, it could have damaged the playlet's political legitimacy, which relied on its being interpreted as an anti-feudal narrative promoting free marriage by detailing the suffering of a girl denied it.

Figure 17: Top row, from left: Gong Yinlei and Hua Wenyi perform the table move on the word 'lingering'. Bottom row, from left, Shen Fengying performs the move on 'suffering' and Zhang Zhihong on 'a carefully selected match'.



Of the seven recordings, the most overt, and perhaps likely to be considered ‘sexual’, performance of this move is by Hua Wenyi. This sense of ‘hidden longings’ is rendered principally by her gaze, which is directed fixedly forward towards the audience rather than the floor or to the side, the serious expression she wears, and the lower and more protracted downward movement she makes compared to other performers. In her description of this in *Dashi shuoxi*, she explains:

Once the foot is in place, the eyes must look directly at the audience and should not glance aside 不能斜視 [...] from beginning to end the eyes do not move [...] but it cannot be too exaggerated, otherwise it looks terrible. (Hua 2014, p.49).

We see for example that while Zhang Jiqing and her students, including Shen Fengying (picture above) do also employ this movement, they contort the body less than Hua. The key difference perhaps is that she does so not on the ‘lingering’ (*qianyan* 遷延) of spring longings, but on ‘suffering’ (*yanqian* 淹煎). This can be seen to place emphasis on the plight of the feudal maiden, rather than on the sexually suggestive word ‘lingering’ portrayal of sexual desire that may be objectionable to 20th century sensibilities.<sup>175</sup> Zhang Zhihong also avoids performing this move on ‘lingering’, but instead takes it forward to the ‘methodically selected perfect match’, which changes again the interpretation, possibly implying her desire for arranged marriage.

It is of course impossible to determine just how old a specific movement is. Furthermore, as the historian David Gross argues, nothing historically engendered ever remains fixed or static:

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<sup>175</sup> Pai Hsien-yung’s *Young Lovers’ Edition* takes its lead from Zhang Jiqing in this matter. Shen Fengying’s movement is performed more overtly, though also on ‘suffering’. Zhang was a consultant director on Bai’s project.

As social and cultural changes occur, so do ways of confronting and organizing experience [...] As experiences change, so do modes of perception, including perceptions of what a tradition is and means. When needs and perceptions shift, no matter how slightly, the inherited traditions cannot help but be apprehended and assimilated differently. (Gross 1992, p.14)

This is a question not just of production but also of hermeneutics, of reading as a conversation or dialogue over time. In the 21st century Kunqu performance environment, proposing an opposition to the feudal wrongs of the imperial past may cede to the desirability of stressing cultural continuity with that same imperial past. Furthermore, the openness about sexuality in late imperial literature is often seen as liberating in the context of the highly moralistic tone of the May Fourth and early Communist eras. Because of this change in attitudes, perhaps, in recent years Hua Wenyi has been able to return to the stage in mainland China and given the accolade of performing this scene in the 2014/15 Master's edition of *Mudanting* 大師版.

From the example of this playlet, we see that, because of the nature of teacher-pupil transmission of specifically choreographed moves, characterisation and dramatic tension are derived not just from the performance, but the relationship of that performance to convention as established by both contemporaries and antecedents, at a very precise level. Eventually coming back to life and marrying her dream lover, Du Liniang's story ends in the reconciliation between convention and her own inner drive, or *qing* 情. The actor's personal interpretation must also reach a compromise within the Kunqu convention. By making small variations to the performance tradition, the actor generates a personal interpretation of the character. It is in these glimpses of difference within overriding similarity, that the character comes vividly to life.

As Du Liniang prepares to walk in the secluded garden in its spring bloom, she imagines her mirror to be someone stealing a glance at her and sings: 'Walking in my chamber. How can I reveal myself?' Yearning to be seen in what she fears is her own

momentary blossom, yet trapped behind the barrier of proper conduct and the will of her parents, Du Liniang reflects the actor playing her, who must both wear yet somehow pierce the cloak of conventional prescription woven by generations of teacher-pupil transmission.

### Picking up the Portrait

I now apply the same performance analysis to the first two lines of the aria (*Yanzile* 顏子樂)<sup>176</sup> from *Shi hua* 拾畫 (Picking up the Portrait), a scene which occurs later in *Mudanting*. The death and later resurrection of Du Liniang put her at the centre of the script's plot. This makes its male protagonist, Liu Mengmei, a challenging character to realise onstage alongside her, since he is overshadowed by her in most scenes and on paper. Being a young scholar, Liu Mengmei is played by the *jinsheng* role-type. Also known as the 'fan scholar' role, the *jinsheng* actor-specialist plays elegant young scholars who have not yet entered official life.

Since discussion of this playlet's performance practice requires background information, I first provide a synopsis of this moment in the play. Du Liniang, as we will recall, has dreamt of an encounter with a young man after her first excursion into the family garden. Enchanted by the beauty of the spring, she bemoans that its beauty, like her own, will soon pass. Having fallen in love during or perhaps even with the dream and unable to recover, Du Liniang dies of a broken heart. Liu Mengmei's experience of the Nan'an garden closely echoes Du's. Having had the same dream as Du, Liu is inspired to take a circuitous route to the imperial examinations via Nan'an, where he suddenly

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<sup>176</sup> The name of this *qupai* in Tang's original script is *Haoshijin* 好事近. Chen Fang suggests that the name *Yanzile* may have originated from Feng Menglong's edited version of the play (2010, p.23)

falls ill. Following their daughter's death, Du's parents have left their estate, and Liu takes up residence there. Having recovered from his illness, he is told of an overgrown garden attached to the estate, and decides to take a walk there to lift his spirits. On arriving, he finds the once-magnificent garden now deserted, decaying and overgrown. In the aria *Yanzile*, Liu describes what he sees as he walks around. His specific observations of crumbling walls and moss profusion recall Du's earlier foreshadowing of the garden's desuetude. Cyril Birch's translation is as follows:

How silently the splendour has eroded.  
One stretch of painted wall still stands,  
the next slants all awry.  
則見風月暗消磨,  
畫牆西正南側左

Strange feelings of grief and familiarity come over him as he moves through the garden. He then stumbles upon a wooden box hidden in a pile of rocks, which he later realises is a portrait of the same girl of whom he dreamed of the previous year.

An overview of the variety of performance and pedagogical contexts in recent lineages demonstrates the complexity of the 20th century environment, in which, I argue, the drive to have a distinctive performance practice is as important as the need to traditionalise the *luzi* by its connection to prior masters.

