Commentary, Illustration, and Cross-Generic Writing in Paired Editions of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji

Yinghui Wu
Washington University in St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/art_sci_etds

Part of the East Asian Languages and Societies Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Arts & Sciences at Washington University Open Scholarship. It has been accepted for inclusion in Arts & Sciences Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Washington University Open Scholarship. For more information, please contact digital@wumail.wustl.edu.
Commentary, Illustration, and Cross-Generic Writing in Paired Editions of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji

by

Yinghui Wu

A dissertation presented to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Washington University in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2014
St. Louis, Missouri
## Contents

**List of Figures** iii  

**Acknowledgements** v  

**Introduction** 1  

Chapter 1: Originality and Imitation: Reimagining *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* in Paired Editions 25  

1.1 A Triad of Meaning: Commentary, Play Text, and Illustration 27  
1.2 “Li Zhuowu” and Performative Commentary 36  
1.3 “Poetic Pictures” and Evocative Illustrations 59  
1.4 Conclusions 100  

Chapter 2: Originality and Excess: Musical and Visual Supplements in Paired Editions 102  

2.1 Musical Supplements in Ling Mengchu’s Edition 103  
2.2 Visual Expansion of the Zhuding Edition 129  
2.3 Conclusions 150  

Chapter 3: Originality and Authority: *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* as Correlated Books of Genius 152  

3.1 *Congshu, Qishu*, and *Caizi shu* 153  
3.2 Different Commentarial Personae, Similar Approaches 162  
3.3 Conclusions 197  

Chapter 4: Originality and Parody: Eight-Legged Essays on *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* 199  

4.1 *Baguwen*: Performance within Ideological Limits 208  
4.2 Playful Eight-Legged Essays and Subversive Role-Playing 213  
4.3 Complexities of *Qing* in Playful Eight-Legged Essays 219  
4.4 Conclusions 237  

**Epilogue** 238  

**Appendices**  

1 Selected Playful Eight-Legged Essays on *Xixiang ji* 245  
2 Playful Eight-Legged Essays on *Pipa ji* 252  

**Bibliography** 255
## List of Figures

2.1. Pages from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 39
2.2. Illustration 17 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 61
2.3. Illustration 8 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Pipa ji*, RYT edition 64
2.4. Illustration 11 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 66
2.5. Illustration 12 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 66
2.6. Illustration 13 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 67
2.7. Illustration 14 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 68
2.8. Illustration 15 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 68
2.9. Illustration 16 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 69
2.10. Illustration 18 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 70
2.11. Illustration 19 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 71
2.12. Illustration 20 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 72
2.13. Illustration 3 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Pipa ji*, RYT edition 75
2.14. Illustration 9 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Pipa ji*, RYT edition 75
2.15. Illustration 11 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Pipa ji*, RYT edition 76
2.16. Illustration 17 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Pipa ji*, RYT edition 76
2.17. Illustration from *Chongjiao Pipa ji*, JZZ edition 82
2.18. Illustration from *Chongjiao Bei Xixiang ji*, JZZ edition 82
2.19. Illustration 13 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Pipa ji*, RYT edition 84
2.20. Illustration 4 from *Dingjuan Chen Meigong piping Pipa ji*, SJT edition 88
2.21. Illustration 2 from *Dingjuan Chen Meigong piping Pipa ji*, SJT edition 88
2.22. Illustration 6 from *Dingjuan Chen Meigong piping Pipa ji*, SJT edition 89
2.23. Illustration 12 from *Dingjuan Chen Meigong Piping Pipa ji*, SJT edition 90
2.24. Illustration 5 from *Dingjuan Chen Meigong Piping Xixiang ji*, SJT edition 90
2.25. Illustration 1 from *Dingjuan Chen Meigong Piping Xixiang ji*, SJT edition 93
2.26. Illustration 2 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition 93
2.27. Illustration (left half-folio) for “Bianhe qu”, *Qiyan Tangshi huapu* 95
2.28. “Bianhe qu” (right half-folio), *Qiyan Tangshi huapu* 95
2.29. Illustration (left half-folio) for “Junzhong jishi”, *Qiyan Tangshi huapu* 96
2.30. “Junzhong jishi” (right half-folio), calligraphy attributed to Dong Qichang, *Qiyan Tangshi huapu* 96
2.31. Illustration 7 from *Dingjuan Chen Meigong Piping Xixiang ji*, SJT edition 99
3.1. Illustration 4 from *Xixiang ji*, LMC edition 117
3.2. Illustration 6 from *Xixiang ji*, LMC edition 119
3.3. Illustration 14 from *Xixiang ji*, LMC edition 120
3.4. Illustration 10 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition 121
3.5. Illustration 9 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition 122
3.6. Illustration 14 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition 124
| 3.7. | Illustration 13 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition | 125 |
| 3.8. | Illustration 2 from *Xixiang ji*, LMC edition | 126 |
| 3.9. | Illustration 8 from *Xixiang ji*, LMC edition | 127 |
| 3.10. | Illustration 18 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition | 128 |
| 3.11. | Illustration 1 from *Zhuding Xixiang ji*, ZD edition | 134 |
| 3.12. | Illustration 2 from *Zhuding Xixiang ji*, ZD edition | 135 |
| 3.13. | Illustration 1 from *Xixiang ji*, LMC edition | 136 |
| 3.15. | Illustration 5 from *Xixiang ji*, LMC edition | 139 |
| 3.16. | Illustration 10 from *Zhuding Xixiang ji*, ZD edition | 140 |
| 3.17. | Illustration 1 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition | 146 |
| 3.18. | Illustration 10 from *Zhuding Pipa ji*, ZD edition | 147 |
| 3.19. | Illustration 19 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition | 148 |
| 3.20. | Illustration 38 from *Zhuding Pipa ji*, ZD edition | 149 |
Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the patient guidance of Professor Robert E. Hegel. He initiated me into the fascinating world of late imperial Chinese literature and culture. His scholarship has been a constant source of inspiration during my study and writing. His careful reading and criticism of every draft have helped me avoid many embarrassing mistakes and improve my argument. I am most grateful to have Dr. Hegel as my mentor during my years at Washington University in St. Louis. He will always be the epitome of the kind of scholar and teacher that I aspire to be.

Particular thanks go to Professor Beata Grant, for sharing her knowledge in Chinese poetry and women’s writing and for warmly supporting me for every progress I make; to Professor Steven Miles, for teaching me the methods of historical research; to Dr. Emma Kafalenos, for sharing her expertise in image and text relationships; to Professors Robert Henke and Jamie Newhard for willingly taking their valuable time to be my committee members; and to Professors Patricia Sieber, Ma Zhao, and Guo Yingde for discussing with me during the early stages of my work and offering enlightening comments.

Thanks are due to my friends for their discussions and input, particularly Xu Yunjing, Alexander Wille, Wang Wei, and Li Fangyu. I would like to thank Deb Ehrstein of Washington University Olin Library for helping me acquire illustrations from a rare edition of Xixiang ji in the Shanghai Library, and Tony Chang of the East Asian Library for helping me in locating sources. A special thank you goes to Wang Guojun for giving me last-minute help in making copies from an edition of Pipa ji in Yale University Library. Tan Yanbing helped me in printing out and submitting the final draft.
I owe a great deal to my brother Wu Yingji for his love and support, as he took care of my parents during their illnesses while I was away. My husband Yang Tianhe shared my happiness and frustration at every stage of this project. He is the first person with whom I discuss my tentative ideas, and has always served as a good-humored critic and patient listener. To him this dissertation is affectionately dedicated.
Introduction

To establish one’s unique voice is what they called “original color” (*bense*).

自成一家言，謂之本色。

—Ling Mengchu, *Tanqu zazha* 譚曲雜劄 (Random Notes on Drama)\(^1\)

In his *Random Notes on Drama*, the critic Ling Mengchu 凌濛初 (1580-1644) stresses the importance for dramatists to find the unique way of verbal expression that fits each character in a play. In the previous Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) when drama was not yet tainted with pedantry, Ling states, professional entertainers staged plays that were accessible to audiences from all walks of life. The speeches and arias of characters include the humorous “winsome sayings”, the witty and unexpected “smart sayings”, and the words that convey a person’s unique way of speaking, which were called “original color” in the Yuan. In comparison, Ling laments the plays of the current dynasty, the Ming (1368-1644), were so fraught with literary embellishments and archaic allusions, to the extent that “maids with painted faces” and “errand-running servants with wild whiskers” talked as if they had spent years studying the Classics and the histories.\(^2\)

Although Ling discusses the meaning of “original color” in a specific context, the passage suggests that authenticity, propriety, and individuality are all central to the cultural meanings of “original color” in Ming drama criticism (to be elaborated later). In addition, “to establish one’s unique way of speaking”, could serve as an apt metaphor for the new cultural ideal of the Ming

---


2 Ibid, 259. For the Ming literati’s idealization of the Yuan as a golden age for drama, see Patricia Sieber, *Theaters of Desire*, 107, 109-10.
elites, namely, originality created by inherent talent and sensibilities that differentiate one’s self and works from those of the rest.

“Original color” and other key terms in drama criticism of the Ming are the starting point of my discussion of originality as a cultural ideal contested, manipulated, and appropriated by various social groups in the production of dramatic texts in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century China. Concepts that enjoyed a high degree of visibility in the period, such as bense 本色 (original color), qu 趣 (charm, lively appeal) and caiqing 才情 (innate talent and sensibilities) all have a dimension of original creation, but there were no concepts that are the exact equivalent of “originality”, nor do I intend to treat “originality” on a purely conceptual level. Rather, originality is chosen because it best encompasses the shared value of various social and aesthetic discourses that treated the primary, innate, or the non-derivative or the inimitable as a calibrator of excellence. In addition, the pursuit of originality was implicated in the social practices of drama criticism, the production of play texts, and the reconfiguration of old literary works according to the fashions and trends of the contemporary world of woodblock imprints. Those social processes complicated what it meant to be original. In fact, they created a field of contested “originalities” that could be an elite ideal of authentic creativity, a marketable social capital, or a margin of competitiveness among peer book producers.

In the following chapters that study new imprints of old dramatic works, I attempt a fresh look at originality as something to be intentionally produced via artificial formulas and contrived to happen through creative derivation. It was a way of effective recycling that makes calculated changes to impart a sense of freshness and up-to-date appeal. Given the degree of ingenuity involved and of the success in enticing readers, the techniques of generating new meanings for each new imprint cannot be dismissed as not original, though it is a type of originality that was
bound up with its antitheses of imitation and plagiarism. To examine the diverse manifestations of originality is to reveal the cultural forces at work that pushed the literati to valorize individualistic or unique expressions in late sixteenth and seventeenth century China, and to shed new light on printing in reshaping of the relationships between tradition and innovation, between private ownership of text and collective editorship, between ineffable creation and calculated reccompilation, and between the control of meanings in book production and the proliferation of meanings through interactive reading.

**Originality as the Social Cachet of the Elites**

This study covers the period of the “long seventeenth century”, spanning from about 1570 to 1720, including the last decades of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and the first of the Qing (1644-1911). The Ming-Qing transition caused turmoil but hardly broke off the continuous development of social mobility and cultural diversity. Although the present study focuses on the shifting manifestations of originality in drama criticism and publishing, similar phenomena were present in art, literature, and ways of living in this period. Between literati painting and painting manuals, between poetry and essays celebrated as spontaneous creations and published for study and emulation, between the lifestyle of a renowned man of taste and the guidebooks of connoisseurship, efforts were made to distinguish the former as original and superior and the latter as derivative and inferior. Such a distinction was key for the elites in maintaining their cultural status in face of the increasing number of people who sought to acquire artistic tastes, knowledge, and sensibility through books and other cultural objects.

However, there were no clear-cut boundaries between the elites as cultural pioneers and the non-elites as followers and imitators. In fact, to speak of the two social groups was highly problematic; each could be stratified into many levels and their boundaries became porous in the
late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Particularly in the late Ming (roughly 1570s—mid-1660s), the metropolitan areas of southeastern China—Suzhou, Nanjing, and the areas around them—expanded with unprecedented speed, while commerce and entertainment businesses there boomed in response to the demands of the new urban public. Many provincial landowning local elites moved from rural villages to towns and cities, and a large urban middle class that engaged in commerce and services also emerged. The thriving economy, rapid urbanization, and the increasing importance and power of merchants created both the economic conditions for the expansion of commercial publishing and a greater demand for printed texts. A greater variety of texts were published in the late Ming, including examination-essay collections, household encyclopedias, divination manuals, medical guides, and novels and dramas, etc. Studies of the intended audiences for late Ming texts suggested an expanding reading public. Many books claimed in their prefaces that they were for “all the four classes of people” (simin 四民) or for “commoners” (suren 素人), suggesting that editors and publishers were deliberately targeting an audience of readers who wanted guidebooks for social mobility.3 Such a marketing technique would not have worked unless such a mass audience actually existed. Indeed, with growing literacy in the late Ming society, people who had no previous access to printed materials began to participate in the consumption of books. For students, lower-degree holders, urban merchants, landowning peasants, and women from elite families, it became increasingly easy to find and purchase books in the market.

Meanwhile, writers from different social backgrounds were engaged in the production of reading materials. Among the increasing number of candidates who attained the lowest official degree of shengyuan but could not move higher in the civil examinations, many sought

alternative ways to attain elite status, by the display of wealth, education, social networks, and accomplishments in the literati arts. For example, as the research by J. P. Park on the Ming painting manuals shows, the knowledge and mastery of painting was an important marker that set an educated gentleman apart from the majority of the population. Initially, the publishers of painting manuals were educated men who failed in their examinations and never held office. Nevertheless, they enjoyed considerable local influence and possessed the resources to produce painting manuals that helped the uninitiated to expand their knowledge and refine their cultural sensibilities, and that publicized their own social networks and artistic achievements.\(^4\) Given the immense popularity of such manuals, commercial publishers soon collaborated with lesser-known artists to produce similar works. While leading critics such as He Liangjun 何良俊 (1506-1573) and Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568-1610) repeatedly attempted to draw the line between the true connoisseur from the common herd of art lovers, painting manuals pushed back against such distinctions by helping the aspiring painting hobbyist negotiate an artistic persona and subjectivity, which could then be leveraged in terms of class and power.\(^5\) In art as well as in literature, the emphasis on authenticity and originality was partially a reaction to the spread of literati culture and skills via print to a wider readership. To complicate the situation, some members of the elite took part in the publishing of know-how handbooks and plays, with the ostensible aims of edifying the public about the true standards of higher taste and to reinforce the distinction between the true elites and their emulators, but the circulation of their books as commodities could paradoxically undercut their professed goals.\(^6\) Such materials could be taken


\(^5\) Ibid, 213-14.

\(^6\) See Timothy Brook for discussion of the elite as “simultaneously agents of change as well as bulwarks against it”, “constantly rewriting the rules of taste”, and the “great artifice and ingenuity” in forging antique things
apart and recycled with a number of other materials completely beyond the authors’ control. The aura of originality that accompanied such books was not free from emulation either. But before a more detailed discussion of the qualities that were considered authentic and original in the Ming literati painting, poetry, and essays, and of the appropriation of such qualities by book producers, I will first turn to the establishment of originality as one of the central values in drama by critics who thereby emerged as cultural arbiters of their day.

*The Emphasis on Originality in Drama Criticism*

The thriving economy of the late Ming and the demand of the new urbanites for leisure entertainment also fostered a flourishing theater culture. A number of the elites also showed avid interest in writing, studying, and staging drama. The participation of those people, including eminent figures such as Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616), generated a form of theater called the *chuanqi 傳奇* drama, or the Southern musical drama, usually featuring a lengthy romance between passionate heroes and heroines, written with arias of intense lyric beauty and aesthetic subtlety. They boosted the status of drama, turning it into an intellectual pursuit and a refined art that gave the author a space of unfettered self-expression. Many of the playwrights were at the same time drama theorists and critics. Ling Mengchu, the writer we quoted from at the beginning of this chapter, was a renowned member of this group. They sought to establish a historical narrative for the development of dramatic forms, rank earlier and contemporary plays, and articulate their evaluative criteria for drama as literature and as performance. Drama criticism was a new arena for a writer to demonstrate his cultural accomplishments and expand his social network, and to establish his own position in the cultural milieu.

---

Before the mid-Ming, there was no systematic treatise on drama. Works on the *zaju* 雜劇, the Northern musical drama that flourished in the preceding Yuan dynasty and continued to appear in a modified form in the Ming, were merely scattered anecdotes about playwrights, discussions of the Northern musical modes, and miscellaneous collections of *qu* songs.\(^7\) By the time of the late Ming, a variety of works on both the Northern and Southern drama appeared. Xu Wei’s 徐渭 (1521-1593) *Nanci xulu* 南詞敘錄 (1559) outlines the evolution of the *nanxi* 南戲, the immediate predecessor of the *chuanqi* 單曲 drama, and compares its stylistic features to the Northern drama. Wang Jide’s 王驥德 (?- 1623) *Qulü* 曲律 is an ambitious project to lay down the rules of writing plays and the standards of drama criticism. Ling Mengchu’s *Tanqu zazha* is a shorter work with similar concerns. Besides, there are works that develop comprehensive systems to rank a large number of plays and their playwrights. Representative among them are Lü Tiancheng’s (1580-1618) *Qupin* 曲品 (Evaluation of Plays) and Qi Biaojia’s (1602-1645) *Yuanshantang qupin* 遠山堂曲品 (Yuanshantang’s Evaluation of Southern Plays) and *Yuanshantang jupin* 遠山堂劇品 (Yuanshantang’s Evaluation of Northern Plays).\(^8\) There are also collections of musical tunes by Shen Jing 沈璟 (1553-1610) and Xu Fuzuo 徐復祚 (1560?-1630?) that provided guidance for the composition of librettos, and texts by Chen Chongsui 沈寵

\(^7\) Those writings include: *Changlun* 唱論 (before 1341-1361) by Yannan Zhian 燕南芝庵, the first work that addressed the theory of vocal music and techniques of singing; *Qinglou ji* 青樓集 by Xia Tingzhi 夏庭芝 that described briefly the lives of courtesans in the big cities of the Yuan, among whom over 60 women were *zaju* actors; *Lugui bu* 錄鬼簿 by Zhong Sicheng 鍾嗣成 (around 1279-1360) that included an account of playwrights and play list of Yuan *zaju*; *Lugui bu xubian* 錄鬼簿續編 by Jia Zhongming 賈仲明 (1343-1422); *Zhongyuan yinyun* 中原韻 by Zhou Deqing 周德清 (1277-1365), a work on the phonology of *zaju* music; *Taihe zhinin pu* 太和正音譜 by Zhu Quan 朱權. Collections of *sanqu* include *Yangchun baixue* 阳春白雪 and *Taiping yuefu* 太平樂府 by Yang Chaoying 楊朝英 (1341-1370); *Shengshi xinsheng* 盛世新聲 (1517), *Cilin zhaiyan* 詞林摘艷 (1525), *Yongxi yuefu* 庚熙樂府 (1566), all collections of selected tunes from *zaju* and *sanqu*. Ye Changhai, *Zhongguo xiju xue shigao* 中國戲劇學史稿 (Shanghai:Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1986), 34-81.

\(^8\) For a detailed study of the ranking systems, see Shen Jing, “Ranking Plays and Playwrights in Traditional Chinese Drama Criticism”, *CHINOPERL Papers* 31 (2012), 1-36.
綏 (1645) that taught techniques of singing. Those books demonstrate that drama became a serious subject for the Ming literati who actively produced the knowledge about *zaju* 雜劇, *nanxi* 南戲, and *chuanqi* 傳奇 genres and the norms governing each genre that we take for granted today. The treatises of drama criticism shared a special feature that caught my interest, namely, that authors often attempted to articulate their standards for evaluating plays through a pair of dramatic works—*Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*.

*Xixiang ji* dramatizes the tale of a young couple, the brilliant student Zhang Gong and the beautiful maiden Cui Yingying (the daughter of a deceased government minister), who fall passionately in love at first sight. With its vivid depiction of the lovers’ repeatedly thwarted desire, sexual consummation with the aid of the maid Hongniang, and ultimate happy union in wedlock, *Xixiang ji* acquired the controversial status of a lover’s bible and a book of lechery in

---

9 The most commonly known *zaju* format is the Yuan *zaju*, the Northern style of music drama that emerged in the thirteenth century. The Yuan *zaju* has a regular structure of four acts. Each act consists of a long suit of *qu* 曲 (from eight to twenty melodies in all) in various modes. All four suits of the four acts are to be sung by one and the same role type, and thus by the same actor or actress. To these fours suits, one or two *xiezi* 楞子 (wedge) could be added. However, *Xixiang ji*, consisting of five plays of four acts, is five times as long as a normal *zaju* and does not follow the regular *zaju* form closely. At around the same time when the Northern *zaju* emerged, in the South, especially at Wenzhou, there developed another form of drama, referred to as *xiwen* 戲文 or *nanxi* 南戲. In the 1360s, *Pipa ji* firmly established *nanxi* in the literary scene and transformed it from a regional genre into a new genre with elegant language, greater dramaturgical sophistication, and wider popularity—the *chuanqi* 傳奇. *Pipa ji* a transitional work studied by both *nanxi* and *chuanqi* scholars. The term *nanxi* is sometimes used loosely in the broad sense of “the Southern style of drama,” especially when the time reference is extended beyond the early Ming to include *chuanqi*, the later sophisticated variety of Southern drama. Two more labels, *nanci* 南詞 and *nanqu* 南曲, with all their multiplicity of meanings, have been used by traditional Chinese scholars to denote Southern drama as a whole, of which *nanxi* (in its narrower sense) is a part. Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft, *A Guide to Chinese literature*, trans. Lloyd Haft (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan Press, 1997), 172-76; William H. Nienhauser Jr., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 14-16, 774-79, 636.

10 *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* were the most frequently reprinted plays in seventeenth century China. There were approximately sixty different editions of *Xixiang ji* appearing in the Ming, forty-five of which are still extant; Chen, *Mingkan Xixiang ji*, 8. In the case of *Pipa ji*, forty-some Ming editions were said to have existed and thirty-four of them survive, housed in the libraries all over the world. Hsiao Li-ling, “Wan Ming banhua yu xiqu he huihua de guanxi—yi *Pipa Ji* weili” (MA thesis, Zhongguo wenhua daxue, 1991), 33-35. The number of extant editions of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* counted here are full-text ones, excluding drama-miscellanies and *qupu* collections that contain excerpts from the two plays. See also Carlitz, “Printing as Performance”, 271.
premodern China.\textsuperscript{11} *Pipa ji* presents the story of Cao Bojie, who was caught between his official career and his obligations to his wife and parents, and of his wife Zhao Wuniang who endured great hardships to serve Cai’s parents.\textsuperscript{12} The play dramatizes the conflicting moral demands on the individual and the physical and emotional ordeals they cause, which had great resonance among late imperial audiences. In the Ming critical discourses on drama, *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* were paraded as examples of inimitable genius and calibrators of excellence. They were both original works and “the origin” of all future transformations of drama. The comparative ranking of the two plays and the elaboration of their respective characteristics became a vehicle to demonstrate the critics’ extraordinary insight into the complexity and subtlety of playwriting. The critic’s ability to voice fresh opinions on this matter proved him to be a man of “unique perspectives” who did not blindly follow others, a definitive quality of the true cultural elites in the late Ming.

*Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* emerged as models of originality in the literati critics’ attempts to adapt traditional literary terms to drama and to elucidate what they mean by those terms. For instance, *bense* 本色 (original color) first appeared in Liu Xie’s *Wenxin diaolong* (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons) as a color metaphor to denote the primary ground provided by the Classics for all forms of literary writing. For any search for change or novelty to be meaningful, the writer needs to base it on the primary ground of the normative texts.\textsuperscript{13} In other words, the originality of literature is based on literature’s

\textsuperscript{11} Scholars have dated *Xixiang ji* to around 1350 or later. The playwright Wang Shifu (ca. 1230-1300) was believed to have written at least part of the *Xixiang ji* that survives in its present form. West and Idema, “Introduction”, in *The Story of the Western Wing*, ed. and trans. West and Idema (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 23.

\textsuperscript{12} *Pipa ji* is the work of Gao Ming (1305?-1371?). The play was probably written between 1348 and early 1368. Jean Mulligan, “Introduction”, *The Lute*, trans. Jean Mulligan (New York: Columbia University Press), 8.
origins. When drama critics employed the term *bense*, they often mean one of these things: a form of expression originating from the authentic self, an appropriate language that fits the specific demands of drama and dramatic characters, or the unaffected manner of presentation reminiscent of drama’s original form in the Yuan dynasty. Although the three meanings of *bense* appear to stress a return to various origins (personal, generic, historical) rather than the pursuit of novelty, *bense* in the context of drama criticism ultimately still carried the implication of the *Wenxin diaolong*, namely that a return to the origin is the essential step for a truly distinctive and meaningful change. Xu Wei, Tang Xianzu, Lü Tiancheng and Ling Mengchu’s varied remarks on *bense* all suggest this point. Xu Wei praises the *nanxi* drama as full of “original color” and valued the parts of *Pipa ji* that seem to “flow from one’s heart”\(^{14}\). He regards *bense* as stemming from the true self and its opposite, *xiangse* 相色, as the substitute of the true self.\(^{15}\) Therefore, the plays of “original color”, such as *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*, are set apart from mediocre works that suffer from their authors’ display of learned sophistication. Xu Wei’s “original color” is similar to Tang Xianzu’s concept of “authentic color”, which has the power to deeply move the readers because it embodies the genuine feelings of the author.\(^{16}\) Although Ling Mengchu traced *bense* to a unique way of speaking for each character in the Yuan drama, he also recognizes the close relation of *bense* representation to true feelings. He criticized the Wujiang 吳江 school of dramatists for their “replication” (*jiaoxi* 剿袭) of a highly ornate and pedantic style, the result being that a thousand pieces all look the same. All their plays are devoid of any lines of “original

---


\(^{15}\) See Xu Wei’s preface for *Chongke dingzheng Yuanben pidian huayi Bei Xixiang*, in Chen Xuyao, *Mingkan Xixiang ji*, 119.  

\(^{16}\) *Tang Xianzu quanji*, ed. Xu Shuofang (Beijing: Beijing guji, 1999), 2046.
color” and any words of “true feelings”. In Ling’s mind, dogged emulation and unnatural expressions go hand in hand, while works of original color certainly should not blindly copy an established model. In his treatise, *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* are two works that excel in “original color”; contemporary playwrights, including Tang Xianzu, had attempted to learn from them but were not always successful.\(^\text{17}\) Likewise, Lü Tiancheng sees *bense* as the opposite of imitation (*mule* 傅勒). He believes that it is wrong to equate *bense* with a plain style that resembles colloquial speech. Instead, any deliberate effort to fake artlessness destroys *bense*. The real *bense* contains “distinct instantaneous spirit and charm” (別有機神情趣) that can hardly be imitated.\(^\text{18}\)

Lü’s comments link “original color” to an elusive quality in drama—*qu* 趣, that is highly dependent on individual creativity. *Qu* (charm, gusto), a term from poetry and painting criticisms, is the elusive and ineffable charm of art that permeates an art work but can not be pinned down to the use of certain words, sounds, or images. The best description of *qu* came from the Song critic Yan Yu 嚴羽 (early to mid thirteenth century). His *Canglang shihua* 滄浪詩話 (Canglang’s Remarks on Poetry) indicates that “in the stirring and excitement of their poetry, the high Tang poets were like “antelopes that hang by their horns, leaving no tracks to be followed” (盛唐諸人惟在興趣,羚羊掛角, 無跡可求). In their works “the words are exhausted but the meaning is never exhausted” (言有盡而意無窮).\(^\text{19}\) Yan Yu’s *qu* as a particular way of enlightened expression was taken over by the Ming literati under the influence of Wang Yangming’s (1472-1529) philosophy of the Mind that emphasized intuitive perception.

In the Ming, *qu* as an ideal was applied to the connoisseurship of artworks, objects, and people.

---

\(^\text{17}\) Ling, *Tanqu zazha*, 253.


\(^\text{19}\) Owen, *Chinese Literary Thought*, 406.
For writers like Tang Xianzu and Yuan Hongdao, the *qu* of writing is inseparable from the individual who produces it; it directly reflects a person of unusual personality and sensibilities.

In drama criticism, *Xixiang ji* was often considered as prevailing in *qu*—a lively spirit, humor, and wit that naturally energizes the entire play, whereas *Pipa ji* was regarded as full of *wei*, a subtle, enduring taste worthy of prolonged appreciation.\(^2^0\) Lü Tiancheng summarized the difference between *zaju* and *chuanqi* as that between the charming spirit of *qu* and the lasting flavor of *wei*.\(^2^1\) In a comment attributed to Chen Jiru (1558-1639), Chen spoke of *Pipa ji* as “a writing of bland flavor” but “its taste, charm, and spirit are revealed precisely in the blandness” (琵琶之文淡矣, 而其有味、有致、有神, 正于淡中見之).\(^2^2\) As we will further elaborate, discourses on *qu* and *wei* reflect a heightened interest in distinctive talent and sensibilities of individual writers.

While *bense* and *qu/wei* primarily describe the distinctive qualities of a dramatic work, *caiqing* (innate talent and sensibilities) is the concept that directly locates such qualities in an individual of extraordinary talent. Hu Yinglin (1551-1602) and Wang Jide are two

---

\(^{20}\) *Qu* (charm, lively appeal) and another term *wei* (flavor) are descriptive terms with a high degree of ambiguity and flexibility, often attached to more substantial terms like *qing* 情, *jing* 景, *yi* 意, *li* 理 or *jing* 境 to form critical phrases; they were deliberately left “insubstantial” (*xu* 虛) and indescribable. They could be used together, as in Sikong Tu’s comment on Wang Wei’s poetry: “*quwei* is limpid and calm, like fresh breeze out of the cavern of a mountain” (趣味澄澹, 若清風之出岫), yet there was also slight differences between the two. Etymologically, *qu* has to do with action or tendency to act, or a sense of urgency to take action. Whereas *wei* stems from a gustatory metaphor, meaning flavor, first introduced into literary criticism by Zhong Rong. The grasp of *qu* in a work emphasizes the reader’s immediate and intuitive response, a state of being transfixed by the stimulating, delightful, or amusing qualities of the work. It is the instant encounter of the vital energy of the reader with that of the author. *Wei* implies gradual crystallization of the flavor of the work through prolonged or repeated appreciation, and it requires effort and expertise. It even conjures up the picture of a solitary activity, with the reader poring over an artwork for a long time to distinguish and articulate its *wei*. In Chinese poetic tradition there was the tendency to admire the “bland flavor” of poems as the “ultimate flavor”, a kind of distilled blandness that embodies a lofty, untrammelled poetic state. Qiu Meiqiong, “Qu yu wei zuowei gudian shilun shenme fanchou bianxi”, *Shehui kexue jia* 109 (2004): 148-150; See also the entry on *wei* in Owen, *Chinese Literary Thought*, 593-94.

\(^{21}\) Lü, *Qupin*, 1.

primary advocators of caiqing, and their assessment of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji in terms of their authors’ talent and sensibilities are representative. Hu Yinglin first regards “immense talent and sensibilities” as one of the reasons for the popularity of the two plays in his time. He particularly admires Wang Shifu (presumably the author of Xixiang ji), thinking of him comparable to the most ingenious poets such as Cao Zhi and Li Bai. His conclusive remarks pronounce Pipa ji slightly falling short of Xixiang ji in terms of caiqing:

西廂主韻度風神,太白之詩也。琵琶主名理倫教,少陵之作也。西廂金元世習,而琵琶特創規鑊,無古無今,似尤難。至才情雖琵琶大備,故當讓彼一籌也

While Hu acknowledges that Pipa ji as the immediate predecessor of the chuanqi drama is a highly original work in its own right, he believes that author’s talent as reflected in Xixiang ji is greater, though Xixiang ji did not initiate a new dramatic form, as Pipa ji did.

Wang Jide reserves the term caiqing for a handful of extraordinary playwrights, especially for Wang Shifu and Tang Xianzu. He praises Wang Shifu for his “well-weighted talent and sensibility” (斟酌才情) and “appropriate use of embellishments” that made Xixiang ji “surpass its predecessors and outshine its followers—a peerless work in history” (令前無作者,后掩來哲,遂擅千古絕調). He metes out a similar comment on Tang Xianzu, whose “talent and sensibility has captured the samadhi of maintaining a balance between simplicity and...

23 Hu Yinglin, Shaoshi shanfang bicong (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), 556.
24 Ibid, 562.
25 Ibid, 563.
26 Wang Jide, “Xin Jiaozhu guben Xixiang ji zixu”, in Chen, Ming kan Xixiang ji, 132.
sophistication, lushness and plainness, elegance and rusticity” (其才情在淺深、濃淡、雅俗之間，為獨得三昧). Wang puts great weight on a writer’s talent, in particular those who know how to appropriately exercise their talent to the best effect. Although Wang considers Pipa ji slightly inferior to Xixiang ji, as Hu Yinglin does, he still regards each the most excellent work in its own genre and the standard for later plays to aspire to. Hu and Wang’s highlight of talent and sensibilities are symptomatic of the stress on individual creativity in this period. Since talent and sensibilities primarily come from an inborn nature and personality, outstanding literary works, such as Xixiang ji and Pipa ji, are primarily the creations of great geniuses. The “original color” of expressions, the lively spirit of qu, and the lasting flavor of wei are all but the natural outflow from subjects of authentic feelings and ingenious perception. In a word, if we are to look for consistency among the Ming drama critics in their varied discussions of bense, qu/wei, and caiqing, it is their common search for a definitive factor that made some dramatic works such examples of originality works that they can hardly be imitated or surpassed.

The literati who sought to establish comprehensive systems of ranking plays more openly celebrated Xixiang ji and Pipa ji as works of originality and the “origins” of zaju and chuanqi that all subsequent writings should look up to. In Lü Tiancheng’s Qupin that focuses on the chuanqi genre (hence the exclusion of Xixiang ji), he gives Pipa ji and its author Gao Ming special prominence by placing them in the highest category of shenpin (divine class), comparing Gao’s creation of new tunes to the mythological sage Cangjie’s original contribution

---

28 Ibid, 149.
of producing written scripts. The play’s diction is superb (gaojue 高絕), its representation is “Creator’s work” (huagong 化工) free from ordinary intentionality (wuxin 無心). In the ranking system, Pipa ji provides the criteria and the vocabulary for Lü to evaluate plays of lower classes, and the second- and third-rate plays’ derivativeness reinforces his assessment of Pipa ji’s originality. For example, Plays of the miaopin 妙品 (marvelous class) are presented as “measuring up to Pipa ji” (仰配琵琶) or “its style originates with Pipa ji” (此派從琵琶來); a contemporary play Fenqian ji 分錢記 (The Divided Money) placed at the “higher of the higher” category (上上 shangshang) is described as “completely resembling Pipa ji in spirit and air” (全效琵琶, 神色逼似), whereas the Yuyu ji 玉魚記 (the Jade Fish) at the “higher of the lower” ( xiashang 下上) receives the comment that “its first half imitates Pipa ji to the extent of copying its pattern—detestable” (前半摹倣琵琶, 近套, 可厭). The evaluation of Li Kaixian’s 李開先 (1502-1568) Baojian ji (the Precious Sword) as jupin 具品 (competent class) includes an anecdote about Li asking the eminent Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590) “how is my play compared to Pipa ji”, further indicating Pipa ji as a venerated model among the Ming playwrights. The answer Wang gave only confirms the inadequacy of Li’s writing and indirectly supports Lü’s judgment of his work as merely in the “competent class”.

In Qupin, writers (and their works) from before the Jiajing reign (1522-1566) are divided into four classes, shenpin (divine class), miaopin (marvelous class), nengpin (accomplished class), and jupin (competent class), in descending order. Later playwrights and their plays are divided into three main categories, shang (higher), zhong (middle), and xia (lower), each of which is further divided into three subcategories by doubling up theses terms, such as shangshang (higher of the higher), shangzhong (middle of the higher), shangxia (lower of the higher), etc. For a detailed discussion of the ranking system, see Shen 1, 5.

Lü, Qupin, 167, 170, 205, 324.

Ibid, 190.
Similar to Lü, Qi Biaojia’s ranking system treats Xixiang ji and Pipa ji as epitomes of originality and other works as their followers and imitations. Although the two plays are not found in the extant copies (presumably they are in the missing miao category), they are by default the highest class. In Yuanshantang jupin, the zaju Jinhuang ji (The Gold Bracelet) in the ya category is described as “deliberately attempting to imitate Xixiang ji and parts of it achieve vivid resemblance” (刻意擬西廂, 亦有肖形處), but “once it begins to emulate it is far behind Xixiang ji” (然一經摹擬, 便不及西廂遠矣). Both Lü and Qi seem to posit a wide gap between Xixiang ji and Pipa ji and the rest of the plays: mediocre plays are disparaged as “poor imitation of Xixiang ji” (效顰西廂) or “replicating Pipa ji” (全襲琵琶), and good ones commended as “achieving its conception from Xixiang ji and receiving its breath from Mudan ting” (結胎於西廂, 得氣於牡丹亭), or as “following the example of Pipa ji” (效琵琶). There is only the difference between good imitation and bad imitation, but no play was free from the influence of the two masterworks, nor did any play reach their level of excellence. Notably, the drama critics were not against finding inspiration from existing models, but by highlighting the qualitative difference between the original and its copies, they had inadvertently elevated originality to a ideal difficult to attain and thus worth aspiring to. Consequently, Xixiang ji and Pipa ji enjoyed a special aura because of their irreproducibility.

---

32 Qi Biaojia has six qualitative categories, in descending order: miao (marvelous), ya (elegant), yi (untrammeled), yan (ornate), neng (accomplished), ju (competent). Shen, 22.

33 Qi Biaojia, Yuanshantang jupin, in Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng, vol.6, 149.

34 Qi Biaojia, Yuanshantang qupin, in Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng, vol.6, 81, 98, 126; Jupin, 171.

35 Despite the high regard Tang Xianzu’s Peony Pavilion enjoyed in the Ming, in the eyes of drama critics Peony Pavilion is an original yet flawed work, falling into a class slightly lower than Xixiang ji and Pipa ji. As Wang Jide articulated his assessment with the metaphor of role types, Xixiang ji and Pipa ji are the “female lead” and the “male lead”, while Peony Pavilion and the “Two Dreams” (Handan ji, Nanke ji) are like the “female supporting role” (xiaodan) who just made her debut—“sensuous and charming, she melts your soul and breaks your heart. But regrettably, she sometimes utters a few wrong words or take some false steps.” Wang Jide, Qulü, 159.
The leading critics who constructed the ideal of originality in play writing were diverse players in the late Ming cultural arena. Some had attained the highest *jinshi* degree and briefly served as officials, such as Shen Jing, Tang Xianzu, and Qi Biaojia, some were from prestigious families but never held official positions, such as Hu Yinglin and Lü Tiancheng, and there are those like Xu Wei and Wang Jide who were from humbler backgrounds, never attained office and whose fame completely rest on their artistic achievements. However, there were close associations among those members in several overlapping social circles as friends, mentors and protégés, members from the same county, etc. Through editing and commenting on one another’s works, they developed the common identity of drama critics and connoisseurs, experts in the one of the most sophisticated art forms of their day. In this context, the ideal of originality not only served to display their superb cultural perception, but also to distinguish socially those of “elite taste” from the crowd identifying as lovers of dramatic literature and theater. The literati valorization of originality not only prevails in drama criticism, but also dominates the aesthetic values in poetry, essays, painting, etc. It is a new cultural paradigm with significant social implication. However, printers and editors quickly recognized the market value of original works, and their producing of fresh and distinctive editions brought out complex and contradicting dimensions of originality, a subject we will soon turn to.

*Originality as the Central Value in Art and Literature*

Katharine P. Burnett’s recent study highlighted “originality” as a central concept in seventeenth-century Chinese art theory and criticism. Although she emphatically treats the term *qi* 奇, she acknowledges that the discourse of originality had such close correlates as “authentic” or “genuine”, “new” and “timely” that all “highlight or valorize personal uniqueness and
prerogative”. The major theorists she identified as initiating the discourse of originality in art actually had a prevalent influence in literature as well. The iconoclastic philosopher Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602) established the link between an individual’s return to an innate, authentic state, or the “childlike mind”, and his ability to make original reflections on social and cultural conventions. His ideas are foundational to the pursuit of personal uniqueness and conceptual originality in the literary and visual arts. In an essay criticizing people who followed moral principles taught to them and who perpetuated them in writing, Li said, “What else can there be but phony men speaking phony words, doing phony things, writing phony writings?” In other words, really interesting writings are only possible when one is being true to oneself. Yuan Hongdao, a leading figure in the Gong’an 公安 school of art theorists and cultural critics, was deeply influenced by Li Zhi, and he argues that there are no set patterns to make writing new and original: one needs to drop various pretensions and “only express what others cannot express”. Li and Yuan were known for the distinctive styles of their essays with ideas that challenge various social and cultural conventions. Yuan also advocated a poetic ideal grounded in “innate personality and sensibilities” (xingling 性靈) of the individual and free from fixed formula. In traditional genres of literati writing such as poetry and prose, Li and Yuan and their followers stirred up an intellectual trend that highly values individual creativity and original expressions.

The art of literati painting and calligraphy was swept by an aesthetic of originality in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. According to Craig Clunas, the late Ming was the critical moment in making the “self-referential” picture the normative model in literati painting


38 Burnett, *Dimensions of Originality*, 95.
and art criticism. In such a model, the manner of representing is more important than the thing represented, and painting becomes primarily a “discursive object” that engages with and transforms the themes and styles of earlier painters.\(^{39}\) The most prominent art theorist and painter of the late Ming, Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636) brought the “self-referentiality” of art to a unprecedented degree by his search for the different and new. As Burnett observes, Dong is a painter who understands his “art-historical references” well but is unwilling to be restrained by them. He purposefully manipulated the motifs of earlier masters and introduced spatial disjunctions and other formal quirks that mark a unique new style. In addition, Dong took the theoretical lead in providing a new way of thinking about calligraphy that values “rawness” rather than skillfulness, and inaugurates the trend toward a free and “deformed” style best exemplified by the seventeenth century calligrapher Fu Shan.\(^{40}\) As the studies of Clunas, Burnett and Park suggest, the rise of originality as a radical ideal in art was at root a social issue: it is an attempt to differentiate one’s artistic taste from that of other art lovers, to prove one’s exclusive superiority and rise above the majority of the public. For cultural elites, such a distinction was particularly important in a time when the cultural capital and proof of elite status became objects of appropriation.

**Differentiated Manifestations of Originality in Print Culture**

The survey of originality as an ideal in literature and art as done above can shed light on the issue and, at the same time, restrict our vision. It primarily reflects the views of the higher reaches of the literati who prioritized individual creativity in each specific genre in order to sustain the hierarchy of the scholar-amateur and the professional artisan. This study introduces

---


\(^{40}\) Ibid, 207-208, 169, 209.
different manifestations of originality in the printing of dramatic works in late sixteenth and seventeenth century China. It aims to present the “differentiated uses and plural appropriations” of the discourse of originality in the hands of publishers, editors, commentators, and illustrators, etc. By using the term “appropriation”, I hope to make it clear that what I present here is not a “trickle-down” effect of elite taste. As Roger Chartier’s critique of a polar opposition between “elite” and “popular” culture suggests, it is necessary to go beyond attempts to “establish exclusive relationships between specific cultural forms and particular social groups”.41 Instead, this study shows that individuals of diverse social statuses and cultural levels participated in the social processes of making new imprints, including well-to-do literati publisher-cum-connoisseurs, anonymous men who edited or commentated on books for a living, commercial publishers, painters from the locally famous to the obscure. Living with a book market that constantly turned out new texts or fresh editions of old texts, they developed innovative strategies to reconfigure the original elements of various cultural forms, and invented new ways of relating text with text, text with image that are specific to printed books. Their practices complicated the meaning of originality by associating it with creative re-editing and imitation.

In her study of twentieth-century avant-garde art from the United States, art historian Rosalind Krauss argued that a pure form of originality was but a myth engendered by a collusive art market.42 Her point can apply equally well to China of the late Ming where claims to originality was as much an artistic imperative as a market demand. Although the painting of the “avant-garde” artist Dong Qichang was a luxury probably beyond the reach of many readers, there were wide demands for new imprints of plays or pictorial albums that vividly evoke the


fashions particular to their cultural moment. The printing of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* in a "combined" or parallel form, accompanied by a diverse range of commentaries and illustrations, which constitute the focus of this study, is one of the practices that answered this demand.

*Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*, the established pair of original plays in the eyes of drama critics, also appeared as a pair in the physical form of books, produced by publishers counting on the combined impact of the two peerless plays. Since the main texts of the plays provide little room for change, commentary and illustration are the places where publishers competed most sharply to persuade readers of the appeal and currency of their particular edition. In a strict sense, none of the editions considered in this study are purely “original”, each set of commentary and illustrations borrow widely from the current literary and visual fashions, and the recycling of certain motifs, texts, and pictures inevitably relates one edition to another. As a consequence, we must ask, why those books struck the late sixteenth and seventeenth century readers as new and intriguing? How did the book producers reorganize or reframe texts and images to stir up interest for old and familiar plays? How did readers’ perception of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* change, and how did the changes relate to the new modes of interacting with commentary and illustration introduced by those editions? What new dimensions of “originality” did book publishing bring out? Those are the questions I explore in the following chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the new printing format of the “paired edition” that shaped *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* as a pair with parallel commentary and illustration. The chapter focuses on the Rongyu tang 容與堂 edition of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* that not only appropriated the discourse of authentic originality from Li Zhi to create a “Li Zhuowu” persona with spontaneous and emotional interactions with the play text in the form of commentary, but that also created a unique set of illustrations through imitation of literati landscape paintings. Unlike previous
studies that discuss the bipartite relationship between the play text and the visual image, through the Rongyu tang edition I see commentary, play text, and illustration as constituting a tripartite relationship. The commentator and the illustrator’s interpretations of the main text display two reading distances and emotional reactions, which offer the reader multiple ways of looking at the plays. The necessity to shift between different reading modes and negotiate contrastive emotions heightens the challenge and pleasure in the reading process. I also compare the Rongyong tang edition with an earlier Jizhi zhai 繼志齋 edition and a later Shijian tang 師儉堂 edition, which reveals the Rongyu tang edition as a vital link between conventional modes of commentating and illustrating plays, and new printing practices that actively borrowed from multi-generic imprints of the same period.

Chapter 2 focuses on two “paired editions” that explore other distinctive ways of making commentary and illustration. Characteristically, they both use materials external and supplemental to Xixiang ji and Pipa ji to provide a new lens for looking at the plays. The literati editor Ling Mengchu regards the play text as a musical script and uses marginalia as an imagined forum for the discussion of techniques of composition and singing. The producer of the Zhuding 硃訂 (Collated in red ink) edition exploits minor details and supplementary poems to give a meaningful structure to large number of images he assembled from various sources, including those from Ling Mengchu’s edition. They “imported” a range of musical knowledge and visual materials into the editions to reshape the reading process into an eye-opening experience. A high degree of familiarity with the plays was taken for granted, and the readers were expected to see more, and to hear more: reading becomes an insatiable journey that ventures from the play proper to the peripheral, the supplementary, and the external.
Chapter 3 looks at the editing and commentary practices that reframed Xixiang ji and Pipa ji as caizi shu (books of genius). After the competitive book market forced out a range of new textual and visual strategies to reimagine Xixiang ji and Pipa ji, as examined in chapter 2 and 3, the late seventeenth century literati Jin Shengtan and Mao Lun initiated a new genre of personalized and elaborate commentary in the form of caizi shu. Although Jin’s Sixth Book of Genius (Xixiang ji) and the Maos’ Seventh Book of Genius (Pipa ji) were not preconceived as a pair, Mao Lun established intricate connections between his edition of Pipa ji and Jin’s edition of Xixiang ji by assuming the position of Jin’s legitimate successor and competitor. Through an effective use of the caizi discourse they free up the textual space for philosophical reflections, personal memories, reveries, and creative writing. The commentators assume complete authority over the play texts and encourage the readers to follow their examples by exploring their knowledge and imagination to generate original interpretations.

Chapter 4 examines a mode of creative writing that conveys readers’ interpretations of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji in the form of the eight-legged essay, the genre of the civil service examination essay. First appearing as a display of literati talent and flair, playful eight-legged essays became attached to Xixiang ji and Pipa ji editions since the 1700s. Playing with two literary conventions, it is a parody that combines creative expression with critical commentary. The playful eight-legged essay continues a trend set by caizi shu that displaces the main text with personal reflections, but it goes further by becoming autonomous writings. When attached to Xixiang ji and Pipa ji editions, they were the key to fulfill the need for new means of interactive reading.

In the competitive reproduction of dramatic texts in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, new configurations of text and text, and of commentary, play text, and image were
brought out in the printing of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*. Similar to what He Yuming argues in her study of the Ming miscellanies, I find that “variation was a generative and often quite self-conscious mechanism” for making something new, and a different way of constellating or framing extant texts and images could bring distinctively fresh reading experiences. As the deliberate pursuit of originality informed the practice in the arts—literature, painting, and decorative arts during the seventeenth century, the printing of many books often extracted new elements from the arts to make its own meaningful innovations. These books in turn called forth new skills of intertextual, cross-generic, and cross-media imagination and interpretation. While seventeenth century readers who possessed those skills could quickly recognize a wonderfully new edition of their familiar plays, we as modern readers need to retrace the small, incremental steps of change by books producers to understand what makes those books so fresh and intriguing.

---

Chapter One

Originality and Imitation: Reimagining Xixiang ji and Pipa ji in Paired Editions

Lyrics and songs flourished in the Jin and Yuan dynasties. Among them the Northern drama *Xixiang ji* and the Southern drama *Pipa ji* were particularly extraordinary and unprecedented works....Staying at my cottage and garden with plenty of free time on my hands, I made a rough editing of the play, giving a bit of explanation at the upper margin for the points based on uncommon sources, and asked it to be carved together with *Pipa ji*.

詞曲盛于金元，而北之西廂，南之琵琶，尤擅場絕代，余園廬多暇，粗為點定，其援據稍僻者，稍加詮釋，題於卷額，合琵琶記而刻之。

― “Longdong shannong”, Preface to *Chongjiao Bei Xixiang ji* ¹

Both *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* are writings infused with spirit. Reading *Xixiang ji* makes you laugh; reading *Pipa ji* makes you shed tears.

西廂、琵琶俱是傳神文字，然讀西廂令人解頤，讀琵琶令人酸鼻。

― “Chen Jiru”, *Dingjuan Chen Meigong xiansheng piping Pipa ji*

My survey of the late Ming drama criticism has shown that *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* was conceived as original and path breaking in their respective genres. From the critics’ point of view, they were the progenitors of later plays and the standards for evaluating plays. However, their notion of originality is limited to the meaningful novelty of a literary work, the manifestation of the author’s unique genius and sensibilities, thus it can hardly be imitated or transferred.

By contrast, this chapter deals with “forced originality” fostered by the constant pressure of market competition and implicated with imitation.² It is a quality projected onto literary works

---

¹ “Longdong shannong” (Mountain Hermit of the Dragon Grottos) is the style name for the famous scholar Jiao Hong (1540-1620). The preface was written in 1582, and reprinted as the preface to the 1598 *Jizhi zhai* (JZZ) edition of *Xixiang ji*. Huang Shizhong, *Riben sucang Zhongguo xiagu wenxian yanjiu* (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2011), 194.
by printers, editors, commentators, and illustrators. “Originality” is the fresh and meaningful appeal that comes into being through various interactions of the literary text with its paratexts, intertexts, and contexts. Participating in the competitive reprinting of popular and familiar texts like Xixiang ji and Pipa ji, book producers were concerned about the diminishing readerly interest due to what they dreaded as an excess of “commercial” editions, so they had to develop new strategies to create fresh and distinctive reading experiences. In the production of new editions of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji, the play texts generally remained the same, so commentary and illustrations became the main spaces where book producers could exercise their agency to arouse the reader’s desire to revisit Xixiang ji and Pipa ji.

This chapter is a case study of the Rongyu tang 容與堂 edition of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji that created new reading experiences through the appropriation of the “Li Zhuowu” persona in commentary and the imitation of literati landscape painting in its illustrations. I first discuss the two types of interpretive strategies respectively called for by the textual commentary and visual images, which lead to different reading stances and contrastive emotional experiences. This is followed by a comparison of the Rongyong tang edition (1610, hereafter RYT) with an earlier Jizhi zhai 繼志齋 edition (1598, hereafter JZZ) and a later Shijian tang 師儉堂 edition (1618, 2)

---

2 I borrow the term “forced originality” from James Cahill who first used the term to talk about painters who “found themselves under some compulsion to display a marked originality and to create fresh and distinctive styles if they were to be noticed at all” and the burden can drive them into a “forced originality”. James Cahill, Fantastics and Eccentrics in Chinese Painting (New York: Asia Society, 1967), 90.

3 Despite the fact that Xixiang ji and Pipa ji were relatively old plays written in the 1300s, they were always on top of the printing list of the Ming publishers. The two were the most frequently printed and read plays during the seventeenth century, enjoying a degree of popularity unmatched by any other plays. See Katherine Carlitz, “Printing as Performance”, 271-72. It could be a sign that the inherent originality of the plays always placed them among the best-written, and that reader’s interest would not wear out as long as something new is added to the editions. It was common among the late-Ming publishing world to attack one another’s products as low-quality “commercial” printing. It is possible that the person who launched the attack might produce an edition that was in turn derided as low-quality “commercial” printing. Granted that this was a strategic claim, there were some publishers who took it more seriously than others and worked hard to find ways to distinguish their editions from the rest. The publishers I discuss in this chapter generally fall into this category.
hereafter SJT) that highlights the RYT edition as a vital link between conventional and more innovative ways of dealing with the two plays. 4 All the three editions of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji belong to the so-called Xi Bo heke 西伯合刻 (Xixiang and Bojie carved as a pair). 5 First mentioned by the scholar Jiang Xingyu, the “paired edition” as a printing innovation has not attracted enough scholarly attention since. In this case study it is also my hope to unravel the historical and cultural contexts in which the “paired edition” took shape and generated meanings that transcend the boundaries of either individual play. I use the term “paired edition” in a broader sense, referring to the printing projects that designed Xixiang ji and Pipa ji as a pair (or members of a set) with a shared style of commentary and illustrations, but that may or may not bind the two texts together as fascicles of a single book.

A Triad of Meaning: Commentary, Play Text, and Illustration

Pingdian 評點 (commentary) was probably the most direct method by which editors, authors, and readers shaped and reshaped the meaning of texts. Confucian exegetes such as Zhu Xi made extensive use of commentary to explain their understanding of the Classics and guide the reader’s interpretation. As an integral part of education in late imperial China, students were trained to read Classical texts “interrupted” by commentaries, and to read in a slow, focused way in order to comprehend both the text and the ideas of the commentator. Commentary was applied

---

4 Extant editions of the RYT Xixiang ji and Pipa ji can be found in the National Library of China, Shanghai Library, and Kunaichō Shoryōbu, Tokyo. However, the recension of Xixiang ji in the National Library of China is damaged with the ten illustrations of first volume missing. The copies in Shanghai Library and Kunaichō Shoryōbu contain a complete set of illustrations. The only extant JZZ edition known to us is in the Naikaku Bunko (currently National Archives of Japan), Tokyo. A reprint can be found in Riben suocang xijian Zhongguo xiqu wenxian congkan, vol.16, ed. Huang Shizhong (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006). The SJT edition can be found in the National Library of China and Shanghai Library. For a detailed description of those editions, see Chen Xuyao, Xiancun Mingkan Xixiang ji zonglu, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 92-93, 38-62, 148-55.

5 Jiang Xingyu, Xixiang ji de wenxian xue yuanjiu (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997), 628-32. See also Chen, Mingkan Xixiang ji, 4-7. Such editions were first mentioned by Jiang Xingyu, but they have not attracted enough scholarly attention to thoroughly explore the printing innovations implied in such editions and the cultural context that generated them, which is what I set out to do in this project.
to fiction and drama in the Ming, in the form of short marginal and interlineal comments as well as lengthy pre-chapter essays. It was an indispensable part of printed editions of fiction and drama and was made to serve a number of purposes. For modern scholars, the study of commentary is essential to the understanding of editorial practices and reader’s reception of texts. Literary scholars have focused on the formal aspects of fiction commentary, its unique terminology, and the relations between the author and the commentator. Commentary’s links to contemporary cultural practices are yet to be thoroughly explored. Mei Chun’s study of the manifestations of “theatrical imagination” in the commentaries for novels in early modern China is one of the works that call our attention to this aspect of commentary. She discusses the playful and theatrical elements of the commentary in the context of the fascination with spectatorship and visual allure in late imperial China. Moreover, there is a tendency among scholars to emphasize the lengthy prefatory essays, “How to Read” essays, chapter/scene comments and overlook the brief, dispersed marginal and interlineal comments. The inadequate study of marginal and interlineal comments kept us from discovering a commentator’s subtle

6 See David Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 42-74. Rolston provides a summary of the formal aspects of fiction commentary: informational commentaries, stylistic commentaries, control of punctuation by commentators, indications of subdivisions in the text, marking for excision, editorial changes, etc. According to the places where comments appeared, they could be categorized as marginal comments, interlineal comments, chapter comments, etc. There are other paratextual materials which could be seen as performing a commentarial function: prefaces, statements of editorial or commentarial principles, “How to Read” essays, prefatory essays, charts and lists, quotations from historical works, lists of vocabulary or interesting sayings, variations on the standard form for tables of contents, poetry, postfaces and final comments. While Rolston calls the comments prefixed or appended to a chapter of a novel “chapter comments”, its counterpart in drama commentary would be “scene comments”, referring to the comments prefixed or appended to an individual scene of a play.


8 See e.g., Zhu Wanshu, *Mingdai xiqu pingdian yanjiu*, (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 314-18. Zhu Wanshu merely focused on the scene comments and left out the marginal comments in his appendixes. Andrew Plaks dismissed marginal comments as “impressionistic,” “quantitatively the most numerous but for the most part of dubious value in terms of critical content.” Plaks, “Traditional Chinese Fiction Criticism: d) Terminology and Critical Concepts,” *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 77-78. Marginal and interlineal comments for novels have received more attention in recent studies. See for example, Robert E. Hegel, “Performing Li Zhi: Li Zhuowu Fiction Commentaries.” In *The Objectionable Li Zhi: Fiction, Syncretism, and Dissent in Late Ming China*, ed Rivi Handler-Spitz, Pauline C. Lee, and Haun Saussy (in preparation).
changes in interpretative stances and voices when he switches from the mode of scene comments to marginal comments, and vice versa. My discussion focuses on a commentator’s switch among multiple personae through different commentarial modes to engage the reader in different ways. The marginal and interlineal comments appear to be elliptical and subjective, but they are reflective on the commentator and his carefully modulated interactions with his reader. When I examine the “Li Zhuowu” and “Chen Jiru” commentaries in this chapter, my discussion is not limited to selective sections of commentary that were believed to “come closer to serious criticism”. Instead, I look at how a commentator skillfully orchestrates different modes of communication with the reader, creating an illusion of authenticity and improvisation that is paradoxically based upon his imitative representation of the core values embodied by contemporary cultural luminaries.

Besides commentary, illustration played a central role in the renewal of publishing and reading practices of seventeenth century China. Researches on illustrations of woodblock prints have generated a variety of scholarship: A number of works focus on the narrative illustration, including Julia K. Murray’s research on illustrations of the life of Confucius, Robert E. Hegel’s early works on fiction illustrations in late imperial China, Anne Farrer’s examination of the illustrations of Shuihu zhuan (The Water Margin), Katherine Carlitz and Michela Bussotti’s works on the illustrations of Biographies of Exemplary Women, etc; Hegel’s book on illustrated fiction and Michela Bussotti’s work on Huizhou carvers supply important contexts for printing and reading practices in the Ming; Craig Clunas and Hegel also provide theoretical reflections, respectively, on the social functions of woodblock images and on the impact of illustrations on manners of reading; the works of Hiromitsu Kobayashi, J. P. Park, and Anne

Burbus-Chasson focus on painting manuals and illustrated albums; finally, Ma Meng-Ching and Hsiao Li-ling’s works on drama illustrations explore the links among print, performance, illustration, and decorative arts.10

Studies have shown that many readers of late imperial China had a rather ambivalent attitude toward printed illustrations. Moreover, as both Robert Hegel and Lucille Chia point out, the relationship between text and illustration was not always a straightforward, mutually supportive one.11 The relationship of image and text is also a major focus in my discussion of illustrated editions of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji. However, while previous studies often work from the bipartite relationship of the play text and the image, I suggest it is necessary to consider the tripartite relationship of commentary, play text, and illustration. I view both commentary and illustration as paratextual materials that affect the interpretation of the play text. As the following discussion of individual editions will demonstrate, illustration can form a number of relationships with commentary, as pictorial commentary (thus an alternative interpretation of the play text), as semi-autonomous pictures loosely connected to the play text and juxtaposed with the emotionally engaged commentary, and as pretty pictures with little or no connections to the play text and the commentary.


Also, I address a question specific to the study of drama illustrations, namely, if they have any generic features that set them apart from illustrations for fiction or poetry. The music drama is a genre that combines narrative and poetic elements; it is meant for both performance and reading. Did pictures illustrating plays exhibit any distinctive features or draw on sources unavailable to other literary genres? Hsiao Li-ling has argued for the connection between theatrical performance and drama illustrations, but her answer is not entirely convincing, because, for one thing, such representations of a stage-like space and characters could also be found in early illustrations of fiction, and such an allegedly stage-oriented style disappeared and gave way to a landscape-oriented style in the Wanli (1573-1620) period.\textsuperscript{12} My study suggests that certain illustrators of drama created a mode of “poetic picture”, which loosely connect to the dramatic narrative and intertextually link with albums of poetic landscapes printed around the same period. I analyze the interplay between text, image, and poetic inscriptions to reveal the tension between narrativity and lyricality in drama illustrations.

While I adopt the concept of “poetic picture” from Ma Meng-Ching, I disagree with her assumption that such “poetic pictures” were randomly selected from a visual repertoire and did not have a vital link to the “essence” of the play they illustrated.\textsuperscript{13} So far Ma’s works on illustration have focused on identifying the general trends in the late Ming toward a fragmented perception of text and the merging of illustrations with other decorative pictures. Thus, her

\textsuperscript{12} Hsiao Li-ling, \textit{The Eternal Present of the Past}.

\textsuperscript{13} Ma, “Linking Poetry, Painting, and Prints,” \textit{International Journal of Asian Studies} 5 (2008), 1, 15-17. Ma did not give a definition of “poetic picture” in her article, but she described it as the mode of illustrations that not only emphasized the poetic quality of the text, but also incorporated visual elements learned from traditional brush painting. She believed that “poetic pictures” first emerged in the illustrated collections of poetry popular in the late Wanli period and soon influenced drama illustrations such as the images in the RYT edition. In contrast with conventional modes of illustrating play narratives, such pictures represent the fragmented poetic lines instead of the narrative text of the play. I concur with Ma’s understanding of “poetics pictures” but I do not think that the pictures’ lack of narrativity necessarily reduces their connections with the essence of the play text. I believe a carefully organized set of “poetic pictures” (e.g., the RYT edition) can be at once free-floating entities and a critical commentary of the drama narrative.
emphasis is on the loosening of ties between text and image. Hsiao Li-ling, on the contrary, assumes the illustrator as an educated reader who consciously designed a set of illustrations to counter or subtly comment upon existing interpretations.\textsuperscript{14} I find myself disagreeing with Hsiao’s underlying assumption because not every set of illustrations is an organic unity and not every picture appears only for the purpose of conveying a message about the text. To generalize their respective stance on the text-image relations, Ma is representative of the art historian who gives primacy to pictures that were gradually separated from the text and became objects of consumer fetish; Hsiao is representative of the literary scholar who gives priority to the text and uses the text as a guide in the interpretation of pictures. In my study of the RYT illustrations, I attempt to strike a balance, because such “poetic pictures” are multivalent entities that, despite their ambiguity, work toward a thematic interpretation of the text, but that also enrich the text’s meaning through their resonance with poetry and poetic landscapes.

The RYT edition explores the interesting effects of the juxtaposition of two texts, and of the emotional discrepancy elicited by commentary and illustration. Through the textual commentary, the RYT creates an emotional bond between the reader and a passionate commentator, allowing for great participatory delight; through the visual image, the RYT carves a poetic space that invites the reader to move in and out of the immediate dramatic contexts and reach spiritual transcendence. Chapter Three continues the discussion of “paired editions” but shifts the emphasis to the musically-centered commentary in Ling Mengchu’s 凌濛初 edition ((hereafter LMC) and the visually-dominated Zhuding 珠訂 edition (hereafter ZD). The five “paired editions” in the two chapters were chosen not because they are the only paired editions of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji, but because they each represent a distinct case in showing the ways

\textsuperscript{14} Hsiao, “Political Loyalty Versus Filial Piety”, 9-64.
Xixiang ji and Pipa ji could be combined and reworked to stimulate new ways of imagining the two plays in conjunction. They were also chosen because they form a close network of paired editions that quote and reference one another in commentaries and illustrations. Finally, they offer specimens of printing plays as textual pairs and as textual series, which calls for a broader vision from their publishers to string plays together and justify their connections.

Formatting A Standardized Pair

Before looking at the RYT edition, it is necessary to remind the reader that the forms of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji had already undergone many transformations in the first half of the sixteenth century. Though originally written as zaju and nanxi, the Xixiang ji and Pipa ji encountered by a reader at 1610 closely resembled chuanqi plays. The adaptations to fit Xixiang ji and Pipa ji into the chuanqi conventions imposed a more uniform appearance on the two plays, and provided the basis for the publishing innovation of producing the two plays as a pair.

Xixiang ji and Pipa ji’s change of appearances demonstrates the power of print to standardize the chuanqi format and to reshape literary works. Despite Xixiang ji’s original zaju 雜劇 format and Pipa ji’s nanxi 南戲 format, they appeared in the Ming imprints with tables of contents listing twenty or forty-two scenes bearing four-character (e.g., Wonderful Encounter at Temple Hall) scene names.15 In a 1579 edition of Xixiang ji by Hu Shaoshan’s 胡少山 Shaoshan tang 少山堂

15 Zaju has no scene or act names and each scene is designated by numbers, like the second zhe 折 (Act) of the first ben 本 (Book). Nanxi appeared to have no scene names either, and each scene was designated by a number, like the fifth chu 館 (Scene). But later there appeared simple names for nanxi scenes, such as “Cai Bojie’s father forces him to leave for the exam”, which reads like a synopsis of the major event in a scene. For the format of Xixiang ji in mid-Ming, see West and Idema, The Story of the Western Wing, 161. The 1498 Hongzhi 弘治 edition of Xixiang ji contains a prelude to the main text. It is a suite of seven melodies with the first six summarizing the plot of the entire play and the coda calling on the reader “don’t be stingy with money” in their bags. They should spend their life in full enjoyment of Xixiang ji and die as “a romantic and rakish ghost”. See also Chen, Mingkan Xixian, 14. This edition includes illustrations that run across the top register of each page and that created a sense of narrative progression similar to the viewing of a hand scroll. West and Idema, The Story of the Western Wing, 439-43; Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 176-78. Some of the images in the Hongzhi edition are accompanied by phrases of irregular length to indicate the major events in a scene. Since there is a gap of eight decades between the
in Nanjing, the play already looked like a mini *chuanqi* play (the typical *chuanqi* is 30-40 scenes long). There were also attempts to adapt opening scenes of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* to the opening scene of *chuanqi* that typically announces its plot and theme in advance. The change was not entirely successful in the case of *Xixiang ji*, as the practice of adding an introductory scene soon died out, but the four-character scene names became a standard format. *Pipa ji*’s adaptation to the *chuanqi* format was smoother as it originally served as the basis from which the *chuanqi* evolved.

Arguably, the main driving force behind the standardization of the *chuanqi* format was the necessity to reach a wider reading public through print. There was a consistent effort on the part of publishers to make the text pleasant and easy to read. The newly created format for *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* includes a lucid table of contents that helps the reader quickly locate a

16 *Xixiang ji* as a *zaju* and *Pipa ji* as a *nanxi* had *timu zhengming* (themes and standard titles). “Standard titles” refer to a couplet or a four-line poem that covers the main subject of a play—it often appears at the very end of a *zaju* and at the very beginning of a *nanxi*. Qian Nanyang, *Yuanben Pipa ji jiaozhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 2. The “standard titles” were probably not part of a play text but used on advertisement posters in the streets in the days of the plays’ initial popularity as theater performances. The last few characters of the “standard titles” often became a shortened, easy-to-remember name of a play. However, by the 1500s, when *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* found their ways into a large number of imprints, the “standard titles” were relocated to the position right behind the *fumo* character’s aria in a play’s opening scene. In the case of *nanxi*, it became the “exit poem” (xiachang shi 下場詩) of the opening scene; in the case of *zaju*, it perched awkwardly at the beginning of each act. For instance, both the 1579 Hu Shaoshan edition and the 1580 Xu Shifan edition of *Xixiang ji* included an aria in the melody of “West River Moon” sung by a *fumo* character who introduces the plot and passes judgments on various characters. Interestingly, the 1579 “West River Moon” aria and “exit poem” was very likely an imitation of the opening scene of *Pipa ji*, and it blatantly praised Student Zhang as “benevolent and righteous” and Yingying as “chaste and loyal”, in sharp contrast to the 1580 aria’s derisive treatment of the main characters. Chen, *Mingkan Xixiang ji*, 20-29.

17 Other changes made to conform to the *chuanqi* convention include: delete the concluding melody ”Luosiniang shawei” 絡絲娘煞尾 in *Xixiang ji*, add or delete melodies, change the words in lyrics, or change the attribution of arias to different characters, and change the names of role types, from *mo* 末 to *sheng* 生, etc. West and Idema, “Exceptions to the Rules”, 70-76.
scene and get an overview of the events in the play. In this sense, the change of format might be a functional one: although some editors may well be aware that zaju and nanxi had forms different from chuanqi, the need to produce an easily navigable reading experience overrides the loyalty to obsolete literary formats.  

As the zaju and nanxi formats of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji were gradually erased in print to conform to the newly established chuanqi format, there was also the effort to synchronize the imprints of the two plays and present them as a pair. This innovation in print culture deserves more attention because it signals a shift in the mode of textual transmission from a single work to textual pairs and sets. There are many possible reasons behind such projects: The publisher(s) might want to turn out two plays of definitive status for more advantageous marketing; the editor(s) might satisfy his ambition to annotate and critique the best works of zaju and nanxi; the commentator(s) might have a comparative view of the two plays and a paired edition is the best way for the reader to see his point with the two works laid side by side; the illustrator(s) might have a chance of exercising his skill in creating pictures on a broader range of themes and subjects. But more importantly, for readers used to see Xixiang ji and Pipa ji as individual plays, “paired editions” create a defamiliarizing effect. However, because of the complexity of each one of the two plays and the colossal task of coordination, there were inevitably discrepancies between the two texts brought into a new context, and incongruity among the layers of paratextual materials designed to settle the two in a new space. As I will argue, the rhetorical discrepancy between commentary and illustrations is precisely what makes the “paired editions”

---

18 The new format became so familiar that literati like Wang Jide chose to bend to it and employ scene names although he was quite knowledgeable about the proper zaju format. Ling Mengchu, though he followed a more archaic format in the main text, felt it necessary to include an appendix of anomalous sections to show that he didn’t include them not because he was ignorant of contemporary practices, but because he considered them spurious based on his expertise and careful research.
refreshing and meaningful. I start with the consistency and discrepancy within a “paired edition”, and move toward the fresh and original experience that the “paired edition” conveyed to its readers despite the imitation involved in the production. A successful imprint like the RYT edition could unabashedly advocate authentic feelings and original expression—core values of the late Ming, and exert a strong impact on the future interpretations of the two plays.

“Li Zhuowu” and Performative Commentary

In the late Ming publishing world, it was a common phenomenon to solicit well-known figures to write commentaries for literary anthologies, novels, and plays. While the commentaries for some books were indeed authored by those figures, a great number of commentaries were falsely attributed to them for the sake of promotion. The four names most commonly credited as commentators are Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574-1624), Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521-1593), Li Zhi 李贄 (style name Zhuowu 卓吾, 1527-1602), and Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (style name Meigong 眉公, 1558-1639). Their popularity was not primarily determined by learning and social status, because among the four people only Zhong Xing had a jinshi 進士 degree and the other three became publicly known in a controversial or notorious way. As a matter of fact, it is precisely the debatable or sensational qualities of those figures that made them publishers’

---

19 Zhong Xing was a Ming poet and official. He was best known for being one of the founders of the Jingling 竟陵 school of poetry that endorsed bizarre expressions and esoteric allusions. He was credited as the compiler and commentator of an anthology of women’s poetry Mingyuan shigui 名媛詩歸 and as commentator for some editions of Sanguo yanyi 三國演義, Fengshen yanyi 封神演義, Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳, and numerous other yanyi 演義 novels. Xu Wei was a poet, playwright, calligrapher, and painter. He had an unsuccessful political career that brought him into prison; he killed his wife, and attempted suicide several times. He was suspected to be mentally unstable during some periods of life, and was famous for his scorn of conventions in artistic creations. Li Zhi’s life as it is known today blends reality with rumor. He became a legendary figure to his contemporaries soon after his death. He was known for his blatant attacks on Confucian learning, his lifestyle as a half-monk and a half-layman, his scandalous relations with the female sex. At the end of his life he was imprisoned for spreading heterodoxy and his works were burned. He died by killing himself in prison. Chen Jiru was a talented writer, painter and calligrapher who openly rejected the pursuit of degrees and vowed to be a recluse. He was also controversial because his disdain of an official career. His lofty profile was regarded by some as pretense, contradicted by his association with high officials.
favorites. Their names appearing in the titles of vernacular literature suggested provocative and intriguing contents, which was the best way to advertise the books in question.\textsuperscript{20}

There existed several editions of \textit{Xixiang ji} and \textit{Pipa ji} with “Li Zhuowu” commentary, but the RYT edition preceded all the other editions.\textsuperscript{21} The success of its new publishing strategy seemed to have made other publishers realize the market value of the “Li Zhuowu” persona and stimulated them to follow suit. However, the RYT edition of \textit{Xixiang ji} and \textit{Pipa ji} stands out from a number of “Li Zhuowu-commentary” books. It fleshes out a “Li Zhuowu” personality that feeds the reader’s imagination of the historical Li Zhi, and creates a set of stylistically distinct illustrations that stand apart from those appearing before and after it.

Rongyu tang (RYT) was a publishing house in Hangzhou that turned out a series of “Li Zhuowu-commentary” plays in the early 1600s.\textsuperscript{22} Those are a set of five plays that employed the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{20} See Maram Epstein, \textit{Competing Discourses: Orthodoxy, Authenticity, and Engendered Meanings in Late Imperial Chinese Fiction} (Harvard University Asia Center 2001), 67. Epstein rightly comments that Li Zhi is a “crossover figure between the world of intellectual history and that of fiction and drama.” Although the authenticity of the many commentaries to novels and drama attributed to him is questionable, the values espoused in those commentaries are produced in close association with Li Zhi. See also Ding Naifei, \textit{Obscene Things: Sexual Politics in \textit{Jin Ping Mei}} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 262. Li Zhi, like Yuan Hongdao, belonged to those “local eccentrics” that constituted a source of “public opinion”. Through the medium of print, such localized “public opinion” could reach a translocal audience, and thereby conduct to fame and symbolic profit. The symbolic value of Li Zhi continued to be exploited after his death and was translated into market value when commentators invented the persona “Li Zhuowu” that embodied Li Zhi’s character and values.

\textsuperscript{21} Zhu, \textit{Mingdai xiqu pingdian}, 308-13. Other “Li Zhuowu-Commentary” editions include the You Jingquan \textit{游敬泉} edition of 李卓吾批評合像北西廂記, the Xiling Tianzhang ge 西陵天章閣 edition of 李卓吾先生批點西廂記真本, an alternate 李卓吾批點西廂記真本, 三先生合評元本北西廂記, 三先生合評元本琵琶記.

\textsuperscript{22} Ma, “Linking Poetry, Painting, and Prints”, 14. Besides \textit{Xixiangji} and \textit{Pipa ji}, the rest are Yuhe ji 玉合記, Yougui ji 幽閨記, and Hongfu ji 紅拂記. The series can be found in the collection of Kunaichō Shoryōbū, Tokyo. See also Chen, \textit{Mingkan Xixiang ji}, 98. Around this time Rongyu tang also produced an edition of 李卓吾先生批評忠義水滸全傳. The Rongyu tang series with “Li Zhuowu commentary” was likely a commercial success, as it soon stimulated a trend for “Li Zhuowu commentary” that other publishing houses vied to emulate. What appeared after the Rongyu tang series include the Yuan Wuya edition of 李卓吾評忠義水滸全傳, an edition of 李卓吾先生批評三國演義 from Jianyang, Fujian, an edition of 李卓吾先生批點原本三國志傳, an edition of 李卓吾先生批評西遊記 with preface by Yuan Yuling, four versions of \textit{Xixiang ji} featuring “Li Zhuowu commentary” in their titles, and eleven plays from a variety of publishing houses advertising themselves with “Li Zhuowu commentary.” Rolston, 405, 408, 433, 451; Zhu, 52-53. For a detailed discussion of the authenticity of the Li Zhi commentaries in novels, see Rolston, 356-63.
same commentator and shared the same illustration style. *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* seemed to have come out earlier than the rest. The commentaries for *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* are the most elaborate, and the commentaries for the rest of the plays in this series are sparse and elliptical. The RYT “Li Zhuowu-commentary” *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* were printed in the same year of 1610; they form a closely-connected pair in this set because the two books maintain a highly unified appearance in typography, commentary, and illustration, and because there are a coherent commentator-persona in both plays and a shared illustrator who employed the same artistic strokes and poetic imagination in creating a mood of melancholy and remembrance despite the widely divergent themes of the two plays.

Typographically, both *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* employed four-character phrases for the scene titles, and indicated the musical mode of each scene before scene titles. Besides, the RYT initiated a typographical convention that was elegant and clear, using a slender Song-script that sets off the arias in bold from the dialogues in a regular font, which many later editions followed.  

The commentary takes different forms and appears at different positions: a specific row set off at the upper margin is for the marginal commentary; comments written over the line between two adjacent columns are directed at the dialogues in the left column; comments immediately follow an aria or dialogue; and summary comments at the end of a scene highlight the most prominent point in the entire scene (Fig. 2.1). They are respectively *meipi* 眉批 (upper-margin commentary), *jiapi* 夹批 (interlineal commentary), *weipi* 尾批 (tail commentary),

---

23 For the standardization of the printed graph, see Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction* 110-13.
and *chupi* 齪批 (scene commentary). It is easy to identify the words and sentences that were commented upon, as they were marked up for emphases with a *quan* 圈 “○” symbol. Sometimes the comments themselves were also marked up with the *quan* symbols.

Corresponding to the varied formats is a multifaceted commentator who enacted the many types of reader responses the plays could trigger. He can be passionate and cool-headed, emotionally engaged, or aesthetically withdrawn. The “Li Zhuowu” commentary invented the image of a commentator with a strong personality and a sharp tongue, pioneer of a line of highly visible and personalized commentators who imbued novels and plays with their character and
emotions. The “Li Zhuowu” commentary definitely profited from the aura of the late Li Zhi, but it was done with careful tactics to evoke his voice and fulfill the ordinary people’s imagination of him.24 As the following discussion shows, “Li Zhuowu” reproduces the harsh tone, biting wit, and polemical style in Li Zhi’s writing, and embodies the values of spontaneity and authenticity expressed in Li’s works. Despite some contemporary literati’s open disparagement, the RYT edition appeared to have been a commercial success as it initiated a fad for the “Li Zhuowu commentary” that promised symbolic and market value to any printed book.

“Li Zhuowu” as Emotional Reader

“Li Zhuowu” has a distinctive style of speaking, especially in the succinct upper-margin commentary, which appears to be spontaneous and emotional.25 First, he notes down his own emotional outburst upon reading certain lines and expects the reader to react in the same way. In the Pipa ji scenes that depicted Zhao Wuniang’s suffering, “Li” sheds tears profusely and his emotion escalates from “sniffling nose” (為之酸鼻) to “bursting into tears” (可為痛哭), and from “crying over every word” (一字一哭), “crying ten times for every word” (一字十哭), “crying a thousand times for every word” (一字千哭), to “crying ten thousand times for every word” (一字万哭). In conventional commentaries, there was often the distinction between a commentator who plays a curatorial and educational role, laying down guidelines and offering learned

24 Most modern scholars believe the Rongyu tang “Li Zhuowu” commentary for plays and novels was written by Ye Zhou 葉周 (fl.1595-1624), a despondent scholar who wrote fake commentaries for a living. See Huang Lin 黃霖’s “Lun Rongyu tang ben Li Zhuowu xiansheng piping Bei Xixiang ji” 論容與堂本李卓吾先生批評北西廂記, Fudan xuebao 2 (2002),119-25; and Liu Haiyan, Ming Qing Sanguo zhi yanyi wenben yanbian yu pingdian yanjiu (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin, 2010), 98,107-10. Huang Shizhong claims that the only edition that could have some connection to Li Zhi is the JZZ edition, because of the editor Jiao Hong is a friend of Li Zhi with whom he discussed his ideas of the plays. Huang, Riben sucang zhongguo xiqu, 193-94.

25 Previous studies often ignore the upper-margin commentary of the Rongyu tang edition because of its terse and scattered nature and its extremely jesting tone. However, I find that the neglected section is precisely where the self-fashioning of the commentator is most vividly accomplished.
opinions, and the reader who is expected to playing the role of a learner or a like-minded friend. Whereas in the “Li Zhuowu” commentary such a distinction is erased—the commentator performs the role of an ordinary reader. Moreover, “Li Zhuowu” enacted a deeply engaged and strongly opinionated reader, who expects other readers to be as deeply affected as he is. He was so moved by the *Pipa ji* scenes that he believed “people who read this without crying are not human” (讀此而不哭者非人也). 26

A large portion of the upper-margin commentary is about the characters. One striking feature of the “Li Zhuowu” comments is its mockery and even verbal abuse of characters. In the case of *Pipa ji*, as “Li” is strongly against Elder Cai’s (Cai Bojie’s father) idealization of an official career, Minister Niu’s abuse of power, and Cai Bojie’s weakness; he employs various negative words to vent his outrage, such as “stupid” (蠢), “bull” (牛), “nonsense” (胡説), “fart” (放屁), “the old fellow Cai deserves two blows of the walking stick” (這柱杖還該打蔡老兒兩下), “only deserves to be killed (殺才)”, and “the curses are so exhilarating” (罵得好快活). 27 In the upper-margin comments for scene 31, “Li” openly insults Minister Niu: “[you are] really a Niu (literally, “bull,” or ironically: you are truly great). Otherwise how could you fart like a bull” (真是牛矣，如何放出牛屁來)? In addition, the commentator’s voice often oscillates between a third-person critic and a first-person interlocutor who speaks directly to the characters. There are many examples in the RTY *Pipa ji* and *Xixiang ji* in which the commentator addresses the character as “you” and argues with or makes fun of him. In the parts where Cai Bojie’s father forces him to travel for the exam, the commentator erupts several times to question him in

26 This comment could be echoing a statement in *Mencius* that “all men have a mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others…. the feeling of commiseration is essential to man”, in *The Four Books*, trans. James Legge (Taipei: Wenhua tushu gongsi, 1979), 549-550.

27 The “bull” is a pun on Minister Niu’s surname “Niu”.

41
sentences like: “So you think your words aren’t wrong?” “So being an official is the greatest filial piety?” The commentator could not believe that Cai Bojie was always kept from getting in touch with his parents while he was in the capital, so he condemns Cai’s inaction as dubious and unmanly: “You only deserve to be killed! Would he stop you from merely sending a person back? Even if he has power over you, would a real man allow himself to be controlled like that? Detestable! Truly detestable (殺才！不孝子, 難道差一人回去他也來禁著你？就禁著你，大丈夫難道便為他禁了？可恨！可恨！)”!

It is hard to leave this section on the commentator’s voice, without giving a few observations on the acoustic dimension of the “Li Zhuowu” commentary. The loudly vocal quality of the commentator’s cries and admonishments serves to elicit similar responses from the reader, creating a kind of affective communion that dissolves the boundary between the commentator and the reader.28 This partially explains the highly creative nature of the “Li Zhuowu” commentary and its appeal.

“Li Zhuowu” as Performative Entertainer

As he moves from one scene to another, “Li Zhuowu”’s dialogic relation with the characters can shift from a grave mode to a tongue-in-cheek mode. In Scene 39 when Minister Niu asks Wuniang to be his adopted daughter and makes his daughter Cai Bojie’s second wife, the commentator cries, “Old Niu [bull], old Niu, why would you insist on giving your daughter to someone as a second wife” (老牛，老牛，何苦定要把女兒與人做小老婆么)? His

28 Paize Keulemans, “Listening to the Printed Martial Arts Scene: Onomatopoeia and the Qing Dynasty Storyteller’s Voice”, Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 67 (2007): 54-56. Keulemans discusses how the commentator, in novels about martial heroes, calls attention to the sounds that bring the text to life and that elicit similar cries from the commentator and the reader. I argue that the “Li Zhuowu commentary” for plays also emphasizes the sound of the text in emotionally climatic moments. An example from the upper-margin comment in scene 23 of Pipa ji reads: “All I could see was Elder Cai lying in bed, and Wuniang crying and weeping by his side. Isn’t marvelous that writing can reach such a degree of vividness” (但見蔡公在床，五娘在側啼啼哭哭而已。神哉？技至此乎)? The comment prompts the reader not only to “see” the characters, but also to “hear” Wuniang’s voice.
comments for the final scene read, “While they should be canonized, you, old Bull, should receive five hundred blows of the heavy bamboo” (他們是該旌表了，只是你這老牛也當打五百脊背).

The “Li Zhuowu” commentator exhibits a more positive attitude toward the Xixiang ji characters, and his engagement with them falls between light mockery and ribald humor.29 He amuses the reader with Student Zhang’s clumsiness in courtship. On Student Zhang’s verbose self-introduction to Hongniang that discloses his age and bachelorhood, the upper-margin commentary says: “What a bold-faced fellow” (老面皮)! The subsequent scene commentary continues to mock Zhang: “Meeting [a girl] by chance, and falling in love with her at a glance, the scholar already makes extensive plans for the future. Such nonsense! Such ludicrousness! The way that scholars yearn in desperation and dream in hunger is often like this. But Zhang eventually did it, which is the so-called ‘where there is a will there is a way’” (無端一見，瞥爾生情，便打下許多預先帳，卻是無謂，卻是可笑.秀才們窮饞餓想，種種如此，到底做上了，所謂“有志者，事竟成”也).

The commentator’s mockery of Zhang extends to a caricature of the xiucai 秀才 (junior scholars) community as a whole, and it is possible that his contemporary readers, who were either xiucai or knew how xiucai acted, would find the comments particularly amusing. In scene 3 when Zhang laments his loneliness in the night, the comment says “scholars all live their lives like this” (秀才們都如此過了日子). In Scene 6 when Student Zhang goes to the banquet and

29 The only person that he finds fault with is Madam Cui, mother of Cui Yingying. In Scene One, he criticizes her decision to live inside the monastery: “The old lady is unusually bold. How dare you live in the monks’ house” (老夫人原大膽，和尚房裡可是住的)? And when Madam Cui allows Yingying and Hongniang to stroll in the temple, the commentator blames her saying “the old hag didn’t rule her family properly in the first place” (老婆子家教先不嚴了). The two comments set up Madam Cui as the progenitor of all the consequent events, and exonerate Yingying and Student Zhang from the very beginning.
says to himself that “I’m going to wed Yingying in our bed chamber” (去臥房內和鶯鶯做親去), there is interlineal commentary exclaiming “Gross! Bravo”( 丑甚! 妙甚)! And the upper-margin comment chimes in: “Scholars get pleasure by setting their tongues wagging and their minds roaming—nothing happens to them physically. This line gives you insight into that.” (凡秀才受用都在口裏說過、心上想過, 于身邊並無半分也，觀此可見).

The commentator teases xiucai for living on their wild fantasies. He addresses Student Zhang with the intimate term “Lao Zhang” 老張 and talks about him in a frivolous, gossipy manner. When the bandit Sun Feihu threatens to attack, the commentator cheerfully declares “Lao Sun is coming to make a match for Lao Zhang” (老孫來替老張作伐了). He constantly laughs at Student Zhang for being “[sexually] too hungry” (餓極了). His ridicule of Student Zhang interjects from time to time: “Lao Zhang is worthless, far inferior to Yingying” (老張不濟,不如鶯鶯多矣); “Useless! Useless! Why did you let it all out”( 不濟不濟,如何都說出來); “Pedantic and stupid, yet in fact overjoyed” (腐甚滯甚,實亦喜甚); “What an idiot!”(真滯貨) “Why ask? You idiot!”(癡人還要問) “Too sour” (酸得夠); “A sour person shouldn’t have such a wonderful encounter with a beauty” (酸人不宜有此奇遇). In a word, he amuses the reader at the expense of Zhang. His tart remarks resemble the outcry of a spectator who expresses his impatience by fidgeting and hurling derogatory speeches at the players.