Sang records that *Shihua* was performed in Shanghai in November 1926 (Sang 2010, p.240), presumably by Gu Chuanjie, and again by Shen Chuanzhi in 1935 (ibid, p.40). After the *Xianni she* disbanded in 1942, there is no record of its performance until its re-emergence following the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s, a number of full-length productions of *Mudanting* were produced by several of the nationalised troupes. From



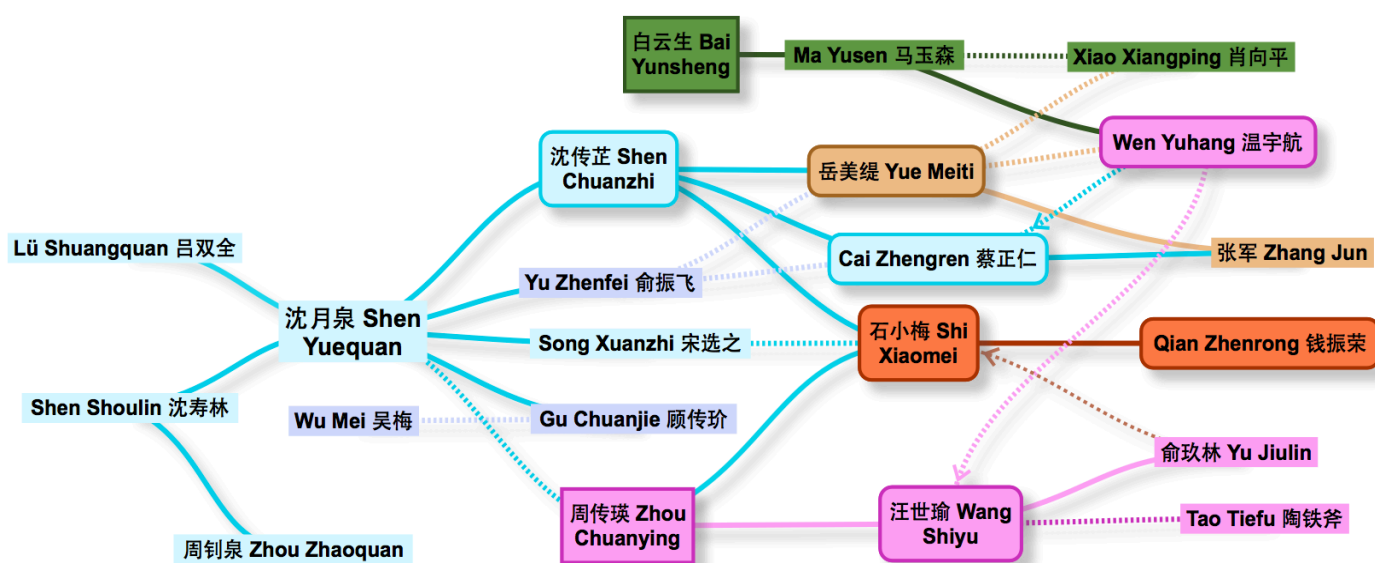
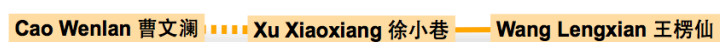
this point onward, *Shihua* started to be seen as the male counterpart to the major female monologues in *Youyuan* (A Garden Stroll) and *Xunmeng* (Searching for the Dream).<sup>177</sup> It is now considered the major monologue playlet for the fan-scholar and one of the first playlets studied by *xiaosheng* actors in basic training. The star female fan scholar of the Shanghai Kunju Troupe, Yue Meiti, states that ‘the calibre of a *xiaosheng* actor can be seen entirely from *Shi [hua] jiao [hua]*’ 一個小生的水準全看《拾叫》(190).

The following diagram, where solid lines indicate primary teacher-pupil relationships and dotted lines indicate secondary ones, are based either on biographic record or observation from performance itself. Influences (rather than teaching relationships) are indicated with arrows. Outlined boxes indicate that there is video footage and those with squared edges indicate a performance account or choreographic notation but no video.

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<sup>177</sup> See Yue 1994, pp.39-41

**Figure 18: Transmission of 'Piking up the Portrait'**



Chen Fang claims to identify a lineage for the performance tradition for the playlet reaching for the Qianlong period, based on a link with the actor Dong Lunbiao 懂掄標 (2010, p.108). I have in Chapter Four elaborated on the pitfalls of constructing genealogies of performance based on links between modern lineages derived from *Chuan* generation and archives gathering fragments of information further back. However, I would like briefly to touch on the relationship Chen attempts to establish with the actor Dong Lunbiao.

Li Dou's *Yangzhou huafang lu* (1795 preface) mentions the actor Dong Lunbiao and comments on his expertise at playing the role of Liu Mengmei:

Lunbiao, son of Meichen, versed in history, and knowledgeable about musical temperament. Playing Liu Mengmei from *Mudanting*, his hands did not come out of his [water-]sleeves once.'

掄標，美臣子，能言史事，知音律，《牡丹亭記》柳夢梅，手未曾一出袍袖。  
(Li 1960, vol.5 p.127)

Firstly, the choreography of this particular playlet is noted, in all choreographic scores and existing stage versions, by the use of a fan. The historical fragment that Chen draws us towards (without providing a link) is a reference in Li Dou's *Yangzhou Huafang lu* (1795) mentioning Dong Lunbiao 懂掄標 (shown on diagram) for his expertise at playing the role of Liu Mengmei:

'Lunbiao, son of Meichen, versed in history, and knowledgeable about musical temperament. Playing Liu Mengmei from the *Mudanting*, his hands did not come out of his [water-]sleeves once.'

掄標，美臣子，能言史事，知音律，《牡丹亭記》柳夢梅，手未曾一出袍袖。

However, the *shenduanpu* itself clearly notes the use of a fan. While on the surface the phrase ‘his hands did not come out of his sleeves once’ might appear to be a general compliment on the excellent use of the water-sleeves, it would be odd praise for the performance of a playlet in which hands must certainly come out of the sleeves in order to use a fan. I recently encountered the same praise of ‘hands not coming out of sleeves’ in relation to the performance of the aria *Shantao hong* from *Jing meng*, mentioned above. This is a love scene and the covering of the hands is seen as an expression of modesty during the scene’s explicit lyrics (Qiu, 2015) and difficult to master. In the context of this scene such praise makes sense and does not appear to be solid evidence that Dong Lunbiao was also noted for his performance of *Shihua*.<sup>178</sup>

As can be seen from the chart, there are now four distinct groups of choreography for this playlet. I shall now explain how the four groups are composed and their relation to prior masters. Shen Yuequan’s notable students prior to the Chuanxisuo included Song Xuanzhi, a literati amateur-performer and director of the Chuanxisuo who became the principal instructor of the Jiangsu Theatre School and, in 1916, Yu Zhenfei, the son of the famous Kunqu singing aficionado Yu Sulu.<sup>179</sup> Two of his principal *xiaosheng* students

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<sup>178</sup> Alternatively, the Dong Lunbiao version of *Shi hua*, far from being the source of the *Kunyi Notation* (and present incarnation), could perhaps have been a version so different as to not even involve the use of a fan. Dong Jihao, a *xiaosheng* of the Jiangsu troupe who ‘defected’ to Germany in 1984 told me that his *Shihua* had no fan, when I interviewed him in Berlin in March 2015. I hoped to follow up and interview him further, but was unable to contact or locate him in July of the same year. However, other aspects of the scene, including a great deal of pointing, in all versions, make it seem unlikely that hands remaining in sleeves would be praise for this playlet.

<sup>179</sup> Fei (2011, p. 29) records that after an amateur performance when he was 14 years old in which he demonstrated natural talent, Yu Sulu finally allowed his son to take formal training in stage performance. To the wealthy and educated, acting was still looked down upon as an inappropriate professional pursuit.

at the Chuanxisuo were Gu Chuanjie and Zhou Chuanying.<sup>180</sup> Shen Chuanzhi, Yuequan's son, entered the Chuanxisuo in spring 1922, but was assigned to study *dan* role, on account of his short stature, (Sang 2000, p.140) learning this playlet directly from his father Shen Yuequan between 1929 and 1931 after the school itself had disbanded. We learn from a 1992 interview with Wang Zhenglai that Shen Yuequan allegedly only taught the 'real stuff' to his son and Song Xuanzhi.<sup>181</sup> The *luzi* that Shen Chuanzhi learned from his father may therefore have been different to that taught to Zhou and Gu.<sup>182</sup>

Shen Chuanzhi and his father (introduced in the previous chapter) held onto a number of hand-copied transcripts giving basic choreographic information of their *luzi*, these *Shen Chuanzhi Hand-Copied Scripts* 沈傳芷手抄摺 currently housed in Taiwan at the National Central University in Jhongli, Taoyuan.<sup>183</sup> The manuscript is dated *guihai* year (1923), at which time Shen was only 17 years old and still at the Chuanxisuo studying the *zhengdan* role (Sang 200, p.140). However, as part of their training in calligraphy students were required to copy playscripts (Sang 2000, p.8). The likeliest explanation is that this is one example that represents the *luzi* taught by Shen Yuequan at the Chuanxisuo. It was originally his father's desire that Shen study the *dan* role on

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<sup>180</sup> Dong Xiuxun and Sang record that Zhou learned the piece from Shen Yuequan, however Wang Zhenglai (Hong, p.675) claims he did not teach him *jinsheng* roles. My interpretation of Wang's comment is that he did not spend the same amount of time preparing Zhou for *jinsheng* roles as he did Gu. In such a case, Zhou probably learned it in a class environment.

<sup>181</sup> Wang Zhenglai in his interview with Hong Weizhu: 'According to Song [Xuanzhi], Shen Yuequan only taught the real stuff 真東西 to two people, one was his son Shen Chuanzhi, the other was to himself, Song Xuanzhi. (675)

<sup>182</sup> Shen Yuequan may also have himself had more than one *luzi*, having learned from two sources of transmission himself.

<sup>183</sup> I am grateful to Professor Hong Weizhu for allowing me access to this document.

account of his small stature. However, having always been fonder of the *sheng* roles, he may have chosen to copy this script for this reason.

To demonstrate the significance of this document and reveal some of the ways the *luzi* changes over time, I will carry out a brief comparison of the first two lines of the aria *Yanzile* with a recording made of Shen's performance in 1986,<sup>184</sup> Shen's students Cai Zhengren and Yue Meiti of the Shanghai troupe, Shi Xiaomei of the Jiangsu troupe and the adapted version created by Shen's classmate Zhou Chuanying at the Chuanxisuo. The following tables traces the four stage directions written on the 1923 score in the subsequent *luzi*.

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<sup>184</sup> Shen Chuanzhi was in his 80<sup>th</sup> year when this recording was made and had suffered a stroke in 1973 (Sang: 143). However, he had been teaching this routine in the years immediately prior, including to Shi Xiaomei at some point between 1979 and 1984 meaning that it would at least be representative of what he taught her (Sang records that Shen taught in Nanjing between 1980 and 1986. Shi began studying with Shen in 1979 and had already studied this playlet before showing it to Zhou Chuanying in 1984.) Some discrepancies do arise between his performance and that of his students and his own 1926 handwritten score, for example casting out his right-hand sleeve instead of the left-hand sleeve at the end of the first stanza. I have assumed that such discrepancies at a level of detail are a result of his age and health and focus on broader structure of the *luzi* for comparison.

**Table 6: Variability within Chuanxisuo *luzi* of *Shihua***

		Shen 1923 score (=Shen Yuequan)	Shen 1986	Cai Zhengren	Yue Meiti	Shi Xiaomei	Zhou/Wang		
			Fan			Fan			
<i>How much</i>	則	Take out fan (from sleeve) 出扇子							
	見								
<i>this scene has over time</i>	風								
	月								
<i>silently</i>	暗		Fan						
<i>withered.</i>	消								
	磨								
<i>West of the painted wall</i>	畫	Turn upstage 轉上臺			Fan	Fan			
	牆								
	西				Point	Point	Point		
<i>directly south</i>	正			Turn	Point		Point		
	南	Point downstage 指下臺	Turn						
<i>to the left side</i>	側				Turn				
	左	Move towards back stage 轉去出臺	Move	Move	Move	Turn / Move	Turn / Move		

It should first of all be acknowledged that a table such as this is unable to demonstrate anything but the basic shape of the *luzi*. The nuances of timing and speed of action are inevitably difficult to portray both in this, or in writing. However, with the aid of video, what this does allow us to perceive similarities and differences across a lineage—in particular actors make changes to the *luzi* they were taught and which do not.

It will be noted that not one of Shen Yuequan or Shen Chuanzhi's students follow the *luzi* exactly, with variability in the order of movements and timing in relation to the words that are being sung. The most similar to Shen's *luzi* is Cai Zhengren.<sup>185</sup> Both Yue and Shi make substantial personal innovations on top of Shen's choreography beyond these four movements, that I shall discuss later in the chapter. The reason for this, one might suggest, is that while Cai seldom performs fan-scholar roles, a role that Yue fills in the Shanghai troupe, and less of a personal imprint, or 'marker' has been consciously imparted or unconsciously developed.

It is interesting to note that the Zhou Chuanying *luzi*, which appears markedly different to the others, does in fact incorporate the same basic structure, demonstrating the extent to which fine details create a performance more than the broad steps.<sup>186</sup> The basic *luzi*, as can be ascertained, involves (1) taking the fan out from the sleeve (2) turning around (3) pointing downstage (4) walking towards the back of the stage. The

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<sup>185</sup> Cai recorded a performance-matching 配像 version of the playlet (estimated to be in the 1990s) to accompany an audio recording by Yu Zhenfei. It is this which I have used as the basis for my analysis [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XOTY2NjgyOTI=.html](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XOTY2NjgyOTI=.html) (accessed 1/1/16) and confirmed that this is indeed Cai's *luzi* (and not Yu's) by reference to another video of Cai in the rehearsal room of the Shanghai troupe on Shaoxing lu in 2013; <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/u14G5D14MV4/> (accessed 1/1/16).

<sup>186</sup> As Zeng Jinping 曾靜萍, the head of the Liyuan Theatre in Quanzhou said to me in 2015, 'Movements are fixed, basic skills needs to be mastered, but the important thing is the process moving in and out of movement.'



immediate difference that becomes apparent between the 1926 score and all later versions is the switched order of the 'point' and 'turn'. One can imagine that on traditional protruding stages this turn might be welcome to audiences on the right hand stage of the side. However, on a proscenium stage, turning upstage would obscure audience vision for the remaining words, and produces no advantage for any audience members. This most obvious change, I therefore propose, reflects an adaptation to the proscenium arch stage which had become standard in post-1949 performance.