The commentator entertains himself by ironically undercutting the romantic sentiments of characters. When Yingying enumerates the reasons that she was willing to sacrifice herself to the bandits, she listed five reasons and the commentator added the sixth: “sixth, you yourself can marry early” (第六來自己又早嫁了人). As Student Zhang offers to help quell the bandits, Yingying says gratefully to Hongniang that “this man is so kind”. The “tail commentary” cries
mischievously, “At this moment they appeal to both monks and laymen under the roof. In case a monk could make the bandits withdraw, how about that? How are you going to deal with that?” It is a tongue-in-cheek response that imagines a scenario that would shatter Student Zhang’s scheme and Yingying’s eager anticipation. The commentator enjoys leaving out the romantic lovers in the cold for a while and derives a great deal of fun from it. The commentator also pays attention to Huiming and Hongniang, the minor characters with interesting personalities. His comments on the scene where Huiming volunteers to break the siege to send a message are: “Living Buddha. Why don’t you quell the bandits and get Yingying” (活佛. 你何不退了兵得了鸞鶯)? “Buddha” (佛); “This monk has a fiery character. It wouldn’t be hard for him to become a Buddha in an instant” (這和尚也是個烈漢子, 何難立地成佛)! Those comments resemble the “Li Zhuowu” commentary for Lu Zhishen and Li Kui in Shuihu zhuan, who are also strong, impetuous characters. This is an indicator that they were probably written by the same commentator. The commentator loves Hongniang immensely and writes about her in an upper-margin comment: “Hongniang has extraordinary talent, superb insight, and great courage. With this military adviser, what fortress couldn’t be conquered? What battle couldn't be won? [We] should surrender for a peace treaty with Yingying” (紅娘真有二十分才, 二十分識, 二十分膽, 有此軍師, 何攻不破, 何戰不克? 宜于鸞鶯城下乞盟也哉). As we see, in Xixiang ji commentary as well as in Pipa ji commentary, “Li Zhuowu” maintains an intimate engagement with the characters by playing with their names, making fun of them, and speaking directly to them. In this way he enacts the dynamic interaction between the commentary and the text, making his voice unique and memorable. In the meantime, he acts as a companion of like-minded readers who cry and laugh with him. His commentary gives fullest expression to his whims and emotions and those of his fellow readers.
“Li Zhuowu” As Literary Critic

The “Li Zhuowu” commentator is also capable of more abstract and detached criticism, in which he connects the two plays in aesthetic and philosophical terms. When Maram Epstein speaks of Li Zhi as “a vital link between late Ming intellectual trends and the production of literary values and aesthetics”, it is important for us to recognize that part of his influence on fiction and drama was realized through the “Li Zhuowu” commentary. The commentary employs a range of critical terms, including fan 煩 (verbosity), jian 簡 (brevity), and zhen 真 (genuineness) for Pipa ji and shen 神 (divine) and miao 妙 (marvelous) for Xixiang ji. It is to be noted that such concepts were often used with an eye to the comparative success or failure of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji in those aspects. For instance, “Li Zhuowu” complains that some Pipa ji lyrics are too fleshy and have too much embellishment (填詞太丰，所以遜西廂拜月耳；填詞太富貴)，and that its plot is arranged inappropriately, being too lengthy at one point and too elliptical at another (只這煩簡不合宜，便不及西廂拜月多了)，and that some points run the risk of over-description (描寫殆盡，亦以太盡而少遜西廂也)—all the problems make Pipa ji inferior to Xixiang ji, and sometimes also to Baiyue ting ji. However, the fan 煩 (verbosity, over-description) he complained about in Pipa ji, when applied ingeniously, becomes a positive feature in Xixiang ji. In the scene commentary for Scene 20, he says: “I used to read short pieces of writing and find their verbosity so hideous. However, when reading Xixiang ji with its repetitions and overlapping, I cannot get have enough of them. What is the reason? What is the reason?” (嘗讀短文字，卻厭其多。一讀西廂曲，反反復復，重重疊疊，又嫌其少。何也？何也？) He further claims that the rich elaboration of a simple romance and the tortuousness of plot in

---

30 Epstein, Competing Discourses, 76.
Xixiang ji are a mode of fan 煩 that the readers happily accept, because they find it not repulsive (讀西廂記, 不厭其煩) but marvelous (煩得妙). He does not explain in detail why the repetition and layers of elaboration here appeal to the reader while the Pipa ji’s descriptions turn him off, but it is in such comparisons that his varying appraisals of the two plays become clear. Xixiang ji is the standard that he uses to evaluate Pipa ji, thus many comments on Pipa ji take the form of “falling short of Xixiang ji” or “on a par with Xixiang ji”.

The commentator is careful to treat Pipa ji fairly by recognizing the good points that put it at the same level of Xixiang ji. “Li Zhuowu” uses parallel terms to praise the superb accomplishment of the two plays. For Xixiang ji he says, “Reading other writings, I could see their spirit within the words. Reading Xixiang ji and Shuihu zhuhan, I see the spirit only. How marvelous!” (讀他文字, 精神尚在文字裏面. 讀至西廂曲、水滸傳, 便只見精神, 並不見文字耳. 咦, 異矣哉!) In other words, the spirit is successfully embodied by words but transcends words. His final statement on Pipa ji has a similar expression: “By this point the speeches and words are no longer speeches and words” (到此則不復語言文字矣). In sum, “Li Zhuowu” develops a set of critical vocabulary and recapitulates the comparative evaluation of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji in the Ming drama criticism. He borrows from and imaginatively elaborates on the thoughts of the historical Li Zhi as he sees fit—a point to be elaborated later.

Like the historical Li Zhi, the “Li Zhuowu” commentator is an avid advocate of innate or authentic expression. He values the realistic effect in Pipa ji, which is based on the genuine outflow of emotions from characters. The opposites of zhen 真 (genuineness) are zhuang 裝 (pretension), su 俗 (conventional, common), and fuqi 腐氣 (rotten smell). He criticizes the opening remarks of Pipa ji as “pretentious”, but appreciates the words of Elder Cai at the moment of his death and those of Cai Bojie showing concern for his family: “All are real
feelings, so vivid”; “feelings so real and acute, very deplorable”. Therefore, the zhen 真 in Pipa ji commentary has a literary and moral dimension. In terms of literary depiction, zhen 真 means whether the portrayal reaches a level of verisimilitude—whether it achieves a realistic effect and follows the laws of probability. In this sense it is close to xiang 象 (likeness). The commentator also uses buxiang 不象 (unlikeness) to mean that the speech or aria does not fit the character or appear convincing. But zhen 真 also comments on the moral authenticity of characters, setting their genuine feelings against stale ideas adopted from the Confucian classics. The literary and moral meanings of zhen 真 are often conflated by “Li Zhuowu”, since a scene is vivid and mimetically successful precisely because it expresses what the characters genuinely feel and think in a way that sounds fitting to the personality and status of that character. Although the moral authenticity may well be a literary construct, “Li Zhuowu’s” comments make it sound like the gushing forth of the authentic feelings of the characters not mediated by the author. The literary zhen depends on the spiritual zhen of the author and the characters. Since the commentator finds in Pipa ji the conflict between one’s emotional need and social constraints, his emphasis on pure feelings and intuitive actions uncontaminated by conventional values directly targets the main thesis of the play. A large portion of the commentary reveals moments of the author’s and characters’ minds stirred by pure qing 情 and unobstructed by learning or pretension.

In the commentary for Xixiang ji, although “Li Zhuowu” shows disdain toward conventionality or banality in minor characters, he generally treats the protagonists’ emotional authenticity as granted, therefore his main concern is not whether authentic qing 情 is involved but how such qing is represented. He uses the term chuanshen 傳神 (conveying the spirit)
extensively to describe the kind of writing that vividly captures the personalities and feelings of characters.

One comment in Xixiang ji gives us some clues on the elusive chuangshen: “The key to writing Xixiang ji is to describe Yingying’s delicate infatuation and Zhang’s amusing clumsiness. Only when the author achieves those, could he be said to have conveyed their spirits”(作《西厢》者，妙在竭力描寫鶯之嬌癡、張之笨趣，方為傳神). The “spirit” that is to be conveyed is Yingying’s lovely obsession and Zhang’s amusing clumsiness, the definitive feature of each person that makes them unforgettable characters.

The “Li Zhuowu” commentary highlights the aesthetic effect of “conveying the spirit”, which get across to the reader the genuine and essential qualities of characters. Ironically, one of the ways through which the author “conveys the spirit” is imaginative imitation, or what the commentator calls mosuo 模索. Mosuo 模索 is the technique of portraying and inducing the contours of one character through the words of another character, which may very likely be what A imagines B would say or do in a situation based on A’s grasp of B’s personality. In other words, the mosuo representation is one character’s imitative enactment of another character that often involves parody. For instance, Hongniang as the go-between of Zhang and Yingying, simulates their mood swings and listlessness. The lovers’ romantic delirium is conveyed through a maid’s eye in a humorous manner. The commentator believes that the indirect portrayal breathes life into the lovers while saving the reader from the boredom of listening to Zhang or Yingying’s self-confessions. Through Hongniang’s parody, the reader could grasp their passionate nature, and draw back to look at them with intensified delight. The commentator believes that such an effect qualifies Xixiang ji as the art of the divine. As I will argue later, the creation of the “Li Zhuowu” persona is based on a technique similar to mosuo 模索. By
imaginatively imitating the tone and language of the historical Li Zhi, the person behind “Li Zhuowu” strives to capture the elusive spirit of Li Zhi.

*The Person Behind “Li Zhuowu”: A Self-Conscious Performer*

In addition to aspects mentioned above, the “Li Zhuowu” commentary imitates Li Zhi by creating an illusion of spontaneous responses to the text. The vehement praise for *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* often takes the form of exclamations and questions as if the commentator were suddenly startled by the object of his commentary.31 The commentator expresses profound amazement at *Pipa ji* in a series of questions about the magic of writing: 32 his amazement at *Xixiang ji* writing takes as a form of self-questioning: “*Xixiang ji*—Is it lyric, speech, or prose? Is it about Hongniang, Yingying, or Student Zhang? Is the person reading it Li Zhuowu? None of those is known to me. Would anyone be able to know?” (西廂記耶，曲耶，白耶，文章耶？紅娘耶，鸞鸞耶，張生耶？讀之者李卓吾耶？俱不能知也，倘有知之者耶？) “Li Zhuowu” demonstrates the reading experience of complete surrender to the spell of the text. At such moments, no rational thinking is necessary or possible. Knowledge about the language, the characters, and oneself is no longer important. Clearly “Li Zhuowu” prioritizes such intuitive aesthetic ecstasy to learned responses mediated by knowledge and deliberation.

“Li Zhuowu” is equally straightforward for the parts he considers superfluous or detestable. He uses words like *keyan* 可厭 (obnoxious) or simply *shan* 刪 (delete) to show his

31 The marginalia of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* include many formulaic phrases with the structure of “可~可~” (可笑可笑，可惡可恨，可敬可畏，可師可法，可憐可憫，可哭可痛)， and that of “~甚” (妙甚，好甚，奇甚)， and that of “聖~”(聖母，聖婦，聖女). The commentator surrenders to the charm of writing saying “妙絕妙絕，要死要死” (Bravo! I’m about to die). The “可~可~” structure can generate different translations with regard to the verb, but it generally conveys the meaning of “[the text]indeed deserves …”, making the text it comments on into the object of laughter, loath, reverence, etc. “~甚” means “extremely”, and “聖~” means “sagely, divine”.

32 Examples of such questions include: “by this point the feelings and scenes are so real! How could his writing reach an effect? Marvelous! Marvelous indeed!”(情景至此竟真矣！文字乃如此乎？奇甚，奇甚！); (Did the writing reach this level? (文至此乎？); “How could the arias and speeches reach such a state [of vividness]?” (曲與白竟至此乎？); (Unbelievable! How could the skill attain a level of divinity? (神哉，技至此乎？)
disapproval. In those loud expressions of positive and negative feelings, the idiosyncratic “Li Zhuowu” commentary strikes the reader not as deliberate reflections, but as a dynamic process in which the commentator enacts a reader who cries at one moment and laughs at another, slapping the desk and kicking his heels.

While “Li Zhuowu” appears to be a reader unaware of himself, the person behind “Li Zhuowu” is highly conscious of and deeply invested in creating a dramatized, appealing image. The person who produced the “Li Zhuowu” commentaries for Xixiang ji and Pipa ji creates the image of a sharp-tongued, impetuous “Li Zhuowu” that echoes the portrayal of Li Zhi in various anecdotal accounts. The producer of “Li Zhuowu” commentaries is like a puppet master who controls the performance of “Li Zhuowu” from behind the stage. Making “Li” an active and passionately-engaged ideal reader, he tacitly spreads the message that the plays at hand are exciting readings that could stir up the readers rather than put them to sleep. “Li Zhuowu”’s interlocution with the characters, seasoned with wit and gesticulation, adds an extra layer of attraction to the play texts, inviting the reader to either laugh at the characters with him, or laugh at him. His predilections for over-the-top reactions and scathing words often makes the little drama he is performing at the margin of the text outshine the main drama in the play text.

“Li Zhuowu” and the Late Ming Fetish for the Eccentric

The popularity of commentaries credited to “Li Zhuowu” and other controversial figures could be viewed in close association with the culture of eccentricity in the late Ming. Although eccentric behavior had historically been known as a trait of a small group of the elite who withdrew from society and sought untrammeled authenticity, it seems to have reached “new heights of self-reflexive performativity during the late Ming” and manifested in various aspects
of culture.\textsuperscript{33} James Cahill has described a wave of eccentricity among painters in the late Ming in which the unconventional became a sign of individuality.\textsuperscript{34} Likewise, Martin W. Huang notes “various dramatic gestures of self-stylization” among intellectuals of the seventeenth century and the demonstrated “compulsion to startle and the necessity to be eccentric.”\textsuperscript{35} Moreover, as Epstein notes, for the late Ming intellectuals, “as important as demonstrating one’s own unique qualities was the ability to appreciate the eccentric behavior of others.”\textsuperscript{36} For Katharine Burnett, the interest in the eccentric is fundamentally a search for new modes of expression, or self-styled originality.\textsuperscript{37} When writings that carried the names of contemporary “eccentrics” spread through the medium of print, they were likely to arouse curiosity among a broadening reading public. This is especially true in the case of Li Zhi—the admirers and worshippers he attracted and the prosecution and posthumous impeachment he suffered caused such a sensation that he might have become a well-known name even among people who never read his books. Publishers recognized the appeal of his name, and the potential to reach a broader audience through novels and drama with commentaries credited to “Li Zhuowu”. In the book market, the authenticity of those commentaries was no longer as important as the symbolic and market value they carried. Such names as “Zhong Xing” and “Li Zhuowu” had become the ultimate fetish for book buyers.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{33} Epstein, \textit{Competing Discourses}, 110.

\textsuperscript{34} James Cahill, \textit{Fantastics and Eccentrics}, 28.


\textsuperscript{36} Epstein, \textit{Competing Discourses}, 110.

\textsuperscript{37} Burnett, \textit{Dimensions of Originality}, 42-45.

\textsuperscript{38} Print culture facilitated the travel of rumors and local anecdotes of eccentrics to a translocal audience. It also helped to magnify the character traits of those people and make them even more famous or notorious. To the
Nevertheless, the RYT “Li Zhuowu” commentary eclipses other “Li Zhuowu” commentaries because it offers an image of Li Zhi that is as eccentric as, if not more eccentric than, the historical Li Zhi. Its mode of commentary speaks even louder than Li Zhi on “emotion as integral and positive aspect of human nature”.\(^{39}\) It evokes the historical Li Zhi using a technique similar to mosuo 模索, the technique of imaginative imitation the commentator speaks so highly of in Xixiang ji. It involves imagination and impersonation of Li’s temperament and manners, and blends the original and its parodic copy. It fleshes out the spirit of an eccentric Li Zhi despite inventing words that may not belong to him.

Besides creating a unique voice reminiscent of Li Zhi, the commentator also consciously uses a critical vocabulary that is either taken from Li’s writing or reflects the main thesis of his writing. Among Li Zhi’s works, there are an essay on the huagong 化工 (Nature’s work) and huagong 畫工 (craftsman’s work) distinction of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji and a letter to Jiao Hong 焦竑 that mentions writing comments on Shuihu zhuan.\(^{40}\) The RYT commentary seeks to embody Li Zhi’s critical spirit by taking over his concepts and elaborating on them. It often refers to Li’s concept of “effortless perfection” in comments such as: “Writing those words is like making everyday food and drink, without forcing the will or straining the mind. Everything is casually picked yet perfectly fitting. This is what I call ‘the work of Nature’”\(^{(如此等已如家}}\)

\(^{39}\) Epstein, Competing Discourses, 61.

\(^{40}\) Li Zhi, Li Zhi wenji, ed. Zhang Jianye (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian, 2000). The essay is “Zashuo”雜説 (Miscellaneous Remarks) in Fenshu 焚書, and the letter to Jiao Hong is “Yu Jiao Ruohou 與焦弱侯” in Xu Fenshu 續焚書.
常茶餞，不作意，不經心，信手拈來，無不是矣，我所以謂之化工也。\[^{41}\] The commentator echoes Li Zhi’s sublimation of *Xixiang ji* to the divine category, and makes constant reference to Li Zhi’s ranking of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*. The recurrent phrase in *Pipa ji* commentary that “it falls (slightly) short of *Xixiang ji* and *Baiyue ting*” is a tribute to Li’s evaluation, and the commentator gives specific examples to support such a claim. In short, all those strategies discussed above makes the RYT “Li Zhuowu” a successful reincarnation of Li Zhi. The RYT “Li Zhuowu” commentary exerted a great influence on later commentaries on *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*, including the ones produced by Jin Shengtan and Mao Lun. Paradoxically, as a careful imitation to satisfy the contemporary fetish of authentic eccentricity, it contributed to the imagination of Li Zhi as a literary critic and a cultural icon.

In sum, “Li Zhuowu commentary” reveals a mastermind that modulates his critical distances from the text and modes of interactions with his reader through the subtle change of personae. He performs an ostensibly subjective response to specific textual elements, and displays a kind of authentic idiosyncrasy that is reminiscent of the historical Li Zhi. By doing so, he ingeniously translates Li Zhi’s subversive thinking into a type of spontaneous literary criticism that challenges the texts he reads on philosophical and literary grounds. “Li Zhuowu” comes across as a reader of intense feelings. He gives priority to the feelings that everyone can empathize with, and encourages straightforward engagement with the text. In this sense, the

\[^{41}\] More instances include: “writing acquires a life of its own” (文已到自在地步矣); “No word is capable of expressing my appreciation” (Scene Seven [批] I欲贊一釘也不得); “*Xixiang ji* words are spitted out from the throat, with no mark of chopping and drilling and no trace of brush and ink” (西廂文字如從喉中褪出一般，不見有斧鑿痕、筆墨跡也) “Writing reaches such a point—no writing is possible beyond that!”(Scene Sixteen [批] 文章至此，更無文矣！)
mode of reading that he promotes is less elitist than those of contemporary commentators and increases the agency of each individual reader.  

*What is Original in the “Li Zhuowu” Commentary: A Comparison with the JZZ and SJT Commentaries*

The new approaches to commentary introduced by the RYT edition could be better understood in comparison with the commentaries of an earlier JZZ edition (1598) and a later SJT edition (1618). The JZZ edition, like all predecessors of the RYT editions of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*, constrains its commentator to a low-keyed profile. The commentator is moderate and impersonal, to the extent that no visible personality could be detected from his voice. The JZZ commentary is a syncretic commentary with annotative, corrective, and critical functions. Annotative comments explain pronunciations or meanings of difficult words, highlights literary allusions, and points out unconventional usage of tunes. Corrective comments criticize “false” practices in the mediocre “commercial” editions and gives suggestions about ways to revise.

---

42 See Rivi Handler-Spitz, “Provocative Texts: Li Zhi, Montaigne, and the Promotion of Critical Judgment in Early Modern Readers”, *CLEAR* 35 (2013), 124-25. Handler-Spitz argues that “the turn of the seventeenth century…heralded an era in which readers attained new levels of autonomy vis a vis texts.” She believes that both Li Zhi and Montaigne’s reading practices “exemplify broader trends in both cultures: the production of texts that increasingly challenged readers to develop their personal judgment, and the concurrent emergence of readers who dared to disagree with the texts they read.” I believe that the imitative “Li Zhuowu commentary” had the similar effect of illustrating reader-centered interpretation.

43 Printed in 1598, the JZZ edition is the first among the extant “paired editions” of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*. It displays a high degree of consistency in commentary approaches and in aesthetics. The edition shows an eclectic tendency in its quotation from Wang Shizhen in the “summary comments”, in its appreciation of the plays’ creative use of literary allusions, and in its condemnation of various “outrageous” changes in “contemporary” and “commercial editions” due to the influence of “vulgar” stage performances. The commentator demonstrates a judicious attitude and confidence in his ability to supply a high quality edition, clean out the anomalous lines, and restore the two plays to their purest state. The prefaces, editorial principles, and comments in this paired edition were carefully designed to show a stylistic continuity and a shared concern with literary elegance, which prepares the ground for the form of imprints that treat *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* as a pair.

44 It identifies the unfamiliar *qupai* 曲牌(tune names) and how they developed as a result of the transmutations of other *qupai* or the anomalous merge of two or more melodies.
Critical commentary helps the reader appreciate lines that the commentator considers particularly well written.

The JZZ commentary takes charge of the problems the readers might encounter and solves them. It is prescriptive, whereas the “Li Zhuowu” commentary is provocative. The RYT edition encourages the readers to take upon themselves the authority to impose meaning subjectively upon texts. It makes reading a more personal, creative and even playful or irreverent process. We can detect traces of influence of the “Li Zhuowu” commentary in many post-RYT editions. I focus on one of them, the SJT edition, to demonstrate how it repackages the “Li Zhuowu” commentary, tempering his poignant wit with cultivated subtlety of “Chen Meigong”, another popular name under appropriative use.

The SJT edition with “Chen Meigong” commentary took a step farther in shaping the ways plays were printed and sold. It incorporates six plays into a meaningful set, including Xixiang ji and Pipa ji as well as Yougui ji (Story of the Secluded Chamber), Hongfu ji 紅拂記 (Red Whisk), Yuzan ji 玉簪記 (Jade Hairpin), and Xiuru ji 繡襦記 (Embroidered Jacket). While the six plays may have first came out in installments, they were treated as a set in a preface written in 1618 by Yu Wenxi 余文熙, and appeared subsequently as components of a book series called Liuhe tongchun 六合同春 (Spring in Six Domains).\(^\text{45}\) Chen Jiru’s 陳繼儒 (style name Meigong 眉公, 1558-1639) name is prominently displayed as the commentator.\(^\text{46}\)

---

\(^\text{45}\) Yu Wenxi’s preface is an incomplete text with some characters missing. For a transcription, see Chen, Ming kan Xixiang ji, 149.

\(^\text{46}\) The SJT edition provides ample information on the people involved in this publishing project: Xiao Tenghong (1586-?) is the publisher (蕭騰鴻梓), Yu Wenxi the proofreader (余文熙閱), and Xiao Mingsheng (1575-1644) the collator (蕭鳴盛校). Yu Wenxi is the cousin of the famous Jianyan publisher Yu Xiangdou, and the Shijian tang appears to be a publishing business that operated in both Jianyang, Fujian and Nanjing. For more information on the Xiao family publishers and its connections with two other Jianyang publishers—the Liu and Yu families—demonstrated in the SJT plays, see Lucille Chia, Printing for Profit (Harvard Asia Center, 2002),173; Chen, Ming Kan Xixiang ji, 152-53.
The SJT publishing house seemed to favor Chen’s commentary, since it published thirteenth editions of dramatic works accompanied by his commentary. Just as in the case of the “Li Zhuowu” commentary, the “Chen Meigong” commentary’s connection to the famous literatus Chen Jiru is spurious. While it is hard to trace the commentary to the historical Chen Meigong, it is easy to see its stylistic link to the RYT “Li Zhuowu” commentary, as we read this part of the preface:

As for the description of characters without any traces of chopping and cutting or brush and ink, none excels Xixiang ji … I have obtained a copy of the book and read it; the writing winds back and forth, twists and turns; its spirit leaps out yet the words are nowhere to be seen. To call it ‘the first divine thing that ever existed’—it surely deserves the name! With my superficial understanding, I wrote some occasional comments with the wish to share my appreciation of the work with interested readers. Alas, it is as natural and marvelous as the fusion of water and moon!”

The emphasized parts repeat the RYT “Li Zhuowu” commentary almost verbatim, and a summary comment at the end of Xixiang ji even more clearly echoes “Li Zhuowu”:

Zhuo the Elder (Li Zhuowu) said Xixiang ji is the work of Nature, since human craftsmanship can never reach that level of ingenuity. Its representation of things and images is like myriad blossoms. Its portrayal of feelings and sceneries flows with unspeakable charm. In the moonlit empty courtyard, with leaves falling in the forlorn autumn, repeatedly reciting and chanting from Xixiang ji, I feel as if worldly things have all returned to dust, my spirit and soul may roam wherever they wish. Zhuo the Elder is truly a master of reading!

---

47 Zhu Wanshu, Mingdai xiqu pingdian, 90.

48 For Chen Meigong’s role in the late Ming publishing business, see Ōki Yasushi, Min-Matsu Kōnan no shuppan bunka 明末江南の出版文化[A study of the publishing culture in late Ming Jiangnan] (Tokyo: Kenbun shuppan, 2004),163-72.

This paragraph sounds like a homage to “Zhuo the Elder”, and that “Chen” basically reiterates the former’s observations in a more flowery and elaborate way. In fact, we will feel the ghostly presence of “Li Zhuowu” throughout the “Chen Meigong” commentary, since it alters “Li”’s wording without changing much of the meaning. “Chen Meigong” comes across as a less blunt version of “Li Zhuowu”. He substitutes “Li”’s emotional outcry with a stylish presentation of sentiments. For instance, “Chen” gives a literary structure to his outrage at the *Pipa ji* character Cai Bojie:

*Pipa ji* is a book of ridicule and condemnation through and through. With [Cai Bojie’s] marriage into the Niu (“Bull”) household, [the author] mocks him as a beast; with the famine, he accuses Cai of failing to take care of his parents; With [Cai’s wife being forced to] eat bran and chaff and to cut off her hair, he accuses him of abandoning his principal wife; With his wife using her apron [to carry earth] to build the grave mound, the author sneers at him for not returning for the funeral; his wife carrying the lute sets off his beggarly behavior; Zhang Guangcai’s kindness highlights Cai’s lack of humanity. In the scenes where Cai plays the zither and enjoys the moon, although he utters filial words, the subjects are far from filial. Expressing complaints through the lute, composing the poem in the study, conferring titles at the graves—the author spares no effort to condemn him!

The disparagement of Cai Bojie in this passage is no weaker than that of “Li Zhuowu”, yet its parallel structure takes the form of controlled literary prose that expresses disapproval with artistic restraint.

The SJT edition’s stylized remaking of the “Li Zhuowu commentary” appears not only in literary expression but also in typography. The prefaces and scene comments are printed in a cursory calligraphical style that lends them a refined appearance. The refined taste reflected in

---

* Dingjuan Chen Meigong xiansheng piping Xixiang ji, in National Library of China, Beijing.
the cursory script matches well with the terse literary prose in scene comments, although the occasional colloquial phrases still belie an incomplete assimilation of the “Li Zhuowu” comments. For instance, the scene comment of scene 14 says: “The old Bull is so snobbish. Isn’t there a proper guy to marry his daughter? Why force her onto the Optimus. Such a Bull!” That of scene 30 reads: “[he’d] rather starve his parents to death than to irritate his father-in-law!” Those occasional phrases show that the sharp edge of “Li Zhuowu” is not well concealed by the more graceful rhetoric of “Chen Meigong”. This becomes apparent in the upper-margin comments that waver between two voices and critical stances: a detached stance that employs a succinct prose with literary allusions, and an engaged stance that uses a more colloquial speech to mock the characters and give outlet to the readers’ emotions.

The RYT edition of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji introduces a new style of drama commentary with significant ramifications. Its impact turned out to be a mixed blessing. It inspired a line of personages like Jin Shengtan who viewed commentary as personal ruminations and artistic creation that brings immortality, but also spawned a number of commentaries that masqueraded as the insights of well-known figures yet that simply copied “Li Zhuowu” verbatim. The SJT “Chen Meigong” commentary is a case in between, but the Zhuding edition we consider in Chapter 2 belongs to the negative extreme. It only includes commentary to support such a claim in its title while the effect of its commentary is totally negligible.

“Poetic Pictures” and Evocative Illustrations

As we shift our attention from commentary to illustration in the RYT edition of Pipa ji and Xixiang ji, we are prompted to adopt a different reading distance and interpretative strategy. The illustrator detaches himself from the events in the plays and allows the reader to experience the pictures primarily through subtle and associative emotions, in sharp contrast with the
commentator’s emphatically expressed love and disdain through direct and intimate verbal interaction with the text. The transition from the textual mode to the visual mode of expression, together with the changing tenor of emotions expressed, adds several layers to the RYT edition and enhances the pleasure of reading.

By the late Wanli period when the RYT illustrations appeared, the competition among booksellers has encouraged them to engage highly skilled professional artists to illuminate their texts. The finest illustrators and carvers even signed their drawings and engravings, as artists would have signed their paintings. Such signatures can be found on several pictures of the RYT edition, which tell us that the illustrator is Zhao Bi 趙璧 and the carver is Huang Yingguang 黃應光 (1592-?), a sojourner in Hangzhou who was a native of Shexian, Anhui and the twenty-sixth generation descendant of the famous Huang family from Qiu village. The signature on a Xixiang ji illustration also indicates the date (a summer day of 1610) and location (Wushan tang 吳山堂) where the illustration was produced (Fig. 2.2). A Pipa ji illustration is inscribed with words “Zhao Bi from Jiaxing”. Information concerning the illustrator and carver was rarely documented in such detail in the Ming illustrations, so the exceptions in the RYT edition shows

---

51 Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 192-93.
52 Chen, Ming kan Xixiang ji, 95; Liu Shangheng, Huizhou keshu yu cangshu (Yangzhou: Guangling shushe, 2003), 152. Zhao Bi, zi Wuxia 無瑕, style name Jiangxue daoren 綺雪道人. In Minghua lu 明畫錄 (A Catalog of Ming Paintings) compiled in the early Qing, there is an entry that describes Zhao Bi: “He has a fascination for the old style and loves the unconventional. Being transcendent and untrammeled, he is an expert on the grass script and excels in poetry and painting. He was known for his pristine and elegant landscape paintings.” Zhu Chongshou, Zhongguo chatu yishu shihua (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubashe, 2005), 77.
53 It is not clear where the Wushan tang was located. Since the RYT was a printing house in Hangzhou, and a range of hills southeast of the West Lake is known as Wu Mountains, it is likely that the Wushan tang was Zhao Bi’s studio located in the vicinity of the Wu Mountains.
54 Both signed images described Zhao Bi’s activity as mo 模 (to copy, to imitate). However, as Burnett reminds us, within the art-historical context, the terms mo 模/摹 and fang 傳 can also indicate, “to work in the mode of an earlier artist.” In the seventeenth-century, a fang painting can be at once an homage to an earlier master and yet a free and innovative improvisation on his forms and ideals. Burnett, Dimensions of Originality, 151, 208.
that the printer took pride in the fine quality of the illustrations and very likely included the names of the famous painter and carver as a way of promotion.

The RYT Pipa ji and Xixiang ji each has twenty illustrations, with ten appearing in front of the main text of the first fascicle and ten in front of that of the second fascicle of each play. They display a generally consistent and unique style. Compared with previous illustrations for Xixiang ji and Pipa ji, the artist Zhao Bi is more devoted to the depiction of natural scenery. His illustrations for the RYT display a scenic mode with human figures occupying a much smaller space and reduced to a smaller size. Some of his images have no human figures at all. If it is true
that Zhao Bi was known for his landscape paintings, his illustrations might well have taken on the characteristics of landscape painting.\textsuperscript{55}

However, a significant departure from pure landscape painting is the use of poetic lines from \textit{Pipa ji} and \textit{Xixiang ji} as captions. Those captions are vital links to the play texts. They bring meaning to the otherwise nameless images. In other words, a caption “anchors” the picture that is a sign with numerous possible meanings.\textsuperscript{56} Taking the \textit{Xixiang ji} illustration with the illustrator’s signature as an example (Fig. 2.2), without the caption such a landscape picture is only one among many late-Ming images with the basic components of trees, rocks, mountains, a river, and a boat. Since the water is low and tranquil and the vegetation and trees appear sparse in the image, it is possible that it belongs to the seasonal genre of the autumn landscape. But that is all what we can glean from the image if it is unaccompanied by the caption. However, with the caption “blue mists hiding the trees, sere grass stretching to heaven, a boat athwart in the countryside ford” (苍烟迷树，衰草连天，野渡舟横) added, it points to the corresponding scene of Yingying wasting away after Student Zhang’s departure.\textsuperscript{57} The line specifically depicts the panoramic view unfolding before Yingying’s eyes as she climbs up a high tower and rolls up the blinds. The landscape shrouded in mist and desolation is both an external landscape and correlates to Yingying’s inner landscape, which is soaked in tears and melancholy. The last line

\textsuperscript{55} As Hegel notes, illustrations during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries “shared to a remarkable degree the artistic elements common to the decorative arts of all kinds—including the work of professional painters.” Hegel, \textit{Reading Illustrated Fiction}, 200.

\textsuperscript{56} I use the word “anchor” in relation to Roland Barthes’s concept of “anchorage”. Linguistic elements can serve to 'anchor' (or constrain) the preferred readings of an image: “to fix the floating chain of signifieds”. Barthes introduced this concept of textual anchorage primarily in relation to advertisements, but it could apply to other genres such as captioned pictures and photographs, maps, and cartoons and comics. Roland Barthes. "Rhetoric of the Image." In \textit{Image, Music, Text}, Ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 39.

\textsuperscript{57} Unless otherwise indicated, translations of captions are taken from Idema and West’s \textit{The Story of the Western Wing}.
“a boat athwart in the countryside ford” (野渡舟横) alludes to the Tang poet Wei Yingwu’s 韋應物 (737-792) “By the River to the West of Chuzhou.” 58 But unlike the Tang poem’s sense of tranquility and ease (a boat at ease with itself and nature) balanced with sound and movement in nature, the empty boat floating here conveys a feeling of disorientation and loneliness when associated with the misty trees and the withering grass, as if it is were abandoned there and does not know where to go. 59 This also perfectly fits Yingying’s feelings of loneliness and helplessness. This is an example of how a poetic caption can limit, anchor, but also enrich the meaning of an image through its intertextual link to poetry.

An image in Pipa ji (Fig. 2.3) that is also composed such elements of a river, a boat, mountains, rocks, and trees conveys a completely different meaning when associated with a different caption. The image depicts a night scene, with an empty boat moored under a cliff. Without the caption it can only be described as a serene landscape. With the caption “The night is quiet, the river cold, fish wouldn’t bite” (夜静水寒鱼不饵) and its position in the sequence of illustrations (after Cai’s examination success and before his attempted resignation), we can

58 Wei Yingwu, 滁州西澗 (By the River to the West of Chuzhou), Quan Tang shi, ed. Peng Dingqiu et al. (N.p. 1706), vol 193, no.63:
   Where tender grasses rim the stream
   獨憐幽草潤邊生,
   And deep boughs trill with mango-birds,
   上有黃鸝深樹鳴.
   On the spring flood of last night's rain
   春潮帶雨晚來急,
   The ferry-boat moves as though someone were poling.
   野渡無人舟自横.

59 Boats were regularly used as metaphors for the poet himself during the Tang.
conclude the image must be related to Cai’s marriage with lady Niu. The caption removes our last doubt, because the fish that refuses to bite the bait is a metaphor of Cai’s refusal of the marriage proposal from minister Niu. This metaphor also shows the illustrator’s ingenious way of representing and commenting on the characters in the play. The examples of the Xixiang ji and Pipa ji landscape images, which are unimpressive without captions and richly meaningful.

---

60 The caption appears in a couplet in Pipa ji: “The night is quiet, the river cold, fish wouldn’t bite. How laughable that our boat returns carrying nothing but bright moonlight.” The couplet first appeared in a poem attributed to Monk Huating chuanzi 華亭舡子和尚 that reads: 千尺絲綸直下垂, 一波纔動萬波隨. 夜靜水寒魚不食, 滿船空載月明歸. See Huihong 惠洪, Lengzhai yehua (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 54. The couplet often appears in novels and drama to express dashed hopes.

61 See more of the source and analysis of this line in Hsiao Li-ling, “Political Loyalty versus Filial Piety,” 29.
with their captions, demonstrate some of the hints and clues for reading embedded in the RYT illustrations. Nevertheless, the captions that connect the images to feelings and events in the play can not completely cancel out the images’ link to the generic landscapes they draw upon. Suppose the reader did not know or care about the context of the captions in the play, they can still sense a poetic mood in the series of images, which are mostly concerned with melancholy, contemplation, and remembrance.

*Image, Caption, and Poetic Mood*

The mood conveyed by the pictures is an effect created by the images and poetic captions working together. In the following I put together several images with their captions from *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* without referring to the captions’ context in the plays, in order to see what poetic “worlds” they could independently create. Afterwards, I take the dramatic context into consideration, to see how the images constitute a type of interpretation of the play texts. Among the twenty images for *Xixiang ji*, only the image on the separation between lovers involves significant human interaction. The rest of the images either fall into a pure scenic mode, or depict one person’s engagement with scenes of natural beauty. Images in the second fascicle of *Xixiang ji* are particularly representative. The first shows a mistress and her maid gazing at a corner of the garden when the dusk is approaching, accompanied by the caption “the tender green pond hides away sleeping ducks; pale yellow willows bear up roosting crows” (Fig. 2.4). The second image is a parting scene, with a servant carrying baggage waiting by the side of a horse and the migrating wild geese in the sky (Fig. 2.5). The caption says “holding hands before I leave, you ask when I will return; pouring the wine of farewell, my heart melts.”  

---

62 The translation for this caption is mine. The wording of this caption differs from its corresponding line in the play and its meaning is slightly altered.
Fig. 2.4. Illustration 11 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition, 1610, Shanghai Library, Shanghai

Fig. 2.5. Illustration 12 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition, 1610, Shanghai Library, Shanghai
spare landscape with mountains horizontally stretching from the right to the left edge, and two willow trees and a small thatched pavilion by the side of two other bare trees (Fig. 2.6). The large area of whiteness in between suggests a river that separates the pavilion on this bank from distant mountains. The caption is “evening light, an old road, sere grass, a long dike”. The fourth one depicts a man and his servant stop by the side of a rice field, again with the outline of the mountains sketched in a minimalistic way, leaving a large area of whiteness (Fig. 2.7). The landscape shows no visible path for the travelers to continue their trip, with the precipice hanging over them from the right. The caption is “ripening millet, autumn winds, listening to his horse.

Fig. 2.6. Illustration 13 from Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji, RYT edition, 1610, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint).
Fig. 2.7. Illustration 14 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition, 1610, National Library of China, Beijing (*Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan*, 2011 reprint)

Fig. 2.8. Illustration 15 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji*, RYT edition, 1610, National Library of China, Beijing (*Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan*, 2011 reprint).
The fifth is again a traveler riding horse on a path surrounded by towering mountains (Fig. 2.8). Raising the whip in his left hand, he seems to urge the horse to move fast, but his head is turned back, as if viewing the scenery, or beckoning to the servant who follows on foot on the bridge. The caption is “Amid four bounds of mountain colors; in the single lash of the lingering rays.” The sixth shows a man admiring water gushing down over layers of rocks and the roofs of some buildings appearing in the clouds afar (Fig. 2.9). The caption reads “Gazing at East of Pu: the monastery is obscured by evening clouds”. The seventh is the one discussed in the previous

---

63 The caption contains an allusion to the poem “Shuli”黍离(millet) in the Book of Songs. The poems laments the destruction of the Zhou dynasty, and shows the deep sorrow of a former official who passed by the ruins of the Zhou palaces that have turned into a field of ripening millet. The phrase黍离 or 禾黍 later carried the implication of sorrow, nostalgia, and remembrance. See the Book of Songs, trans. Arthur Waley, and ed. with additional translation by Joseph Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 56-57.
section, with the caption “blue mists hiding the trees, sere grass stretching to heaven, a boat athwart in the countryside ford” (Fig. 2.2). The eighth is a boudoir scene where a woman looks out from her window at a garden with blooming peach trees. The caption is “in spring winds, on nights when the peach blossoms opened” (Fig. 2.10). The ninth is a man reading in his study, with wutong leaves falling in his courtyard. The caption reads “In autumn rains, at the time when wutong leaves fell” (Fig. 2.11). 64

Fig. 2.10. Illustration 18 from Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji, RYT edition, 1610, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint).

64 The poetic captions for the eighth and ninth images allude to Bai Juyi’s (772-846) “Song of Unending Sorrow” with only a slight change of a phrase from “autumn rain” to “night rain”. In Bai’s poem, the two lines appear in the section in which the grief-stricken emperor Xuanzong wanders through the old gardens of his newly recaptured palaces, visiting spots he once frequented with his beloved Consort Yang. They indicate his everlasting love and longing for the dead Consort Yang, as his memories of her beauty flash back and haunt him at every season of the year and every moment of the day.
To sum up, this series of images show solitary figures traveling or wandering in natural landscape, or in a private space occupied by thoughts, with meaningful visual markers such as peach and apricot blossoms, wutong tree and leaves. Together with the poetic captions they convey a melancholic, contemplative, and lonely feeling. The eighth and the ninth images form a pair of female and male figures deep in thought, both very likely filled with longing for a distant lover (Figs. 2.10-2.11). Their captions form a couplet alluding to Bai Juyi’s “Song of Unending Sorrow”, and suggest that the longing is lingering and endless, no matter whether on a flower-

---

65 David McMullen notes that flowers and trees in the Tang poetry often serve as symbols of the imperial grandeur before the An Lushan rebellion. For the post-rebellion poets such as Du Fu and Bai Juyi, they are metaphors evoking memories or imaginations of court life and the Xuanzong emperor. David McMullen, "Recollection Without Tranquility: Du Fu, the Imperial gardens, and the State", Asia Major 14: 2 (2001): 200-205; 248-250. Therefore, the peach and apricot blossoms and wutong leaves here both signify the passage of time in nature and carry layers of symbolic meanings such as prosperity and decline, passionate love and its sad ending, mingled with feelings of nostalgia and sorrow.
blooming spring day or a rainy autumn night. The tenth image (Fig. 2.12) at the very end adds a lofty coda to the series, with two men sitting on top of a cliff gazing at a river with magnificent waves. The caption is “Listen to the river’s sounds roaring and surging, see the mountains’ color uneven and mottled.” The image puts an end to the melancholic tone of this series, and introduces a broad view where the nature is working its wonders while the human figures are perfectly at ease and enjoying what they see. In a musical metaphor, it is like a sonorous, glorious last movement that ties up and sublimes the languorous, chatty tone of the earlier movements.
The Image-Caption Unit and its Reflective Comments on the Play Text

At this moment, if we associate the ten images (Figs. 2.2; 2.4-2.12) with the text of the play, we will discover that the captions are all taken from the scenes where Yingying and Zhang parted and lived in a solitary state remembering their love and missing each other. There are many events in the second fascicle of Xixiang ji (Zhang’s thwarted and then successful tryst with Yingying, Hongniang’s persuasion of Madam Cui, Zhang’s dream of Yingying, exam success, and the grand reunion), but apparently the illustrator was not interested in moments of narrative tension or climax. Instead, his imagination was poetically oriented, finding its best expression in the creation of images that evoke a mood of solitude and remembrance. The captions, when taken out of their contexts, also acquire a life of their own. The tenth caption (Fig. 2.12) is drawn from Scene 18 where Zhang receives a letter from Yingying. In that context, it describes his activities during a period of mounting desire for her, so it is tinged with listlessness and longing. But the image alone conveys a mood of ease and transcendence of worldly cares, as if the figures finally cleansed themselves of various desires and freely roamed with nature. The human figures who appear like friends in the image do not correspond to any character in the play, but the attitude they convey is comparable to the enlightened state of Zhang after his dream (in Scene 16) that many critics celebrate. The image seems to depict a state of mind after a person awakens from qing, a perspective that transcends the entanglements of love and desire. It puts an end to the lingering melancholy that permeates the first nine images.

Likewise, the RYT Pipa ji illustrations rarely show any interest in depicting human interaction and concentrate on single solitary figures immersed in contemplation or remembrance. Of the twenty images, only the first and the last are centered on human activities and interactions. Even in those images, social interactions were always mediated by the appreciation of natural
scenery. The first places the Cai house in a natural setting (no walls) and shows the parents stepping away from their table admiring the mountains and trees, and downplays the ritual elements in the original. Besides the first and the last, the rest of the images either show a solitary figure immersed in thoughts or memory, or a landscape. The most significant ones are: the image with the caption “I approach the mirror, dark clouds of hair disheveled”, showing a woman combing her hair at the top floor of a building deep in a compound, separated by clouds from the distant gate and wall and the swirling trees in and outside of the courtyard (Fig. 2.13). The image suggests deep seclusion and a troubled mind by making the woman appear as if she is suspended above the clouds and the swinging trees, a position of extreme isolation and precariousness. Another image with a similar composition is the one with an official climbing long stairs toward a palace lost among the top of trees and clouds (Fig. 2.14). The seemingly illusory and inaccessible nature of the palace implies that the man is working toward something virtually impossible to attain. In both images the illustrator uses large areas of whiteness to suggest a kind of unfathomable distance, a technique that works effectively to create the meanings of the images.