However, there are more than technical changes that accompanied the playlet's transition into the 20th century. Stepping further back into its performance history and another manuscript located in the Fu Ssu-nien library at Academia Sinica in Taiwan, Chen Kaishen brings to light a hand-copied script of the *Shi hua* from 1831 assigning Liu Mengmei to the poor-scholar role-type 苦生巾，身穿黑衫 (Chen 2014, p.212) rather than a fan-scholar 巾生 in current *luzi*. As Chen notes, this suggests that the performance would also adapt the conventions of poor scholar in performance. Poor scholars characters such as Zhang Yuanhe from the *Tale of the Embroidered Robe* 繡襦記 are dressed in black rags and broken shoes. They walk in small steps, slightly limping and often clutching their empty stomachs. Chen uses this as evidence to argue that earlier performance was more realistic, as Liu Mengmei during this scene is 'down and out,' having just recovered from illness (212). Chen further links this to the *xiaosheng* actor of the Zhejiang troupe, Wang Shiyu's biography, in which Wang says that this performance should adopt some of the 'sluggishness' 拖拖踏踏 of the poor-scholar role-type, including the use of the small 'gallop-step' 騰步.

However, I am not aware of any scripts in which Liu Mengmei is presented as a poor-scholar in late 19th and early 20th century performance. Quite to the contrary, the *jinsheng* role-type seems to have been important to the scene's value. Ding Xiuxun, a researcher attached to the Jiangsu Kunju Theatre Research Institute, writes that the

challenging dimension to *Shihua* is in projecting the ‘noble sentiment, erudition and the depth of spirit’ that is idealised in the figure of Liu Mengmei by ‘the high-class literati audiences who wield critical authority for Kunqu performance’ 掌握崑曲藝術話語權的上層觀眾 (Ding 2015, p.527). A photograph probably taken in the late 1890s of the final actor to specialise in the role in Beijing, Wang Lengxian 王楞仙 (1859-1908), an actor from what later became known as Jingju troupes, shows him posing in the role for this scene (holding the portrait just picked up). This clearly shows Leng wearing the scholar’s garb, including the *jin* hat, and not the poor-scholar’s rags.



Figure 21: Wang Lengxian. (circa 1900)



Figure 21: Shang Xiaoyun circa 1922-36. Appears in Zhang Yihe's book *Lingren Wangshi*



Figure 19: Yu Zhenfei poses as Liu Mengmei

The extent of Liu Mengmei's idealised status in this era is perhaps evidenced by the number of stars willing to have their picture taken in an erudite pose holding the portrait of Du Linian. Exemplary in particular is the second photograph, of Shang Xiaoyun 尚小雲 (1900-76), one of the 'Four Great Famous Dan' 四大名旦, among a set of photographs taken of the four performers at some point after 1921. Being a *dan* performer, it is unlikely that Shang ever performed the playlet. It was common during photo shoots of stars at this time, however, to dress up in characters that they did not necessarily play on stage. The fact that Shang chose the scene may illustrate the ideal that the role continued to hold within Republican society of the erudite yet romantic scholar.

Kunqu *jinsheng* was not a popular role type during the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, as refined literati characters were being replaced by role types representing a more martial masculinity. Since this occurred at the same time as the rise in popularity of the *dan*, it may be that this polarisation of stage gender roles occurred in response to the insecurity of Chinese society in a period riddled by wars and rebellions.<sup>187</sup> There was thus a period of time at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when very few actors if any actors performed this scene (Hong 2002, p.244). The discontinuity of *jinsheng* performance on the urban commercial stage is important to consider when examining how the role of Liu Mengmei has been constructed since the 1940s, including the appearance and popularity of female male-impersonating *jinsheng* actors in the post-Cultural Revolution reform era. Bai Yunsheng writes that when he decided to learn it in 1936, it had not been performed for more than twenty years in Beijing or in the South (Bai 1986, p.337).<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Both Goldstein and Li have argued that the military crises of the late Qing, including the Taiping rebellion wars against foreign aggressors led to a masculinisation of the stage (Goldstein 2007, p.54; Li 2010, p.24).

<sup>188</sup> Wang Lengxian, who had performed regularly in Shanghai died in 1908.

In his own description of the playlet, Ding reserves mention only for Gu Chuanjie. Both he and Zhou Chuanying learned the choreography under Shen Yuequan, he says, but following graduation from the Chuanxisuo, Gu would frequently seek out direction from Nanjing-based scholar and aficionado Wu Mei 吳梅 for advice on how to cultivate this 'noble sentiment, erudition and the depth of spirit'.<sup>189</sup> Zhang Yunhe 張允和 (1909-2002), describes when she was part of a group of fellow female students learning to sing Kunqu in Shanghai in the early 1930s, one of the first arias taught to them by their teacher was *Yanzile*, from 'Shi hua,' remarking that they all longed to see it performed. At that time, the *Xianni she* (the name of the *Chuan* acting troupe at the time) would on occasion act a full evening of *Mudanting*, but never including this scene. However, she and her sister eventually wrote a letter to Gu asking him to perform it, which he did.<sup>190</sup>

Using the poor-scholar role-type to represent both Liu's physical and emotional state during his walk around the garden and his wild elation on recovering the portrait is an intriguing proposition that could be played to considerable dramatic effect. However, it might potentially disrupt the lofty ideals that are crystalised in the character of Liu Mengmei by Republican elites. This may be one reason why *Shihua* remains to this day a highly contested and among the least 'stable' of the playlets in repertoire.

In 1954, Yu Zhenfei and Shen Chuanzhi started teaching at the newly established Kunqu class at the Shanghai Opera School. The students included Cai Zhengren and Yue Meiti, the latter a female student originally in the *dan* class who moved to studying *sheng* roles whose *luzi* I shall look at in depth.<sup>191</sup> In an interview in 1992, Shen cited Yue

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<sup>189</sup> We learn little from Ding's book about the content of Gu's *luzi*, except that he had the custom of knitting his brow 蹙眉 from the start of this piece, which was apparently very effective (Ding 2014, p.527).

<sup>190</sup> Gu later married Zhang's sister, Yuanhe 張元和. The couple left the mainland for Taiwan in 1949, where Gu passed away from illness in 1965.

<sup>191</sup> For Yue Meiti's version I look at two recordings, one from a DVD release in 2010, and a second from an unpublished training recording in which Yue talks through the

as the student ‘with whom he was most satisfied’.<sup>192</sup> However, after the Cultural Revolution, when the Shanghai Kunju Troupe was preparing to stage its 1982 new evening-length *Mudanting*, perhaps lacking confidence after a decade without studying or performing, Yue Meiti visited Zhou Chuanying in Hangzhou to relearn *Shi hua*. According to second-hand sources, Shen Yuequan had not taught Zhou Chuanying any of the fan-scholar plays.<sup>193</sup> By Yue’s own account (2006, p.192) Zhou told her that he himself did not know this particular playlet, but if she performed it to him he could help her ‘fix it up’. She describes his input being more a case of improving the existing routine rather than creating a new one: ‘At what point is it important to use strength in the wrists, when should I lift my arms, at what angle should I be facing, should I take five steps or seven steps.’ Yue has moreover continued to make minor adjustments to her choreography since 1982.<sup>194</sup> In particular, she mentions reading Bai Yunsheng’s published performance notes on the choreography he created for it and borrowing ideas (197).<sup>195</sup>

As the playlet was already ‘extinct’ in Beijing, Bai Yunsheng ‘kneaded’ a *luzi* himself which has been transmitted by Ma Yusen as the ‘*Beipai*’ (Northern school) version to Xiao Xiangping (who, prior to moving to the Northern troupe in 2013, had originally

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movements as she demonstrates them, prepared in the early 90s (exact date unknown) for amateurs and aficionados who wish to learn how to perform.