The images with solitary human figures are coupled with suggestive captions. One has the caption “In dreams I’ve just reached my hometown; the wind pounding on blue-green bamboo shakes me awake”, showing a man sitting in a pavilion facing a pond with water lilies (Fig. 2.15). The other one with the caption “The blue silk’s streaked where I’ve sealed the letter with tears; my soul in dreams winds round those silver screens that block the way”, shows a man putting a letter into an envelope in front of his desk in a fine garden. Yet another one shows a man standing beside a wutong tree watching his servant sweeping away the fallen leaves. The

66 Translations of the Pipa ji captions are from Jean Mulligan’s The Lute with my modifications.
Fig. 2.13. Illustration 3 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Pipa ji*, RYT edition, 1610, National Library of China, Beijing (*Guben xiqu congkan*, 1954 reprint).

Fig. 2.15. Illustration 11 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Pipa ji*, RYT edition, 1610, National Library of China, Beijing (*Guben xiqu congkan*, 1954 reprint).

Fig. 2.16. Illustration 17 from *Li Zhuowu Piping Pipa ji*, RYT edition, 1610, National Library of China, Beijing (*Guben xiqu congkan*, 1954 reprint).
caption says, “The wutong leaves have filled the courtyard, just as depression piles up in my heart”. Even without the context of the play, those pictures and their captions that frequently refer to dreams convey a sense of distress and remembrance of things far away and in the past. After placing them in the context of the play, they more clearly point to Cai Bojie’s private memories of his hometown and family, and to the pain and loneliness he feels in the midst of comfort and luxury. Through a thorough analysis of the details of those pictures, the scholar Hsiao Li-ling regards them as the illustrator’s commentary on the play. According to Hsiao, the illustrator shows Cai spending his private time as a retired literatus, in order to argue against the notion of Cai as a coward yielding to the temptation of wealth and status. Hsiao’s discussion is fairly persuasive, but her identification of the male figure in the images with the character Cai Bojie prevents her from considering other ways to approach the images. I suggest a way of looking at the figure as at once Cai and not Cai, because I am convinced that the illustrator’s imagination is not confined by the play text. Some of the images signal a big departure from the plot, such as the one showing a man preparing to annotate The Book of Changes in a garden setting (Fig. 2.16), and they could well be a matter of showcasing various refined literati activities. While the reader may infer from the illustrations a different interpretation of Cai Bojie, the illustrator could have simply used the play text as an aid to work out a group of vignettes on the literati lifestyle, which is only tangentially related to the play. Thus, I find the complete identification of the literatus figure with Cai and the reading of images in accordance with the narrative sequence too rigid. Instead, I propose to look at the mood conveyed by the images, a cumulative effect of a group of “poetic pictures” that becomes the definitive emotions of the illustrations. The search for the poetic mood rather than for specific narrative clues could open up the prospect of considering illustrations beyond the territory of a single play, and examine an
illustrator’s work across several plays in order to discern the common style, motif, and poetic mood that he brings to those plays of different themes and subjects.

*An Illustrator’s Imagination: Narrative- or Poetically-oriented?*

Taking the RYT *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* as a whole, the illustrator Zhao Bi’s poetic imagination often overrides his concern for the narrative of the play. He often depicts sparse landscapes with minimal sketches that leave lots of white space, creating a mood for the reader to savor and interpret. Since the images are not closely tied to the plot, he allows the reader more freedom to associate or dissociate the images from the plays. Despite *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*’s difference in theme and subject, Zhao Bi’s illustrations for both plays are dominated by melancholy, contemplation, and remembrance. They could be viewed independently as an album of pictures with those poetic moods, or understood as commentaries on those plays. If we see the male figure in the image as Student Zhang or Cai Bojie, then the illustrations portray a refined literatus Zhang beset by melancholy, quite different from the amusing, clumsy Student Zhang identified by “Li Zhuowu” in the commentaries. Similarly, the illustrations in *Pipa ji* portray a reclusive Cai Bojie detached from wealth and status, again quite different from the spineless, morally torn Cai despised by “Li Zhuowu”. The illustrator’s representation of them as respectable literati with rich sophisticated feelings could be seen as subverting the perspective of the “Li Zhuowu” commentator.

If we do not restrict our understanding of the images to the characters and events in the plays, we could say the illustrations add subtlety, sophistication, and ambivalence to the play.

---

67 In the SJT edition, which adapted the RTY landscape mode (and some of its pictures) and transformed it into a hybridized entity of picture, poetic inscription, and calligraphy, the affinity with late-Ming albums of illustrated poetry became clearer. Comparison with the SJT illustrations and illustrated poetry albums such as the *Tangshi huapu* 唐詩畫譜 will be the focus of next section.
texts through their intertextual references to other poetic texts and images.\textsuperscript{68} The illustrations serve as a visual index to scenes in the plays and to the imaginative unfolding of other poetic “worlds” triggered by their captions.

To recapitulate the argument raised at the beginning of this chapter, the exhilarating “Li Zhuowu commentary” and the melancholic images together constitute the RYT edition of \textit{Xixiang ji} and \textit{Pipa ji}, which introduced a number of innovations. Most important among them is the varying reading modes and emotions that the commentary and illustration call forth. It would be hard to speculate how an individual reader experienced the shifts, but we can be sure that the book requires renewed sensitivity to read the old plays. The RYT also allows a reader to see how other readers read, in particular, how a commentator and an illustrator unpack the text in quite different ways.

\textit{What is Original in the RTY Illustration: Comparison with the JZZ and SJT Editions}

This section compares the RYT illustrations with the images of the JZZ edition and the SJT edition to show the significant innovations the RYT introduces. It places the RYT illustrations in the broader context of decorative arts in the late Ming. Through a discussion of the RYT and the SJT illustrations’ correlation with illustrated poetry albums, we will get a better understanding of the “poetic picture” as a cross-genre product made possible in particular by the sharing of artisans, techniques, and resources in the late Ming publishing world. This discussion will then leave us prepared for the more complicated visual pastiche in the next chapter, in which plagiarism and creative revision, narrative and poetic elements come together to more dazzling effects.

\textsuperscript{68} In the case of RTY illustrations, since the captions were mostly taken from the play texts, they are poetic lines that allude to earlier poetry and song-lyrics. When they appeared independently with the illustrations, the mood or emotional response they evoke could not be limited by the context of the play. Rather, the match of such a poetic line with a sketch of landscape could evoke rich and varied responses depending on the literary cultivation and emotional state of the reader.
Again, the JZZ illustrations serve as a good starting point, since they are a typical example of images that follow the narrative sequence closely and depict characters faithfully.\(^6\) In such pictures, character figures are the central focus. Those images meticulously present the interaction between characters, rendering their facial expressions and gestures with vividness and precision. They imply a degree of narrative dynamism: An image captures a moment that suggests an earlier action and prefigures the action to follow.\(^7\) It conveys a sense of immediacy as if the story were unfolding right before the reader’s eyes.

The JZZ illustrations serve as a visual aid to the reader’s grasp of the storyline and as pleasant artworks that reveal the characters’ subtle relations and psychological states through carefully designed pictorial composition.\(^8\) The illustrator bases his imagination closely on the play text and shows a close-up view of the characters in a setting (a room, a corner of a courtyard or a garden). The apparently short distance between the viewer and the image has its advantages.

---

\(^6\) Chen, Ming kan Xixiang ji, 108. The JZZ illustrations were faithfully reproduced to the last detail from an existing edition of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji printed by Wang Guanghua’s 汪光華 Wanhu xuan 玩虎軒 around 1597. The illustrations of the Wanhu xuan edition of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji still survived, and they look exactly the same as those of the JZZ edition. What type of transaction occurred between the owner of Wanhu xuan, Wang Guanghua, and the owner of Jizhi zhai 繼志齋, Chen Bangtai 陳邦泰, is beyond our knowledge. What is most likely to have happened was that Chen Bangtai procured the illustration blocks of Wanhu xuan (bought them from Wang or his workers, or simply plagiarized them by using a printed edition as models for his block carvers). The National Library of China has a damaged copy of the Wanhua xuan Xixiang ji, and the Beijing Library and Anhui Provincial Museum respectively hold copies. For discussion of the Wanhu xuan and JZZ Xixiang ji, see Dong Jie, Ming Qing kan Xixiang ji banhua kaoxi, 13-25. For a comparison of the Wanhu xuan and JZZ illustrations for Pipa ji, see Hsiao Li-ling, “Wan Ming banhua yu xiqu”.

\(^7\) Gotthold Ephraim Lessing first introduced the notion of “pregnant moment” to show that the spatial arts can sometimes overcome their narrative deficiency by selecting a so-called “pregnant moment” that offers a window on the preceding and following actions. See Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, [1766] 1984). For instance, the first image for Pipa ji depicts Cai Bojie and his wife celebrating their parents’ birthday and serving food to them. It is the specific moment when Zhao Wuniang hands a cup of tea to her husband and bashfully lifts her sleeve to her face. It suggests a previous action—Zhao pours a cup of tea from the jar at the left side of the table, and the next action—Cai is going to take the cup and place it in front of his father.

\(^8\) As we discussed in the previous section, the JZZ Xixiang ji and Pipa ji were clearly designed as a “paired edition”. Its illustrations for Xixiang ji and Pipa ji exhibit a consistent mode: they are interspersed in the text and follow the narrative sequence closely. Besides their tendency to highlight the most dramatic events and to convey the characters’ emotions, they also display similarity in the spatial layout, in the patterns of dresses, hairstyle, furniture, textile, and the texture of trees and rocks. All those elements point toward a shared craftsmanship that excels in conveying emotional and cultural messages through meticulously executed visual details.
and drawbacks. On the one hand, we have a full view of the body language of characters that often tacitly convey their relationships by showing them lean toward or lean slightly away from one another. In the image for scene 28 of *Pipa ji* (Fig. 2.17), Cai Bojie leans against the balustrade and gazes at the moon, while his wife Lady Niu stands beside him ordering the maid to serve wine. Cai seems to be deeply absorbed in his own thoughts and completely oblivious of his wife and the surroundings. Cai’s face and upper body are conspicuously turned away from his wife—such a visual detail reveals Cai’s secret longing for his first wife on the Mid-Autumn night and his deep frustration that could not be dispelled by a lavish banquet and cheerful companions. In another image that illustrates a moment in *Xixiang ji* when Lady Cui breaks up the betrothal between Scholar Zhang and Yingying, the lovers are shown standing separated by a stern Lady Cui. Yingying turns toward the right and Zhang leans toward the left (Fig. 2.18). Yingying meekly stands behind her mother but her tilted face and downcast eyes show signs of defiance and distress. Zhang leans toward Hongniang as if he were too drunk to support himself; his shoulders and sleeves hang down as if all his strength has left him; his eyes are downcast, barely open, showing that he is in an extreme state of shock and disappointment. The two images demonstrate the mimetic function of illustrations at its best: they effectively reflect the dramatic events and imbue them with visual beauty and emotional intensity.

On the other hand, by focusing on the large-scale human figures, the JZZ edition limits the expressive power of the setting. In fact, the reader could only see parts of buildings, rocks, and trees with exquisite patterns that are no more than decorative. When we look at a similar
Fig. 2.17. Illustration from *Chongjiao Pipa ji*, JZZ edition, 1598, National Archives of Japan, Tokyo (*Riben suocang xijian Zhongguo xiqu wenxian congkan*, vol.16, 2006 reprint).

Fig. 2.18. Illustration from *Chongjiao Bei Xixiang ji*, JZZ edition, 1598, National Archives of Japan, Tokyo (*Riben suocang xijian Zhongguo xiqu wenxian congkan*, vol.16, 2006 reprint).
image handled by the RYT illustrator, we often recognize a zooming-out effect that increases the distance between the viewer and the image. As a result, the viewer obtains a panoramic view of a landscape with a small, solitary human figure. For instance, the RYT *Pipa ji* contains an image (Fig. 2.19) that looks like an adaptation from the JZZ moon-gazing image (Fig. 2.17) but that significantly reduces the size of human figures, changes their location from a pavilion to a terrace that hovers high above clouds. Human figures only occupy the lower left of the image that spans two half-folio. Cai still sits turning away from his wife, but the emphasis of the image has shifted away from interpersonal relationship to the large blank space between Cai and the distant moon. The terrace on a precipice, the blank space, and the poetic caption work together to create a sense of isolation, melancholy, and longing. The blank space becomes a poetic space for the reader to imaginatively place himself in. It could elicit emotional resonance in anyone whose feelings for a friend or lover has ever been stirred up in a lovely moonlit night. In this way, the RYT illustrations disengage the reader from the specific dramatic events and offer a poetic experience that counts on the individual reader’s imaginative association of feelings with the visual image and the poetic caption.

If the JZZ images are referential, the RYT illustrations are evocative. The JZZ edition helps the reader understand the plot and the characters’ emotions at specific dramatic moments. Conceived to match a poetic line and invested with motifs of brush painting, the RYT image contains rich sensibilities that go beyond the referent. The JZZ’s faithful adherence to the dramatic events does not leave much room for the reader’s imaginative participation in the picture. In contrast, the RYT illustrations loosen up the connection between the dramatic scenes and the images, allowing the reader to imaginatively take part in the creation of meanings for
each picture. Consequently, it is possible for an individual reader to arrive at his or her own particular interpretation of the illustrations and their relationships to the text.

The RYT introduces a type of open-ended image, which were soon adapted by the SJT edition of 1618. The SJT absorbed a variety of influences from not only the RYT but also illustrated poetry albums that were popular at the time. As a result, it moves the “poetic picture” from an indefinite space to the concrete space of Jiangnan landscapes that invite the reader with a lifestyle of leisure and cultural sophistication.

The owner of the SJT printing house, Xiao Tenghong, clearly hoped to leave his personal mark on the SJT set of illustrations. On several images, next to the poetic caption, a spot was reserved for his signature and seal, as well as those of Xiao Mingsheng (zi Jingwei 僑韋, his
uncle and the annotator) and Xiao Zhaoming 蕭照鳴 (probably a member of the same Xiao clan).

This practice is hardly surprising, considering the increasing number of seals and signatures found on drama illustrations from the late Wanli to the Chongzhen era. Moreover, the practice is not limited to illustrations of plays. In the Tangshi huapu 唐詩畫譜 (An Illustrated Album of Tang Poetry) and a series of other illustrated albums printed in the first and second decades of the seventeenth century,⁷² there was an assortment of seals and signatures of the illustrators and the calligraphers, in addition to the diverse calligraphic styles in which the Tang poems were copied and the exquisite images that accompany those poems.⁷³

---

⁷² See Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 197, Chapter 4, Note 33; Park, Art by the Book, 83; Mao Wenfang毛文芳, “Yu sushi zhong yasang: Wan Ming Tangshi huapu tuxiang yinggou zhi shenmei pinwei” 於俗世中雅賞—晚明唐詩畫譜圖象營構之審美品位, in Tongsu wenxue yu yazheng wenxue 通俗文學與雅正文學 (Taizhong: Guoli Zhongxing daxue, 2001), 315-64. There were a series of albums of illustrated poetry printed in the late Wanli and Tianqi period. Most notable among them are Shiyou huapu 詩餘畫譜 (An Illustrated Album of Ci Poetry) printed in 1612 by a Mr. Wang from Anhui, and Tangshi huapu 唐詩畫譜 (ca. 1616) by Huang Fengchi 黃鳳池 who was most likely also from Anhui and related to the Huang family from Qiu village, She county. The Tangshi huapu include three volumes that are respectively devoted to the seven-character quatrain, the five-character verse, and the six-character verse. For an estimate of the printing date, see Han Sheng, “Ming mo Tangshi huapu fanke zhisheng jiqi wenxue yixi” 明末唐詩畫譜翻刻之盛及其文學意義, in Wenyi pinglun 文藝評論 No.2 (2012), 145-48. During this period there were also a number of pictorial albums emulating the styles of eminent painters. Gushi huapu 顧氏畫譜 was edited by the court painter Gu Bing and printed in 1603 by Shuanggui tang雙桂堂 in Hangzhou. Besides the three-volume Tangshi huapu, Huang Fengchi is also the publisher of five other pictorial albums, the Meizu lanju sipu梅竹蘭菊四譜, Cao mu hua shi pu草木花詩譜, Muben huaniao pu木本花鳥譜, Gujin huapu古今畫譜, Minggong shanpu名公扇譜. During the Tianqi period, Huang collected the eight volumes together into Huangshi huapu bazhong黃氏畫譜八種. A reprint of Huang’s albums can be found in Tangshi huapu bazhong 唐詩畫譜八種 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997). A copy of Tangshi huapu was sold at the price of half a tael (silver), according to the price printed on the Huangshi huapu bazhong黃氏畫譜八種 held by Harvard-Yenching Library. See Shen Jin 沈津, “Mingdai fangke tushu zhi liutong yu jiage” 明代坊刻圖書之流通與價格, in Guojia tushuguan guankan 國家圖書館館刊 85.1 (1996), 101-18.

⁷³ In this genre of illustrated poems, the basic unit consists of an image and a poem that appear on two sides of a folio. It is important to note that such an arrangement is different from the double-page illustrations found in novels and plays. In double-page illustrations, a picture runs over two pages that face one another: the page on the right and the page on the left belong to two separate folios that were carved on two different blocks. Such an arrangement facilitates the viewing from right to left of a complete picture. The reader does not have to flip the page to find the other half of the illustration. In the case of the illustrated poems, the reader first encounters the picture, and he has to turn the page to see the poem on the back. The poem on the right page and the image facing it on the left page does not form a pair, though it often confuses a first-time reader. The album clearly prioritizes its images over the text. The poems copied in various scripts that are not always legible to an untrained eye might be more significant for their visual appeal than for their contents.
In the *Tangshi huapu*, however, the attribution of brushwork to eminent scholars and artists such as Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1540-1620), Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636), and Chen Jiru is not substantiated.\(^7^4\) It may well be a strategy to enhance the prestige of the book by fabricating the signatures and seals of those celebrities.\(^7^5\) By the same token, we cannot take the seals and signatures of the SJT edition at face value. The publisher Xiao Tenghong’s primary concern is not the authenticity of his attributions. Rather, the most important thing is to impress the reader with a collection of renowned names in sumptuous visual display. Nor can we tell from the signatures of publisher Xiao Tenghong and his kinsmen in the illustrations if they really took part in designing the images and writing the captions. The rest of the images and their signatures are equally surrounded by mystery.

The name of Cai Chonghuan 蔡沖寰, a Ming painter from Xin’an who illustrated the *Qiyan Tangshi huapu* 七言唐詩畫譜 (An Illustrated Album of Tang Poetry: Seven-Character Quatrains), appears on several of the SJT illustrations. Two seals attributed to him look exactly the same as his seals in the *Qiyan Tangshi huapu*. It is possible that Cai Chonghuan was enlisted as an illustrator for the SJT edition, because some of the SJT images resemble the images in the *Qiyan Tangshi huapu* in terms of style and composition. Later I will discuss specific images from the RYT, the SJT, and the *Qiyan Tangshi huapu* for their shared sensibilities that informed the creation of “poetic pictures.” If Cai Chonghuan indeed played a role in the illustration of the

\(^7^4\) In *Tangshi huapu*, the poems are copied in an assortment of scripts and calligraphic styles, signed as being done by different personages and usually accompanied by seals. The subjects of the pictures in response to the poems are varied, ranging from landscapes and figures to birds-and-flowers. The pictures are deliberately rendered in different systems of texture strokes and styles. Some are clearly marked as “in the style of” certain renowned painters. Yet by simply looking at the pictures, we can hardly tell if the attribution is correct. Ma “Linking Poetry, Painting, and Prints,” 16.

\(^7^5\) Jiao Hong and Dong Qichang were identified as the calligraphers for Lu Chang’s 陸暢 “Ti Dugu shaofu yuanlin” 題獨孤少府園林 and Yang Shi’e’s 羊士諤 “Junzhong jishi” 郡中即事 in *Liuyan Tangshi huapu* 六言唐詩畫譜; Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 was credited as the calligrapher for Yu Shinan’s 虞世南 “Chunye” 春夜 in *Wuyan Tangshi huapu* 唐詩五言畫譜.
SJT edition, he will be a direct link between the SJT and *Qiyan Tangshi huapu*. The connection between the painter, the illustrated album, and the book illustration also shows that, by the late Ming, “the world of painting was already imbricated in that of the book”.

In addition to Cai Chonghuan, the SJT attributed the sources for its images to historically renowned artists such as Mi Yuanzhang 米元章 (aka. Mi Fu 米芾, the Song painter and calligrapher, 1051-1107), Zhao Songxue 趙松雪 (aka. Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫, the Yuan calligrapher and painter, 1254-1322), Xia Gui 夏圭 (painter, ca. 1180-1230), and painters active in the Ming, including Ding Yunpeng 丁雲鵬 (1547-ca.1628), Wang Tingce 王廷策, Xiong Lianquan 熊蓮泉, et al. Interestingly, some of the signatures identify the image as an imitation, such as “an imitation of Xiong Lianquan” 倣熊蓮泉寫 (in the style of Xiong Lianquan, inspired by works of Xiong Lianquan), while other images contain signatures such as “drawn by Mi Yuanzhang” 米元章寫 or “drawn by Zhao Songxue” 趙松雪寫. Obviously, the Song artist Mi Fu or the Yuan artist Zhao Mengfu could not be the real creators of those images and calligraphy. Such glaringly false attributions inevitably put in doubt the reliability of other signatures, including the contemporary Ming artists. More doubts are raised if we look at the *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* illustrations together. If the SJT publisher has indeed recruited Cai Chonghuan to illustrate his series of plays, why would he designate one of the images as “an imitation of Cai Chonghuan” 倣蔡沖寰筆 (Fig. 2.20) among a number of images “drawn by Cai Chonghuan” 蔡沖寰筆 (Fig. 2.21-2.22)? If he had been able to obtain the last brushwork of Xiong Lianquan 熊蓮泉遺筆, then why would he bother to create “an imitation of Xiong
Fig. 2.20. Illustration 4 from *Dingjuan Chen Meigong piping Pipa ji*, SJT edition, 1618, National Library of China, Beijing (*Pipa ji banhua tulu*, 2003 reprint).

Fig. 2.21. Illustration 2 from *Dingjuan Chen Meigong piping Pipa ji*, SJT edition, 1618, National Library of China, Beijing (*Budeng daya wenku zhenben xiqu congkan*, 2003 reprint).
Lianquan” (倣熊蓮泉寫) (Fig. 2.23-2.24)? What could have really happened was that all the attributions are false.\textsuperscript{76} The publisher enlisted anonymous illustrators to execute those images and forge the seals and signatures, and he and his relatives might have lent a hand, if their seals and signatures are real. The many contradictions among the signatures reveal that the publisher did not take pains to conceal the forgery either. Since the precedents of such dubious attribution

\textsuperscript{76} Although it is hard to discern whether the SJT’s attribution of images to contemporary artists is true or false, some Ming professional artists was known to have participated in the production of designs for book illustrations. Those include Chen Hongshou (1598-1652), Ding Yunpeng, Xiao Yuncong (1596-1673), Cai Chonghuan, etc. In fact, Clunas suggests that it is hard to pin down the range of pictorial practices in which painters were involved in through the use of such critical terms as “amateur” or “professional”. “Amateur” or “professional” were more like social roles to be negotiated with regard to the subjects they worked on and the functions of such works were expected to fulfill. Clunas, Pictures and Visuality, 22, 39-40.
Fig. 2.23  Illustration 12 from Dingjuan Chen Meigong Piping Pipa ji, SJT edition, 1618, National Library of China, Beijing (Pipa ji banhua tulu, 2003 reprint)

Fig. 2.24  Illustration 5 from Dingjuan Chen Meigong Piping Xixiang ji, SJT edition, 1618, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
already existed in the illustrated albums of poetry, most likely it had become a conventional practice by the time of the SJT edition to forge the seals and signatures of artists in the past and present. Readers would not take them at face value, and yet the false identities did not necessarily affect the pleasure of looking at the fine pictures. Readers may even have felt flattered by a wide array of images that were done in the styles of a variety of renowned artists spreading before his eyes. For readers who could not afford the expensive authentic works of those artists, the imitations in the illustrations and the illustrated albums could help expand their knowledge and enjoyment.  

The SJT illustrations exhibit traces of adaptation from the JZZ, the RYT and illustrated albums of poetry. Some of the SJT images are more poetically-oriented, while others are more keyed to the narrative. In the images that evoke poetic moods, the style of brushwork has a marked difference from the RYT. While the RYT illustrator adopted a minimalist approach in the sketches of suggestive, sparse-looking landscape, the SJT illustrator drew up pictures that depict leisure and merrymaking, and that look like an album of sample activities of the wealthy and the educated. For instance, the first image of the SJT Xixiang ji depicts a traveler and his servant admiring the beautiful spring scenery (Fig. 2.25). The image presents a typical Jiangnan spring, with lush plants covering the mountains and extending to the side of the river, and mansions and towers built close to water. The caption is a poem that perfectly presents the scenic beauty and its intoxicating effect on the traveler (畫閣映山山映閣，碧天連水水連天。金勒馬

---

77 In his study of Master Gu’s Pictorial Album, Clunas notes that the album with the biographical texts accompanying it “enable discourse about ‘painting’ even in the absence of actual works of art”. It offers “a history of pictures from as seen from a Ming point of view”. Ibid, 144-47. The drama illustrations only contain the names of artists, so they appear to presuppose some knowledge about the artists, which the reader might acquire from reading other texts, such as the painting albums. And as Robert Hegel reminds me, art was not only to be found in books; professional artists could produce paintings in the styles of the old masters as well original paintings, and such paintings were not beyond the reach of book buyers. In fact such professional paintings were often bought as gifts.
We could take the male traveler as Student Zhang and the image as referring to his travel in the first scene of *Xixiang ji*. However, the scenery presented in this image could not be more different from the scenery Zhang sings about in his aria. Zhang’s aria describes the roaring and awe-inspiring Yellow River with its strategically commanding position. It is a kind of sublime and masculine beauty, like that shown in the second image of RYT (Fig. 2.26). In contrast, the SJT image and caption unfolds a kind of humanized and feminine beauty that soothes and intoxicates the viewer. A similar landscape could be found in the second image of the SJT *Pipa ji* (Fig. 2.21). Although the caption is drawn from the play text, the image does not have a significant connection to the narrative. Both this image and the previous one are “poetic pictures” that present leisured enjoyment of a beautiful Jiangnan landscape, and they invite the reader to imagine himself as one of the culturally refined tourists who appreciate the lovely natural scenery and the poetic sentiments that they evoke.

The mode of illustration demonstrated by those two images closely resembles that of the illustrated poetry albums. In the *Qiyan Tangshi huapu*, we frequently encounter refined cultural activities taking place in landscapes of natural beauty. For instance, the image that accompanies Li Yi’s poem “Bianhe qu” 沙河曲 (Ballad on the Bai River) depicts a spring scene outside

---


79 Zhang’s aria includes lines such as “Snowcapped waves beat the long sky, at Heaven’s edge autumn clouds furl; Bamboo hawsers cable together the floating bridge, on the water a steel blue dragon reclines.” West and Idema, 118.
Fig. 2.25. Illustration 1 from Dingjuan Chen Meigong Piping Xixiang ji, SJT edition, 1618, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)

Fig. 2.26. Illustration 2 from Li Zhuowu Piping Bei Xixiang ji, RYT edition, 1610, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
the city wall and tourists who went out of the city for sight-seeing (Fig. 2.27-2.28). Although the image shows people standing on the riverbank and palaces shrouded in clouds (signifying the fallen Sui dynasty), there is no manifest melancholy or nostalgia on the faces of the tourists. The poem was copied in the clerical script. Another poem, “Junzhong jishi” (A Scene in the County) by Yang Shi’e, was illustrated showing two ladies talking to each other by the side of a pond with water-lilies (Fig. 2.29-2.30). Although the poem describes the Yue maidens’ being sentimental when they look at the withered water-lilies in autumn, the women in the picture do not show any sign of sorrow. They seem to enjoy each other’s company and find great pleasure in the natural beauty that surrounds them. The calligraphy in the running-grass script is ascribed to Dong Qichang. We can infer from such images that their illustrator did not regard faithful reflection of the poem’s content as his first priority. Instead, the primary objective is to create exquisite visual images that help the Ming period reader associate the poem with refined cultural activities. In such albums, the image takes precedence over the poem. The illustrator played a pivotal role. He was free to devise the ways for the Tang poem to become relevant to the Ming readers. And he played this role with superb skill by making the old appear fresh and meaningful: when the poems were associated with the contemporary cultural activities familiar to the Ming readers, the sentiments expressed by the Tang poets were re-interpreted or transformed for Ming readers.

Those images as well as the SJT images of poetic landscapes have only loose ties with the texts they are supposed to illustrate. Yet, I disagree with the interpretations of the images as

---

80 汴水東流無限春, 隋家宮闕已成塵, 行人莫上長堤望, 風起楊花愁殺人。

81 紅衣落盡暗香殘, 葉上秋光白露寒。越女含情已無限, 莫教長袖倚闌幹。

82 STJ Xixiang ji Illustration 6 has a similar composition with a woman and her maid taking a stroll by the side of a pond with water lilies and mandarin ducks.
Fig. 2.27. Illustration (left half-folio) for “Bianhe qu”, Qiyan Tangshi huapu, ca.1616

Fig. 2.28. “Bianhe qu” (right half-folio), Qiyan Tangshi huapu, ca.1616
Fig. 2.29. Illustration (left half-folio) for “Junzhong jishi”, *Qiyan Tangshi huapu*, ca.1616

Fig. 2.30. “Junzhong jishi” (right half-folio), calligraphy attributed to Dong Qichang, *Qiyan Tangshi huapu*, ca.1616
independent visual objects completely severed their connection with the texts. I believe that their identity as illustrations accompanying texts is still very relevant to our discussion. Only with the text in mind can we adequately understand what liberties the illustrator had taken with the images to re-interpret and transform the text’s relation to its reader.

An illustration for a play in the late Ming is not an isolated product. It often came into being through a process of selective adaptation based on a pictorial repertoire. For example, a “poetic picture” is can be derived from a non-poetic, “narrative-oriented” picture. The fourth image of the SJT Pipa ji shows clear traces of adaptation from a JZZ Pipa ji image (Fig. 2.20). While the JZZ image presents a close-up view of male scholars exchanging flirtatious glances with some ladies on a garden swing, the SJT reduces the sizes of human figures, stretches the distance between the scholars and the women, and gives a panoramic view of a beautiful landscape where such interactions take place. Through such changes, the intensity of flirtation in the JZZ disappears, replaced by a sense of self-amusement with the male figures absorbed in their own leisurely enjoyment and the women absorbed in theirs.

Moreover, a “poetic picture” could be easily transported from one play to another by simply changing the caption that accompanies it. For instance, the sixth image of SJT edition of Pipa ji (Fig. 2.22) is curiously adapted from the RYT edition of Xixiang ji (Fig. 2.11). This image depicts the dejected Cai Bojie in his studio at a rainy evening, tormented by his homesickness. The half-folio on the right looks completely identical to that of the nineteenth image of the RYT Xixiang ji. The spatial layout is the same, as is the position male figure sits, obliquely facing the door with his gaze toward the desk. The rock, the wutong trees, and the leaves flying in the sky and falling on the ground all look identical. The SJT illustrator tampered with the left half-folio, adding a stretch of wall and a closed gate and some chrysanthemum
flowers growing at the side of the gate. While the left half-folio of the RYT image contains a large blank space that intensifies the feeling of desolation, the SJT illustrator makes the setting look more like a secluded domestic courtyard. Those changes turn the image into a seasonal representation of literati life. The transformations this image went through demonstrate the malleability of the “poetic picture”: Since the visual elements in a poetic picture make meaning in an ambiguous way, it could be made to generate different meanings in different referential frameworks. A wanton lover’s longing and a filial son’s homesickness are far apart in meaning, but the illustration for one could be easily reworked to signify another. Is this a sign of the illustrator’s creativity or lack of imagination? Is the adaptation of earlier pictorial designs a matter of saving cost? However, the thoughts and cost in making images that feature a new combination of conventional pictorial elements (as the SJT did), were not necessarily less than making a completely new set of images, because both call for careful design and carving of new

---

83 Upon close examination the SJT illustrator does not completely avoid the awkwardness resulting from his changes. While the RYT image makes the garden boundary disappear at the left as if it sits high above a void space, the added wall and gate in the SJT indicates the level ground. In contrast, the garden appears to be on a piece of gigantic rock that sits high above the ground and no stairs are visible for one to descend the rock to reach the gate.

84 The SJT images contain various specimens of pleasurable pursuits. In dealing with the sexual consummation reached by Yingying and Student Zhang, instead of showing their tryst in a bedroom setting, as most illustrators do, the lovers were shown at a corner of a garden, holding hands beside a Taihu rock by the side of a pond (See Fig. 2.31). It is clearly erotic as the man raises a hand to untie the woman’s belt. A male servant peeps in from behind the open gate of the garden. The erotic image in a garden setting is a radical departure from the conventions of Xixiang ji illustrations. But more radical than that is the caption. Curiously, the caption is a line taken from The Peony Pavilion (转过芍药栏前, 紧靠着湖山石边), from Liu Mengmei’s aria as he escorts Du Linian to a corner of the garden to have sex with her. The reader is left to wonder why such an image found its way into the SJT Xixiang ji illustrations. It is likely that the illustrator adapted it from other sources (probably an illustration for The Peony Pavilion) and he forgot to replace the caption with a line from Xixiang ji. It is also possible that he did not deem it necessary to replace the caption. Since the SJT publisher hardly cared to conceal its numerous forgeries and imitations from a careful reader, such an image did not appear out of place here. It fits in well with the overall style of the SJT illustrations that emphasize pleasant activities in a natural setting.
woodblocks. If the book producer’s major concerns were convenience and cost-effectiveness, he could have simply reprinted an earlier edition that sold well. Instead, he seemed to favor a change by variation: The appropriation of common motifs and reusable materials achieves a sense of “difference in familiarity”, which was probably for him an effective way of promoting a new edition of familiar plays.

In sum, while the JZZ illustrations exemplify the visual image’s faithful representation of the dramatic text, the RYT initiated a trend of open-ended “poetic picture” that gives way to multiple interpretations. The SJT continues the RYT mode of “poetic picture” but shares a degree of stylistic exquisiteness with illustrated albums of poetry. The many images of the SJT

---

85 The production process does not become easier, unless a new image completely follows the structure of an earlier image and only fills in small details in the blank space left in that earlier image. In that case, the publisher can produce a new printing board modeled on the old image (or even reuse the old printing board if he could get hold of it), but such a case was rare in the SJT edition.
virtually constitute an album of elite pursuits, displaying a life of culture and comfort for readers to imaginatively place themselves in.

Conclusions

My discussion of the JZZ, RYT, and STJ editions illuminates three ways by which commentary, the play text, and illustration can enter into complex tripartite relationships. In the JZZ edition, both the commentary and the illustration are closely keyed to the play text; they take respectively a philological and a mimetic approach to the play text. The RYT edition dramatizes the tension between commentary and illustration on multiple levels: The commentary calls for a direct emotional engagement with the play text while the illustration implies a detached and reflective viewing distance; if the illustrations are taken together as a visual commentary on the play, its interpretation of characters form a contrast with the interpretation of characters in the commentary; the illustrations have a degree of poetic and visual ambiguity that generate meanings beyond the play text, etc. The SJT edition features a set of stylish commentary and illustration: while the commentary moderates a direct response to the play text with some artistic restraint, the illustration moves farther away from the play text. Some SJT images are merely pictorial vignettes that display a life of culture and comfort for readers to imaginatively place themselves in, with strong links to other pictorial genres of the Ming and very weak links to the play text. Each of the three editions providing a distinctive way of reading and viewing Xixiang ji and Pipa ji, by incorporating and transforming elements from other artistic genres.

The next chapter examines two “paired editions” that took different approaches to rejuvenating Xixiang ji and Pipa ji. Ling Mengchu approached the two plays as a meticulous music connoisseur with the ambition of creating a correct musical notation for each play. He differentiates the plays on musical terms but his illustrator links them on visual terms. The
Zhuding edition concentrates on designing a new system of organization for an overwhelming number of images from diverse sources. The book producer accomplishes a project of creative recycling that exceeds the SJT in scale and complexity by digging into minor details in the plays and advertising a dazzling range of renowned painters, scripts, seals, and calligraphy styles.
Chapter Two

Originality and Excess: Musical and Visual Supplements in Paired Editions of

*Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*

Soon I saw him investigating [the editions] of *Xixiang ji*, which helped wash off the dust that prevented us from seeing the true Northern drama. So I asked him to put his effort to *Pipa ji* as well, to make a peerless pair.

旋復見攷覆西廂記，為北曲一洗塵魔。因請并致力于琵琶，以為雙絕。

—Ling Yanxi, postscript to *Pipa ji*

This study concentrates on the late-Ming publisher’s ability to create new meanings in areas where all possibilities of innovation seemed to have been exhausted. While the last chapter covered various ways to reconfigure the relationship of commentary, play text, and illustration in paired editions of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*, it would appear immensely difficult for subsequent publishers to come up with any new perspectives. However, two publishers soon took up the challenge and each offered a new lens for us to discover another dimension of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*.

This chapter deals with two “paired editions” of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* with different missions and niche markets, and the unexpected connection between them. In spite of their different goals, Ling Mengchu’s 凌濛初 (LMC) edition and the Zhuding 矢訂 (ZD) edition both engage a creative conundrum, and they resort to a common solution of introducing supplementary materials and additional information to shed new light on the plays. Ling Mengchu regards the play text as a musical script and uses marginalia as an imagined forum for the discussion of *qu* composition and singing. The ZD editor exploits minor details and
supplementary poems to give a meaningful structure to the large numbers of images he assembled from various sources. The two editions share a tendency to overwhelm the reader with a great deal of extra information. The editors’ superior knowledge about the plays boils down to a familiarity with every single word and every single line, and more: they possess a wide range of extra knowledge and materials that they “imported” into these editions to reshape the reading process into an eye-opening experience. Editors presume the readers’ intimate knowledge about the plays and expect them to see more, and to hear more: reading becomes an expansive journey that ventures from the play proper into the peripheral, the supplemental, and the external.

Musical Supplements in Ling Mengchu’s Edition

Ling Mengchu (1580-1644) was first introduced to the Western audience as a complier of two anthologies of vernacular short stories: “Slapping the Table in Amazement” and “Slapping the Table in Amazement: Second Collection.” Ling’s roles as a music connoisseur and a publisher were lesser known, but are indispensible to a full grasp of his identity.¹ The Ling family printing business hailed from Wucheng 烏程, Zhejiang (today’s Huizhou) and produced some of the finest books printed in the late Ming. The outcome of rivalry between his printing business and that of another Wucheng native, Min Qiji 閔齊伋 (1580-?), is a number of polychrome imprints with impeccable editing and exquisite images.² Ling approached Xixiang ji and Pipa ji with the discriminating eye of a drama and music connoisseur. Similar to Wang Jide 王驥德, he carried out his printing project with the ambition of setting up a standard for posterity,

¹ Ye Dejun, Ling Mengchu shiji xinian (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 591.

with the shrewdness of a merchant. A result of his heavy financial and intellectual investment, his edition did succeed to distinguish itself among the vast number of imprints of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* and became a favorite of book collectors.

In her study of literati drama printing in the late Ming, Katherine Carlitz challenges us to think about the changed roles a printed edition was expected to play among “a community of cognoscenti” who might be seeing the play as well as reading it. When a literatus like Ling joined the trade of drama publishing, he was determined to make his edition of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* appear in every way different from its predecessors. Carlitz suggested that Ling’s edition was meant to show his mastery of both textual traditions and prosodic rules and metrical patterns. In the eyes of the literati, actors and singing teachers were poorly educated in the latter areas, which led to their arbitrarily altering play texts. Though we could reasonably doubt whether actors and singers actually heeded Ling’s instructions, Ling’s choice to put his opinions in print implies the desire to reach a wide public that included but was not limited to a small number of literati insiders who had theater-going experience and music expertise. There is a precarious balance in the LMC edition between an out-reaching tendency and an elitist discourse that the editor finds himself irresistibly drawn into. The following will be an analysis of the two forces that are played out in his edition.

---


5 Carlitz, “Printing as Performance”, 290.

6 Ibid, 291. Ling’s contemporaries such as Shen Jing, Shen Chongsui, Qi Biaojia all wrote manuals or treatises on prosodic principles, but not all of them turned their works into print. Some of the works circulated in manuscript for a long time before they were printed from imperfect manuscripts after the authors’ deaths.
On the textual level, Ling reduced the number of words on each page and increased the space between columns, and used two colors (red and black ink) respectively in the commentary and main text. As a result, the printed page looks more lucid and pleasant. Ling claimed to have acquired two old editions descended respectively from Zhu Youdun 朱有燉 (1379-1439) and Zhu Quan 朱權 (1378-1448), the two Ming princes known as playwrights and critics. With the two “old editions” allegedly in his possession, he raises his edition as a pristine and correct version above all contemporary editions. Ling’s approach to the two plays is scholarly and fastidious: He is particularly insistent on the correct formats of zaju and nanxi and on matters of prosody. In his “editorial principles”, Ling establishes himself as the one with the sophisticated expertise needed to pass authoritative judgment on the two classics.

In the “editorial principles”, Ling differentiates high and low reading abilities. He defines his audience as “learned gentlemen” (boya 博雅) and chooses not to annotate the words he considers within the capacity of their knowledge. He laughs at the contemporary practice of providing glossary for simple words that “even school children wouldn’t feel the need to have them explained.” He criticizes the “contemporary editions” for mixing up the zaju and nanxi with the chuanqi format: making up twenty scene titles for the unnamed scenes of Xixiang ji while retaining the “Subject-Official Title” at the same time; replacing Northern role types with

---

7 On each page, there are only eight columns with eighteen characters in each column. The earlier JZZ, RYT, and SJT editions all have ten columns per page and over twenty characters per column. The main text of LMC edition is in regular script and the commentary is in running script. The “padding words” (襯字) and speeches appear in smaller characters than those of the “base words” (正字) and arias. For the distinction between “padding words” and “base words”, see Dale R. Johnson, “The Prosody of Yuan Drama,” in T’oung Pao, Second Series 56 (1970), 96-146.

Southern role types; failing to recognize the “padding words” and printing them the same as “base words”, etc. He speaks disparagingly of people with “ordinary eyes” (sumou 俗眸) who are unable to discern the artistry of both the first four plays and the last play of *Xixiang ji*. He describes the former style as “sensuous and pretty” and the latter as “the splash of a mature brush trailed with original color”. Once “the ordinary eyes” see the latter’s plain style, they rush to the conclusion that it is not as good as the former. According to Ling, “those people barely know how to read *qu*”.

Ling seeks to establish his superior understanding by attacking two recent “anomalous editions” with commentaries attributed to Xu Wei 徐渭 and Wang Jide, calling the former’s commentary “fake”, “overstretched”, and “exasperating”. As for the latter, he concedes that about twenty to thirty percent of Wang’s observations are correct, but “it is a pity that Wang had a strong bias in his mind,” “audaciously altered the text” and “commented in the way a village school-teacher explains the Four Books”. He speaks most disdainfully of a recent “fake Li Zhuowu commentary edition” of *Pipa ji* and its various imitations, saying that they are not worth a word because even the historical Li Zhi knew nothing about *qu*. “Fake editions” vex him so much that he cries: “Reading them makes my hair stand on end, and it pains me for not being able to dig up the author from his grave and ask!”

With all contemporary editions under attack, Ling defines his role as a vindicator and cleanser of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*. Having already destroyed the reader’s faith in any previously existing edition whatsoever, his critique clears the stage for the so-called “old editions” from Zhu Youdun and Zhu Quan that he happened to gain access to. Yet, he does not even explain how he was fortunate enough to find the two old editions. His historicism sits awkwardly with a high-
flown rhetoric that refers to a spurious 1498 preface about a White-Cloud Immortal’s dream encounter with the ghost of Gao Ming, believed to be the author of *Pipa ji*.