<sup>192</sup> In the same interview he makes thinly veiled criticism of ‘certain actors who had changed to *xiaosheng*’ clearly referring to Shi Xiaomei (2002, p.26). During her *Dashi shuoxi* lecture on the playlet *Wanjian* 玩箋, Shi tearfully recalls her relationship with Shen. It is written in Yang Shousong’s *Damei Kunqu* that Shi tended to Shi in his final years of sickness, during which time he taught her the piece.

<sup>193</sup> e.g. Wang Zhenglai: ‘Shen Yuequan didn’t even teach the *jinsheng* steps to Zhou Chuanying (who sings *zhiweisheng*)’

<sup>194</sup> This is indeed common to all actors who have been performing a particular playlet for several decades.

<sup>195</sup> Yue has taught her version to many students, including Zhang Jun, Li An, Hu Weilu and Weng Jiahui.

learned *Shi hua* from Yue Meiti in Shanghai) and Wen Yuhang. Both Wen Yuhang and Xiao Xiangping's adoption of the Northern school *luzi* are highly similar and correspond to Bai's notation.<sup>196</sup> Wen subsequently moved to Taiwan and performed the role in Chen Shi-Zheng's 1999 New York Lincoln Center production. However, for that production, he developed another *luzi* for the aria *Yanzile* adapted from the Zhou/Wang *luzi* below and, for the aria *Jinchan dao*, one based on that which Cai Zhengren was to originally perform for the same production before the Shanghai troupe's involvement was cancelled, apparently for political reasons.<sup>197</sup> Wen has also studied Yue's *luzi*, and he continues to perform both it and the northern *luzi* as separate contrasting performances. However, for the current analysis, I will look at his performance of the Lincoln Center choreography, a video of which is available online.<sup>198</sup>

In the early 1980s, at around the same time that Yue Meiti travelled to Hangzhou to work on her *Shi hua* with Zhou Chuanying, Shen Chuanzhi was living in Nanjing training another promising female *xiaosheng*, Shi Xiaomei of the Jiangsu troupe. Wang Zhenglai, a fellow student in Shi's class and then subsequently a teacher at the Jiangsu Theatre School, recalls that he himself first helped her to learn the playlet in 1963 (Interview in Hong 2002, p.675).<sup>199</sup> In the same volume we learn that she also studied it with Shen (ibid. p.331). Like Yue, Shi Xiaomei also sought Zhou for further instruction:

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<sup>196</sup> I watched Xiao's performance at the Shanghai Yifu theatre in April 2015. I have seen Wen Yuhang's from a DVD he kindly gave me.

<sup>197</sup> For background to these events see chapter 7 of Swateck (2002). Although this version was to be performed by Cai's student Zhang Jun, in Chen's staging Cai was to appear on stage to 'teach' Zhang how to perform this one aria (Interview notes with Wen Yuhang, May 2015)

<sup>198</sup> <http://www.tudou.com/programs/view/w45fzDGWMrM/> accessed 6/7/2014

<sup>199</sup> Shortly after learning Song Xuanzhi's version of the playlet, from 1964 until after the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), Shi was obliged to abandon the *sheng* role-type. After 15 years of performing either contemporary, political theatre, or *dan* roles, it was decided in 1979 that she would indeed change (back) to performing *xiaosheng*

Teacher Zhou watched me to rehearse *Shi hua* once and said, 'yours is the traditional *luzi*, I can see you must have been taught it by Shen Chuanzhi,' I answered 'yes, I was'. Then he said, 'Mine is based on the traditional *luzi* but with a few changes, but you can stick with the original version and let the two different *luzi* be both passed on in order to let future generations know the changes that this playlet has undergone.'<sup>200</sup>

However, in her 1992 interview she claims that she performs it 'according to her own understanding' (p.331). Shi Xiaomei's version received official recognition recently when she was selected from all the oldest generation of actors from all troupes to act this scene in *Mudanting Dashiban* 大師版 (Masters Edition) in Beijing in 2014, supported by the Ministry of Culture.<sup>201</sup>

The final major line of transmission is Zhou Chuanying's pupil in the Zhejiang troupe, Wang Shiyu, who was presumably taught the piece some time after Yue Meiti's visit in 1980/81. Wang fully attributes his performance to Zhou Chuanying, and the same choreography is visible in his students, including Tao Tiefu and latterly Yu Jiulin's performances, in Pai Hsien-yung's *Young Lovers Edition*, for which Wang was a consultant designer.<sup>202</sup> Wang's version has also won recognition in an official capacity in 1986 when he was awarded the Plum Blossom Award 梅花獎 for his performance of this

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<sup>200</sup> Shi Xiaomei, published as blog and podcast (Accessed 2015-06-11) *Wo yongyou zhenzhi de ai* 我擁有真摯的愛 <http://tieba.baidu.com/p/626474268>

<sup>201</sup> Shi's choreography as can be seen now on stage, in audio-visual recordings and as performed by her pupils, Qian Zhenrong and Shi Xiaming. For Shi Xiaomei I follow two recordings, available online from the Shi Xiaomei Workshop 石小梅工作坊 website, one recorded in Beijing in 1987, the other in Taipei in 2010. I have also seen a live performance of the scene as part of an evening-length *Peony* in Hangzhou in October 2014. For Qian Zhenrong, I use a recording of a Nanjing performance at the Jiangsu troupe's Lanyuan theatre in 2013 made available to me by that troupe. I also studied to perform the choreography with Qian in late 2014, and have seen him perform and rehearse the scene on a number of occasions between 2012 and 2015. I myself performed the aria under analysis, based on Qian's instruction.

<sup>202</sup> Yu performs the aria *Jinchandao* based on Shi's *luzi*.



playlet. He also enjoyed endorsement from Zhang Yunhe who, on seeing him perform it in 1985, said that he had ‘passed on Gu Chuanjie’s exquisite art, only more refined and more beautiful’ and that ‘this is because teacher Zhou Chuanying’s direction is correct and Comrade Wang Shiyu spares no effort.’<sup>203</sup> Wang is also the presenter for this playlet in the *Dashi shuoxi*. The choreographic score for the playlet contained in the book *Zhou Chuanying’s shenduanpu* is in fact based on Wang’s performance, as Zhou’s son Zhou Shirui 周世瑞 writes in the postscript (2003, p.572).<sup>204</sup>

As can be observed from the above summary, there are a large number of versions of this playlet, all of which have a high profile—attesting to the popularity of the playlet in the present and recent past. However, because of the period in the early 20th century in which it was seldom if ever performed, combined with a secretiveness confining the transmission within families, two new *luzi* emerged as Bai Yunsheng and Zhou Chuanying had an effective ‘blank sheet’ to work from. We also see that these newest *luzi* (those kneaded by Bai and Zhou) have hardly change over three generations, while the ‘traditional’ *luzi* transmitted by Shen, perhaps precisely as a result of its association with tradition rather than a specific performer, has been subject to the most changes by both Yue Meiti and Shi Xiaomei, the two female practitioners who have dominated performance of the ‘fan scholar’ role type since the end of the Cultural Revolution.

I will now examine in more depth the differences between these versions. Yue Meiti, the foremost fan-scholar of the Shanghai troupe and key practitioner of this scene, describes the task of the actor approaching this soliloquy as ‘borrowing the landscape to describe feelings’ 借景抒情. Apart from the first line that describes a feeling of lament,

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<sup>203</sup> She also adds that Wang’s dimples remind her of her late brother-in-law.