The 1498 preface is possibly a pure invention of Ling to legitimize his editorial authority. In the White-Cloud Immortal’s dialogue with Gao’s ghost, the ghost explains that his *Pipa ji* was meant to be a satire on Murong Jie 慕容喈 of the Eastern Jin Dynasty who had nothing to do with the famous Han scholar Cai Bojie 蔡伯喈. But the remnants of his destroyed manuscript were adulterated in the process of their transmission, conflating the two figures and blemishing Cai Bojie’s name. As a result, Cai’s ghost filed a lawsuit against Gao’s ghost in the underworld. The White-Cloud Immortal suggested burning *Pipa ji* in order to save Gao from his trouble, yet the ghost said, “How can burning put an end to them? I wish you change the play according to my words, making the authentic text emerge so the fake ones will die out by themselves.” Even the ghost in a fictional context seems to have accepted the ideas that print copies are capable of infinite reproduction and the only way to fight against fake ideas is to produce your own book with the “authentic” ideas. It seems that Ling did exactly what the ghost suggested. Since it is impossible to wipe out the prevalent fake editions, it is only natural for Ling to produce his authoritative edition. The ghost story helps shed light on Ling’s virulent criticism of his predecessors as more a pretext than strict intolerance of change. In fact, Ling is not such a purist as he claims to be. He would compromise with current fashion while grudgingly expressing the wish not to do so. For example, he considers illustrations “unnecessary” for a book catering to “learned gentlemen”, yet still complies with popular taste for ornamentation and provides illustrations. He aims to settle textual disputes once and for all, yet in order not to alarm

---

9 This could also be a joke with his readers.
people familiar with the current variants, he notes them down and explains why he changes them in the commentary and the appendix.

Ling’s commentary focuses exclusively on musical matters and addresses his audiences as music lovers, singers, and *qu* composers. What sets him apart from all predecessors is his *danghang* 當行 credentials, a professional, superior understanding of Northern and Southern drama, a cultural capital that places him among an select inner circle of the elite, who surpasses the general literati public by his superb ability to speak on the literary, musical, and theatrical aspects of drama, a major contest ground of talent and originality in the late Ming.¹⁰

The Context of Literati Duoqu/Duqu Culture

It is necessary, at this point, to look at the larger context of *duoqu/duqu* 度曲 (composing-singing the *qu*) culture in the late Ming to understand the Ling’s commentary. Few works have been written on this subject, but we can piece together different types of writings to get a glimpse of this popular practice.¹¹ *Duoqu/duqu* is a vague term that often appears in the Ming literati

---

¹⁰ In drama criticism *danghang* basically means “all-around mastery of drama”. It originated from poetry criticism to mean the mastery of poetry composition. In the Ming different authors have different point of emphasis when they used this word. Shen Jing used it to mean the expertise in music; Ling Mengchu used it to refer to “appropriate language” that is true to the rank, class, and education of characters. It is similar to *bense* (authentic color) and opposed to a style of excessive ornamental lyrics and dense allusions. Zang Maoxun introduced a comparison between *mingjia* 名家 (renowned writers) and *hangjia* 行家 (masters): those with broad knowledge and flamboyant style can become "renowned", yet the “masters” accomplish the best drama with representational completeness. They achieve a perfect synthesis of lyric, plot, and music to reach a level of artistic excellence that derives from the three aspects but is more wondrous than the simple addition of the three. Meng Chengshun particularly stresses the *danghang* master’s ability to understand and imitate people of all trades and their emotions. In spite of the different opinions on *danghang*, the popularity of this term in the late Ming suggests that the literati’s involvement in theater prompted the increasing awareness of drama as a synthetic and demanding form of art. One needs many more talents that poetic talent to qualify as a *danghang jia* 當行家. I use *danghang* to refer to the implied multi-dimensional qualifications, rather than to a specific connotation by any single drama critic. See Carlitz, “Printing as Performance”, 290; Hsiao, *Eternal Present of the Past*, 53, 280, 285.

¹¹ See Li Huimian, “Cong yinyun xue jiaodu lun Mingdai Kunqiang duqu lun zhi xingcheng yu jiangou,” *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu jikan* 31 (2007), 75-119; idem, “cong yinyun xue jiaodu lun Qingdai duqu lun de chuancheng yu kaizhan”, *Hanxue yanjiu* (2008), 185-218; Lu Eting, *Kunqu yanchu shigao* (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 70-76, 247-53, 330-33. *Duqu* culture (its singing aspect) seems to be an important component of the late-Ming literati’s fascination with theater. Besides the professional performers in commercial and private troupes, there were some well-to-do musicians who occupied a gray zone between professionals and amateurs and who associated with literati patrons to practice “pure-singing”. The literati and their musician friends
writings. Its two pronunciations encompass two types of related activities: First, *Duoqu* implies the practice of writing librettos based on a thorough knowledge of the Northern and Southern musical modes and the sets of melodies under each mode, including the number of words, the proper tones of words, and the beats, etc. In the writing of *zaju* and *chuanqi* plays the writer composes librettos to existing melodies, the writing process contains both a literary and a musical dimension. The LMC *Pipa ji* includes a postscript by his relative and collaborator Ling Yanxi that substantiates this meaning of textual-based *duoqu*. Ling speaks about his dismay at “writers who knew nothing about the correct rules for adding or reducing characters and phrases and placing level and oblique tones [according to the melodies]”. He was delighted to discover that Master of Empty Vision (Ling Mencghu) had composed (*duo* 程) *Qiaoheshan ji* and applied his thorough knowledge of prosody to the annotation of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*.

Second, *duqu* indicates the act of vocalizing the music implied in the melodies by realizing the tonal qualities of characters, measuring the tempo by beats, controlling the volume and pitch of one’s voice, managing the transition between musical notes, etc. The textual-based were “pure-singers” taking a meticulous attitude towards the enunciation of characters and the beats in a melody. They often engaged in a slow painstaking word-by-word, beat-by-beat exercise to aim for an ideal of perfection. “Pure-singing” had no musical accompaniment or only the *xiao* 竹, *guanzi* 管子, and a pair of wood clappers, in contrast with “theatrical singing” accompanied by wind and percussion and choreography. If acting was a profession, “pure-singing” was considered more like an “art”. Although *duqu* could simply mean “singing”, in the late-Ming context the term was often used by the literati to speak about the intricate techniques of enunciating a character or singing a single melody, thus it most likely denotes the practice of “pure-singing” rather than theatrical performance. It is possible that some literati had their private actors/actresses taught in art of “pure-singing”, but most actors were not trained in such way, attested by the frequent complaints by literati perfectionists such as Ling Mengchu.

12 The writer was expected to know the distinction in traditional phonetics of four tones (level, rising, falling, entering), of the *yin* 隱 versus *yang* 曉 and *qing* 清 versus *zhuo* 濁 characters, as well as the pentatonic musical scale of *gong* 宮, *shang* 商, *jue* 角, *zhi* 律, *yu* 羽, *qupai* 曲牌 (tunes), *gongdiao* 宮調 (musical modes), *taoshu* 套數 (sets of melodies). Li, “Mingdai Kunqiang duoqu lun”, 75.

13 Li, ibid, 75–76. Richard Strassberg, “The Singing Techniques of Kunqu and Their Musical Notation,” *Chinoperl Papers* 6 (1976): 45–81. As a matter of fact, the two implications of *duoqu/*duqu* only constitute two of the three necessary stages for making a play musically performable. The missing stage is the role played by professional musicians who worked on the *gongche* 工尺 notation that marks up the notes for each word, the musical scores for various instruments, and the various singing techniques. This step bridges the implied music of
duoqu and musical-based duqu were related because: 1) in the process of writing, literati playwrights often engaged musicians to test the musicality of the librettos, thus writing already involved tentative singing; and 2) it was a refined cultural activity for the literati to learn to sing in a private setting, and literati singing often involved such bookish activities of checking against previous editions and notation manuals for discordant characters, to the extent of debating the proper use of every single character, thus the singing involves retracing every step of writing librettos. The two implications of duoqu/duqu are inseparable, and they together shaped the image of the multi-talented literati who mastered both the literary and musical aspects of drama. The act of duoqu/duqu combines poetic art and music, the two essential ways of literati self-expression exemplified by ancient figures such as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. Chuanqi-writing and qu-singing, next to various collecting and traveling, were recognized as quintessential manifestations of subjectivity among the seventeen-century literati. They were serious intellectual pursuits and irrational obsessions, status symbols and instruments for subtle differentiations of taste. Duoqu/duqu allowed the elite to partake in the fun of theater without descending to the social level of actors and music teachers. It purported to search for a cultural ideal of pristineness and elegance, in text and in music.

the written librettos and the actual music that is realized by the singer. Without it a singer can hardly “translate” the text into musical notes by himself, and there were few writers who can take up the task without the aid of musician. But unfortunately few records about the musician and his notation-making activities survived. The earliest gongche notation survived from the Qing by the time Kunqu was already declining and musicians with such skills dying out. Ye Tang was the first of those musicians who published a collection of gongche notations to salvage the knowledge.

14 The most prominent example is Kong Shangren’s writing of Taohua shan. Although the play was rarely performed and largely regarded as a desktop play, Kong confessed that he took musical matters seriously and collaborated with a contemporary musician Wang Shouxi. They would sing every melody after it was done, and change the character that did not sound right. Such collaboration would only have been more prevalent in the heyday of Kunqu in the late Ming. Kong Shangren, “Taohua shan benmo”, Taohua shan (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005).
Text-Based Commentary on Xixiang ji

Situated in the context of the duqu/duqu culture, Ling Mengchu’s commentary offered more information than an ordinary reader of plays would hope for. His commentary on Xixiang ji concentrates on the textual aspects of duqu, whereas his commentary on Pipa ji combines the textual and singing aspects. Since Xixiang ji was rarely performed in Ling’s time, Ling’s commentary is mostly a hypothetical evaluation of the success and failure of setting words to melodies. It stresses the “laws” of play writing that also function as a barrier separating the insider from the uninitiated. Ling implies that Xixiang ji never lacked readers but it lacks truly informed ones. If a person not only reads but also writes plays, a copy of this book is even more helpful since it contains suggestions and examples from the real danghang master.

Ling’s comments on Xixiang ji focus on the proper tones and correct number of words based on extant phonetic and notation books. For instance, there is a song in the tune of “Hunjianglong” 混江龍 in the first scene of Xixiang ji. Ling notes that it is possible to reduce the seventh and eighth lines “Caigao nanru suren ji, shiguai busui nan’er yuan”才高難入俗人机，時乖不遂男兒願 (lofty talent does not fit into schemes of the vulgar; when time’s athwart, there is no attaining of the ambitions of a man) to the three words “nan’er yuan”男兒願, since the original pattern of “Hunjianglong” only requires a minimum of three words in this slot, but the three words have to follow a tonal sequence of level-level-oblique. He further locates an example from a “Huijianglong” song in Pipa ji scene 15, where only three words xiu jietan 休嘆 are used in a similar slot and their tones are level-level-oblique. Here Ling demonstrates the flexible use of a melody in two examples. Though the topic appears esoteric, the load of information Ling provides helps to get across his point to any reader, including those having little knowledge of the subject.
Ling’ displays his danghang 當行 qualifications by debating with famous prosodists over the use of specific words. In the fourth scene of the first act, there is the phrase shougao 壽高 in the “Chenzui dongfeng” 沉醉東風 tune which Wang Jide believes should be replaced by shoukao 壽考. Ling thinks it is fine to make this change but disagrees with Wang’s claim that “the last word in the first line of this tune should use a rising tone.” He picked out other examples of “Chenzui dongfeng” in Xixiang ji, four other plays and a qu poem to illustrate that the last character in the first line could use the level tone. In addition, Ling praised Xixiang ji as a dangjia writing for its frequent use of the auxiliary word er 兒 which fits the situations well and conveys intimate emotions. These discussions may sound like unnecessary hairsplitting, but it is precisely on those fine distinctions that Ling assumes his superiority as a master of textual-based duoqu over an “inadequate” critic like Wang Jide.

Textual-and Singing-Based Commentary on Pipa ji

Ling’s comments on Pipa ji emphasize the enunciation of characters and the banyan 板眼 system. The two emphases correspond to the guidelines on literati singing laid down by Wei

---

15 Ling did not avoid literary criticism either. He regards the lyrics for Yingying seeing off Zhang as “perfect masterstrokes for the expression of separation sentiments”. Ling is not only confident about his ability to recognize the danghang strokes and nonsensical comments, but also quite insistent on where Wang Shifu’s Xixiang ji ends and Guan Hanqing’s sequel begins. He sees the last aria in Act Four as the author’s self-portrayal of the difficulty of fully expressing his sorrows and sentiments. It is a typical example of editor-imposed mutilation of text. In contrast to the attempt to see a work as an organic whole, he openly declares the inconsistency in a work and refuses to see it as organic.

16 The best explanation of banyan 板眼 is in Strassberg, “The Singing Technique of Kunqu and Their Musical Notations”, 48-50. The banyan system is a way of applying notations to a play text, marking up the tempo and meter with downbeats and upbeats. In singing, all downbeats are marked by a strong tap of the wooden clappers known as ban 板 and all upbeats by a softer tap on a drum. A related term dianban 點板, when used as a verb, means to “mark up the beat”. It can also mean a complete set of marked-up beats. There are two different kinds of beats—downbeats and upbeats. The usual meter is 4/4 composed of one downbeat and three upbeats. Occasionally a 2/4 meter of one downbeat and one upbeat, or an unfixed rhythm marked only by a series of downbeats is employed. Both upbeats and downbeats are sub-divided primarily according to whether they occur in the beginning, middle or end of a lyric or melisma while upbeats are further distinguished according to their order as initial, middle or final upbeat in 4/4 time. This creates a certain complexity in the number of symbols used, but the ones Ling use are for Pipa ji are relatively simple. He only marks the downbeats, using the symbol “、“ for an initial downbeat, “L” for a
Liangfu 魏良輔 (fl. mid-seventeenth century). Wei stated, “literati singers are unlike professional singers, so there should be a more forgiving attitude. When he enunciates the character well but his voice cannot reach a certain note scale, be tolerant; when he follows the correct ban and yan but his voice cannot fully realize the notes, be tolerant. What is more important is the ambience, [thus we] should not be too demanding.” On the contrary, he expected professional singers to perfect the three aspects of enunciation, ban yan, and voice. Ling’s commentary clearly focuses on enunciation and ban yan, so it is most likely that the type of singing he had in mind is the literati amateurish style of “pure-singing”. In other words, this style stresses the practitioner’s sensitivity to the minute details of every tone and beat in order to pursue an ideal of pristineness and precision, but downplays the importance of voice that is naturally endowed.

Ling’s dual aims at qu composition and singing can be observed from the two types of readers he addresses, the changzhe 唱者 (singers) and the qujia 曲家 (qu masters). For the singers and zhiyinzhe 知音者 (music connoisseurs), Ling openly declares that his detailed notes on every melody could be viewed as “making a musical score for Pipa ji”. He explains that his middle beat, and “_” for a final downbeat. In Ling’s time, the rhythm of the northern qu still hasn’t been adapted to the dianban system. Instead it was considered very flexible with the accompaniment of pipa and banjo. Marking up dianban was more common among the Southern drama, which explains why Ling only applies dianban to Pipa ji.

17 Wei Liangfu, “Nanci Yinzheng”, in Lu Gong, Fangshu Jianwen lu (Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), 240.

18 Qian Nanyang, “Wei Liangfu Nanci yinzheng jiaozhu”, in Han shang huan wencun (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chuanshe, 1980), 99.

19 There are different types of traditional musical notations in China. The early ones, like the Taihe zhengyin pu 太和正音譜, only provide musical modes and tune names, often called qupai pu 曲牌譜; it later developed into gelü pu 格律譜 (prosodic rules about tones of characters in a melody) and dianban pu 點板譜 (notations marking the rhythm, with downbeats and upbeats); and in the early Qing there appeared the gongche pu 工尺譜 (musical notations which write the pitch of each word in the gongche system diagonally to the right of each character of a lyric and the downbeats and upbeats to the right of the notation). The dianban and the gongche notation usually are often applied to selected scenes of plays, while the qupai pu and gelü pu are often organized
dianban 點板 closely follows the authoritative jiugong pu 九宮譜, though he is aware that it differs from contemporary pure-singers’ dianban notation. It is clear from those remarks that Ling considered himself a musical connoisseur who purified the music of a foundational work of the Southern tradition. Ling’s ambition and confidence are fully revealed in his choice of Pipa ji, because prior to his notation the most significant musical innovation on Pipa ji was Wei Liangfu’s adaptation of Pipa ji to Kunqu music, which was key to the creation of the “Water-polished Style”. For the qu masters who write librettos, Ling highlights examples of proper correspondence between language and music as a way to aid their writing and appreciation.

Ling’s emphasis on the musical aspect of Pipa ji recognizes the popularity of the play as heavily mediated by singing. He uses printed marginalia as an imagined forum of discussion of singing, offering guidelines about how to sing with intelligence and aesthetic elegance. For instance, he exposes contemporary people’s conflation of the tune of 風入松 and 風入松慢 (the latter is a prelude) in singing. He reveals the intricacies of dianban down to the level of specific words or phrases. He criticizes “pure-singers” for mixing up the tune “San xueshi” 三學士 with the tune “Jie sancheng” 解三酲 (the dianban patterns of the two look similar but the former has no final downbeat) and blames the musical teachers for spreading this mistake. In his discourse on dianban Ling often drew upon the authority of Shen Jing but he also took pride in his discovery of misprinted tune names that Shen Jing failed to recognize.

To sum up, Ling attempts to introduce drama as a synthetic art through his edition of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji. Ling apparently imagined his readers as someone already familiar with the
two plays and looking for something extra, and the margins of his book overflow with information. In pursuit of authority and precision, Ling encodes details of music and singing in a process of textualization and perpetuates them in print. For the reader, full absorption of the details will inevitably slow down the reading process, as he needs to imaginatively restore the tones and beats by deciphering lengthy notes and complex typographic markers, which is unlikely a smooth process due to the pauses required to work out every detail.

The LMC Illustrations: Sequestered Elegance in an Architectural Maze

Just as Ling Mengchu brackets the contents of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* and shifts our attention to the extratextual and contextual music, the illustrations of his edition tone down the dramatic tension to create an air of composure and elegance. Despite Ling’s misgivings about illustrations, he spared no effort and expense in making pictures that match the overall quality of the edition. The illustrator was clearly identified as Wang Wenheng 王文衡 from Suzhou, a well-known artist in the late Ming who also illustrated *Mudan ting*, *Handan ji* and other plays. He produced a set of twenty half-folio illustrations for each play, appearing right before the main text. All the images exhibit a consistent style, featuring an elegant entourage of main figures and attendants living in an architectural maze. The characters are miniature figures, conceding much of the space to trees, rocks, walls, buildings of various structures and functions, and covered pathways connecting buildings. With the exception of a few images in natural landscape, most of the illustrations leave an impression of sequestered life in a private setting. Walls and bamboo fences define a relatively enclosed space, an effect the dazzlingly exuberant trees and bushes further enforces. The miniature figures and intricate design in a limited space conveys a strong sense of artificiality, in sharp contrast to the evocative, deliberately sketchy pictures of the RYT

---

edition. The sense of artificiality already creates a distance between the viewer and the image, calling attention primarily to the artistry of the brushstrokes and only secondarily to the content they create.

The proportion of figural versus non-figural elements in the picture strengthens the feeling of artificiality, because the rocks appear disproportionately large beside tiny men and women, and the trees are much taller than the small houses. Since each image only occupies a single page, distance is conveyed by layering up distant mountains and landscape at the upper part of the page and putting human activities in the courtyard at the lower part of the page. Sometimes the nearby and the faraway are separated by clouds. This spatial layout creates an effect of a camera zooming out and taking a panoramic picture. Compared with previous editions, the human figures and buildings are much smaller, but the illustrator used very fine lines to sketch them. Likewise, the texture of trees and rocks, and the patterns on door panels and balustrades are carefully rendered.

The Ling illustrations closely follow the narrative sequence of the texts and depict easily identifiable events in the plays. However, there is a particular tendency to select scenes without dramatic tension. Even in the scenes with heightened dramatic tension, the illustrator makes the image appear with little theatrical effect. It seems his aesthetic preference to tone down the drama and give the figures an air of serene elegance. For example, in the most clamorous scenes of *Xixiang ji* such as the loud Buddhist ceremony and the sending off of Monk Huiming, excitement and clamor are largely absent. In the former scene that depicts Student Zhang and monks’ delirium in proximity to a rare beauty, the image instead presents a courtyard structure.

---

22 The way of conveying distance may fall into the category of “high distance” in Guo Xi’s 郭熙 theory of “three distances”(三遠). That is, using the view to the top of the mountain from below to express the sense of distance. See Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Hongkong: Hongkong University Press, 2013), 150-54. The half-folio illustrations convey distance in this way, in contrast with the illustrations on a folio such as the RYT image that seems to stretch space horizontally.
with the monks in the main hall, Zhang and Yingying still on their way, one standing in the courtyard while another in a roofed corridor at the right wing of the main hall (Fig. 3.1). This visual arrangement separates the three parties and greatly reduces the heated and hilarious atmosphere of the text.

Fig. 3.1. Illustration 4 from Xixiang ji, LMC edition, 1621-1627, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
The Huiming scene, an exhilarating moment when the bloodthirsty monk voices his heroic spirit among an alarmed crowd and the panicking Cui family, is softened into a much quieter image with Zhang talking to the monk about the letter, two monks standing, and the women talking to each other in anxiety and dismay (Fig. 3.2). The supposed open and public announcement turns into private strategizing in a secluded corner of the temple. The fight and victory of General Du that previous editions illustrated are completely absent from the Ling edition. Moreover, another highly dramatic scene, Zhang climbing over the wall to meet Yingying, was completely neglected. Lady Cui’s interrogation of Hongniang is rendered very placid as if she were giving instructions to the maid (Fig. 3.3). Instead, an indirectly mentioned detail in play, about Lady Cui sending a doctor to Zhang, is given the space of one illustration. All together the illustrator displaces dramatic tension with an air of propriety, composure, harmony.

The *Pipa ji* illustrations also basically follow the narrative sequence of the play. Two adjacent images often form a contrast between the *sheng* and *dan* scenes, between wealth and poverty, and between Cai’s leisure and Wuniang’s struggle. For instance, in the “Playing zither by the lotus pond” scene, Cai is not his usual melancholy image detached from his wife and servants. Instead, the image shows an intimate moment of Cai and his wife drinking together and talking with no servants by their side (Fig. 3.4). Juxtaposed with this image is Zhao Wuniang walking alone in an open field, worrying about how to acquire food (Fig. 3.5). In the “Gazing at the Moon” scene, Cai and his wife share a harmonious moment of looking at the moon together (unlike previous illustrations with hints of disharmony), while the image next to it is Zhao

---

23 The southern drama’s relatively symmetrical structure requires the proper alternation between the scenes focusing on the *sheng* character’s singing and the scenes focusing on the *dan* character’s singing in order to reach a balance of labor for the two role types. Later it becomes a conventional way to speak about *sheng* and *dan* scenes with or without a performance context.
Fig. 3.2. Illustration 6 from Xixiang ji, LMC edition, 1621-1627, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojiatushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
Fig. 3.3. Illustration 14 from Xixiang ji, LMC edition, 1621-1627, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
Fig. 3.4. Illustration 10 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition, 1621-1627, Liaoning Provincial Library, Shenyang
Fig. 3.5. Illustration 9 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition, 1621-1627, Liaoning Provincial Library, Shenyang
Wuniang grieving over the graves of her parents-in-law (Fig. 3.6-3.7). Judging from those poignant contrasts, it seems the illustrator did not share other artists’ ways of vindicating Cai.

However, there are other pairs of images that point to a different direction. The beautifully dressed Niu escorted by maids for wedding is juxtaposed with a Cai whose homesickness makes him shut off from contacts. The distressed Wuniang cutting off her hair is paired with Cai tormented by his longing for his hometown. The illustrator seems to smooth over bitterness and conflicts as soon as they emerge. This ambivalence may have to do with the aesthetic unity of the entire set that places harmony above discordance, and that emphasizes orderliness and elegance in figures and settings as well as the relativity of personal emotions.

Wang Wenheng’s illustrations exhibit great affinity in style. The Xixiang ji and Pipa ji images share an interesting connection: The pictorial design plays with the dialectic of concealing and revealing through the manipulation of architectural structures. The lush plantation and architectural complex emphasize the elusiveness of figures; the compartmentalized spaces set up boundaries between genders and social classes. Meanwhile, windows and openings reveal partly concealed figures and pathways connect separate spaces. The artist gives the reader a view of different activities going on at the same time in different sections of the same building, using walls to separate people who are not supposed to meet while at the same time connect them by crevices, gates, and corridors. This is manifested in the image of Yingying and Hongniang burning incense and Zhang peeping through the hole of a large Taihu rock that reveals his head and bust (Fig. 3.8). The image revises the play text that places Zhang and Yingying at two sides of a wall, and increases their intimacy. In the image of

---

24 I am inspired by Keith MacMahon’s discussion of walls and other symbolic barriers that set up boundaries in the traditional Chinese xiaoshuo, and of windows, gaps, and other “interstices” that break through such boundaries. Keith MacMahon, Causality and Containment in Seventeen-Century Chinese Fiction (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 10-25.
Yingying listening to Zhang’s zither, a wall separates the lovers with Zhang’s room sitting right next to the wall and Yingying standing at the other side (Fig. 3.9). In the LMC edition, separate

Fig. 3.6. Illustration 14 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition, 1621-1627, Liaoning Provincial Library, Shenyang
Fig. 3.7. Illustration 13 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition, 1621-1627, Liaoning Provincial Library, Shenyang
Fig. 3.8. Illustration 2 from Xixiang ji, LMC edition, 1621-1627, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojiatushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
Fig. 3.9. Illustration 8 from Xixiang ji, LMC edition, 1621-1627, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
but related events that happen simultaneously are always presented in this way. In the *Pipa ji* scene of reunion, the image shows a compartmentalized building in three sections: we have a frontal view of the main hall with Cai’s parents’ portrait on the wall; in the adjacent room stand Cai and his wife and Wuniang; a further extended room sitting diagonally in the picture shows the maid lighting a candle, about to take it to the masters (Fig. 3.10). Finally, both the LMC
*Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* illustrations contain examples of a master in his main room and a servant in the adjacent room. They allude to the motif of the high-minded master immersed in thinking and his simplistic servant snoring away in his innocent slumber—a favored contrast in literature and painting.

*Visual Expansion of the Zhuding (ZD) Edition*

Ling Mengchu hoped to expand the horizon of the reader with a profusion of literary, musical, and visual materials. His edition serves as a reminder of the many layers on which the plays could be appreciated, though “the many layers” might excite some and overwhelm others. Likewise, in the Zhuding edition, the primary challenge and attraction comes from its visual expansion, and its unique way of manipulating a great deal of supplementary and “borrowed” materials.

The originality of the ZD edition does not rely on the editor’s learning, but benefits from his flexibility to transform every item plagiarized from other editions into an indispensible part of a pastiche. The ZD editor is distinguished by a collector’s acumen and a quick wit to generate new configurations out of the diverse and superfluous materials.

Late-Ming editions of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* often include a number of supplementary materials, such as glossaries, poems on the play, postscripts, and historical materials. They were documented by bibliographers but never received enough attention from scholars. Discussions of prefaces and editorial principles are more widely seen, since they are considered direct reflections of the editorial intentions. It lies beyond the scope of this study to fully explore the supplementary materials for the two plays, but one of them is particularly noteworthy since it plays a significant role in structuring the images of the ZD edition. The *Pudong zhuyu shi* 蒲東珠玉詩 (*Jade and Gems: Poems of Pudong*), or simply *Pudong shi*, was thoroughly explored by
the editor to supply poetic captions for the illustrations of Xixiang ji. Most of the Xixiang ji images bear poetic lines from the Pudong shi, and Pudong shi becomes essentially the connecting factor among the vast array of disparate images.

Before going into a detailed analysis of the illustrations, a few words about the overall “patched” nature of the ZD edition of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji. Though the edition claims to bear the red-ink commentary of Sun Kuang, both its prefatory materials and commentary does not appear to be the hand of the eminent scholar. The main text of Xixiang ji is identical to that of the RYT edition. Next to the main text is a miscellany of works in various calligraphy styles—standard script, running script, running grass script—each printed within a decorative frame. There is Wang Jide’s “Qianqiu jueyan fu” 千秋絕艷賦 (Rhapsody on Peerless Beauties through the Ages) and a portrait of Yingying taken from Wang Jide’s Xiangxue ju 香雪居 (Studio of Fragrant Snow) edition, and several poems and lyrics and essays by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1329-1412?) and Zhu Yunming 祝允明 (1460-1527) that first appeared in the JZZ and other editions. After that there is a preface by “Huayue lang Min Zhensheng” 花月郎閔振聲 (Min Zhensheng the Romantic) that proclaims his obsession with qing and with the “beautiful essence and fragrant spirit” of Cui Yingying that embodies qing.

---

25 Chen, Mingkan Xixiangji, 61, 319.

26 Sun Kuang 孫鑛 (1543-1613), zi Wenrong, hao Yuefeng, a native of Cixi, Zhejiang and a prominent scholar-official of the Wanli reign. Chen speculates that this edition could be edited by Zhuchen, who identifies himself as a follower and admirer of Sun Kuang in his signature on the first page. Ibid, 241.


28 Min Zhensheng professed to have written the preface for a friend named “Feng Xu”, but it is likely that Feng Xu is a pseudonym of himself. Min reputedly had produced an edition of Xixiang ji that was no longer extant and that was the possible origin of this preface. Min was also the printer of Qianqiu jueyan tu 千秋絕艷圖 (1621-1627), an album of forty famous beauties from Chinese history and fiction, which includes a portrait of Yingying that is the same as the Yingying portrait in Wang Jide’s edition. Dong Jie, 86.
The ZD *Pipa ji* features a ba (postscript) in front of the illustrations and the main text. This is an essay by Ling Yanxi that first appeared at the end of Ling Mengchu’s *Pipa ji* edition. The editor also copied Ling’s ten “editorial principles” for *Pipa ji* and attached it behind the postscript. Interestingly, the prefatory materials for the ZD *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* are drawn from a Min family edition and a Ling family edition, respectively. The editor could not be unaware of their rivalry in the printing business, but the discrepancies in origin seem to matter less than the new purpose they were expected to serve. The ZD editor’s eclecticism is also reflected in the commentaries and illustrations. The commentaries conflated the RYT *meipi* and *weipi* and the SJT *meipi*, with slight variations in wording and printed in a cursive script. 29

The ZD editor’s creative intervention with “borrowed” materials is best shown in the way he reconfigures large quantities of visual elements from diverse origins. There are a total of thirty-eight pictures for *Xixiang ji* and forty-three for *Pipa ji*. They are all half-folio images with peculiar inscriptions and seals. The seals and inscriptions become an integral part of every picture, and they impose a strikingly consistent factor on the images. The inscriptions are in various calligraphic styles—grass script, clerical script, small-seal script, etc. Below each inscription is a seal with the name of famous painter or calligrapher, indicating that the painting (or calligraphy) is an imitation of that person’s style. A rough count of the names yields a number of over fifty calligraphers and painters (with some overlap between *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*) spanning the dynasties from Tang to Yuan. There are well-known figures such as the Yuan painter and calligrapher Zhao Songxue 趙松雪(aka. Zhao Mengfu, 1254-1322), Mi Fu 米芾

29 In its present state, the upper-margin comments were covered up by handwritten “附錄西廂文一十六篇”. Since the sixteen essays on *Xixiang ji* appeared at a much later date (in the Qing), it is possible that a Qing reader encountered this edition and wrote down those essays in the position of upper-margin commentaries. Probably in the era after Jin Shengtan’s commentary appeared, the elaborate essay form were considered more expressive than the terse comments by “Li Zhi” and “Chen Meigong”, the latter being witty but elliptical.
(1051-1107) and his son Mi Youren 米友仁 (1074-1153) from the Song, Guo Xi 郭熙 (1023?-1085?), Ma Yuan 马远 (1160?-1225), Wu Daozi 吳道子 (680-759?), Lu Tanwei 陸探微 (d.485?), Cao Ba 曹霸 (704?-770?), Wang Guyun 王孤雲 (aka. Wang Zhenpeng, fl. 1280-1329), Dong Beiyuan 董北苑 (aka. Dong Yuan, d.962) and the monk Juran 巨然 (painter of the Southern Tang, the Five Dynasties, 10th century), Kong Rong 孔榮 (712-756), Gu Deqian 顧德謙 (painter of the Southern Tang, the Five Dynasties). There are also lesser known ones such as Han Huang 韓滉 (722-787), Cui Zixi 崔子西 (aka. Cui Bai, Northern Song), Huang Ciyu 黃辭玉 (aka. Huang Jubao 黃居寶, second son of Huang Quan 黃筌), Ding Yefu 丁野夫 (Yuan painter), Zhao Danian 趙大年 (aka. Zhao Lingxiang, Northern Song), and the Ming painter Zhao Bi (style name Jiangxue daoren), et al. The names were probably collected from contemporary painting albums, but the images are certainly not the imitation of the varying styles of renowned masters. Some of the images were clearly adapted from works of Ming illustrators. Nevertheless, the inscriptions and seals lend a consistent and stylish appearance to the entire edition. They familiarize the reader with the names of a variety of painters and calligraphers rather than with their painting and calligraphy styles per se. It obviously lies beyond the editor’s scope to distinguish the style of a Zhao Mengfu or Mi Fu, or to support a learned discussion about them. A curious reader could always attain such information from other resources. The ZD editor’s accumulation of names and distribution of them among the eighty-one images is strictly functional: He stamps a personal mark on the otherwise scattered entities and claims them as his own.

30 Pictorial albums emulating the styles of ancient and contemporary masters were quite popular in this period. A prominent example is Gushi huapu 顧氏畫譜 (Master Gu’s Pictorial Album), edited by the court painter Gu Bing and printed in 1603 by Shuanggui tang 雙桂堂 in Hangzhou.
The ZD editor never merely copies images from other resources, but seeks to adapt them to the overall structure that he envisions for the illustrations. His “plagiarism” suggests a comprehensive design, a principle of making the least change to achieve a transformative effect, and much creative thinking. He opens *Xixiang ji* with three images that seem to give the play three beginnings. The first image introduces Yingying with an image that falls into the genre of “portraits of ten beauties” of the Tianzhang ge edition of *Xixiang ji* (Fig. 3.11). The second introduces the Cui family, with a slightly modified version of the first image in the LMC *Xixiang ji* (Fig. 3.12-3.13). The spatial layout remains the same: three people standing in a garden with peach trees that are blooming and a pavilion at the upper left. The present edition adds more trees beside the pavilion, draws distant mountains and some birds flying in the sky, adds a boy chasing butterflies. The positions and relationship are shifted however: In the ZD edition, two ladies take a stroll and a maid attends upon them, whereas in the Ling edition the lady and the maid bows deferentially to an older lady who seems to give them instructions. Besides, the ZD picture adds ducks and water lilies in the pond. All the changes in the picture are not randomly made. They fit well with the new inscription: “The Tender Green Pond Hides Away *Water* [sic] Ducks; Pale Yellow Willows Host Roosting Crows” (嫩綠池塘藏水鴨，淡黃楊柳帶栖鴉). The third image introduces Student Zhang (Fig. 3.14). It compresses the first image of SJT edition (Fig. 2.25) from a horizontal folio into a vertical page without losing the visual appeal of the original. The three images set up a seasonal context, bring out all the important characters, and implicitly convey romantic sentiments.

When the ZD editor made changes to a “borrowed” image, they always serve to create a better correspondence of the image with a new caption. The tenth image is modified on the basis

---

31 For the Tianzhang ge images, see “Li Zhuowu Xiansheng Pidian *Xixiang ji* zhenben”, in *Wu Xiaoling zhencang gu banhua quanbian*, vol.3, ed. Ma Wenda (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003), 104-42, especially 128.
Fig. 3.11. Illustration 1 from *Zhuding Xixiang ji*, ZD edition, 1621-1644, National Library of China, Beijing (*Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan*, 2011 reprint)
Fig. 3.12. Illustration 2 from *Zhuding Xixiang ji*, ZD edition, 1621-1644, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
Fig. 3.13. Illustration 1 from Xixiang ji, LMC edition, 1621-1627, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
Fig. 3.14. Illustration 3 from *Zhuding Xixiang ji*, ZD edition, 1621-1644, National Library of China, Beijing (Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
of a picture in the LMC edition (Fig. 3.15). The ZD version adds a degree of dynamism and urgency to make the image fit well with the caption “The Widow and Her Children are Panic-Stricken; Student Zhang is Sought out for Rescue” (孤孀子母魂欲斷，要求排難請張生) (Fig. 3.16). As indicated above, the LMC image uses a wall to divide the pictorial space into two sections, describing concurrent events. The distress of the old lady outside the wall is contrasted with the leisure of Yingying and her maid inside the wall, who are still unaware of the danger. In the ZD version, the spatial layout and all the surrounding elements remain the same, but a monk appears to discuss with Madam Cui outside the wall (he is hardly visible behind a rock in Ling’s edition) about the bandits’ siege. The old lady is apparently horrified and transfixed on the spot. The boy Huanlang rushes to the door, about to open it and yell to the women inside. Yingying and her maid stand beside the balustrade, and Yingying is leaning forward and looking in the direction that Hongniang points to. With subtle changes in the characters’ gestures, now it is uncertain whether they are still enjoying a distant view or they already discover the besieging soldiers from their high position. The ZD picture implies urgency and sounds and actions, drastically different from the static and quiet image in the LMC edition.

The examples above allow us to see that whatever changes the ZD edition made to its visual sources are closely related to the poetic captions. The ZD editor appears to have spent considerable effort in finding a matching caption for each image, adjusting them into a pictorial unit, and linking up units into a meaningful set. Especially in the case of the twenty-scene Xixiang ji, a total of thirty-eight images mean that certain scenes are given two illustrations. How to find a supply of appropriate captions without making the pictures appear unnecessary and scattered? The ZD editor looks beyond the lyrics in the text proper toward the supplemental Pudong shi (蒲東詩) for inspiration. The Pudong shi is a series of 141 confessional poems
Fig. 3.15. Illustration 5 from *Xixiang ji*, LMC edition, 1621-1627, National Library of China, Beijing (*Guojia tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan*, 2011 reprint)
Fig. 3.16. Illustration 10 from Zhuding Xixiang ji, ZD edition, 1621-1644, National Library of China, Beijing (Guoji tushuguan cang Xixiang ji shanben congkan, 2011 reprint)
written from the perspectives of different characters in the play. Every character, even the minor ones, was allowed to have his or her voice. The poems are linked together by a dialogic format of “inquiries” and “responses” between characters. The *Pudong shi* in its entirety retells the story of *Xixiang ji* in a rambling narrative that includes a great deal of digressions, extra details, and rearranged events. Many captions in ZD *Xixiang ji* are either a direct quotation from the *Pudong shi* or a slight variant of lines from the *Pudong shi*. Among the Thirty-eight inscriptions that accompany the *Xixiang ji* illustrations, Twenty-two fall into this category. In contrast, only nine inscriptions (Illustrations 1, 2, 7, 12, 13, 21, 26, 28, 32) are from the play itself, with four of them (Illustrations 1, 2, 12, 28) from the arias and five from the speeches. The other seven captions (Illustrations 3, 9, 19, 23, 27, 30, 38) have no identifiable source in either the play or the *Pudong shi*. The *Pudong shi* becomes a handy source for the editor to extract poetic lines, trim them into captions, and supply additional details to accommodate the abundant number of illustrations.

While the *Pudong shi* serves as a convenient way to string together the images, the original order of the *Pudong* poems has to be adjusted for images that basically follow the temporal order of the play. For instance, the fourth image draws its inscription from *Pudong shi*.

---

32 Chen, Mingkan Xixiang ji, 16, 61-62, 319-39. The *Pudong shi* is one of the most commonly seen appendices for *Xixiang ji*. The 1498 Hongzhi edition of *Xixiang ji*, being the earliest extant edition of *Xixiang ji*, already includes the *Pudong shi* as one of its supplementary materials. It is also listed as an appendix in the JZZ, RYT and SJT editions. Chen’s book contains a complete transcription of the 141 poems. The work is attributed to the literati official Zhang Kai (jinshi 1424). Besides the *Pudong shi*, other literary works frequently attached to *Xixiang ji* editions are the *chuangqi* story “Yingying zhuan”, Li Kaixian’s *Yuanlin wumeng*, and an anonymous *Qiantang meng*. See Ma Meng-ching’s categorization of supplementary materials for *Xixiang ji*, in “Fragmentation and Framing of the Text”, 39-41.

33 For example, the *Pudong shi* opens with seven poems in the voice of Madam Cui that tells the reader her circumstances and gives instructions to her daughter, son, and maid. While in the play text Zhang only decides to rent a room at the temple after he encounters Yingying, in the *Pudong shi* he already asks to rent a room for study before he sets his eyes on Yingying. Also, the *Pudong shi* elaborates on Zhang’s illness after his thwarted meeting with Yingying, including his attempt to hang himself and Madam Cui sending for a doctor to see him. There is also an episode of Zhang and Yingying’s wedding after Madam Cui was forced to consent to their marriage and before Zhang was sent off for the exam.
poem 18, depicting Yingying’s first encounter with Student Zhang. The fifth image bears the inscription “Listening to Zen Talk during My Leisure” (閑中還可聽談禪), a quotation from *Pudong* poem 15 “Zhang begs for residence”. The order of images conform to the dramatic narrative that Zhang only plans to rent a room at the temple after he catches a glimpse of Yingying.

*Pudong shi* has a more significant impact on the pace, rather than the order, of the narrative embedded in the illustrations. Since the *Pudong shi* treats events elaborately and often repeatedly from the perspectives of different characters, the incorporation of the captions from the *Pudong shi* slows down the pace at which the illustrations progress. For instance, the play *Xixiang ji* contains one single scene to depict the military crisis that leads to the initial betrothal of Yingying to Zhang. The events from the siege to the lifting of the siege move at a swift pace to highlight the intensity of the situation and to avoid taking too much space in a play that centers on romance. In comparison, the *Pudong shi* divides the episode into six segments, entitled “Bandits besieging the Temple of Universal Salvation”, “Madam Cui seeking Help from Zhang”, “Zhang’s Reply to Madam Cui”, “Zhang Writing a Letter to General Du”, “Yingying Rejoiced by Zhang’s Help”, “General Du Driving away the Bandits”. Accordingly, the ZD edition uses five illustrations that roughly correspond to the six segments in the *Pudong shi*. Compared with Ling’s edition that only devotes two images to this episode, the pace of the ZD illustrations is strikingly slow. As we browse the five images, we are forced into a mode of close re-reading that dwells on details that we may have neglected in previous readings.

The illustrations’ absorption of *Pudong* poems also causes a kind of narrative inflation that magnifies minor and nonexistent details. In the part that deals with the courtship between Zhang and Yingying that leads up to their sexual consummation, we encounter another cluster of
images that deal with minute details and that move at an agonizing pace. This could be a feeling
of viewing eleven images in a row, but the sheer number of images prolongs the anxiety and
frustration the lovers experience, and makes the reader revisit every twist and turn in the tortuous
courtship. The following is a detailed analysis of the eleven images (Illustration 16-26) that
cover the episode from Zhang’s confession of love by playing the zither to the sexual
consummation. Illustration 16 depicts the zither playing scene, and its caption reads, “On the
Strings He Conveys the Heartfelt Emotions; To the Jade Pegs He Releases Inexplicable Sorrow”,
a variant of Pudong shi 55 entitled “Hongniang offering a strategy to Zhang”. Illustration 17
shows the dejected Zhang in his studio, but its source switches back to Pudong shi 36 “Zhang
Strolling under the Moon and Chanting a Poem”. Illustration 18 shows Zhang imploring
Hongniang to deliver his letter, and the inscription comes from Pudong shi 62. Illustration 19
shows Yingying reading the letter from Zhang, and the caption has no identifiable source.
Illustration 20 depicts Yingying entrusting her letter to Hongniang, and the caption is a variant of
a couplet in Pudong shi 59. The captions were not quoted in the order of the Pudong shi, yet
the illustrator has taken great care to adapt each caption to a matching image. The result is a
detailed account of the zither night, Zhang’s illness, Hong’s visit and delivery of Zhang’s letter,
Yingying’s reading of the letter, and her letter in return. The indiscriminate portrayal of central
and auxiliary events inevitably brings about a pictorial inflation that displaces the play text as the
major appeal of an edition.

34 This image is adapted from Ling’s image of Hongniang being interrogated by Madam Cui. All the
pictorial elements remain the same but for the figures. The ZD illustrator changes the kneeling Hongniang into
Zhang, and the sitting Madam Cui into Hongniang. This change totally undercuts the seriousness of the original and
turns it into one with light-hearted humor.

35 The couplet in Pudong shi 59 reads “unable to send secret feelings by ink, he entrusts his sorrow to icy
strings”. The caption is modified into “unable to send secret feelings by ink, she entrusts her sorrow to letters”. The
modified couplet fits perfectly with the image.
The *Pudong shi* supplied a basis for the ZD editor to take liberties with the *Xixiang ji* narrative. On the subject of Student Zhang’s illness, the ZD editor lines up three images: Illustration 23 shows Madam Cui sending off a monk to find a doctor (no source for caption), Illustration 24 depicts the doctor paying a visit to Zhang (caption from *Pudong shi* 127), and Illustration 25 shows a sickly Zhang confessing his passion to Hongniang (*Pudong shi* 53). Zhang’s illness is apparently a small link on the storyline, and incidents of Illustration 23 and 24 are only mentioned indirectly in the play. The heavy emphasis on this subject can only be explained as an expedient way to accommodate the many pictures the editor had in hand.

Another image on a strikingly superfluous detail is Illustration 30 with the inscription “Red Skirts thronging to see the Green-Robed gentlemen”, which depicts Zhang’s street parade as an Optimus. *Xixiang ji* never openly mentions such a parade, and the image looks like a variant of the image on Cai Bojie’s street parade in the SJT edition of PPJ. It is one of those generic images that circulate among a number of imprints and adapted for different plays. The caption is derived from the SJT image as well. In fact, the ZD editor never fully relies on the play or the *Pudong shi*, but takes considerable freedom to adopt lines elsewhere as captions (Illustration 19, 23, 27).

In sum, although the ZD illustrations are narrative-oriented pictures, they no longer passively reflect the events in the play. Instead, visual images occupy a privileged position. The editor amassed a large quantity of images and browsed the play and its supplementary materials for captions to link them. *Xixiang ji*’s extensive or elliptical treatment of incidents no longer determines the heavy or light coverage the incidents receive in visual form. The number and variety of images the ZD editor possessed are the key factors. In the illustrations there is a redistribution of narrative energy and adjustment of narrative pace, which have little relation to the distinction of major and minor events in the original play.
The *Pipa ji* is a play of greater length, so it does not pose as much challenge to distribute the forty-three visual images alone the line of its forty-two scenes. The *Pipa ji* illustrations are very balanced by providing visual image for nearly every scene, including minor details overlooked by previous illustrators. However, The ZD editor does not seem to apply a consistent effort in matching every image with a suitable caption. Among the forty-three images, nine are adapted from the LMC edition (Illustration 8, 10, 12, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 38) to serve a new purpose. A few others (Illustration 13, 32, 39, 43) seem to be modified on the basis of the RYT illustrations. With a few brushstrokes, ZD Illustration 10 changes a scene of family harmony into family conflict (Fig. 3.17-3.18). It retains all the non-figural elements of LMC Illustration 1 except for the positioning of human figures. It shows Cai’s father standing alone in the courtyard (facing right) and Wuniang kneeling before Cai’s mother in the hall, trying to appease her anger. Illustration 38 adds a layer of poignancy to the LMC source image, by making the servant Li Wang engage in a vehement conversation with Elder Zhang and adding fluttering paper coins (Fig. 3.19-3.20). The detail of the paper coins matches well with the inscription “Chill Winds Send Paper Money Fluttering in Circles”. All the changes made to the “borrowed” images indicate that the editor was careful to adapt the picture to new inscription, as a way of making it generate new meanings. However, there are instances where he was lax in this task and left the image totally in disjoint with the inscription. Illustration 33 shows Minister Niu sending away a servant to inquire after Cai’s parents, thus the caption reads “You Should Inquire Carefully at Chenliu County”. And Illustration 34 shows Cai arriving at a temple in sedan chair, and the caption reads “Passing by the Bamboo Yard I Met the Monk for a Chat; in this Floating World, Another Half-Day of Leisure.” Those two captions match the images quite appropriately. The two captions were subsequently recycled for the two completely irrelevant images. We can only
Fig. 3.17 Illustration 1 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition, 1621-1627, Liaoning Provincial Library, Shenyang
Fig. 3.18. Illustration 10 from Zhuding Pipa ji, ZD edition, 1621-1644, National Archives of Japan, Tokyo (Riben suocang xijian zhongguo xiqu wenxian congkan, 2006 reprint)
Fig. 3.19 Illustration 19 from *Pipa ji*, LMC edition, 1621-1627, Liaoning Provincial Library, Shenyang
Fig. 3.20. Illustration 38 from Zhuding Pipa ji, ZD edition, 1621-1644, National Archives of Japan, Tokyo (Riben suocang xijian zhongguo xiqu wenxian congkan, 2006 reprint)
attribute such discrepancy to the negligence of the editor, because it is not difficult to locate an appropriate line from the play to serve as caption. In general, the transformation of images from diverse sources into a stylistic unity has been successful. However, there is slight slippage on the editor’s part that fails to supply a unique caption for each image.

The ZD edition is most noteworthy for the large number of illustrations culled from a wide range of contemporary editions. It would appear that the editor had chosen a shortcut by perusing readily available images and appropriating them for his own use, yet, the wit and creativity involved in assimilating those images should not be underestimated. Similar to Ling Mengchu, the ZD editor experiments with the boundaries of drama publishing by recruiting extra and at times excessive materials, and challenges the reader to discover the charms of an oversized Xixiang ji and Pipa ji.

Conclusions

The two paired editions of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji appeared at a time when the conventions of printing drama with commentary and illustration were already well established. What was already done in the areas of drama commentary and illustration posed challenge to farther innovative attempt, but also provided ample resources for book producers to borrow and reuse. In addition, when literati figures such as Ling Mengchu joined the publishing business, they both worked within conventions and sought to redefine the conventions with their knowledge as literary critics and experiences with theater. Ling hoped to use his edition to improve the quality of drama texts as reading materials, and to influence elite singing culture. His marginalia demand frequent pauses during the reading to imaginatively restore the play as a musical script. Ling also possessed the financial and cultural resources to enlist a painter to make a set of original pictures dominated by elegance and restraint. The ZD editor exemplifies a collector’s acumen to generate
new configurations out of diverse and superfluous materials. He puts a predominant emphasis on the pictures and it is possible that the reader was also primarily attracted by the pictures, but in remaking and reorganizing the images he borrowed, he changes our ways of looking at the play narratives by reminding us of small details and supplementary materials.

The two editions stretch the play texts to accommodate an overload of information. The book producers presuppose a high degree of familiarity with the plays on the part of the reader, and require musical literacy and a basic knowledge about painting and calligraphy to appreciate their works fully. The editions turn the reader away from the direct and impetuous reading promoted by “Li Zhuowu”, to a mode of slow and mediated reading that would accommodate varying degrees of cultural sophistication.
Chapter Three

Originality and Authority: *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* as Correlated Books of Genius

No matter how extraordinarily wonderful a work is, once readers become too familiar with it they often cease to feel its excellence. Those parts in *Xixiang ji* are truly marvelous writings—don’t let your feelings grow dull simply because you have read them many times!

從來異樣妙文，只是看熟了便不覺。西廂中如此等，真是異樣妙文也，切思不得看熟了。

—Jin Shengtan, The Sixth Book of Genius

*Pipa ji* is a peerless piece of writing, but it has become so widely seen and familiar, to the extent that everybody in this world must have read it, yet [many] do not know that they have never really grasped it.

琵琶記雖是絕世妙文，然今既習見習聞，天下當已無人不讀，不知確是未曾得讀也。


In previous chapters, we have discussed the publishing strategies that maximize the roles of commentary and illustration to refresh our understanding of old plays. I highlighted how the presentation of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* as a dyad created links and counterpoints, as well as other defamiliarizing effects. This chapter explores the literati’s creation of unique commentary editions that not only connect and compare the two plays, but more importantly, that nominate them as components of a book series that claims canonical status and cultural authority.

Although the terms *qishu* 奇書 (marvelous masterworks) and *caizi shu* 才子書 (books of genius) seem to signify undisputable cultural superiority, they were strategically used in seventeenth-century publishing world, to serve the needs of printers and critics seeking profit.
from and prestige for their specific texts. The establishment of a roster of candidates for qishu or caizi shu involved various strategies of appropriation and exclusion, and the shift from qishu to caizi shu conferred greater agency on both the commentator and the reader.

**Congshu, Qishu, and Caizi shu**

The application of a collective title to a group of texts is a practice that long predates the Ming. Traditionally, the most eminent textual groups were predominantly the classics and histories, such as the Four Books, the Five Classics, the Three Comprehensives (santong 三通), and the Four Histories. However, before the Ming it was relatively rare to gather existing canonical texts and print them together as a book series. With reduced cost and improved technology of printing, the Ming initiated an era of congshu (collectanea) publication that culminated in the massive eighteenth-century Siku quanshu (Complete library of the four treasures) and stretched into the modern era. Congshu refers to a collection of monographs or other types of previously existing independent works that are put together and published under a single cover or as a series. Although congshu were supposedly compiled to preserve texts that were becoming rare, the publication of many congshu in the Ming was at the same time a commercial undertaking and a marketing strategy to sell books. A distinctive grouping of existing independent works and the selection of a striking collective title was an effective means

---

1 The “Three Comprehensives” are Du You’s (735-812) Tongdian, Zheng Qiao’s (1104-1162) Tongzhi, and Ma Duanlin’s (1254-1323) Wenxian tongkao. The “Four Histories” are Sima Qian’s (145?-86BCE)’s Shiji, Ban Gu’s (32-92) Hanshu, Fan Ye’s (398-445) Hou Hanshu, and Chen Shou’s (233-297) Sanguozhi.

2 China Bibliography, comp. Harriet Zurndorfer (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 266-83. Zurndorfer listed six categories under which the congshu were published, such as Collections of Individual Authors, Collections of Works by Members of One Family or Clan, Collections of Works by Writers of One Locality, Collections Devoted to a Single Subject Area, Miscellaneous Collections, Composite Works Compiled to Preserve Valuable Shorter Works. A comprehensive catalogue of congshu dating from 1202 to 1992 is Zhongguo congshu zonglu 中國叢書綜錄, compiled in 1959, with a revised edition published in 1981. The catalogue indexes 2797 collections, among which a majority was published in the Ming and Qing periods.
of promotion, and the practice applied not only to traditional bibliographical classes (classics, histories, masters, and belles-lettres) but also to lower-prestige genres such as novels and plays.

A large number of congshu display their nature as a collection in their titles: They were either directly identified as congshu, or appear under such titles as congke (literally, carved as a series), congkan (published as a series), huike (carved as a collection), huikan (published as a collection), heke (carved as a pair) and hekan (published as a pair, usually reserved for the collection of two works or two authors), etc. For instance, among the large number of Tang poetry anthologies published in the Ming, there were Li Du heke (Li Bai-Du Fu Paired Edition), Wang Meng heke (Wang Wei-Meng Haoran Paired Edition), Sheng Tang er dajia (Two Masters of the High Tang), San Tangren ji (A Collection of Three Tang Poets), etc. The notion of Eight Great Essayists of the Tang and Song Periods was also first proposed by Ming critics and popularized through Mao Kun’s printing of Essays of Eight Tang and Song Masters. In the field of fiction and drama, there are the Sixty Stories (ca.1550) and Sixty Plays (ca.1616), as well as the Three Words (ca.1620-1627) and Two Slaps (1628-1632). The application of collective titles to a constellation of texts was widely recognized as an effective way to promote the works in question and raise their cultural prestige. They facilitated serialization, allowed less-known texts to benefit from the reputation of better-known works, and created a textual alliance that collectively made claim to a monumental status. Publishers further enhanced the efficacy of

---

3 Among the 2797 collections in Zhongguo congsu zonglu, 472 have congshu in their titles, 59 have congke, 66 have congkan, 17 have huike, 7 have huikan, 46 have heke, 12 have hekan.

this strategy by drawing on the authority of literati figures, whose real or forged prefaces were enlisted to endorse the books.

The emergence of *qishu* and *caizi shu* particularly reflects the joint forces of printers and the literati to publicize the fame of a certain grouping of texts. A brief review of the *qishu* and *caizi shu* concepts reveals that they were inventions of the seventeenth century. During the late-Wanli period the term *qishu* enjoyed an increasing visibility among the paratextual materials of printed novels. In an edition of *Lieguo zhizhuan* (Romance of the Warring States) reprinted in 1606, a preface by the editor Yu Shaoyu 余邵魚 (ca. 1566) expresses the regret that “it is rare to find any marvelous masterworks besides *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 (Romance of the Three Kingdoms) and *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (The Water Margin).” In Zhang Yu’s 張譽 preface (dated 1620) to the *Bei Song San Sui pingyao zhuan* 北宋三遂平妖傳 (The Three [Men Named] Sui Quelling the Demons) edited by Feng Menglong, he provides a gradation of novels from the truly great ones to the poor imitations:

Fiction writers consider the depiction of realistic events as standard and the depiction of fantastic events as marvelous. Yet the saying goes: “Painting ghosts is easy; painting humans is difficult.” *Xiyou ji* (Journey to the West) is fantastic to the extreme, yet it falls short of *Shuihu zhuan* due to the “ghost” and “human” distinction. Ghosts are not humans: though they move your teeth and tongue, they will not stir up your liver and lungs. *Sanguo yanyi* falls into the “human” category; its depiction is also skillful. What it lacks is fantasy. But it is because the events [in *Sanguo yanyi*] did not allow for much fantastic depiction, not because the author did not have the talent to create fantastic events. Therefore, *Sanguo yanyi* can perhaps be viewed as on a par with *Shuihu zhuan*? I once compared the novels to the *chuanqi* plays: *Shuihu zhuan* is like *Xixiang ji*, *Sanguo yanyi* like *Pipa ji*, and *Xiyou ji* like *Mudan ting* (The Peony Pavilion) of recent days. Others such as the *Yu Jiao Li* (Jade-Charming-Pear) and *Jin Ping Mei* (Plum in the Golden Vase) are like brilliant maids who act as mistresses. They only know how to keep the daily accounts but never learn how to manage the household. Such novels follow *Shuihu zhuan* but expose their shortcomings. Romances of the Seven States, the Former and Later Han, the Tang, and the Song dynasties are like the vulgar Yiyang opera that rely on the noise of gongs and drums. They copy *Sanguo yanyi* but only show their own

---

inferiority. *Sanbao Taijian xiyang ji* (The Eunuch Sanbao’s Journey to the Western Seas) is like the shrine god of Jin family from the Wang alley who collects alms by swindling. It imitates *Xiyou ji* but lacks its wisdom.

小說家以真為正, 以幻為奇; 然語有之: “畫鬼易, 畫人難.”西遊幻極矣; 不逮水滸者, 人鬼之分也。鬼而不人, 第可資齒牙, 不可動肝肺。三國志人矣, 描寫亦工; 所不足者幻耳。然勢不得幻, 非才不能幻。其季孟之間乎? 賽辟諸傳奇: 水滸, 西廂也; 三國志, 琵琶記也; 西遊則近日牡丹亭之類矣。他如玉嬌梨、金瓶梅, 如慧婢作夫人, 只會記日用賬簿, 全不曾學得處分家政, 效水滸而窮者也; 七國、兩漢、兩唐、宋, 如弋陽劣戲, 一味鑼鼓了事, 效三國而卑者也。西洋記如王巷金家神, 說謊乞布施, 效西遊而愚者也。^6

While Zhang apparently regarded *Shuihu zhuan*, *Xiyou ji*, *Sanguo yanyi*, and *Pipa ji* as the most accomplished works that depict affairs of the human realm, a later critic, Master Smiling Flower (*Xiaohua zhuren* 笑花主人), in his preface to the *Jingu qiguan* 今古奇觀 (Marvelous Spectacles Old and New, ca.1632-1644) explicitly labeled them together as “Four Great Works” (號四大書).^7 A subtle shift occurred in the early Qing when Old Fisherman of West Lake (*Xihu diaosou* 西湖釣叟) in his preface to Ding Yaokang’s 丁耀亢 (1599-1669) *Xu Jin Ping Mei* (Sequel to the Plum in the Golden Vase) singled out three masterworks that are exclusively literati novels:

Among today’s numerous novels only *Shuihu zhuan*, *Xiyou ji*, and *Jin Ping Mei* are singled out as “three great marvelous works”. How do they deserve this title? *Xiyou ji* explicates the Mind yet confirms the Way via demons; *Shuihu zhuan* disparages swordsmanship yet honors the righteousness of bandits; *Jin Ping Mei* admonishes wantonness yet flaunts passion through sex. They all resort to a way of expression that tends to externalize [the strangeness], exaggerate [the violence], and expand [the eroticism], but their purpose is to insinuate, to satirize, and to restrain.

---


^7 Ibid, 195. In the late Ming there seemed to be still a hierarchy that recognized the *The Water Margin* and *The Three Kingdoms* as masterpieces and the *The Journey to the West* and *Jin Ping Mei* as slightly inferior works. A certain Yanxia waishi in his preface to the 1623 *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* 韓湘子全傳 praises the book as having “the orderliness of *The Water Margin*, the marvelous transformations of *The Three Kingdoms*,” but without “the wanton playfulness of *The Journey to the West* and the obscene eroticism of *Jin Ping Mei.*” Obviously he regarded the former two as good examples and the latter two as works with flaws. Cheng, “Lun Mingdai fangkan”, 137.
今天下小說如林，獨推三大奇書曰水滸、西遊、金瓶梅者，何以稱乎？西遊闡心而證道于魔，水滸戒俠而崇義于盗，金瓶梅懲淫而炫情于色：此皆顯言之，夸言之，放言之，而其旨則在以隱，以刺，以止之間。

The Qing novelist Chen Chen’s 陳忱 (1614? -?) list of qishu encompasses texts of different genres and origins that feature detailed revelations of basic human conditions. In the preface to his novel Shuihu hou zhuan 水滸後傳 (Sequel to the Water Margin, ca. 1664), he made the claim that his book “synthesizes the strengths of Four Marvelous Masterworks” (jian sida qishu zhi chang 兼四大奇書之長), which include the Daoist philosophical text Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca. 4th century), the play Xixiang ji, the Buddhist sutra Lengyan jing 楞嚴經 (the Surangama Sutra, translated into Chinese ca. 8th century), and Qu Yuan’s (229-278BCE) long poem “Lisao” 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow). He cited previous critics by saying that “Zhuangzi is a book of anger (nushu 怒書), Xixiang ji a book of imagination (xiangshu 想書), Lengyan jing a book of enlightenment (wushu 悟書), “Lisao” a book of lamentation (aishu 哀書)”. Interestingly, several decades later, Zhang Chao 張潮 (1650-1707?) applied those comments to an entirely different list of works, namely that “Shuihu zhuan is a book of anger, Xiyou ji a book of enlightenment, Jin Ping Mei a book of lamentation.”

Li Yu appears to be among the first to confer the title of “Four Marvelous Masterworks” onto the four novels Sanguo yanyi, Shuihu zhuan, Xiyou ji, and Jin Ping Mei, as they are recognized today. In a preface to the Zuigeng tang 醉耕堂 edition (1679) of Sanguo yanyi, Li proposed that “marvelous books should follow their proper categories” (書之奇當從其類),

---

8 Jin Ping Mei ziliao, 404.
justifying the exclusion of works that are nonfictional.\textsuperscript{11} The Zuigeng tang edition is also the first one that contains the epithet \textit{Sida qishu diyi zhong} 四大奇書第一種 (Number One of the Four Great Marvelous Books) in its title.\textsuperscript{12} Some later editions of \textit{Jin Ping Mei} and \textit{Xiyou ji} also draw on this practice. Zhang Zhuo’s commentary edition (1695) of \textit{Jin Ping Mei} is titled \textit{Gaohe tang piping diyi qishu Jin Ping Mei} 高鶴堂批評第一奇書金瓶梅 (Number One Marvelous Book \textit{Jin Ping Mei}, With Commentary from Gaohe Studio), which was later changed to \textit{Sida qishu disi zhong} 四大奇書第四種 ((Number Four of the Four Great Marvelous Books) in a 1747 edition. Zhang Shushen’s commentary edition of \textit{Xiyou ji} (1749) is titled “\textit{Diyi qishu xinshuo Xiyou ji}” 第一奇書新說西遊記 (Number One Marvelous Book, A New Explication of the \textit{Xiyou ji}).\textsuperscript{13} By the time of mid-eighteenth century the four novels’ entitlement to “Four Great Marvelous Works” appeared to have been widely recognized, though there were occasional challengers such as the author of \textit{Qilu deng} 歧路燈, who mentioned an old list of four Masterworks including the \textit{Zuozhuan}, “Lisao”, \textit{Zhuangzi}, and \textit{Shiji} and blamed commercial printers for the four novels’ usurpation of the ancient works’ positions.\textsuperscript{14} However, his criticism of the four novels’ pretense to \textit{qishu} status can be read precisely as a proof of the broad popularity that the four novels enjoyed in his time.


\textsuperscript{12} The Zuigeng tang 醉耕堂 edition (1679) appears to be the earliest edition of \textit{Sanguo yanyi} with commentary by Mao Lun and Mao Zonggang. It bears the full title \textit{Shengshan bieji guben Sanguo zhi sida qishu diyi zhong} 聲山別集古本三國志四大奇書第一種 (Mao Lun’s Number One of the Four Great Marvelous Books, Ancient Edition of the Romance of the Three Kingdoms). The edition has a preface by Li Yu, in which Li compared two lists of “four marvelous works” created by Wang Shizhen and Feng Menglong. The former regarded \textit{Zhuangzi}, Sima Qian’s \textit{Shiji}, \textit{The Water Margin}, and \textit{Xixiang ji} as the four marvelous works in this universe, whereas Feng Menglong gave the honor to the four novels. Li Yu sided with Feng and proposed that “marvelous books should follow proper categories”. Rolston, \textit{How to Read the Chinese Novel}, 434; Chen Xianghua, “Mao Zonggang de shengping”, 68-86.

\textsuperscript{13} Rolston, \textit{How to Read the Chinese Novel}, 440, 454.

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Jin Ping Mei ziliao}, 368.
Multilayered Meanings of Caizi shu

As the seventeenth and eighteenth century witnessed the sustained appeal of the qishu title, another honorary title, caizi shu, started to emerge in the second half of the seventeenth century, notably via the Suzhou literatus Jin Shengtan’s 金聖嘆 (1608-1661) commentaries of Shuihu zhuan and Xixiang ji.15 Jin Shengtan’s commentary editions of Shuihu zhuan and Xixiang ji were respectively published around 1641 and 1657, and named as the fifth and sixth book of genius. Together with the Zhuangzi, “Lisao”, Shiji, and Du Fu’s poetry they comprise Jin’s six books of genius. A few years after Jin’s death, the father and son team from Suzhou, Mao Lun and Mao Zonggang, created commentary editions of Pipa ji (1665) and Sanguo yanyi (1679) that also claimed the name of “book of genius”. As a matter of fact, after getting to know the different proposals of qishu made by Jin and the Maos’ predecessors, we could recognize that their “books of genius” is no more than a synthesis of the various lists of qishu. None of the candidates in the list was untouched by previous critics. Although Du Fu appears to be a surprise on the list, to judge from Li Zhi’s remarks that “the world has five great works” (宇宙有五大部文章) and Du Fu’s collection is one of them, Du’s works was always among the critics’ top choices.16

However, the emergence of caizi shu concept in parallel with qishu signaled a shift of emphasis from a text-centered to a reader-centered promotion strategy. The concept of caizi 15

---

15 Jin is known for a carefree lifestyle and defiant attitude toward authorities. There are numerous stories of his being kicked out the civil service examinations for outrageous conduct. He obtained only the lowest civil examination degree, never held office, and ceased to participate in the examinations after the fall of the Ming. The greatest part of his energy was devoted to writing commentaries on a variety of literary works. He died on the execution ground of Suzhou because of his participation in a protest against a newly appointed magistrate of Suzhou and his program of punitive taxation.

16 The rest are Shiji, Su Shi’s collection, The Water Margin, and Li Mengyang’s collected works. It is recorded in Zhou Hui (1546-?)’s Jinling suoshi (1610), reprinted in Jinling suoshi, Xu jinling suoshi (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 2007), 195.
(men of talent) in caizi shu took on several layers of meaning through its popularization in the commentary editions of Jin Shengtan and the father and son Mao Lun and Mao Zonggang. It is at once a literary trope, a way of self-identification, an ideal of masculinity, and a key critical term from a cultural discourse. When a book receives the honor of caizi shu, the caizi could refer to the author, the character within the book, the commentator, and/or the reader. The credentials of caizi proposed by Jin and the Maos will be our concern later. Here it suffices to say that the growing popularity of nonofficial titles such as minggong 名公 (renowned masters) or caizi among the circle of printers did signal a new ideal image of the literati. As Kai-Wing Chow has noted, the publishers’ choice of nonofficial titles suggests “the emergence of the literary authority of scholars regardless of their position”.17

Present scholarship on caizi mainly focuses on the literary representation of caizi in the scholar-beauty romances, but their reviews of the formation of the caizi discourse still helps shed light on the traits that distinguish caizi from other identities of the literati and stimulates us to consider the implications of the caizi shu phenomenon.18 In terms of social status, the Chinese literatus was first and foremost a member of the shi 士, the cultural elite who possessed knowledge and pursued a public career; they welded power through holding official positions. They are also ru 儒, or rusheng, who faithfully adhere to Confucian ideology. The majority of the literati also aspired to be junzi 君子, men of moral integrity and cultural refinement.19 Given the various options a Chinese literatus could choose to identify himself, the growing popularity

---


19 Geng, 45.
of *caizi* is worth considering. The title *caizi* puts a predominant emphasis on *cai*, talent, a quality that could be improved through cultivation but that is primarily an innate gift. In most periods of Chinese history, talent was placed in a category secondary to virtue, the latter being the most important quality that distinguishes a person. When *cai* was singled out as the predominant feature of a person or a work, it often signifies exceptionality, unconventionality, and a frivolous display of literariness that are at best morally ambiguous.

While Geng views the talented male hero within novels and plays as a self-aggrandizing myth invented by the literati, the exaltation of *cai* in the collective title of *caizi shu* reflects a new sense of pride in the creative power of authors, commentators, and readers. The increasing visibility of *caizi shu* demonstrates a renewed interest in literary texts regardless of the genres they were written in. It shifts the reader’s attention from the moral content to the artistic construct. It brings an aura of exceptionality to the novels and plays, allots a space for the commentators to express their talent, and flatters the readers with a badge of genius. Jin Shengtan played a pivotal role in initiating the fad for *caizi shu*. The Maos’ commentary of *Pipa ji* was named after Jin’s sixth book of genius, and his commentary of *The Three Kingdoms* attained the name of the first book of genius through the spurious Jin Shengtan preface we mentioned above. The trend of *caizi shu* caught on in the Qing, to the extent that a list of ten books of genius were complied, with three *caizi jiaren xiaoshuo*, *Haoqiu zhuan* 好逑傳, *Yu Jiao Li* 玉嬌梨 (1658), *Ping Shan Leng Yan* 平山冷燕 occupying the second, third, and fourth positions. Zhong Daicang’s 鈡戴蒼 commentary of *Huajian ji* 花箋記 (1713), a Qiaoyun shanren’s 樵雲山人 *Zhuogui zhuan* 捉鬼傳 (1720), and a Wuhang yeke’s 吳航野客 *Zhuchun*

---

20 Ibid, 73.

21 See the tension between *caizi* and *junzi* in chapter 4, ibid, 87-124.
yuan 駐春園 (1782) were later added to complete the list of ten. Interestingly, Yu Jiao Li, Ping Shan Leng Yan, and Haoqiu zhuan were printed before the Mao edition of The Three Kingdoms, but they only acquired the title of caizi shu after Jin and the Maos’ editions appeared.\textsuperscript{22} Moreover, there were a number of contenders for the ninth and tenth places. The names I listed here only represent one version of the list. There was no definitive answer to the qualifications of the ninth and tenth books.

With the above discussion my purpose is to historicize the concepts of qishu and caizi shu. The emergence of those concepts helps us see that the evaluation of novels such as Shuihu zhuan and Sanguo yanyi was intertwined with the assessment of plays like Xixiang ji and Pipa ji. They were often conceived as two correlative pairs that constitute Four Great Works. The Maos’ Pipa ji and Sanguo yanyi adopted the caizi shu status through a process that closely engages Jin Shengtan’s works despite the lack of historical link between them and Jin. The production and publishing of the Maos’ Pipa ji in particular illustrates how an editor and publisher could turn the anxiety of influence into a driving force of innovation. In the rest of the chapter, I focus on the structural and thematic correlations between Jin’s commentary of Xixiang ji and the Maos’ commentary of Pipa ji to unravel the Maos’ strategies of imitation and creation. The Maos fully demonstrate how one can be derivative without being inferior, and earn for Pipa ji the undisputable position next to Jin’s sixth book of genius.

\textit{Different Commentarial Personae, Similar Approaches}

David Rolston, editor of the influential volume \textit{How to Read the Chinese Novel}, noted the correlation between Jin Shengtan’s commentaries on Shuihu zhuan and Xixiang ji and the Mao father and son’s commentaries on Sanguo yanyi and Pipa ji. He described them in this way:

\textsuperscript{22} Deng Jiarong, “Shida caizi shu de youlai”, Zhongguo wenhua 2 (2008), 72-75.
Both the commentary for the *Pipa ji* and that for *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* were undertaken in reference to Jin Shengtan’s commentaries on the *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Xixiang ji*. These four works, easily among the most influential in the entire vernacular tradition, form two pairs. In the *Pipa ji* and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* conventional morality is perhaps questioned, but ultimately affirmed. The *Shuihu zhuan* and the *Xixiang ji*, on the other hand, are more subversive in nature. The former tends to uphold the right to rebel against the state, while the latter praises romantic love. The two Maos emphasize the moral correctness of their texts. 

This general observation points to an area that needs detailed exploration. As a matter of fact, although the works chosen by Jin and those by the Maos could not be more different in nature, their approaches to them exhibit surprising affinity. Even the commentators’ moral judgments are not so far apart as they first appeared. Although the works Jin chose are “more subversive in nature”, his attitude in the commentary toward political and sexual transgressions is at best ambivalent. Notwithstanding his celebration of intuitive and courageous individuals, he undercuts the meaning of rebellion in his prefaces and in his truncation of the *Shuihu* text into seventy chapters. Likewise, Jin Shengtan tried to contain the subversive nature of *Xixiang ji* by emphasizing the lovers’ strong sense of moral propriety that prevents them from seeking immediate sexual satisfaction, and that qualifies them as a real *caizi* and *jiaren* pair. The Maos, on the other hand, sought to aestheticize and romanticize their take on morality in the novel and the play. They applied the *caizi jiaren* discourse to Cai Bojie and Zhao Wuniang because they believe that moral obstinacy defines the true scholar and beauty. The biggest difference between Jin and the Maos perhaps lies in the personae reflected in their commentaries—Jin is self-indulgent and overbearing, spontaneously witty and humorous, whereas the Maos are scholarly and moderate, predictably composed and wise. Because of the apparent impetuousness of Jin, it is hard to tell how seriously he was committed to some of the moral, Buddhist, Daoist ideals he freely turned on and off in the commentary. Therefore, the texts Jin and the Maos chose to

---

23 Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 147.
comment upon did not automatically define two distinctive commentary styles, nor did they answer the question whether Jin and the Maos’ moral beliefs are close or diametrically apart. On the contrary, both commentators were responsible for reshaping their texts to generate desirable interpretations, and the approaches they took to the texts are not as different as we are made to believe.

In terms of critical approaches, it is clear that the Maos were heavily indebted to Jin and yet strove to rival Jin. There seemed to be a deliberate omission of Jin Shengtan’s name in the prefaces to *Pipa ji*, the Seventh Book of Genius. It bears a preface by You Tong 尤侗 (1618-1704) dated 1665, in which You referred to the previous six books of genius to support *Pipa ji*’s qualifications for the seventh, but he left out Jin Shengtan from a list of famous commentators. Mao Lun’s preface also mentioned contemporary commentaries of *Xixiang ji* but failed to raise the name of Jin Shengtan. Jin was executed by the Qing state only four years before then, so it is understandable that his contemporaries chose to be silent about him. However, their circumspect treatment of Jin Shengtan only ends up attracting attention to the unnamed other that looms large behind the title of the Seventh Book of Genius. Ironically, Jin Shengtan’s name also found its way into some Mao commentary versions of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* that appeared later than the oldest extant Zuigeng tang edition (1679). For instance, the title page of one edition bears the title *Guanhuatang Diyi caizi shu* 貫華堂第一才子書 (The Guanhuatang edition of The First Book of Genius), with “Comments and emphases by Master Mao [Lun] Shengshan” (Shengshan pidian 毛聲山先生批點) and “Original Commentary by [Jin] Shengtan” (聖嘆原

---

24 You claims that Mao Lun’s commentary of *Pipa ji* is like what Guo Xiang did for Zhuangzi, Wang Yi for *Lisao*, Pei Yin for *Shiji*, Yu Ji for Du Fu’s works, and Luo Guanzhong and Guan Hanqing for *Shuihu zhuans* and *Xixiang ji*. Interestingly, he cites Guan Hanqing who was often believed as a sequel writer who completed *Xixiang ji* as a commentator but fully ignores Jin Shengtan. *Diliu caizi shu Xixiang ji, Diqi caizi shu Pipa ji*, ed. Deng Jiarong, Zhang Yunlong (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2007), 246.
Some editions altered the Li Yu preface in the Zuigeng tang edition and ascribed it to Jin Shengtan. In the preface, “Jin” indicates that he was more impressed by *The Three Kingdoms* than any of the six books of genius. While his wish to write a commentary for it was delayed by illness, he found Maos’ commentary “accomplished what he had in mind.” Thus he concluded that *The Three Kingdoms* should be the First Book of Genius and that “the Maos and I shared the same mind.” The false attribution to Jin Shengtan in those editions led later scholars such as Lu Xun to speak occasionally of Jin Shengtan as the author of a commentary on *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

It seems rather unfair that the extensive work that the Maos diligently invested themselves in should be passed on to later generations as a work of Jin Shengtan, but it also demonstrates the overwhelming fame of Jin that threatened to eclipse the Maos. The bogus preface makes it sound like the Maos are junior followers of Jin and their commentary seeks the endorsement of Jin, who generously approves Mao Zonggang’s effort and praises him as a likeminded friend. It appears as if the Maos’ commentary was valuable only when it successfully speaks Jin Shengtan’s mind with Jin’s personal approval—at least it is a thought some Qing printers believed what their readers would readily subscribe to. This contrived attempt to establish a link between the two famous commentators might have to do with the printers’ desire

---

25 Thus the title page gives full credit to the elder Mao Lun 毛綸, rather than the son Mao Zonggang 毛宗崗 (who would have been known as Mao Xushi 毛序始). However, the table of contents revises the credits somewhat, listing “contributions” (wai shu 外書) by [Jin 金] Shengtan; commentary by Mao Zonggang (Xushi) of Maoyuan 茂苑毛宗崗序始氏; a “new collection” (bieji 別集) by [Mao Lun] Shengshan, that was “edited by Hang Yongnian (Zineng) of Suzhou” 吳門杭永年資能氏定. It also alters the title to *Si da qizhu diyizhong* 四大奇書第一種 (First of the Four Works of Genius). Hang Yongnian is probably the disciple who participated in the creation of the commentary and who reputedly stole the completed manuscript and tried to pass it off as his own. See Zhongguo tongsu xiaoshuo zongmu tiyao 中國通俗小說總目提要 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian, 1990), 37; Robert E. Hegel and Maria Franca Sibau, “Introduction: *Sanguo zhi yanyi* Chapters 48 and 49,” *Renditions* 81-82 (2014), (forthcoming).

26 Chen Xianghua, “Mao Zonggang de shengping”, 81-82.

27 Rolston, *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 149.
to magnify the sales of their products, it might also stem from some traceable correlation between the two sets of commentaries. The Maos are not without responsibility for creating the impression that they must have some connection to Jin, as they freely borrow the *caizi shu* title and so aptly exploit Jin’s approaches in the commentaries for another novel and play.

The Maos were never satisfied with replicating Jin and walking in his shadow. They intended to produce commentary editions that rival and surpass those of Jin Shengtan. From the fact that the Maos named their *Pipa ji* edition the Seventh Book of Genius, they seemed to be the Jin’s pious followers; but from the fact that publishers celebrated the Mao edition of *The Three Kingdoms* as the First Book of Genius, they had regarded the Maos as Jin’s strong competitors. Some of the Maos’ approaches display a striking similarity with Jin’s, but they openly compare *Pipa ji* and *Xixiang ji* on various occasions to argue that *Pipa ji* represents a better manifestation of a certain literary device, often with implicit reference to Jin’s discussion of such a literary device in *Xixiang ji*. Jin’s and the Maos’ *caizi shu* commentary editions together established a genre of systematic, organized, creative, and critical writing that marked a new phase in drama publishing and criticism. They are a qualitative departure from the desultory commentary by “Li Zhuowu” and “Chen Jiru” in an earlier period. They were executed by regionally famous literati figures who willingly identified themselves as the authors of such commentaries, and who regarded these projects as the hallmarks of their life’s work. It is widely acknowledged that the emergence of Jin and the Maos’ commentary editions eclipsed all other editions and monopolized the transmission of the two plays for a long period of time. It is not until the Republican period when scholars and bibliophiles excavated other recensions and made them

---

28 Li Yu preface to the Jiezi yuan edition concludes with the remark: “Truly, it is [worthy to be called] The First Work of Genius.” Ibid, 149.
available to the general public that people became aware of the existence of these plays in
diverse forms.

As the initiators of the caizi shu title and commentary, the sweeping influence of Jin
Shengtan and the Mao father and son begs for explanation. What are the characteristics that
seized the interest of publishers, readers, and connoisseurs for generations to come? Jin and the
Maos’ commentaries have been respectively analyzed in a number of scholarly works, but
certain important aspects are left unaccounted for, namely that the caizi shu appeal lies in many
social, cultural, psychological factors that go beyond the literary. A convenient way to identify
those factors is to look at what the Maos adapted from Jin’s “Sixth Book of Genius” and made
effective use of in their “Seventh Book of Genius.” The Maos’ creative repetition of Jin’s
approaches achieved the effect of repeating with tactful avoidance (avoiding at the point of
repeating), a technique of writing discussed in their Three Kingdoms commentary that shows the
author’s superb mastery of his materials. What the Maos adopted from Jin helped reinforce the
power of Jin’s commentarial approach, and an analysis of Jin and the Maos in juxtaposition
reveals the common knowledge that the early Qing reader was assumed to possess to
comprehend the book of a caizi and the common skills that the reader would be proud to acquire
in order to qualify for a caizi himself. Prefaces for Jin and the Maos’ commentary editions
revolve around a cultural discourse of caizi, advertising a mode of private reading that was both

29 Sally K Church, “Jin Shengtan’s Perception of Hidden Meanings in Xixiang ji”, Harvard Journal of
(Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2004); Wang Ai-ling, “Lun Mao Shengshan fuzi Pipa ji pingdian zhi lunli

30 Rolston, How to Read the Chinese Novel, 101.
different from the examination curriculum and considered to be connected with the preparation for examination essay writing.\textsuperscript{31}

\textit{Commentarial Framework and Cosmic Outlook}

Jin’s and the Maos’ books both set up a grand agenda and explicate the meanings of their commentaries on a magnificent scale. Jin’s two prefaces, ostentatiously named “Crying over the Ancients” and “A Gift to Readers-to-Come”, devises a cosmic and existential frame to situate the commentator’s relation to the book. Although this may sound like Jin’s usual tricks of arguing from an unexpected angle to set his readers on their tiptoes, his first essay does present an agnostic and nihilistic outlook into a universe where everyone and everything is transitory and illusory. However, his second essay quickly cancels its validity by seeking to connect with later generations through writing. The first essay uses the concept of “big kalpa” (\textit{dajie} 大劫) to set off a transitory universe: Heaven and Earth have no consciousness nor conscience—they are unable to account for anyone growing out of it from nowhere and disappearing into nowhere. The Self, identified as “I”, would want to find a pastime in this accidental and helpless life. However, even the sense of Self, or the I-identity is not stable. It grows out of a person’s illusion of self-boundaries, which in turn boost self-importance and the pursuit of immortality. How can “I” be so foolish as not to realize, Jin says, that everybody harbors a similar illusion of a unique Self? When “I” woke up to the transitory nature of “my” existence, “I” will realize that “I” will soon be “Non-I” (“I” and “Not-I” are permeable). Most people err by taking this transitory life of “Non-I” as “I” and seriously invest in it. Although this is a big mistake, this mistake cannot be undone, so surely there is no harm to perpetuate it by spending the time and talent of a “Non-I”

\textsuperscript{31} Private reading has some overlap with leisure reading/reading for pleasure, but not entirely the same. Some private reading is both a pastime and a means of self-cultivation, a quest for the meaning of life or of historical events, self-initiated scholarship unrelated to the pursuit of degree in examination, and an indirect way of learning the skills to write.
on something “I” find pleasurable. Therefore, the meeting of “I” and “my” writing on Xixiang ji, witnessed by a buzzing bee and a crawling ant on a pleasant day, is the result of unusual karma and an extraordinary delight. Jin achieves the insight that writing can be no more than a pastime for him in such a fleeting life, no matter whether he lives with or breaks through his self delusion. And it can be no more than a pastime for future readers in their fleeting existence. The writing of the ancients, whose talents are ten times greater than his, can be no more than a pastime for themselves and for Jin Shengtan—it is truly lamentable! Thus Jin regards his production and print of the commentary as a way of crying over the ancients’ sorry existence. However, since he shares the deplorable fate himself, the crying can be no more than a pastime either.

The essay leaves the impression of taking off with a heavy load and landing lightly on soft ground. Jin speaks of his commentary as of little value, yet such a light conclusion carries weight because of the cosmic hypothesis he sets up as a background. Jin’s commentary essays are often such spectacles of wonder that doubly serve as live demonstrations of the techniques he expounds upon. His second essays builds on a different hypothesis that the power of a great book carries through time and that bygone writers could live in the minds of the future people. Xixiang ji is just such a great book whose power is sustained through time, and it can serve as his gift to future people who would thereby be reminded of him. Doesn’t this contradict his previous allegation that everything is transitory and any obsession with the self is meaningless? What is the point of claiming the uniqueness of Xixiang ji and Jin Shengtan? Practically, Jin through his dismissal of the ancients dismisses all the textual history of Xixiang ji and previous interpretations, focuses attention instead on “the present Xixiang ji” as a fresh encounter between Xixiang ji and Jin Shengtan. Metaphysically, he touches on the paradox of negating and seeking meaning in a world divested of celestial and moral origins. Xixiang ji was said to take on its
significance in such a cosmogonic and cosmological background. Readers familiar with the Jin’s three prefaces to his edition of *Shuihu zhuan* may recognize that Jin adopts a more poetic and mystical attitude in his essays to *Xixiang ji*. If *Shuihu zhuan* offers a playground for Jin’s demonstration of literary devices, *Xixiang ji* serves as a meditation space to set off his personal musings. This may also have to do with the creation of the two commentaries at different stages of his life.

The Maos situated the creation of *Pipa ji* commentary not in a fleeting physical universe but in an eternal moral universe. There are two prefaces by “Floating-Cloud Sojourner” (the tutor of Mao Zonggang) and You Tong dated 1666 and 1665. The “Floating-Cloud Sojourner” compared Mao Lun to the blind Zuo Qiuming who wrote the historical accounts of the Spring and Autumn period (ca. 770BCE-476BCE), *Zuozhuan*. He argued that Mao Lun had devoted his eyes of wisdom to folks of this world, opening up the eyes of people who are “blind at heart”. Therefore, Heaven may reward him by restoring his eyesight or benefiting his son, Mao Zonggang. This preface is striking in that he attributed the *caizi shu* value of *Pipa ji* firstly to the commentator rather than the author. It is Mao’s commentary that made him believe *Pipa ji* is indeed a *caizi shu* and it is Mao who made visible the talent of the author. Thus he regarded Mao as the primary creator of the Seventh Book of Genius. You Tong also gave the primary merit to the Maos who revived the old play, and who helped bring to the spotlight Gao Ming who were otherwise neglected among the Yuan masters. In addition, Mao Lun wrote despite his blindness, just like the talented predecessors who persisted in extreme circumstances. Therefore You Tong believed Mao Lun deserved the appellation of *caizi* in his own time.\(^{32}\)

---

\(^{32}\) *Diliu caizi, Digi caizi*, 245. You Tong also gave his definition of *caizi* here. He said, “What I called talent is based on a person’s nature, arising from his emotions and restrained by rituals and propriety. It is not merely giving free rein to one’s whims and acting decadent and eccentric. Zhuang Zi is free-spirited but wise, Qu Yuan is resentful but loyal, Sima Qian is hypercritical but outspoken, Du Fu is stubbornly devoted but upright. They all
Unenlightened Reading is Non-Reading

Both Jin Shengtan and the Mao father and son resorted to the strong rhetorical position that readers who have not read their commentary editions have in fact never really read *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*. In other words, even though those people may have read the two texts a thousand times, without being enlightened to the intricacies of the authors’ design and the true worth of the texts, their reading is meaningless. Jin and the Maos share the basic presumption that the author is a genius and the book in question is an ideal piece of writing and a classic, and that the task of the commentator is to excavate the author’s ingenious points and explain them to the reader. On the other hand, they imply that the author’s intent is ultimately unknown, and that the commentator by retroactively working out the author’s design has appropriated the book as his own. As Jin says,

> If there is one book in the world that has the power to reach later generations but that remains unknown to people of our time, it must be *Xixiang ji* …. I really do not know the original intentions of the *Xixiang ji* author—are they like [what I said in my comments], or are they not like [what I said in my comments]? If they are the same as my comments, you can say that you have not truly seen *Xixiang ji* until today; if they are different from my comments, you can say you have seen *Xixiang ji* for long but just seen Shengtan’s *Xixiang ji* for the first time today.