<sup>204</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that Chen Fang finds Shen’s notations and Wang’s performance ‘almost the same’ 幾乎全同 (2010, p.114)

the rest 'seems to be describing the scenery; but naturally the purpose of the aria is not the scenery itself but a frame of mind' 唱曲的重點，自然不在景物上，而在於傳達心境. (2006, p.196). A comparison of the various practitioners reveals how *luzi* establish, adopt and adapt different modes of representation.

The first line, 'Seeing this changed scene over time. Silently withered,' is sung in unmetered rhythm and in all versions is accompanied by a striking pose. A cursory glance at the following slides of performing images for movements accompanying these first seven words '*ze jian feng yue, an xiao mo*' reveals very little unity.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> As previously discussed, there are several limitations in analysis of performance based on audio-visual materials and in the comparison of screenshots. In particular camera angles and different stage sizes and environments may compromise comparison. Also, screenshots in particular, capture just a moment in an action, giving little information about the process of the movement in full. That said, there is no more accurate or more visible way of demonstrating the great variety of practices within a supposedly fixed and traditional choreography.

Figure 22: Yanzile line 1 comparison





































	則 How	見 this	風 scene	月 over time
Shen Chuanzhi				
Wang Shiyu				
Yue Meiti				
Shi Xiaomei				
Qian Zhenrong				
Wen Yuhang (Lincoln Center)				



Figure 23: Yanzile line 2 comparison

	暗 Silently	消 withered	磨 away	
Shen Chuanzhi				
Wang Shiyu				
Yue Meiti				
Shi Xiaomei				
Qian Zhenrong				
Wen Yuhang (Lincoln Center)				

Wang Shiyu tells us that Shen Chuanzhi and Zhou Chuanying's understanding of the play 'was not the same' (in Hong 2002, p.194). While Wang does not elaborate further on these differences, one essential distinction that can be derived from Wang's own version of Zhou's *luzi* relates to broader debates of *xiqu* performance and raises issues of interpretation and changes in representational systems in the modern era. In his explanation of the scene in the *Dashi shuoxi*, Wang Shiyu explains that his movements at this juncture illustrate, in a mimetic manner, the previous glory of the garden gradually fading away: 'On seeing that the scene of the time has now bit-by-bit disappeared, his movement is the same.' Bai Yunsheng, also writes of a mimetic approach at this moment: 'Go back a step throwing out both sleeves, to express that during the year no people had been in the garden, that the row of flowers by the wall had disappeared.'

We see, in the examples, three different approaches. In the 1986 Shen Chuanzhi video and that of Yue Meiti and Qian Zhenrong, the actor uses both mimetic movements describing the scene and a personal response to them. Taking the example of Qian Zhenrong, we see an example of the technique that Riley calls *duan* 斷 or 'the dissected body' by which the actor uses different part of his body to indicate different elements of the performance. The essential composure of the actor remains in role as Liu Mengmei inspecting the scene, eyes fixed forward. However at the same time (on singing the character *an* 黯) a single water sleeve is cast out (in the same manner as Bai notes) reflecting the neglect to the garden and its ruined state. In the Zhou choreography, we see the image of crumbled walls and a withered garden, presented mimetically by the falling movement of the actor's hand (seen in the slides above of Wang Shiyu). Although a shake of the head precedes the falling movement, the movement itself is distinct from how the character reacts to the scene. In the example of both Shi Xiaomei and Wen Yuhang, the spectator sees only the character Liu Mengmei assessing the scene decaying accompanied with no dissected movement to describe the scene. Differences such as

this, in apparently traditional choreography, lead us to question the boundaries of difference within which the notion of tradition can be authenticated. Were we to consider the example of notated music, differences in the performance of the work as large as these might be seen as taking liberties with the composer's intentions. Observers of Chinese theatre sometimes have similar reactions to liberties taken with movement tradition. For this reason, the actors take great care to traditionalise their lineages. The interesting aspect of this particular playlet is the apparently concurrent authenticity of at least two different *luzi*.

Sometimes such differences can respond also to the actors' interpretations of the text. This may not in relation to abstract motions or allusions, but sometimes relates to even the most basic cues to action within a danced choreography, for example, which direction to walk in and why. Although this may seem like a trivial matter for analysis, an absence of intention or clarity of movement and purpose in performance, regardless of how banal that purpose is, can turn a powerful rendition into an undistinguished one.

As an example of cues to movement in the aria in question, lines three and four 畫牆西, 正南側左 are found to be particularly obscure. These are translated by Birch as: 'One stretch of painted wall still stands, the next slants all awry.' While the character *zuo* 左 does indeed carry the possible meaning 'awry' it is more commonly the word for 'left' and was likely chosen by the playwright at least partly because it rhymes with *mo* 磨, the final word of the previous line. An alternative translation according to its most basic apparent meaning would be: 'West of the painted wall, directly south, to the left side.' Although it requires a familiarity with the original scene (rather than the playlet), this interpretation could be read as referring to instructions about how to find the garden, given to Liu in a preceding scene, by Sister Stone the Daoist nun, who tells him: 'Follow the west gallery past the painted wall, after a hundred yards you come to the wicket gate' 從西廊轉畫牆而去, 百步之外, 便是籬門.

Both interpretations, either as directions to the garden or the contrast of its southern and western walls are determined not by the audience but by the actor in mediation. The following table shows the notation from the two choreographic scores and my description of Wen Yuhang's actions in the Lincoln Center production directed by Chen Shi-Zheng.

Figure 24: *Hua qiang xi zheng nan ce zuo*

Interpretation A		<i>Kun-Yi shenduanpu</i> (est. 1785-1816)	Shen Chuanzhi (1923)	Lincoln center (1999)	Interpretation B (Cyril Birch)	
<i>West of the painted wall</i>	畫牆			Take out fan	畫牆	<i>The painted wall</i>
	西	Move backwards to stage centre 退下歸中	Turn upstage 轉上臺		西	<i>on the west</i>
<i>directly south</i>	正			Open fan	正	<i>is intact,</i>
	南		Point downstage 指下臺		南	<i>[but that to the] south</i>
<i>to the left side.</i>	側				側	<i>leans</i>
	左	Left hand point to left corner, 擊左手指左角	Move towards back stage 轉去出臺	Falling down motion with fan	左	<i>left/awry</i>

The *Kun-Yi shenduanpu* and Shen notations indicate a pointing action as either the words 'south' or 'left' are being sung, suggesting that Liu Mengmei is recalling Sister Stone's instructions and pointing in the direction she has indicated. The Lincoln Center production interprets the words in the same way that Cyril Birch's translation does, since the falling down movement with the fan is a stock movement that is traditionally used later in this same aria, when Liu stumbles into 'broken walls' 倚逗著斷垣低垛.

In the above two lines, a contrast can be made within one genealogy of *luzi*, that between Shi Xiaomei and Qian Zhenrong, although the timing cannot quite be captured in stills. In Qian's performance the final fixing of the eyes to the upper left corner of the auditorium coincides with the word *yue*, meaning 'moon' at which point he also flips his closed fan backwards. All else is still. Although the word here is linked to the prior character *feng* (wind) and together as wind-moon refers to 'beautiful scenery', or romance, Qian pointedly (and distinctively) moves his glance upwards on the word 'moon'. Qian's gaze remains fixed, on what appears to be the moon, until the word *ce* (leans). The movement of the fan emphasises the stillness of the gaze directly towards the moon. Such small innovations as this, essentially just an eye movement synchronised with a small movement, is sufficient to create both dramatic emphasis and also personal style. This is nonetheless carried out within the framework of the transmitted *luzi*.

## Concluding remarks

An analysis of these two short moments of theatre not only reveals the annotated function of choreography in contemporary performance, it also highlights the intertextuality of choreography between and within generations and lineages of performer. The widespread availability of recorded performance in the 21st century has added a new dimension to the archiving capacity of performance. While the spontaneity and fluidity of performance can never be truly captured on video, its weakness in this regard is really less debilitating than any other form of archivism. Just like the waves of archivism and categorisation that colour Kunqu's history, norms and standards of performance are arguably more identifiable, objectifiable and proprietary than ever before.



The comparative approach that I have taken to examining these pieces of theatre is not simply my own exercise of performance scholarship, but reflects the critical mindset and social discourse among contemporary audiences. We are reminded of Elliot's conception of the traditions in which he noted that, within a tradition, the new monuments must line up with the old, creating together an ever shifting alignment of monuments (1923, p.2). So too with Kunqu choreography: in order to be included within the critical connoisseurship of theatregoers, the rendition of a specific playlet must be similar enough to established norms in order to be considered in comparison with them.

## Conclusion

On her discovery that the choreographic directions discovered in a Qing dynasty manuscript differ from contemporary performance, the Taiwanese theatre scholar Chen Fang made the observation that transmission is on the basis of ‘spirit’ and not of ‘form’ 傳神不傳形 (2010, p.105). Two distinct relationships merge in her discussion—the transmission between mentor and pupil over generations and that between actor and the audience in performance. In one sense, the two notions do converge, for the mentor is teaching the student to pass on meaning to the audience. However, her observation begs the question of what it is that constitutes the performance tradition that is being so assiduously saved from extinction. Is it a special meaning for playlet that must be passed on to future generations, or is it a formal way of passing on meaning in performance?

In either its pure-sung or stage form, Kunqu repertoire has long been one arena in which the intellectual elites, rising social classes and professional theatrical workers have postured and contested authority through a variety of archiving projects. I make the case that, while this posturing was previously a question of correct pronunciation and interpretation in song, it has during the 20th century expanded into the domain of stage movement.

A shift has taken place, I have argued, by which the choreography of the ‘traditional *luzi*’ has become the currency with which the promise made to the Kunqu archive can be paid. The mastery of convention and technique of *chengshi* could and have furnished Chinese theatre with infinite choreographies, but none are seen to be as valuable as those which reference their origins. The traditional *luzi* is thus itself an archive of sorts,

proof of a heritage of some pedigree, enclosed in a playlet, supported by the arcons—the governments, international institutions, universities and internet algorithms. The hundreds of *luzi* that are lamented to have been lost to posterity are history are the pretext to the preciousness of those that have apparently not.

The faithful transmission of Kunqu is therefore measured by the number of playlets are performable with a ‘traditional’ *luzi*. The UNESCO webpage describing Kunqu states that ‘of the 400 arias regularly sung in opera performances in the mid-20th century, only a few dozen continue to be performed.’<sup>206</sup> Similarly, the Hong Kong-based professor Cheng Pei-kai writes that while the *Chuan* generation was (collectively) proficient in about 400 to 500 traditional playlets, the current generation of actors are ‘only able to perform dozens’ (2013, p.19). But as this thesis has shown, even these few dozen are new in some way.

Many are entirely new creations, many are characterised by the innovations, additions and changes of contemporary performers. Few ‘traditional’ *luzi* are traceable to the public theatre of the Qing dynasty, and none to the private theatre of Ming literati. This differs from the consensus in Kunqu scholarship from Lu Eting onwards, that sees Kunqu’s choreographed finesse as a legacy of the Qian-Jia period of competition on the commercial stage. I show that the perception that performance practice has been passed in unbroken transmission has arisen in order to accommodate Kunqu’s practices into Japanese-derived global narratives of heritage and elegance, channelled through

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<sup>206</sup> [http://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/?s=films\\_details&pg=33&id=10](http://www.unesco.org/archives/multimedia/?s=films_details&pg=33&id=10) Accessed 18/1/16. This statement is confusing and possibly misleading. It is not clear why arias should be the unit of performance here rather than the playlets containing them—as the latter is presumably the source of the approximation ‘a few dozen’. The context of either professional stage performance or pure-sung renditions is also unspecified. The tendency to blend these categories is a key facet of 20th century Kunqu discourse, always privileging a narrative of decay and lingering.

strictures of global modernity that privilege the creative product rather than the process, and authorship (in this by tradition) over the performer.

Aoki Masaru's scholarship linked the 'how' and 'what' together in a historical narrative that has pitched elegant content and performance of the *yabu* in a struggle for survival against the popular vulgarities of the *huabu*. This was, I argue, a categorisation expanded in both the National Theatre movement the Reform and Opening Up era, in which social and political elites wished to promote China's literary heritage via a new esteem for performance in a globalising environment. The 'what' of the literati tradition of the late Ming became intertwined in the 20th century with the 'how' of the professional actors of the commercial stage in the late Qing.

My proposal in this thesis is that the dramatic miscellanies, musical scores, genre categorisations, national and international political initiatives, and filmed performances are active agents of subtle but persistent change. By a detailed comparison of performances of two major soliloquies from the *Peony Pavilion*, this thesis has drawn attention to the traditional *luzi*, whose primacy, I have argued, is a 20th century phenomena. Kunqu has been the prism by which I have explored how apparently 'intangible' cultures are often the direct product of tangible ones.

In 1986, the Kunqu Revival Advisory Committee enshrined in policy the requirement for actors to 'excavate' 挖掘 *luzi* for repertoire which had fallen out of performance and transmission. Many such playlets are now perceived as 'traditional' when in fact they were choreographed in the later years of the 1980s. Even these newly choreographed pieces are presented as fixed and unchanging. Academic and political efforts such as these to propel Kunqu performance as China's National Drama (*Guoju*) were in the new millennium swept up in a bluster of patriotic and anti-imperialist political discourse which sought to co-opt Kunqu as an expression of indigenous cultural strength. Ignited by the 2001 UNESCO designation, this trend is characterized by the

contributions of celebrity academics such as Pai Hsien-yung, Yu Qiuyu 余秋雨 and Yu Dan 于丹. Such writers and activists have promoted fixity framed within a discourse of nostalgia for an imagined perfect tradition, one seen intimately linked to fading Chinese identities under a barrage of global capitalism.