夫世間之書，其力必能至於後世，而世猶未能以知之者，必書中之西廂記也……我真不知作西廂記者之初心，其果如是，果不如是也？設其果如是，謂之今日始見西廂記可；設其果不如是，謂之前日久見西廂記，今日又別見聖嘆西廂記可。

Jin brackets the author’s intention by proposing two ways of understanding his project: it can either be a true revelation of a masterpiece or a new creation. Whether the dead author cares about this, or whether he deliberately left clues to the commentator, are suspended in Jin...
Shengtan’s case. In the case of Mao Lun, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, “Floating-Cloud Sojourner” regarded him as the primary owner of the Seventh Book of Genius, and Mao regards himself as the *zhiji* 知己, the true friend of Gao Ming, who helps unveil Gao’s talent and redeem his *caizi* status after several hundred years. His own “General Discussions” concludes with those remarks:

*Pipa ji* is a peerless piece of writing, but it has become so widely seen and familiar, to the extent that everybody in this world must have read it, yet [many] do not know that they have never really grasped it. Even though one or two mindful readers have made comments or discussions, their comments are not detailed, their discussions not thorough. As a result there are still people in the world who was not capable of reading *Pipa ji*. I commented and discussed it, with the hope to share my reading with people of the entire world.

琵琶記雖是絕世妙文，然今既習見習聞，天下當已無人不讀，不知卻是並未曾得讀也。即有一二有心人，亦嘗評之論之，但評之未詳，論之未悉，天下人終有不能讀者。我今更評之論之，庶幾與天下人共讀之. 34

In other words, Mao sees previous commentaries as inadequate and aims his edition at “people of the entire world” who previously could not really grasp *Pipa ji* (likewise, Jin targets a broad audience of “later generations”; both commentators have more specific delimitations of readers later). He recognizes the contributions of such predecessors as Wang Shizhen, Xu Wei, and Li Zhi, but the purpose is to make the reader “recognize that I have a distinctive pair of hands and eyes and dare not slavishly follow my predecessors” (*方乃知予今日別出手眼，非敢有所蹈襲前人也*). In sum, both Jin and Mao acknowledged that the text they dealt with was already an old and familiar text by their time and numerous readers were already familiar with its content. However, what they promote is a refreshed and enlightened understanding of the text that never

---

34 Ibid, 259. There are similar claims in Jin Shengtan’s *Xixiang ji* that blames the reader’s over-exposure to the play for their dulled sensitivity, such as the quotation at the beginning of the chapter, and the comment in Scene 3 of Book 3, “Rejecting the Letter”: “Those are most marvelous events of the ages. Extraordinarily wonderful! They have been performed so many times that people could no longer feel (千載奇事，煞是好看，被人搬熟，遂不覺耳). Ibid, 142, 163.
appeared before. This is an easy and ambitious claim to make. For nothing is easier than to pick up a widely available text and piece together some widely available comments, as many Ming editors did; however, nothing is more different than to make the reader approach an old book with the same degree of curiosity and anticipation they feel for a latest release. This is the common goal Jin and the Maos set out to accomplish.

In order to promote the fresh and enlightening effect of their commentaries, Jin and the Maos used metaphors of the powerful eye and the golden needle. In his *dufā* (*How-to-Read*) essay, Jin describes the author’s writing as “seizing by his inspired eye and snatching by his godly hand” (靈眼覷見, 靈手捉住) and he uses the same metaphors for his creation of the commentary. Besides the powerful perceptive eye, he speaks of himself as the one who finds the golden needle of the master embroiderer and generously passes it on to others. Readers familiar with his commentary will acquire “a distinctive pair of hands and eyes” (異樣手眼) to unravel the marvels of other books. Mao Lun’s preface writer loves to play with a paradox of the eye, for it is the blind Mao who shares his “eye of wisdom” with everyone. He claimed, “A man who lost his eyesight could open up the eyes of people under Heaven. Even if I were to say he never lost his eyes, that would not be inappropriate.” Several decades later, Zhang Zhupo wrote in a preface to his commentary for *Jin Ping Mei* that the purpose is to “empathize with the bitter heart of the author and refresh the ears and eyes of like-minded readers” (憫作者之苦心, 新同志之耳目). The idea of the commentator as the person with a special pair of divine eyes with powerful insight persists through time.

*Commentary as an Educational Tool*

Jin and the Maos present their commentaries as an important tool for self-cultivation and the education of youngsters. Their projects were construed as an effective means of passing on
family reading tradition and spreading the benefit to a larger community. Jin in his _dufa_ essay for _Xixiang ji_ made frequent references to _zidi_ 子弟, youths of his day, who could benefit from his commentary on the play. It promises to teach them the way of distinguishing unworthy books, and to help them learn skills of writing. When those young men reach the age of fourteen or fifteen _sui_, Jin believed they should be given his edition of _Xixiang ji_, rather than be prohibited from reading it, otherwise they might stealthily read some harmful random editions. Jin claims that they could extend the good reading methods to _Zhuangzi, Shiji_, and the “Airs” in _Shijing_. A reading of his edition would also cure the young men’s writing problems of “appearing elegant without being smart” or “appearing smart without being elegant”. Jin traced his edition to a very personal concern for educating young men in his own family, which must have struck a familiar note among many literati of his own time and after, who are equally eager to raise men of talents in their own families.

Jin also secures his readers’ interests by calling them “splendid geniuses of all times”. Jin states that marvelous writings are shared treasures of the universe, thus both _Xixiang ji_ and Jin’s commentary were merely stolen from the minds of “splendid geniuses of all times”. In other words, he promises to demystify the concept of genius by unwrapping _Xixiang ji_ piece by piece and word by word, allowing the readers to see it was created with structural principles that the literati were familiar with in their own essay writing. It is flattery and a pledge that the literati would find hard to resist. However, Jin Shengtan would not be Jin Shengtan if he always follows up with what he sets out to do. In the pre-chapter comments he did discuss the literary devices, but sometimes only further mystifies them by making contemplative digressions or exclaiming that the author is heavenly-endowed to give an ingenious touch or a familiar move. He marvels at the author’s brushwork as if it were that of a god, a Bodhisattva, or ghost, and he can do
nothing but to throw himself to the ground and kowtow a hundred times. This greatly reduces the applicability of Jin’s commentary, and reveals that the explication of literary devices is a strategic claim, which often gives way to his overflowing reverence for Xixiang ji, be it sincere or performative.

Jin projects a target of vulgarity and mediocrity for attack, making his readers to feel compelled to ally with him to avoid harsh criticism and enjoy a sense of superiority. Jin’s favorite targets of ridicule are Donghong xiansheng 冬烘先生 (Mr. Muddlehead) and cang 傍 (Mr. Vulgar). The former attacked Xixiang ji for its obscenity, but Jin believed that they were actually the most obscene-minded readers who stained the reputation of Xixiang ji. He speaks scornfully in the pre-chapter comments of “Answering the letter”: Since Mr. Muddlehead is so fixated on the erotic content and so insensitive to the wonders of composition, is it due to his exceptional interest in sexual intercourse? Then nobody’s mind is as dirty than his! Mr. Vulgar represents those with vulgar thoughts (e.g., Zhang and Yingying engaged in flirtation soon after they met; Yingying can’t wait to consummate her affair with Zhang) and those too stupid to grasp the author’s ingenious design. The problems Jin listed for Mr. Vulgar implicitly refer to some late Ming editions (like the drama miscellanies), but his main purpose is to polarize Mr. Vulgar and Splendid Geniuses of All Times (Tianxia jinxiu caizi 天下錦繡才子), assuming the latter to be brilliant and incredibly refined. Since he dropped the former so low and raised the latter so high, who among the readers would not like to identify himself with the latter and show distain toward the former?

Mao Lun introduces Pipa ji with the affectionate memory of a father’s teaching of his son. He recalled his childhood reading under the guidance of his father: First he was told stories of

---

35 For example, see scene 3, Book 1, “Answering the verse”, ibid, 58, 59, 61, 62, 63; scene 2, Book 4, “Interrogating the Maid”, ibid, 167, 170, 174.
filial piety, chastity, and loyalty by his father, and then, by the time he could read, he was kept from reading novels and plays with the exception of *Pipa ji*. This early contact built the foundation for his growing insights into the play. With these growing insights he came to realize how deep his father’s love is, for allowing him to read *Pipa ji*. Thus, Mao Lun vows to pass on the advice to all fathers, brothers, and sons: “*Pipa ji* is not a play and shouldn’t be read as a play. Fathers and brothers shouldn’t view it as a play and prohibit youths in their families from reading it.” It is with a professed concern for the common good that Mao recorded how his friend Jiang Xinyou urged him to hasten the publication:

> It is such a delight that *Pipa ji* has received this commentary, which enlivens the images of filial sons and loyal husbands, chaste wives and virtuous ladies. Therefore, it is not only a necessary book under the lamps and on the desks of learned gentlemen, but also an indispensible companion by the side of the mirrors on the dressing tables of ladies in their boudoir. [You] should quickly send it to a printer, so that readers from everywhere could carry several copies with them. Besides keeping some for themselves and for friends who may come by to borrow, they could give one copy to the family tutor to teach the boys, and give another copy to the nanny to teach the girls. As a result, everyone has something to read and follow. It will be a great contribution to the court for spreading its teaching and improving the customs.

且琵琶一書得此快評, 直為孝子義夫、貞婦淑女別開生面, 是不特文人墨士窗前燈下所不可少之書, 而亦深閨絹箋妝台鏡側所不可少之書也。蓋急授之棗梨, 使四方能讀書之人, 每人各擕數帙以歸, 除留自玩與留備友人借觀外, 一付塾師以誨弟子, 一付保姆以誨女子, 俾皆有所觀法, 則為朝廷廣教化、美風俗, 功莫大焉。

36 The term *biekai shengmian* 別開生面 originates from Du Fu’s poem “Danqing yin” 丹青引, referring to his praise of Cao Ba’s 曹霸 (704?-770?) re-painting the faded portraits at the Lingyan pavilion. The twenty-four portraits of famous generals and ministers were first commissioned by Tang Taizong and painted in the year 643 by Yan Liben and others. As the portraits faded with time and exposure, Cao Ba re-painted them in the Kaiyuan reign (713-741) of Tang Xuanzong. Du Fu depicted Cao Ba’s superb skill that brings generals and ministers to life. They appear so high-spirited that their hairs and mustaches are slightly moving, being freshly dressed and equipped to charge into the battlefield. See Du Fu, “Danqing yin”, in *Quan Tang shi*, vol. 220, no. 29. When Jiang Xinyou applied this term to the Maos’ commentary, it is a significant remark because it implies that Mao brings new life to the images of Cai Yung and Zhao Wuniang in *Pipa ji* that have faded with people’s familiarity, stimulating a new round of interest in and appreciative sensitivity to the familiar *Pipa ji*. It may also imply that Mao produces a commentary different from hackneyed discourses about *Pipa ji* that have worn out reader’s interest.

37 *Diliu caizi, Diqi caizi*, 258.
Mao tried to be more inclusive than Jin Shengtan by including both the gentlemen and the ladies. Though he put great emphasis on the explication of literary techniques, his pronounced purpose here is to exert moral influence, and in this aspect *Pipa ji* has something to offer both sexes. Mao reiterated his interest in female readers in the pre-chapter comments. For Scene 17, he writes, “No book is better informed with wifely etiquette and regulations for women than the *Pipa ji*”; for Scene 36 he introduces the term of “talented women” (*caifu* 才婦), stating that “*Pipa ji* is a must-read for women who lack talent, but it is particularly a must-read for women endowed with talent”. 38 At the very end of his commentary, he made a final statement that expects his readers to be “future junzi who combines talent and moral behavior” (天下後世才行兼全之君子). Such readers not only understand the intricacies of ingenious composition, but also share the author’s deep moral concern. If Jin Shengtan’s readers could easily earn their credentials by joining the camp of “geniuses” against “Mr. Muddlehead” and “Mr. Vulgar”, Mao tightens his requirements by making explicit moral demands on readers. If Jin Shengtan often indulges in his dexterous play with language to mesmerize the reader, Mao’s enthusiastic moral preaching also conveys his belief in the evocative power of language to move and touch. The allusion to an educational purpose under private tutelage appears to limit the function of Jin and the Maos’ books, but it may have in fact enlarged their potential audience by touching on the central concerns of the literati: the cultivation of male heirs and the replication of young men in their own images. Almost every educated reader of late imperial China would dream of taking a cohort of talented young men under his wing in order to ensure the continuity of values within his family or community. Therefore, the education of youngster held a broader appeal than such narrow schemes of examination success or official positions.

---

38 Ibid, 250, 446.
The Maos also project a negative image for the readers to distance themselves from. He learned from Jin Shengtan the effectiveness of this psychological game: projecting the less ideal readers as *cangfu* 俗父, the stupid and despicable Other, and casting them into an disgraceful zone no one wants to identify with. In the Maos’ case, *cangfu* is more often a foil to the ingenious writer, referring to clumsy writers rather than less-than-ideal readers. The Maos gave more elaborate treatment of such people in pre-chapter comments. For instance, while previous authors wrote with such care that the sequence of words in a sentence has implications, he was appalled at today’s inexperienced young writers and rotten pedants who barely understood the use of level and oblique tones in the basics of poetry, yet who presumptuously started to draft the more poetically complex *chuanqi*. In pre-chapter comments for Scene 28, he laughs at “those *cangfu*” who build a stove and oven for each piece of writing (meaning that they do not know the art of preparing connecting threads in an earlier part for a later incident). This way of writing exhausts the writer without earning him any fame. In other words, *cangfu* in the Maos’ commentary is another name for “mediocre writer”, who do not know how a wonderful piece is constructed. It is a vehicle for Mao to criticize bad *chuanqi* writers of his day. In pre-chapter comments for Scene 27, he talks about the flexible use of supernatural elements in *Pipa ji*. Clumsy writers fabricate a dream or a ghost whenever they run out of inspiration. They resort to the supernatural that because they have no other way out—geniuses would never stoop to that. While Gao Ming creates an phantasmagoric effect by announcing and then quickly denying the appearance of divine figures, “mediocre hands” (俗手) may lapse into the habit of using dreams and ghosts in every difficult situation. That is how genius can be creative and playful while the mediocre writers’ hands are easily glued and stuck together. In addition, Mao also emulated Jin by stating that it is lucky for *Pipa ji* if *cangfu* are unwilling to read it, for the book was not meant
for such people in the first place. As Jin and the Maos create an internal discriminative system to extol the type of readers they consider worthy and censure the readers they consider undesirable, they exert on every reader the pressure to yield to their authorities and accept their value judgments.

 Commentary as Collaboration and Social Interaction

 Both Jin and the Maos presented their commentary as a collaborative product that involves family members and friends. Such a statement unfolds the process of commentary as the expansion and deepening of social ties. In Jin’s case, friends sat together on various occasions to discuss Xixiang ji, or they talked about other things that stirred up Jin’s thoughts toward Xixiang ji. In the Mao case, the son read and the blind father listened; then the father uttered his comments and the son jotted them down. Thus, creation of the commentary goes hand in hand with the growth of mutual admiration and understanding between friends and of love between father and son, to the extent that they become zhiji. Since there was often a lapse of time between the conceiving of the commentary and its final publication, when the commentary finally appeared, it had a commemorative dimension, being a site of pleasant memories shared with friends and family members. Specifically, Jin Shengtan mentioned eight people in his commentary, including his uncles Chen Ziyu and Chen Zirui, friends Sun Ziqing, Wang Yi, Wang Zhuoshan, Buddhist friends Master Shengmo and Master Zongzhi, and a publisher friend Han Zhu who printed his books at Guanhua tang. Those people perform different functions. In Scene 1 of Book 3, he talks about being inspired by a casual conversation with Chen Ziyu on playing shuanglu 雙陸 (backgammon). Chen taught him the secret of nuzhan 那輾, which simply means to start with a small step and move patiently and steadily with small incremental

---

steps. Jin develops and applies this skill to writing, especially to the writing of a seemingly bland and constraining subject, like Hongniang being entrusted with a love letter from Student Zhang. Jin’s method is to break up the topic into small parts and break down each small part into even smaller parts, and begin with the smallest unit and move by incremental steps. In this way, one can produce “a sprawling essay out of a narrow topic, a relaxed essay out of an urgent topic, a winding essay out of a straight topic, and an effortless essay out of an exhausted topic”.40

Wang Han 王瀚 (zi Qizhong, hao Zhuoshan 斬山, ca.1606- ca.1669) played a most complicated role in Jin’s commentary. Wang Zhuoshan and his brother Wang Yi 王伊 (also known as Wang Xueyi 王學伊, zi Gongsi, hao Daoshu 道樹) are both fifth-generation descendants of Wang Ao 王鏊 (1450-1524) who served as Grand Secretariat in the Zhengde reign. Like Jin Shengtan, they only attained the lowest degree in the civil examination and spent their entire lives at Suzhou. They spent their family wealth on various artistic pursuits and associated with famous literati of their day.41 Wang Zhuoshan was mentioned twenty-three times in Jin’s commentary in Xixiang ji, and was quoted four times in Jin’s commentary of Shuihu zhuan. He played the role of a companion who read and commented on Jin’s commentary, a friend whose insights were often quoted, a fellow caizi who appreciated Jin’s talent, and a person who shared Jin’s playful personality and unconventional lifestyle. The introduction of his voice enriches the texture of the commentary and sews another layer to Jin’s remarks. In Scene 2 of Book 3, Jin inserted a small biography for Wang. Wang read widely and treated friends generously. He was skilled at various arts and entertainment but lived the life of an ascetic. He is white-haired but still has a childlike heart. More importantly, he was like a brother to Jin and

40 Ibid, 114.
they enjoyed each other’s company immensely for several decades and grew old together. Jin envisioned his future as living to a ripe age together with Wang, or passing away like a wisp of smoke or breeze, with Wang as his companion. Therefore, Jin explained, his frequent references to Wang results from his constant thought of a close friend in his old age. How could it be seen as a way of fishing for fame through reciprocal promotion?

If we take Jin at his word, the references to his interaction with Wang Zhuoshan are infused with his nostalgia toward an irretrievable past shared with a dear friend. The commentary is an act of remembrance to capture the happy moments when he and Wang engaged in a friendly competition to come up with witty expressions. Jin presents his relationship with Wang as the ideal friendship of two geniuses, reflected in their mutual admiration and perfect communication in reading and commentating *Xixiang ji*. As he indicated in the comments, this is also the type of relationship he yearns to build with his readers. Therefore, his interaction with Wang serves as a model that attracts readers to follow suit. For instance, Wang Zuoshan extolled Jin for his insights in the pre-chapter comments for “Listening to the Zither”, saying, “*Why is it necessary to have this scene after the betrothal crisis and before the love letter? ... Shengtan’s comments completely enlightened me. The expressions appear to me as if they have just taken a fresh bath. Shengtan’s eye is truly as big as a winnowing pan!*” In the comments immediately follow, Jin expresses his wish to summon “Splendid Geniuses of the Universe” to his side: “I want to sit with you on a mat, light up a candle, drink in large goblets, and have a delightful chat. We will sing, recite, discuss, critique, call and bow to this piece of writing. If there is no one who understands [us], we will burn it and cry over it.” This evocation is followed by Wang Zhuoshan’s response: “*Zhuoshan said, ‘I will cry first.’*” 42 Wang Zhuoshan here plays the role of a supporting friend who affirms Jin’s ideas and sympathizes with him. Their interaction

---

42 Ibid, 105-06.
presented in the form of dialogue is fairly dramatic and amusing. Jin’s desire for genius companions is a rhetorical stance because he already has Wang Zhuoshan, with whom he enjoys precisely the scenario he wishes for. The pre-chapter comments for “Interrogating the Maid” are made up of twenty-four entries of “Delightful Things” Jin and Wang came up with in a playful contest to kill the boredom of rainy days while they lived together. This unusual piece of commentary uses a crisp style to feature the exhilarating moments of life. It implies that readers who delight in such moments and expressions are bound to delight in Hongniang’s sharp and eloquent arguments in the main text.

Wang often stimulated Jin’s ideas in understanding Xixiang ji. He told Jin about the marvelous scenery of Mount Lu, making Jin extremely curious and upset when travelers’ reports did not match Wang’s description. Wang enlightens him by saying that he has never actually been to Mount Lu. Its wonders exist in one’s imagination—if they do not exist in reality, it only means that creativity of Heaven and Earth falls short of human imagination. Through this incident Jin believes Wang helped him understand the wonders of indirect portrayal of characters.43 In scene 2 of Book 2 “Banquet Invitation” Jin expresses the idea of recognizing extraordinary beauty out of the ordinary landscape during travel, to illustrate the author’s capacity to write a wonderful piece on Hongniang’s insignificant errand. Again, the thoughts on travel were based on his discussion with Wang, and they unexpectedly emerged at the right moment to inspire Jin’s interpretation of Xixiang ji. Jin goes on to quote Wang’s telling of the anecdote of Wang Xizhi who silently caresses every stem and every petal of his flowers and counts every stamen. Answering his question about the origin of this anecdote, Wang coolly

43 Jin argues in this scene that all the descriptions of Yingying and the monks are indirect descriptions of Zhang.
replied, “I just know.” Jin exclaimed, “Such is the eccentricity of Zhuoshan. What a pity that people of this world didn’t get to know Zhuoshan, and fall for his charm!” To summarize, the interaction between Jin and Wang Zhuoshan often took the form of such *gong’an*-like (公案) dialogues, or the language game between two Chan masters. Like the *gong’an*, it presents insiders’ jokes, self-mockery and mutual mockery, and a spiral argument towards enlightenment. It has the dramatic and tricky features of *gong’an* that entices the reader to savor and enjoy.45 Wang Zhuoshan, as the reader Jin directly addresses him, is the supporter, companion, and interlocutor the commentator relies upon to make the commentary a social and collective event. Such collaborative effort could be seen as heralding the circle around the author of *Honglou meng* whose critique and comments became absorbed into the creation of the great novel.

Mao Lun and his son Mao Zonggang collaborated in creating the commentaries for *The Three Kingdoms* and the *Pipa ji*. *Pipa ji* is primarily known as Mao Lun’s work because he noted in the preface that he made his comments verbally and his son took notes. The son Mao Zonggang also contributed his own thoughts, elaborating a point raised by the father, or supplementing a point not adequately expressed. In Jin’s *Xixiang ji* we hear the voices of Jin’s friends mediated by Jin’s narration, while here Mao Zonggang speaks in his own voice in the “Supplementary Remarks”. However, the meaning of father-son team is not as simple as it appears. All of Mao’s friends commented on how difficult it was to create the commentary—blindness confined Mao Lun to home and took away the pleasure of scholarly activities. Yet Mao Lun’s son served as his eyes and his hands, reading to him the texts and jotting down his comments. Mao Lun’s work with his son not only passed on the Mao family tradition of allowing youngsters read *Pipa ji* for moral education, but also set a brilliant example for the

44 The anecdote means that close observation of detail at the microscopic level is essential to good work.

public to emulate. The father’s care and love for son and the son’s filial piety and respect for father were implied in Mao’s narrative of his intimate and successful cooperation with his son. Therefore, not only is *Pipa ji* a story of moral failure and redemption, but the story behind the commentary of *Pipa ji* a living moral lesson made possible by healthy and powerful father-son ties. Unlike Jin Shengtan, Mao did not clearly indicate in the commentary itself which parts were elaborated or supplemented by his son. Mao Zonggang’s silence is in keeping with a son’s virtue of showing deference to his father and being modest about his own achievements. In the case of *Three Kingdoms* commentary credited to Mao Zonggang, which was completed before the *Pipa ji* commentary but printed after it, the exact manner of the father-son collaboration is unclear, so it is even more difficult to make out Mao Zonggang’s contributions.

**Reframing the Text To Enforce a New Argument**

Jin and the Maos used the same strategy of making a highly opinionated argument and holding onto it throughout the play commentary. In the *dufa* and the opening essay of the *Xixiang ji* commentary, Jin makes clear his stance on the characters and theme. Yingying (aka. Shuangwen) was viewed as a noble, virtuous, and innocent young lady, and Student Zhang a talented, pure-hearted man solely focused on his study for the examinations. Not a single thought of romance ever crossed their minds until all of a sudden they ran into one another, a result of Madam Cui’s improper management of her household and of karmic connections. From the beginning Jin sublimates the protagonists, especially Yingying, to a godly status and asserts that she is the core character in the mind of the author. The other characters are merely auxiliaries, the tools to trigger the twists and turns and to smooth the transitions in the romance.

Jin establishes his apologetic attitude toward the main protagonists in the essay that purports to explain the implications in the name of “the Western Wing”. Jin provides a tongue-
in-cheek reading of karma that traces the love affair to Cui Yingying’s father’s building of a house next to the Western Wing. He starts with the assertion that the Western Wing is a room at the west part of the Temple of Universal Salvation, and Minister Cui built a housing compound to the west of the Western Wing, not within the temple but right next to it. Minister Cui might have planned to spend his retirement years close to a Buddhist sacred site, but how could he predict that he would die early and that having a house close to a temple would precipitate a scandal that involves his daughter? Jin went on with an argument that one should be cautious about making a karmic cause. In this line of thought, Minister Cui’s house became a distant karmic cause for his daughter’s affair. The other thing he insists upon is the spatial layout of the Western Wing. The Cui house must have been separated from the temple by a wall, Jin argues, because it is against propriety for the high-class women folks to mingle with the monks and visitors of a big temple. It is hard to believe Jin is totally serious in his arguments here, especially the one about distant karma causes, but he maintains a solemn tone and attributes both ideas to the author. According to Jin, the author named the play “the Western Wing”, precisely because he wanted to alert us to the grave consequences of karma and ritual propriety. The entire essay sounds deliberately serious in advancing a curious argument, which may well be Jin’s way to provide an eye-catching beginning and an insider’s joke with his learned readers.

The pre-chapter comments for Scene One glorify the protagonists from another perspective, arguing that an author who loves himself must have loved his self-expression dearly. If he loves his writing dearly, he would not want to portray Student Zhang (who is no more than an incarnation of himself) as a rake and Yingying (no more than an incarnation of his ideal love)
as a loose woman. Overstretched as the argument is, Jin builds all his subsequent arguments on this assumption that Yingying is a heavenly person in the first place. Since direct description, which is just like heavy makeup, is not fit for a heavenly person, we can only get a glimpse of Yingying through the delicate portrayal of her admirer Student Zhang, just as the beauty of an elusive moon can only be set off by painting the silky and gossamer clouds that half-conceal and half-reveal it. Jin’s commentary absolved Yingying of any responsibility in the affair: she never actively initiated any contact or responded to Zhang’s advances until after Madam Cui made the marriage promise. The events after the aborted marriage happened because Yingying had no other way out—she was forced to reduce collateral damage caused by her mother’s wavering attitude. They also arise out of her admiration of Zhang as a caizi and her sense of justice and gratitude. Jin portrayed Yingying and Student Zhang as victims who have every reason to consummate their love after the old lady’s betrayal but who still take pains to overcome their sense of propriety. This is Jin’s major way of defending the protagonists against the “misinterpretations” of Mr. Vulgar and defending Xixiang ji against the charges of obscenity. In fact, he is not the first person to lay the blame on the old lady and justify the young lovers’ premarital intercourse. Such thoughts already emerged in the “Li Zhi” commentary and was passed down in other commentaries. Yet Jin Shengtan developed this argument at length into an eloquent rebuttal against the diatribe from moralists.

The Maos also made an overarching but highly controversial argument at the very start. They believed that Pipa ji was created by Gao Ming as a satire on his friend Wang the Fourth

\(^{46}\) Here Jin conflates the author, the reader, and the character, since he declares the original author’s intentions unknown and asks the reader to imagine himself as the author and how he would want to portray the lovers. And he mixes up caizi and jiaren as literary representations and as self-images pursued by people in reality.

\(^{47}\) Jin Shengtan’s indebtedness to the “Li Zhi” commentary is also manifested in his Fifth Book of Genius. About half of the comments attributed to Li Zhi in the Yang Dingjian preface edition of the novel published by Yuan Wuya (ca. 1612) are echoed in Jin Shengtan’s comments and that his edition follows many of the editorial changes of the Yuan Wuya editions. Rolston, How to Read the Chinese Novel, 130, n 25.
(王四). The claim was based on a spurious source saying that Gao Ming’s friend Wang the Fourth abandoned his wife and married Minister Buhua’s daughter. As Pipa ji has the characters pipa 琵琶 in its title but the lute never plays a significant role, the theory proposed that the four “Wangs” in the characters pipa is an allusion to Wang the Fourth. The Maos are not the first who supplied a subtext for Pipa ji. Ling Mengchu made a similar claim by identifying the main protagonist as Murong Jie who was later mistaken as Cai Bojie. Unreliable as the “Wang the Fourth” claim appears to be, Mao sophisticates this theory by using it to explain the points that have long puzzled Pipa ji readers. “Wang the Fourth” helps explain why the play was titled Pipa ji but pipa never plays a significant role and why the image of Cai Yong is so different from the historical Cai Yong. Since the target of satire has nothing to do with Cai Yong, argued the Maos, the inconsistencies in the play are clues dropped by the author to foreground the play’s fabricated nature. The real genius may fabricate the events but achieve such a degree of verisimilitude that readers forget its fictiveness. Moreover, the author depicts Cai Yong as a person who never completely forgets his home or abandons his wife, so as to put Wang the Fourth to shame. The author retains Cai as a positive example rather than a negative one because he is lenient and unwilling to openly accuse others of wrongdoing. In addition, the Maos believe that the author creates Cai Yong as “complete in filial piety and loyalty” to assuage his unhappiness with Wang the Fourth’s wrongdoing.

Mao’s obsession with Wang the Fourth had incurred criticism from other commentators. Zhang Zhupo expressed his disapproval in his dufa for Jin Ping Mei. He reported having seen a work called Diqi caizi shu “which is full of speculation about Wang the Fourth” and wondered “if the time spent on these inconclusive speculations might not be better devoted to appreciation
of the literary techniques embodied in the work”. However, Zhang seems to not have realized that the Maos incorporated these speculations into their argument about the centrality of the Zhao Wuniang character. The Maos’ interest in Wang the Fourth is unlikely an interest in the pursuit of obscure origins, but a tactic to use a handy source-story to support their revisionist position. They believe that Pipa ji centers on Zhao Wuniang as a chaste and filial wife (to help voice the grievances of Wang the Fourth’s wife). Cai as a devoted husband is secondary, and Cai’s parents are there to reflect on the character of Zhao Wuniang. They believe that marital devotion and filial piety are intertwined because they are indeed related (a person who abandons the wife his parents chose for him betrays his parents). The Maos’ choice to focus on Wuniang is similar to Jin’s argument about Yingying as the focus of Xixiang ji. They start with biased assertions, but reinforce them with the persistence and zeal of their writing, to the extent of reframing the play texts and drumming their unique interpretations into the readers. The elaborate interpretative frames they develop are their biggest differences from earlier commentaries. A highly consistent theme is maintained from the onset to the last word, and fleshed out in the interpretation of characters.

**Sophisticated Structures of Commentary**

Jin and the Maos refined drama commentary by developing a sophisticated system of comments in multiple forms and at different positions: prefatory essays, dufa essays, lengthy pre-chapter comments, section comments, and interlinear comments. Perhaps the biggest departure

---

48 Ibid, 222-23.

49 Section comments refer to the practice of dividing a scene into several sections (jie 角) as a way of examining the progression of the writing and showing the interlocking of one section with another. This practice may originate from the commentary on exam essays, and Jin Shengtan is the first person using it extensively in his Shuihu zhuan and Xixiang ji commentary. Mao employed section comments in his Three Kingdoms, which he referred as “itemizing and dissecting” (條分節解). Ibid, 257. He did not directly use section comments in the Pipa ji, but still often talks about the progression of a scene in segments. For example, see Diliu caizi shu, Diqi caizi shu, 316.
from the late-Ming commentary lies in the prefatory essays, *dufa*, and pre-chapter comments. As I discussed in the previous section, Jin and the Maos wrote their own prefaces to contextualize their projects in a grand narrative, and used *dufa* essays to lay out their major arguments and critical methodology. The many materials they brought into the plays restructured *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* and our reading experience. Their attention to the compositional or structural aspects of the texts (*zhangfa* 章法) distinguished them from the late-Ming formulaic marginal comments and brief post-chapter comments that focus on the immediate sentence or scene. They are also distinguished from the late-Ming commentary on an epistemological level: When a commentary starts with the transitory nature of all beings and ends with enlightenment to Emptiness, or weaves chastity, loyalty, filial piety into an ethical universe, it is no longer plays a supplemental role vis-a-vis the main text, but supplies a superstructure to mold the main text. In this sense we can say that the two books of genius set out to shape the reader and structure his relation to the world.

The Maos’ emulation of and competition with Jin are most manifest in the discussion of compositional methods. Both of them use vivid metaphors such as sewing, tailoring, building, and performances like the lion dance. One of the Maos’ favorite skills is the dynamics of *bi* 避 (avoiding) and *fan* 犯 (duplicating). In the *dufa* for *The Three Kingdoms*, they famously state:

Writers take pride in their skill at avoiding [*bi* 避] [duplication], but they also take pride in their skillful use of duplication [*fan* 犯]. If a writer wishes to avoid [duplication] by never duplicating [*fan* 犯] himself, his skill at avoiding [duplication] will not be apparent. It is only when he avoids [duplication] in the process of duplicating himself that his skill at avoiding [duplication] becomes manifest. **51**

---

**50** Mao Lun did not provide a separate *dufa* essay, but a large section of his “general remarks” and that of his son’s “supplementary remarks” are devoted to methodology. So their prefaces serve the two functions at the same time.

In other words, Mao appreciates the skill of creating variation out of purposeful repetition. Although the paragraph refers to the author’s skill, I find that the Maos also take pride in applying this skill to their duplication of Jin Shengtan. They openly copy Jin Shengtan’s critical methods (some points are verbatim, see below) yet give it a twist to argue that *Pipa ji* provides better manifestations of the methods in question. Interestingly, Jin Shengtan could not find fault with such ostentatious duplication, even if he were aware of them, for he had famously vowed to pass on the golden needle and the “magic finger” that turns stones into gold. The Maos could rightly claim they merely made creative use of Jin’s methods.

First among those methods, Mao learned from Jin that a successful reading has to identify the key event and character that the author wanted to concentrate on. Jin identifies Yingying as the key character and other characters as supporting roles to set off the main character. Mao echoes this point in his “general remarks”, saying “readers should first observe where the author focuses his attention”. He believes that the whole *Pipa ji* has two foci—the Scene of “Matchmaking” in the first half and of “Reunion in the Studio” in the second half, because “rejecting the marriage” and “unwillingness to abandon one’s wife” are the authors’ main concerns. All the other chapters are there to complement and highlight the two foci. Therefore, Mao states that “within a piece of writing the focus is on one or two chapters, and within a chapter the focus is on one or two sentences. Once we understand where the focus is, we will know which part is the ‘accompanying guest’, which part is the ‘host’, where the text projects forward and reflects backward, where the author describes directly or indirectly, where he inserts information in advance or fills in materials at a later point.”

---

52 In my translation of the Maos’ terms I consulted “Terminology” in *How to Read the Chinese Novel*, 91-100.
Mao further expounded the technique of writing about certain things to reflect on the focus. He explains using a painting metaphor, “flowers can be painted but the scent of flowers cannot be painted, so the painter puts aside flowers to draw butterflies; this does not mean he shifts interest to butterflies, his purpose is still to paint flowers. Snow can be painted but the coldness of snow can not be painted, so the painter puts aside snow to paint the people huddling around a fire; this does not mean he shifts his interest to paint the fire, his purpose is still to paint snow. Moon can be painted but the brightness of moon can not be painted, so the painter puts aside moon to paint the person reading under moonlight; this does not mean he shifts interest to the book, his purpose is still to paint the moon.” In other words, when a certain aspect of the author’s focus is hard to depict directly, the author would use other characters and events to highlight this aspect indirectly.

Moreover, Mao distinguishes “direct and primary description” (正筆), “secondary description” (次寫) and “idle strokes” (閑筆). He praises the author’s for depicting everything vividly, which is the so-called “using one’s whole strength no matter whether one fights a hare or an elephant” (搏兔擊象俱用全力). This idiom was first used by Jin in his pre-chapter comments for “Banquet Invitation” to show the need to invest fully one’s creative energy no matter how small the topic is. Mao further develops this point by saying “primary and idle strokes are different in their weight and concision. Primary strokes should be heavy and detailed; idle strokes should be light and brief.” Therefore, the main characters in Pipa ji were painted carefully and in detail, while the minor characters are treated in sketches.

---

53 Diliu caizi shu, Diqi caizi shu, 250.
54 Ibid, 252.
Jin used the metaphor of “lion dance” to illustrate the technique of skirting around the main point or theme, playing with it like the lion playing with a ball. Jin explains,

The most wonderful writing is that in which the author fixes his gaze on a certain thing, and then, positioning himself on all four sides of that thing, picks up his brush, winds to the left and circles to the right, then winds to the right and circles to the left. He never releases the thing, yet he never captures it. He is like a lion rolling a ball. In its essence it is only a ball. But when the lion is let loose after it and exerts all its skill, the people who fill the circus tent are suddenly focused on the lion, spellbound by it. The lion is not concerned with them, however. While the people’s eyes are all fixed on the lion, the lion’s eyes are fixed on the ball. The one who rolls it is the lion, but the lion rolls this way and that entirely because of the ball. Zuozhuan and Shiji essentially use this method, and Xixiang ji does it as well.

In this paragraph Jin emphasizes the mesmerizing effect of the lion’s antics, which the translator of the above passage Sally K. Church interprets as Jin’s warning to the reader not to be distracted by the flourishes the author makes with his brush.

Mao Lun takes over this lion-and-ball metaphor but shifts the emphasis. The expressions he uses are very similar to Jin’s:

It is certainly true that the author should catch the key point of writing with one snatch of the hand and with one bite of the mouth. However, if a genius merely catches the key point of writing with one snatch of the hand and with one bite of the mouth, one sentence would be enough [for the whole writing]. How could his writing flourish and flow, immersing the reader within it and attracting them to sing and chant about it? When the author picks up his brush to write, he must make the writing flourish in exuberant patterns. Afterwards, when the book is done, the reader can get its exuberant feelings. Therefore, when a genius writes, while he fixes his gaze on the key point, he does not catch with one snatch of the hand and with one bite of the mouth, but moves his brush up and down, crisscrosses from its four sides, winds to the left and circles to the right, then winds to the right and circles to the left. His brush gallops and dashes, flashing and dazzling the spectator’s eyes. This is what is called unprecedented wonderful writing.

Now I observe in Pipa ji that for every word that presses close [toward the focus] there is another word that gently pushes away [creating a centrifugal rippling effect]; when the ripples expand until it is almost no way to gather them together, it presses close again; when it presses close until there is no room to step away, there is another push outward. Such movements have to be repeated several times before a chapter can be completed. It is just like a lion rolling a ball or a cat playing with a mouse. They would not catch with

---

one snatch and with one bite, but like to have numerous dashes forward and backward, plunges and falls. Only after that will the lion and cat feel satisfied and the spectators feel that they have fully enjoyed themselves.  

Mao uses the lion-ball metaphor but emphasizes another aspect, namely, the author’s ability to elaborate and create exuberant writing that dazzles the reader. To Mao this ability is as important as seizing the main subject, because simply dwelling on the main subject obviously results in dry and uninteresting writing.

In the above we discussed the Maos’ “purposeful repetition” of Jin Shengtan’s critical methods. Besides those, the Maos often make overt comparisons between Xixiang ji and Pipa ji, pointing out the analogies and contrasts to highlight Pipa ji’s superiority. In the first place, they claim it was more difficult to write Pipa ji than Xixiang ji, because “Xixiang ji writes about ‘scholars and beauties’: lyrics of the moon and breeze are easily done. Pipa ji writes about ‘filial sons and loyal husbands’: lyrics of grains and beans are hard to accomplish.” Moreover, the Maos argue that Xixiang ji purely uses Northern melodies that have a rigid system of arrangement whereas Pipa ji purely uses Southern melodies that ascribe arias to different role types, thus it is easier to write the former than the latter. They cite Li Rihua’s unsuccessful adaptation of Xixiang ji into the Southern qu to show that the lyrical excellence of Pipa ji is indeed peerless.

Mao Lun follows with an elaboration on the blandness of Pipa ji, using Xixiang ji as the implicit object of comparison. He says, “In writing, it is not hard to embellish with ornate words, but it is hard to embellish with bland words; it is not hard to compose beautiful lyrics to melodies, but it is hard to compose plain lyrics to melodies. Why is it so? The qu form is different from shi. The form of shi is straightforward, so tortuousness is valued. If one manages to handle tortuousness in the straight form, then it is good poetry. The form of qu is tortuous in the first

---

56 Diliu caizi shu, Diqi caizi shu, 254.
place, so straightforwardness is valued. If one manages to handle straightforwardness in the
tortuous form, then it is wonderful *qu.* Therefore, the wonder of *Pipa ji*’s lyrics lies in that “they
appear like daily talk but once sung they agree perfectly with music,” and that they concealed
“the best of all writings in plainness”.

In addition, Mao argues that *Pipa ji* has as much Chan Buddhist implications as *Xixiang
ji*. He discusses the technique of “casual growing” (隨筆生來) and “casual wiping-out” (隨筆抹倒). For example, while writing about the wife’s expression of concerns for her husband, the
author suddenly makes her wonder whether her worries would be meaningless; while writing
about the imperial banquet for new degree-holders, he suddenly makes the characters reflect on
the splendor as a “vain dream”. Mao believes those elements in *Pipa ji* are infused with Chan
wisdom. Therefore, *Xixiang ji* is not singular in helping enlighten the reader to the emptiness of
human emotions and pursuits.

*Various Incarnations of Caizi and Their Spiritual Communion*

In previous sections of this chapter we already discussed the multi-layered meanings of
*caizi*. Jin and the Maos have demonstrated the *caizi* images they have in mind through the
positive example of Wang Zhuoshan and the negative example of Mr. Vulgar. This section
covers three aspects where the various incarnations of *caizi* in the author, character, commentator,
and reader, merge. The commentator was celebrated as the primary facilitator of such a
communion. He demonstrates the *caizi*’s quick wit associating the play text with the Four Books,
*Zhuangzi*, Buddhist sutras, Tang poetry, etc, as well as his sensitivity in infusing musings on
literature with musings on life. Secondly, he shows the *caizi*’s penetrating vision—he
understands the interiority of characters to an unprecedented degree of subtlety and complexity.
Finally, he displays the *caizi*’s exceptional talent to discover and articulate the “newness” of
familiar texts. The authority of the commentator builds on those three aspects, but the reverse is also true, namely that what we feel as the distinctiveness of *caizi shu* depends on the commentator’s firm grip and exercise of authority.

One of the fascinating aspects of Jin’s *Xixiang ji* is that he never confines his vision to the play. He freely interweaves the text with many other texts, which both demonstrate his broad learning and a Buddhist perception of the world as intricately connected. For example, when Jin marvels at the agility of the author’s brush, he quickly extracts a passage from the *Analects* and an anecdote about a monk obsessed with beautiful poems in Buddhist sutras.\(^{57}\) A more striking example appears in the pre-chapter comments of “Farewell Banquet”, in which Jin includes a entire passage from the sutra *Fo shuo Suntoluonanto ru Dao jing* 佛化孫陀羅難陀入道經 (literally, Buddha’s Conversion of Sundarananda). However, the passage is probably Jin Shengtan’s own creation because there is no similar passage among existing Buddhist sutras. His inspiration may have come from the story of Sundarananda in the *Lengyan jing* 楞嚴經 (*Surangama Sūtra*), who was attached to his beautiful wife Sundari and reluctant to convert. Jin’s passage expounds on separation as a vehicle of enlightenment to the illusion of emotional attachment. It sublimes Student Zhang and Yingying’s separation from its mundane details, provides a broader context for reflections on life and transcendence. Though Jin attributes this layer of meaning to the author, apparently he is the person who fully realizes this meaning in his commentary and communicates to others. If Student Zhang as the incarnation of the author is to reach this level of enlightenment, Jin also expects readers to achieve their enlightenment via the Buddhist context he provides in pre-chapter comments. The spiritual communion of the author, character, commentator, and reader as intelligent and sensitive souls gives full credit to the *caizi*

---

\(^{57}\) Ibid, 81.
name of the book. The Maos in their commentary of *Pipa ji* are no less erudite in the juxtaposed discussion of textual details with that of the Tang poetry, the Five Classics, etc. While Jin uses *Xixiang ji* to reflect on the human dilemma of attachment and detachment, the Maos recognize a similar condition in the *Pipa ji* but reach a different conclusion. At various points they express sympathy for the idea of transcending pain and suffering by forgoing ethical relations and moral obligations, but they never accept detachment as a viable option. Instead, moral duty and reciprocal care always come back with a stronger force, recognized as more essential to the world of the character, author, commentator, and the reader. They also attribute the “unfair” and “unhappy” ending of *Pipa ji* to the fundamental unpredictability of the Creator, thus mixing up their musings on the imperfections of life with musings on literature. The assumption that the author, character, commentator, and reader share a common set of values underlies both Jin and the Maos’ criticism. This commonality fosters a sense of consensus about ultimate truths of life that emanates from the books despite changed historical and cultural contexts.