Yet fixity itself corresponds to separate yet similar trends in other parts of the world, where creativity is also accompanied by a rise in the 'archival' process. The decline of the improvised cadenza in European classical music came about just as musical notation began to circulate widely, causing the roles of composer and performer to become ever more split (Ferrand 1961, p.14). As an academic discipline, musicology has only in recent decades begun to call into question the primacy of the 'work' over performance. The emergence of published scores and public concerts in the early 19th century, elevated the musical 'work' into a piece of intellectual property and performance to the status of a mere reproduction. The performer had become a middleman tasked with creating an accurate reproduction of the artist's intentions, with the composer seen as the locus of meaning and 'authenticity'. Performers had merely to be 'faithful' to his intentions. By the 1990s, music scholars had become increasingly aware of how such a framework overlooked elements of interpretation not specified in the score but quintessential to the music, including decisions about dynamics and timbre, nuances of timing and values negotiated between performers in ensemble music.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Piano performance, just to take one example, contains many deviations from the regularity of score information in terms of note durations, intensities, and articulation (note offset-onset relations), in addition to voicing (synchrony among notated simultaneities) and foot pedalling (Palmer 1996, p.438). A performer brings to music a variety of sources and perspectives. He or she will, for example, have a conceptual interpretation of the music, and will position it within a conception of a certain stylistic period. Clarke (1988) seeks to prove it is the performer's interpretation of the musical structure that generates expressive variations by the observation that musicians are able to perform a piece of music in a highly similar way (measured digitally) without rehearsal even after a number of years have passed. This suggests that expression is

In China, as the actor took to the commercial stage as interpreter of *chuanqi* texts from the Yongzheng reign onwards, the literati similarly raised the stakes in what was once spontaneous musical composition in song into Ye Tang's 'orthodox' archival scores. In chapter one I argued that through various acts of archival, literary and political elites recorded their view on correct practice, they also competed with actors for mediating authority over texts in performance. More importantly, a sense developed that, when it came to literary theatre, professional troupes were ill-equipped to execute correct practice. The Kun lyric was, the literati felt, the domain of the intellectual elite, a feeling probably experienced most strongly by newly successful urbanites hoping to demonstrate their membership of that elite through connoisseurship.

The modern fear that 'traditional' Kunqu practice might be threatened with extinction has given rise to an anxiety over its loss, adding to the perceived value of both its archive and repertoire. Institutional and policy frameworks (encouraged by UNESCO) have tended to emphasise these notions of 'preservation' and 'loss,' an attitude connected to the writing of Kunqu histories which presuppose a performance tradition that is fixed and unchanging. They also explicitly encourage practitioners and policy-makers to regard the tasks of 'preservation' and 'innovation' as entirely separate duties.

In his afterword to the *Dashi shuoxi*, its publisher Ye Zhaoxin reiterates the general policy of the political establishment in China that Kunqu should 'walk with two legs' 两条腿走路, one in the traditional and one in the innovative as 'separate pillars facing the same direction'.<sup>208</sup>

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closely related to the performer's mental representation of the musical piece, rather than its score.

<sup>208</sup> Ke Jun, the youngest master in the set and head of the Jiangsu Province Performing Arts Group and former head of the its subsidiary the Jiangsu Province Kunqu Theatre (hereafter referred to as the Nanjing troupe), has said he disagrees with the 'walk with two legs' policy. The future, he argues, is for traditional Kunqu to face one direction and avant-garde Kunqu to face another.

Ming-Qing Kunqu is just like Tang *shi*, Song *qu* and Yuan *qu* poetry; or Ming-Qing *chuanqi*, Ming-Qing furniture, Ming-Qing gardens; its transmitters should cautiously preserve and continue it. As for modern Kunqu, innovators can reform and develop without caution. The objective is not the same. You should treat each problem according to its needs, be clear of your target. (262)

However, this policy of separating the tasks of ‘preservation’ and ‘innovation’ as entirely incompatible duties obscures the creative mechanisms by which traditional choreography is adapted and innovated.

The ‘rigorousness’ of Kunqu’s traditional choreography accentuates the significance of such omissions, additions and changes. As the Jiangsu troupe *xiaosheng* actor Qian Zhenrong, told me, ‘sometimes each actor, according to their own constant process, will have their own understanding, their own ideas. From an overall style perspective, [he/she] will deliberately insert some of their own stylistic material.’ The decisions on how to interact with the choreography routine, and on which teacher’s movement to use at which moment, becomes itself a channel of communication between actor and audience.

In my analysis of the playlet *Jing meng*, I demonstrated how practitioners innovated at the performance micro-level in order to compete for authority within a *luzi* that has already become ‘fixed’ to a pattern of movement by all who perform it. Characterisation and dramatic tension were derived not just from the performance, but the relationship of that performance to convention as established by both contemporaries and antecedents to a very precise degree. In such a case, since broad-stroke change might attract the charge of being untraditional or inauthentic, the actor instead strives to

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e.g. <http://ent.sina.com.cn/j/2014-05-29/15204150305.shtml> (accessed 7/12/15)

innovate at a level of detail that personalises the tradition rather than rejects it in favour of something new. In order to establish a position as the mediator of tradition, even of an invented tradition, the actor must authenticate his *luzi* by sourcing it lines of transmission, appealing to what Derrida calls the ‘irrepressible desire to return to the origin [...] the most archaic place of absolute commencement’ (1998, p.91). This authentication can take the form of adducing the traces of past masters in the performance itself, the affirmation of genealogies, but also by the markers of their own creation.

In recent years, at the direction of the Ministry of Culture, but initiated by celebrity author Pai Hsien-yung, there has been encouragement for troupes to formalise teacher-pupil relationships with formal *baishi* 拜師 ceremonies, involving bowing by the students to the teachers, and the presentation of gifts by both students and mentors. In these situations, there is a clear expectation that the student follows the choreography (and sometimes the singing) of the teacher to whom they are formally attaching themselves. As a result, there has been observably increasing fixity, particularly within a lineage, but also between lineages. Fixity between lineages has also increasingly occurred either through the general recognition that a certain *luzi* is best (for example Cai Zhengren’s rendition of Tang emperor Minghuang in *The Palace of Eternal Life* 長生殿) or if it simply becomes the only *luzi* left (for example Liu Yilong’s *On the Pretext of Tea* 借茶). Many playlets in the repertoire were passed down in this manner by only one particular master of the *Chuan* generation.

However, my own research suggests that, for the *Chuan* generation, the *luzi* was more a pedagogy, a template—like the painting manual that teaches the artist to draw birds, flowers and other components of a picture—developing the skills and modular components necessary to develop new compositions. Authentic performance and painting, however, could be achieved without strict adherence to the template. Yao



Chuanxiang, notably, demonstrated different *luzi* to his pupils for the same playlet each time he taught it. Only in the 20th century, I argue, was it felt that authenticity was achievable by one single lineage.

But just as value of the late Ming painting manual lay in enabling new wealth a means to participate in the dilettante culture of the old, the recognisable *luzi*—with its renditions good and bad, conservative and edgy—allows new audiences to participate in a perceived elite culture. As well as being the format that appeals to a position in global categories, choreography is an entry-point within 21<sup>st</sup> century China, in particular one that is accessible to a generation of ears trained to western music. Connoisseurship proper of Kunqu—developed over many years of not just listening singing—remains a study of the character-word articulated in music, in textures of timbre in voice and sentiment. These ideals, though not immediately accessible, remain part of the appeal. So too for 21<sup>st</sup> century Kunqu is its UNESCO status and global positioning in equivalencies with European ballet and opera. Thus while on the surface a UNESCO designation plays to postmodern obsessions with authenticity and postcolonial ones with national or indigenous culture, the real vitality of the Kunqu revival derives from social posturing, what Carlitz describes as ‘a competitive mastery of the past’ (2005, p.293) in a field solidly established by the arcons of culture in a globally-influenced, but specifically Chinese, cultural cosmos.

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