Both Jin and the Maos explore the interiority of characters with great subtlety. Claiming *caizi* status for themselves, they support the idea that this category of people could reach mutual understandings, thus encouraging readers to put themselves in the shoes of *caizi* predecessors and perfectly imagine their thoughts and emotions. Jin’s most elaborate psychological representations occur in the pre-chapter comments of “Borrowing the Room” and “Rejecting the Letter”, in which he changes into a ventriloquist and speaks the conflicted minds of Student Zhang and Yingying. Feelings of anxiety and anger, wild fantasies and meticulous calculations are fleshed out through his commentary. As a result, the impression we get about the characters already conflates *Xixiang ji* and Jin’s creation. The Maos never adopted a first-person voice to depict the characters, but they closely follow the twists and turns of thoughts and emotions.
embedded in the dense arias of *Pipa ji*. Their analysis of characters wandering between despair and self-consolation, repression and confession is a thorough exploration of the mind caught in distress. Jin and the Maos delve into the psychological dimension of *caizi* characters with the confidence that the tortuous workings of mind can be known through empathy, and that the reader can relive the feelings of characters when he temporarily transfers himself into their places, as the *caizi* commentator does.

Finally, the essential ability that Jin and the Maos take pride in, and that they promote to the reader, is the ability to recognize the exceptional and the original in the ordinary and the familiar. In other words, they are not satisfied with originality created by external forces, such as the commentary and illustration we have focused upon to this point, but hope to inspire “a type of exceptional talent” (*yifu biecai* 一副別才) and “a pair of exceptional eyes” (*yishuang bieyan* 一雙別眼) inherently present in the reader. Jin further explains that the “talent” and “eyes” are not really unattainable gifts, as the reader sets free his imagination to creatively engage with the text. The Maos indicate that the reason the reader could not feel *Pipa ji*’s originality is because they “let certain words pass by as if they are random” (*dengxian kanguo* 等閒看過). Therefore, both Jin and the Maos imply that we are partly responsible for the texts that appear to grow more and more tasteless. As we become more familiar with *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*, we need to consider not only what we get from the text, but also what we bring to the text. It is in a reciprocal process that old texts become original and the *caizi* creativity reaches its fullest.

**Conclusions**

Jin Shengtan and the Mao father and son team initiated a new publishing and commentary genre in the form of *caizi shu*. Although Jin’s Sixth Book of Genius and the Maos’ Seventh Book of Genius were not conceived as a set, Mao Lun and Mao Zonggang assumed the
position of Jin’s legitimate successor and competitor by establishing intricate connections
between Jin’s work and their own. Through an effective use of the *caizi* discourse they freed up
the textual space for philosophical reflections, personal memories, reveries, and creative writing.
Jin and the Maos pushed commentary from its supplementary position to the center. They
imposed a superstructure on the main text, and assumed the authority to shape the reader’s
perception of his relation to the world through guiding his perception of literary texts.

In the Books of Genius, presumably, author, character, commentator, and reader were all
placed on the plane of the *caizi* and could achieve mutual understandings. As a matter of fact, the
commentator and reader take primary responsibilities in creating new meanings for the text. The
*caizi* books encouraged the readers to explore their own potential for original interpretations. As
we will see in the next chapter, a handful of readers did answer this appeal, turning to a freer
form of interpretation-*cum*-parody, namely, the playful eight-legged essays.
Chapter Four

Originality and Parody: Eight-Legged Essays on Xixiang ji and Pipa ji

To contemplate Chan with the words of a play is a practice never heard of since ancient times; to write eight-legged essays with the words of a play is even more unprecedented.

以傳奇語參禪，自古未有也。以傳奇語為時義，尤自古未有也。

—Huang Zhouxing, “Preface to Six Eight-Legged Essays on ‘Autumn Ripples’”

秋波六藝小引

Since the appearance of the Sixth and Seventh Books of Genius, they have eclipsed other versions of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji to become the dominant forms in which the plays circulated. As the commentaries illuminated an active way of seeking new meanings out of familiar texts, and encouraged the reader to follow suit, it is interesting to see that they did inspire a mode of creative writing that interprets the plays in the form of the examination essay, or the so-called youxi baguwen (playful eight-legged essay). The writing connects two seemingly far-flung genres, the dramatic text and the examination prose, but the gap between the two genres was not as wide as it appears to us. In the eyes of the seventeenth-century literati, a set of zhangfa (structural or compositional rules) informed the writing of both play and prose, and drama and the eight-legged essay shared the common feature of impersonation. As a matter of fact, the pre-chapter commentarial essays in the “books of genius” are a freer form of prose that prefigured the more stringent eight-legged essay to be dealt with this chapter. Both are virtually a critical commentary with extensive discussions of dramatic characters and events, but the former often also takes up the task of explicating the composition of a specific scene, while the latter

1 Huang Zhouxing, Jiuyan xiansheng yiji, in Xuxiu Siku quanshu (Shanghai guji, 2002), ce 1399, 466.
focuses on a highly structured imaginative representation of the motivations, feelings, and desires of the dramatic characters. The playful eight-legged essays appropriated a cultural form commonly used for the presentation of Confucian orthodoxy and imperial ideology, and subjected it to the expression of more personalized feelings of parents and children, husband and wife, and the erotic desires of lovers. As the eight-legged form has a heightened literary tone and formality, its application to the specific moments of common life in the play, creates a sense of irony and incongruity. At the same time, the playful essays reconstruct the plays in a new linguistic context and bring new insights into the interiority of characters. As a language game, the playful eight-legged essay is a means to display the “unfettered” nature of the literati writer and reader. As exuberant expressions of qing 情 (feelings, passion, desire), they empathetically connect the learned readers to the dramatic characters in a common web of sophisticated qing.

Just like other practices of innovative printing, playful essays on drama first appeared in imprints of Xixiang ji and influenced the publishing of Pipa ji. In the oldest extant edition of Xixiang ji, the Hongzhi edition (1498), there are two essays that respectively comment on the first and the sixteenth scenes of the play. The first essay, “On Autumn Ripples”, elaborates on the first encounter of the lovers and the powerful gaze that catalyzes the love between them. The latter, “On ‘Golden Bracelet Loosening’ and ‘Jade Flesh Shrinking’”, deals with the hyperbolic expression that Yingying’s body wastes away so quickly, consumed by the sorrow of seeing her lover off, that her arms immediately become thinner and her bracelet could no longer fit tightly on her arm. Those two essays are in the form of regular prose. They do not appear to have an immediate connection with the playful eight-legged essays appearing as late as the second half of the seventeenth century, but they did exemplify a literary prose that empathetically fleshes out dramatic characters’ thoughts and emotions. They primarily express the authors’ personal,
emotional engagement with the play, and draw on the rhetorical power and embellishment of parallel prose, different from the analytical or critical essays that treat the play’s history or language from a scholarly, objective point of view.

The authors of the earliest playful eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji* were renowned literati figures, and the essays were autonomous works not yet attached to printed editions of the play. You Tong 尤侗 (1618-1704), the famous poet and playwright during the Ming-Qing transition, had written an eight-legged essay with the title “How Can I Withstand that One Shift of Her Autumn Ripples as She Left”（怎當他臨去秋波那一轉）, a line from the first scene of *Xixiang ji*. The essay was so widely known that it even caught the attention of the Shunzhi emperor, who praised You as a true genius. You’s friend Huang Zhouxing 黃周星 (1611-1680) was inspired by You and wrote a set of six essays on the same topic. It was a playful gesture to compete with his friend, but it also revealed that the eight-legged essay provided a channel for the ostensible display of versatile talent that was not defined by the study of Confucian classics. Interestingly, both You Tong and Huang Zhouxing are intellectuals who faced tough political choices after surviving the cataclysmic Ming-Qing transition. Although You took the 1679 *boxue hongru* (Eminent Scholars of Vast Learning) examination and served the new dynasty and Huang refused to serve and drowned himself, both associated widely with the Jiangnan *yimin* (loyalist) circles and ruminated on the dynastic decline and fall. A hopeless longing and

---

2 You Tong, *Xitang zazu*, in *Siku jinhui shu congkan* (Beijing chubanshe, 2000), Jibu, ce 129.

3 Huang received his *jinshi* degree in 1640 and served as an official in the last few years of the Ming. After the Ming fall, he was forced to travel from one place to another and support his family with teaching. His suicide in 1680 was often interpreted as a protest against the Qing official draft. Huang associated with many Ming loyalists in the South, including Lü Liuliang who printed model examinations essays to criticize the Qing. Huang had a strong interest in Daoist and Buddhist ideas and often expressed the desire to renounce the world for an ideal realm. He was the collaborator of Wang Xiangxi in writing a commentary for *Xiyou ji*, which takes a Daoist perspective toward the novel. Hu Zhengwei, “Huang Zhouxing jiaoyou kao ji qita”, 59-62. You Tong seemed to be less resistant to the civil
lament for a lost world often pervade their writings. Therefore, when both writers viewed eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji* as a means to contemplate the “Chan of passion” (*qingchan* 情禪), it is hard to believe that they would not project onto the essays the complex feelings of deep attachment to an irretrievable past and the search for transcendence.\(^4\) The emotional experiences could be a backdrop for their insight that *qing* (passion) can be at once immensely intoxicating and sobering. Their appropriation of the eight-legged essay for a personal and playful use might also suggest a lack of interest in, and perhaps a lack of respect for the official use of examination essay and the Qing state’s attempt to recruit talent.\(^5\)

Playful eight-legged essays appearing afterwards continued to focus on *qing* but the political implication became tenuous. Qian Shu's *Yaqu cangshu* (雅趣藏書, A Book for Fine Taste, 1703) (also titled *Xiuxiang Xixiang shiyi* 繡像西廂時藝 Illustrated “Contemporary Art” on The Story of the Western Wing) is a collection of twenty eight-legged essays on the twenty scenes of the play. Each of the essays is preceded by an illustration and a poem and followed by a terse comment. Qian Shu’s *Fine Taste* only comprises playful eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji*, with no *Xixiang ji* play text or commentary included, and the twenty essays form a unity of their own. Qian Shu’s book provided the basis for four subsequent sets of playful eight-legged essays. They are *Caizi Xixiang zuixin pian* (才子西廂醉心篇, 24 essays, earliest extant examinations, but he once resigned from his official post and lived ten years in seclusion before being drafted again by the Kangxi emperor.

\(^4\) “Chan of passion” alludes to the anecdote of an old monk who had murals of scenes from the *Western Wing* on all four walls. When being asked why the murals appeared in a monk’s room, the reply was “the sudden realization of Chan was right there.” Feng Menglong, *Qingshi leilue* (Hunan: yuelu shushe, 1984), 466. At the end You’s essay, he calls on the reader to meditate on the Chan of passion in the “one shift” of “autumn ripples”, and Huang in the preface to his essays *Xixiang ji* spoke of You and his own experiment as an unprecedented creation to “contemplate Chan” with the words of a play. Huang Zhouxing, *Jiuyan xiansheng yiji*, 466.

\(^5\) While Wai-yee Li’s statement that “examinations essays….were irrelevant for loyalists, whose very self-definition was based on not taking office under the Qing” is largely true, the playful eight-legged essays of Huang Zhouxing signals a way of turning the official essay into subversive use. Li, “Early Qing to 1723”, *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 164.
edition ca.1703-1722), *Liu caizi Xixiang wen* 六才子西廂文 (20 essays, earliest extant edition 1782), *Shi mingjia Xixiang wen* 十名家西廂文 (20 essays, late 1700s), and *Tang Liuru xiansheng wenyun* 唐六如先生文韻 (20 essays, earliest extant edition 1887).[* Caizi Xixiang zuixin pian, Liu caizi Xixiang wen and Shi mingjia Xixiang wen recycled Qian’s essays with some degree of textual variation, and falsely attributed them to prominent literati figures from the late Ming or the early Qing periods (See Appendix One). *Tang Liuru xiansheng wenyun* appeared to be the work of an anonymous author in a much later period, but it was attributed to the famous painter and poet Tang Yin (1470-1523).[*

Among the different versions of eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji*, only Qian Shu’s *Fine Taste* put the essays together as a free-standing book. The other four sets of playful eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji* all came down to us as an appendix to Jin Shengtan’s *Sixth Book of Genius*. While Qian seemed to believe in the value of his essays as independent artworks, publishers imitating his essays always took the precaution of printing the essays and Jin’s commentary edition of *Xixiang ji* together as a bundle. Qian’s book was reprinted at least twice, and the other four sets of eight-legged essays appeared with editions of *Xixiang ji* throughout the Qing period, from the late Kangxi reign to the Guangxu reign and even into the Republican period (1910s). Among the forty editions of *Xixiang ji* surviving from the Qing, seventeen are *Xixiang ji* with playful eight-legged essays.

Probably publishers chose to print playful eight-legged essays together with the commentary edition of *Xixiang ji*, because they hoped to rely on the cumulative effect of the creative writing plus the book of genius. If Jin’s commentary was not enough to stimulate the

---

*Youxi baguwen jicheng*, ed. Huang Qiang and Wang Ying (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 40, 47, 58, 64, 157-59. For instance, the *Zuixin pian* was advertised as being “edited by Chen Weisong” and Tang Liuru xiansheng wenyun as the works of Tang Yin, and but the attributions are mostly likely false.

reader’s interest, its combination with the essays might just be able to pull it off. As the playful eight-legged essay became a promotional strategy for *Xixiang ji*, it also influenced the publication of *Pipa ji*. One extant edition of *Pipa ji*, the *Huifeng ting ping diqi caizi shu Pipa ji* 繪風亭評第七才子書琵琶記 (ca.1723), contains a volume of *Caizi pipa xieqing pian* 才子琵琶寫情篇 (*Ingenious Pipa ji Essays on Passion*) with twenty-three eight-legged essays on *Pipa ji*, which apparently followed the example of *Caizi Xixiang zuixin pian* 才子西廂醉心篇 (Ingenious *Xixiang ji Essays to Indulge the Heart*). 8

The eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* are interesting testimonies to the legacy of Jin Shengtan and the Mao father and son’s commentaries. In the case of *Xixiang ji*, they reinforce Jin’s assertion that reading *Xixiang ji* improves one’s writing skills, and they inherit Jin’s jesting attitude toward the play and his mixture of a serious tone with a lighthearted subject matter. They add another interesting layer to the already thick paratext of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*, introducing a reading experience, the intrigue of which depends as much on the reader’s familiarity with the original play as on his grasp of the essays’ interpretation of the play. In other words, as with the illustrations and the commentaries, the publisher feeds the book buyer’s curiosity about how other readers read—the eight-legged essays offer a channel for the reader to see how a particular group of readers appreciated *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*.

Who were those “other readers”? They were educated in the classics and well versed in the eight-legged essay genre. Yet they apparently did not always bury themselves in the “proper” readings for the examinations. Instead, they had some extra time to spend on *belles lettres*, to toy with their brushes and occasionally to splash their talent to create a piece that is purely literary. Playful eight-legged essays opened up an aesthetic space for like-minded readers to share their

---

8 See Appendix Two.
love of dramatic characters in a genre they are familiar with. Qian Shu’s remarks are representative of this type of reader: “Who said a scholar should only read and recite the classics, hold his book and sit straight, and work himself to death to comprehend a sentence, in order to be regarded as a scholar?” As a matter of fact, breaking free from this stereotype might be an admirable gesture given the prevalent careerism and utilitarianism among the overwhelming number of degree-seekers of their day.

The popularity of playful eight-legged essays suggests an ironic view of the civil service examinations among people living around 1700 and later. By subjecting the official genre to a “profane” usage, the literati could have gained some temporary relief and freedom from the usual gravity associated with the eight-legged essay. The teachings of the sages are brushed aside and the reigning god in the playful eight-legged essays is qing. The mentality behind such a practice could be analogous to the examination candidates’ ranking of courtesans during drinking parties, in imitation of examiners’ ranking of candidates. Both give some power and voice that were denied to the candidates through parodies of official practices.

The Free Rambling, the Playful, and the Theatrical

Writers of eight-legged essays on plays often describe their work as youxi 遊戲 (playing tricks) or youyi 遊藝 (roaming in the arts). According to different contexts they appear, the terms may be a celebration of the author’s imaginative freedom and ingenious role-playing, or an apology for the incongruity and heterodoxy that the essays may entail. The use of those terms engages the rich and complex ramifications of youxi in Chinese culture, a subject that deserves a brief digression. The term youxi comprises of two related ideas of you 遊 (free and easy rambling)

9 Comparable to the roster of jinshi candidates are the “rosters of flowers” ranking courtesans. A record of such activities can be found in Jinling baimei edited by Feng Menglong. For a study of the “rosters of flowers” and Jinling baimei, see Oki Yasushi, Fengyue Qinhuai: Zhongguo youli kongjian, trans. Xin Ruyi (Taipei: Lianjing, 2007).
and xi 戏 (playing). In the philosophical writing Zhuangzi, youxi is an ideal way of being that eludes fixed definitions, and a playful hermeneutic attitude. From Zhuangzi originates the belief in Chinese culture that “imaginative freedom is often…synonymous with playful creativity”, and that a playful way of writing often reflects an untrammeled personality behind the page.¹⁰

However, youxi has both a positive side and negative implications. It suggests something casual, trivial, and unworthy of serious attention. The Ming and Qing proponents of traditionally low-prestige genres such as fiction and drama used the term in a defiant way to celebrate the writing that served its own end. In their eyes, youxi writing is authentic expression untainted by utilitarian purposes and a source of innocent pleasure.¹¹ The term xi, besides its general meanings of tricks or games, played a major role in the cultural imagination of late imperial china because of its associations with theater and theatricality.¹² People often saw history and human life through the lens of xi: there was no lack of analogies between the world and the stage where success turns into disgrace, glamour transforms into illusion in the blink of an eye, but there was also the evocation of a playful attitude toward life after having awakened to the dramatic, illusory nature of our existence.

As Mei Chun suggests, the heightened sense of life as role-playing is reflective of the increasingly porous social status boundaries in the late imperial period. For the cultural elites, the playful shift of roles in real life and in literature signified an “easy and unaffected” manner, which was self-indulgent and free from social regulation. Various stylized ways of “playing with


¹¹ Li Zhi saw zaju and yuanben as “the best vehicle for roaming and playing” (遊戲之上乘也), probably because of the creative freedom they gave to authors. Tang Xianzu described the theater god Master Qingyuan in the Yihuang County Temple as “a beautiful creature who achieves the Way through playing”. Li Zhi, “Zashuo” in Fenshu, Li Zhi wenji, vol.1, 90-91; Tang Xianzu quanji, 1189.

¹² Mei, Novel and Theatrical Imagination, 13-33.
literature” and the appreciation of such a gesture was a crucial nexus for forming literary
communities in the late imperial period.13

It is in such a context that we are to understand Qian Shu’s characterization of his playful
eight-legged essays as “playing tricks” (*youxi*) and “roaming in the arts” (*youyi*). Qian wrote in
his preface to the collection *Yaqu cangshu* (A Book for Fine Taste):

According to sages of the past, the ultimate training of one’s mind and nature lies
in “roaming in the arts”. Although the arts are minor pursuits, they are full of depth and
variations, sufficient to elicit one’s innate innocence, and adaptive to the shifting states of
one’s personality and feelings. Besides the teachings of the Six Classics and Four Books,
sages of ancient times have created the g*in* and se zithers, poems and songs, board games,
music, and other playful activities and disseminated them. If scholars can carefully probe
into them, to discover the complexities and origins of the arts, they will be able to
communicate with the divine and grasp the transformations of the Creator, and their
cultivation will in turn become refined…As for writings that reach the highest degree of
fusion between feelings and words, is there any that surpasses *Xixiang ji*? To add to that,
[the eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji* show] the magic of “playing tricks” (*youxi*) that
ingeniously apply teachings of Buddhism and Daoism, and the skills of “roaming in the arts” (*youyi*) that is the essence of Confucianism.

昔聖人言，心性之功，而終之以游于藝。蓋以藝雖末務，而沉潛反覆，亦足以發天
真之趣，而適性情之變。自六經四子之書垂訓而外，而琴瑟詩歌以及博弈、音樂嬉
戲之事，古人一一創之，流播人間。學者苟能留心尋繹，則其中之曲折原委，自可
通神達化，而其養因之益密…天下情文交至者，孰如《西廂》？況遊戲神通，為
兩教之妙用，而遊藝工夫，又吾儒之精義耶。

Qian elevated the act of “roaming in the arts” to a central position in the “essence of Confucian
teaching”. According to him, more than just elegant diversions, music and games, poems and
plays stimulate the uninhibited expression of one’s nature and give the final touch to the literati’s
cultivation. Eight-legged essays on the *Xixiang ji*, as a kind of double play with the “minor art”
of dramatic literature and the genre of exam essay, are at once *youyi* and *youxi*: it finds support in
the “roaming in the arts” idea of Confucianism, and it dazzles the reader with the tricks it plays
with texts, just like the marvelous transformations of Buddhism and Daoism bedazzle believers.

13 Ibid, 17.
The negative connotations of shiftiness and frivolity often associated with youxi are turned into positive traits through a link with sagely teachings. In the same way, the editor of playful eight-legged essays on Pipa ji, Chen Fangping 陳方平, received the comment from a contemporary that “the way he playfully writes manifests the workings of great magic” (遊戲為文，著大神通).

How did playful eight-legged essays transform the eight-legged essay genre? They exploit the techniques of impersonation and ventriloquism to dramatize the motivations, feelings, and desires of characters in the play. The inner landscapes of male and female characters they reveal, are vivid, complex, subtle, and full of affective power. Editions of Xixiang ji and Pipa ji with play eight-legged essays could potentially attract a learned public who know the pattern of the eight-legged essay, and enjoy its display of artistic virtuosity as its frame of references shifts to the realm of qing.

Baguwen: Performance within Ideological Limits

The Qing scholar Fang Bao 方苞(1668-1749) considered the process of learning to write the eight-legged essays an effective way of knowledge transmission and moral cultivation. As the compiler of an imperial collection of model examination essays, his idea was fairly influential among the elites, and even for those who took a more practical attitude, the eight-legged essay was a good means to showcase an examination candidate’s argumentation skills and talent. In light of the significant role the examination essay played, it predictably was a subject the literati often discoursed upon. The Qing scholar Liang Zhangju 梁章鉅 (1775-1849, jinshi 1802) compiled Zhiyi conghua 制義叢話 that deals with the history, anecdotes, and

14 Fang Bao, Qinding sishu wen, in Wenyuan Siku quanshu, vol. 1451.

15 For a survey of the representative views, see for example, Pu Yanguang, “Lun bagu wen ruhe quanshi jingdian”, Disanjie zhongguo wenzhe zhi dangdai quanshi xueshu yantao hui huiqian lunwen ji (Taibei daxue wenxue xi, 2007), 262.
various other aspects of the civil examination essay. In a preface to this book, the Hanlin academician Jiang Guolin 江國霖 (1811-1859, jinshi 1838) spoke of the eight-legged essay as an ideal format that perfectly met the demands of the time:

Was the rise of the examination essay an inevitable result of people’s demands? In selecting officials, the Han dynasty used *ce* (policy), but it has the problem of being too expansive to fit for practical matters; the Tang used poetry and rhapsody, but they were too frivolous to deal with real affairs; the Song used *lun* (discourse), which is too superficial and groundless with regard to the Principles. Subsequently there emerged the essay that based its argument on the classics, namely the eight-legged essay. Since the Ming employed the eight-legged essay to select officials, it has already been five hundred years. Brilliant men of these five hundred years have concentrated their intelligence and talent, and exhausted their minds and spirit in the eight paragraphs of parallelism. After scholars study the books of sages for a long period of time, each would want to express what his heart has absorbed. The eight-legged essay, in its reference to state affairs, is like *ce*, in its exposition of the Principles, is like discourse; its selection of materials is as wide as the rhapsody, its adherence to structural rules is as strict as poetry. The key of writing is to pick what one has in his heart and to pour it out through one’s hand, and to strive for the marvelous and the innovative. Thus it has infinite possibilities.

In Jiang’s view, the eight-legged essay has withstood the test of time as the best examination format up to date, because it concentrates the advantages of previous evaluative methods and allows for creative expressions. Such a statement is opposed to the modern contempt for the eight-legged essay for its petrification of thinking. Jiang is not alone in his exaltation of the eight-legged essay. The rhetorical properties of the eight-legged essay also impressed nineteenth-century Catholic missionaries who translated and investigated them in light of medieval and Renaissance forms of reasoning. Their fascination with the essay form is shown in the Latin names they invented for the eight sections, to be explained later. While it is difficult to assess

---

whether the eight-legged essay did more good than harm to the intellectuals, the playful eight-legged essay provides an opportunity for us to see the genre as highly malleable. Its playful application foregrounds the political and cultural institutions the regular eight-legged essay was bound up with. It reminds us that the impact of the eight-legged essay can never be assessed apart from the contexts in which it appeared.

In its original context, the eight-legged format provides a way for the literati to organize, present, and defend their views in the civil service examinations. Scholars generally agree that the civil examination acquired its final institutionalized form in the Ming dynasty. The state supervised a regular process of selection that moved through the local, provincial, and metropolitan levels, and standardized the examination into a three-tiered format. In this format, the key to success was to write terse but elegant eight-legged essays on quotations from the Four Books and Five Classics. The eight-legged essay is a type of succinct (500-700 characters in total) and powerful essay built on formal parallelism and analogy, first initiated by literati examination candidates such as Wang Ao, and made official in the late fifteenth century. The term “leg” (literally thigh), refers to “parallel wording”, or a pair of sentences with balanced clauses and characters to advance the argument, just as the two identical thighs help a person move forward steadily. The main part of the essay consists of pairs of complementary

---


18 Ibid, 133-34; idem, “Changes in Confucian Civil Service Examinations from the Ming to the Ch’ing Dynasty”, in *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, ed. Benjamin A Elman and Alexander Woodside (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 114-15. The three parts of the final, *jinshi*, examination are as follows: first, students were required to write three essays based on three quotations from the Four Books and four essays based on four quotations from the Five Classics; second, a *lun* discourse based on a text from the *Classics of Filial Piety* was required, and students were tested on three types of official documents and five legal terms; finally, they had to prepared answers to five practical questions on public policy. The three sessions were not considered of equal importance. The essays that dealt with quotations from the Four Books were read with care, and frequently the questions from session two and three were viewed as merely confirming the initial standings of the candidates after session one. The three-tiered format remained in force until 1905, although the questions for each part were frequently changed during the Qing period.
propositions, which, when formalized and disciplined by analogies, avoided a wandering, unfocused argument.19

The eight-legged essay has four basic features. First, the essay topics are quotations from the Four Books and the Five Classics, a set of Confucian canonical texts at the core of the examination curriculum. For example, the topics could sound like “When good government prevails in the empire, ceremonies, music, and punitive military expeditions proceed from the son of Heaven” (天下有道，則禮樂征伐，自天子出, 1385 metropolitan examination), or “when the people have enough, how can the ruler alone have too little” (百姓足，君孰不足)? Both quotations are from the Analects. Second, candidates’ interpretations of those quotations had to conform in spirit to the commentaries written by exegetes in the Song dynasty (primarily Zhu Xi 朱熹, 1130-1200). Third, candidates were required rhetorically to “speak in the voices of the sages” (dai shengren liyan 代聖人立言).20 In other words, candidates were expected to interpret a passage as if they spoke for the sage who created it. They should articulate the moral teachings of the sages without directly quoting the classics and related commentaries; instead, they were expected to have internalized the classics and commentaries so well that at the moment they picked up their brushes, they fully embodied the sages with their manners of speaking. The rhetorical form of the essay also required the use of exclamatory particles and single-character conjunctions, which captured the supposed diction and emotive force of the ancient sages.21 Fang Bao regarded the impersonation of the sage as the key to prepare the elite as moral beings. 

19 Elman, A Cultural History of Civil Examinations, 392.

20 Ibid, 396. The method was alternatively described as “speak in the voice of the ancients” (代古人語氣) in “Xuanju zhi”, in Mingshi, see also Hou Kang, Sishu wen yuanliu kao, quoted in Qian Zhongshu Tanyi lu duben, ed. Zhou Zhenfu and Ji Qin (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 445, 447.

21 Elman, A Cultural History of Civil Examinations, 397.
order to “speak in the voice of a sage”, students had to deeply immerse themselves in the classics. Such daily cultivation since childhood was supposed to broaden their understanding and focus their minds on the right track.\textsuperscript{22} This aspect of “speaking in the voice of a sage” served as the basis for some Ming and Qing writers’ claim that eight-legged essay share something in common with drama—impersonation or ventriloquism.\textsuperscript{23} Finally, the eight-legged essay is extremely formalized, limited to five hundred characters in the Ming and seven hundred in the Qing, and Elman talks about its structure as a grid. There are eight sections to be observed:

i. Break open the topic (\textit{po ti} 破題): \textit{Apertura}  
ii. Receiving the topic (\textit{cheng ti} 承題): \textit{Continuatio}  
iii. Beginning discussion (\textit{qi jiang} 起講): \textit{Exordium}  
iv. Initial leg (\textit{qi gu} 起股): \textit{Anterior pars}  
v. Transition leg (\textit{xu gu} 續股): \textit{Propositio}  
vi. Middle leg (\textit{zhong gu} 中股): \textit{Media pars}  
vii. Later leg (\textit{hou gu} 后股): \textit{Posterior pars}  
viii. Conclusion (\textit{da jie} 大結): \textit{Conclusio} \textsuperscript{24}

The initial, transition, middle and later leg each comprises of two mini-legs of parallel prose. The eight mini-legs in total thus give the essay its “eight-legged” name. Practically speaking, the eight-legged grid came into being as a response to the huge working load of examiners. With this grid of formal parallelism, the examiners could literally follow the number of legs and count the number of characters in an essay, and quickly locate the parallel clauses, phrases, and characters. This streamlined the reading process and enhanced the efficiency of grading examination papers.

\textsuperscript{22} Liang Zhangju, \textit{Zhiyi conghua}, 17.  
\textsuperscript{23} For discussion, see “Bagu wen tongyu xiqu”, 445-52.  
\textsuperscript{24} Elman, \textit{A Cultural History of Civil Examinations}, 394.
The process of writing eight-legged essays is described as “dancing in shackles”, but it is often ignored that a successful eight-legged essay displays a great degree of creativity in bringing ancient sages to life through ventriloquism. In writing an eight-legged essay, embodying the sagely figures as characters with distinctive manners of speaking and thinking is as important as conveying the ideas of sages. Moreover, although the examination essay speaks in the voices of the sages, in actual practice it is a means for each writer to express what his mind acquires [from the sages] (制義雖代聖賢立言, 實各言其心之所得者也).²⁵ In other words, the writer could regard the sages as a mouthpiece to convey his understanding of the classics.

*Playful Eight-Legged Essays and Subversive Role-Playing*

When the eight-legged essay was shifted to the context of popular literature, the author no longer plays the role of a sage but shifts his persona according to the specific topic. Playful eight-legged essays tacitly undermined the authority of this official form by applying it to private affairs and juxtaposing an elevated diction with small, subtle, and sometimes trivial details. This creates an amusing effect. First, like standard eight-legged essays, playful essays’ topics are quotations from a source text, the *Xixiang ji* or *Pipa ji*. The quotations could be well-known lines such as “How can I withstand that one shift of her autumn ripples as she left”, “How can my body that is full of grief and full of sickness stand a face that can topple cities and topple states”, or more obscure ones like “standing on dark green moss until my embroidered slippers were frozen through”. When we compare those topics with the sample topics for the eight-legged essays listed earlier, we can see playful essays have moved from public and moral issues to private and illicit affairs.

Second, to parallel the “speaking for the sages”, writers are supposed to “speak for
dramatic characters”. As with the classics in the standard essay, writers of playful essays had to
be extremely familiar with the context of a quoted line from the play in order to elaborate on it.
As a matter of fact, many such essays reveal that their authors could memorize the lines verbatim
and creatively paraphrase those lines in parallel prose. To “speak for the character” requires the
grasp of the dominant personality traits and voice of a character, and of what he or she thinks or
acts in a specific scene. In writing such essays, the author imagines himself as the passionate and
cumbersome Student Zhang, the reserved Yingying who yearns for love, or the smart and sharp-
tongued maid. He spiritually identifies with such a character, anticipates what he or she thinks in
a certain situation, and speaks in a first-person voice. The eight mini-legs sound like a
monologue in highly stylized prose, sandwiched between a third-person introduction and
conclusion. The interpretation of a character’s voice and emotions has to conform to readers’
impressions of the status and temperaments of the character in the play. The most successful
playful essays enrich our understanding of the psychological complexity of the characters and
leave a lingering feel for the reader to ponder and savor. It combines the oratorical power and
tonal musicality of parallel prose.

Finally, playful essays observe the eight-legged grid, but have totally transformed its
ideological essence. In the following, I use You Tong’s essay as a specific example to illustrate
how playful essays change our perception of both the eight-legged essay and the original play:26

The topic “How can I withstand that one shift of her autumn ripples as she left” comes
from the first scene of Xixiang ji when Yingying and Student Zhang meet for the first time. Struck

---

26 Translation of You Tong’s essay is from Stephen H. West’s unpublished handout for his presentation
“The Afterlives of the Story of the Western Wing” (Toronto: Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference,
2012), 16-19. West marked off the eight sections of the essay using terms slightly different from those of the grid
described above. My analysis of the essay follows the terms of the grid.
by Yingying’ beauty, Zhang immediately falls in love with her, but Yingying quickly leaves the scene. Zhang fancies that she has given him an enigmatic and enticing final glance as she withdraws. This final glance stirs up infinite fantasies in him. “Autumn ripples” is a common metaphor in Chinese literature to refer to women’s beautiful eyes that subtly and tacitly let waves of emotions flow, or that flash with a seductive gaze.

You’s essay opens with a sentence that “breaks open the topic”: “Imagine how understanding was completed in the eyes of Doublet [that is, Yingying] and how passions were shifted by that and thereby were communicated.” The opening identifies two key points in the topic: “autumn ripples” (Yingying’s eyes) and “shift”, and points out that what underlies the power of her glance is passion.

The next section, “receiving the topic”, precisely performs the function by using one sentence to link with the pervious section in explicitly saying “passion is what effects this shift”, and another sentence to lead up to the next section.

The third section, “beginning the discussion”, is the section where the author starts to adopt the voice of the character. The transition from a third-person voice to a first-person voice is done in a formulaic way: “it is as if x were saying”. The author imagines himself as Student Zhang, who is dealing with the magic and puzzling effect of his first love. The speaker “I” tries to reason with himself by mustering all his knowledge about flings and affairs, which start and end as passions come and go. However, in the present situation, “I” feels the longing for the woman is most overwhelming, precisely at the moment when she turns away and gives that last glance.

The fourth section begins the “initial leg”, which contains the first and second mini-legs, or two paragraphs that are exactly symmetrical in their structures, because each phrase and
clause in the upper paragraph parallel that in the lower paragraph. “I” continues to justify his “unreasonable” passion for the woman by enumerating her charms. And the most charming of her charms lies in her eyes that seem to make a part of her linger, long after the lingering echoes of her voice and the fragrant dust of her footsteps have vanished.

The fifth section constitutes the “transition leg”, which contains the third and fourth mini-legs of parallel prose. This section focuses on the key word “one” in “that one shift of her autumn ripples”. In other words, the speaker imagines how the woman spends hours and years of seclusion in the company of beautiful surroundings. Although her gaze may rest on those flowers and willows, curtains and houses, in moments of happiness or sadness, no shift of her eyes is as tempting as that “one” shift “at this moment” when she sends off her feelings and stirs up the speaker’s longing.

The sixth section is the “middle leg” that plays out the ambivalence in “that one shift”. The speaker asks a series of questions and answers them himself. Obsessed with that one glance, he constantly questions whether the woman has the feelings implied in that glance, and if so, how much feeling was in it. Through those seemingly preposterous questions, the reader could almost visualize Student Zhang pacing back and forth, talking to himself, at once confident and clueless about the woman’s love for him. He is torn between hope and hopelessness, extreme joy and extreme sadness. And the parallel paragraphs both conclude with a line of self-questioning, conveying a sense of fate—he has no way to dodge from the arrow of love, yet succumbing to it also requires great courage, for that means he hands over himself to the whims of her love.

The seventh section is the “later leg” with two parallel clauses. They use two allusions to reinforce the sense of fate and destiny.
In the final conclusion, the author shifts back to the third-person mode, presenting two scenarios with regard to passion: the enchanted Student Zhang and the enlightened old monk. In this way he links the shift of passions to Chan Buddhism, inviting the readers to contemplate the philosophical meanings of passion. Thus, it conforms to the usual practice of the eight-legged essay by leaving a lingering and provocative note at the very end.

You’s essay (altogether 581 characters) exhibits a highly successful application of the eight-legged form to a Xixiang ji topic. Parallelism and allusions heighten the rhetorical and evocative power of the essay by constant references to the play and to stories of love and passion in Chinese literature. You’s impersonation of the character’s voice vividly portrays the complex psychology of a young man who tries to come to terms with his surging passions. If the impression we get about Student Zhang from the play is simply a bedazzled young man, the essay enriches such a character by showing his inner conflicts and struggles, his efforts to sort through, justify, resist the temptation of love and the failure to do so. Through using the first-person voice, You achieves a sophisticated interpretation of the play without foregoing the spontaneity and vividness of drama. We seem to hear a direct confession of Zhang about his feelings, and this confession fits snugly with his sensitive and indecisive personality in the play. The eight-legged essay, a vehicle to flesh out the sages’ images and to convey their teachings in a vivid way, was transformed by You Tong into a literary genre appreciated for its verbal beauty and lively representation of dramatic characters.

The playful eight-legged essay was a product of the interaction of diverse reading materials in print in seventeenth-century China. Its parodic nature reflects the reading patterns of a group of elite readers who consumed novels, plays, and sample exam essays.27 We may well

27 The publication of examination essays was never monopolized by the state. From the late Ming onward, printers collaborated with renowned personages to produce model eight-legged essays on topics of their own
imagine a classically educated candidate study model exam essays to prepare for the civil examination, and read novels and plays for personal interest. As Qian Shu’s preface to *Fine Taste* pointed out, the elite members of society were never merely grim Confucian scholars, but also were fond of fun and romantic flair. The criteria for a flamboyant and stylish elite male were the ability to be playful on appropriate occasions, and to play in elegant ways.

In popular accounts from late imperial China, a youth often showed promise through his ability to compose eight-legged essays on randomly assigned topics.\(^{28}\) In such accounts, the eight-legged essay boils down to a writing exercise of making swift, clever, and organized responses to a set topic, regardless of the nature of the topic.\(^{29}\) According to You Tong’s preface to Huang Zhouxing’s six essays on “Autumn Ripples”, he composed his own “Autumn Ripples” essay to answer a guest’s challenge of “adapting music-drama to prose” at a drinking party. Be that as it may, by the time of Qian Shu’s *Fine Taste*, playful eight-legged essays had gone beyond an occasional pastime or a random parody, and grown into a self-conscious literary genre to explore the intricacies of *qing*. The subsequent *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji caizi shu* editions made the practice of including playful eight-legged essays a routine. The publishers posited a readership of stylish *caizi* and elegant personages who are first and foremost individuals of a passionate nature. Those essays offer a look into the complexities of the discourse of *qing* in the early Qing that intertwines romantic sentiments, physical desire, feelings grounded in morality, etc., which will be dealt with in the next section.

---


\(^{29}\) With a lax attitude, some playful eight-legged essays ventured into areas of ribald humor, as we can perceive from such titles as “the hen-pecked General Du” (怕老婆的都元帥), “Escorting a hooker across the bridge” (扶小娘兒過橋), or “Wang San the Bearded from Suzhou has two nephews; he will feed A Er the junior scholar but is unwilling to feed A San the pupil” (蘇州王三鬍子有兩侄焉, 其阿二秀才來則飯之, 阿三童生來則不飯也). *Youxi baguwen jicheng*, 92-93.
Complexities of Qing in Playful Eight-Legged Essays

Qian Shu, the editor of Fine Taste, and Chen Fangping, the editor of Caizi Pipa xieqing pian, both expressed in their prefaces that the play in question is first and foremost a work of qing, and that the qing in the play is contagious, arousing in one the desire to express one’s emotional resonance with the characters. Qian described qing as an irresistible force that pressured him to write because he felt somewhere deep down that his qing could not be controlled (覺隱隱然情不自禁). For Chen Fangping, “the words of Pipa ji are laden with sorrow; it is so moving that one can not help cry for every word…. While reading, feelings of loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and integrity naturally rise in your heart.” While both of them recognize the spontaneity and authenticity of feelings in the plays, the types of feelings they discuss are different. Qian deals with the romantic sentiments of scholars and beauties, whereas Chen treats “the aroused essential moral nature and passions of filial sons, virtuous ladies, loyal husbands, and chaste wives”(孝子賢媛義夫節婦一段至性至情之所發也). As Martin Huang notes, the late Ming witnessed broad discussions of qing in philosophy and literature, which valorized personal feelings and desires to an unprecedented degree, but there were also people who feared the subversive potential of uncontrolled qing, so they tried hard to reconcile qing with xing 性 (one’s moral nature), promoting the idea that qing motivates people to better perform ethical roles and maintain moral order.\(^\text{30}\) The qing discussed by Chen Fangping is the passion to perform moral duties manifested in Pipa ji. However, romantic sentiments, physical desire, moral passion all fall under the premises of qing in the late Ming and early Qing. The playful eight-legged essays reflect the early Qing literati’s approaches to the ambiguities and

\(^{30}\) Huang, Desire and Fictional Narrative, 26-27, 45-47.
tensions within the all-encompassing concept of *qing* through their exploration of the inner worlds of the characters.

In his writings, Qian emphasizes romantic love as the legitimate pursuit of everyone. The essays cover both the emotional and physical aspects of love, and they oscillate between a sentimentalized representation of desire and sensualized treatment of sentiments. Qian and his friends’ prefaces to *Fine Taste* are vehement celebrations of *qing* as a universal emotion. They believed that “one person’s *qing* is the same as everyone else’s *qing*” (蓋一人之情，天下人之情也). His friend Zheng Pengju claimed that “only the people in this world who have *qing* are able to act with *qing*, create books of *qing*, and write essays and verse that has *qing*” (天下唯有情之人，能為有情之事，能撰有情之書，能作有情之文章詩歌). Zheng links up the romantic characters, the playwright, the essay writer, and the reader by their common identity as persons of *qing*:

> Therefore, the writer is a man of passionate feelings, and the reader who appreciates him must be also a person of abundant feelings. I am no doubt a person of passionate nature. I have recalled and admired the affair of Cui Yingying and Student Zhang; I have recited the lines of *Xixiang ji*; thus I could not stop myself when I immersed myself in reading aloud the essays and poems of Youshan [on *Xixiang ji*], and in appreciating and praising them. Yet, are Youshan and I the only ones in this world who have passionate feelings? Charming men of talents and elegant personages—it is surely among people like ourselves that feelings are most concentrated. In terms of romantic affairs, surely they can rival Student Zhang, Yingying and writers of the Yuan, then how could they be willing to be surpassed by Youshan and me in terms of insight into *qing*? Thus I took Youshan’s essays and *shi* and *ci* to a printer, in order to publicize them for all people of passionate feelings in this world, so that we can all appreciate the stylistic elegance of *Xixiang ji*, recognize the feelings in *Xixiang ji*, and savor Youshan’s essays and poetry as the expression of his true nature and feelings, and not merely as trick-playing.

特是作者有情，識者亦必多情。余固情人也。於崔張之事嘗憶而羡之，於西廂之文，嘗吟而詠之，所以於酉山之文章詩歌嘗伏而誦之，嘆賞而嘉美之，而不能以稍輟。雖然，天下有情人獨余與酉山乎哉？風流才士，俊雅名人，料鍾情多在吾輩。必不肯以佳話讓君瑞雙文以及元公輩，又何肯以知情讓余與酉山耶？因取其文其詩與詞付諸棗梨，以公諸天下有情人，願天下有情人共賞酉山之文，識酉山之情，而因以賞酉山之文章詩歌為性情之所發，而非徒作遊戲已也。
Both Qian and Zheng’s prefaces promote the book to “persons of passion in the entire world”. They ask the reader not to overlook the genuine feelings simply because the author applies the eight-legged form to dramatic literature and performs different roles in the essays.

The twenty essays of Fine Taste provide a fine specimen of the author’s role-playing. Eight adopt the voice of Student Zhang, five the voice of Yingying, and seven are from the perspective of the maid Hongniang. I focus on three essays that respectively depict the pleasure of poetic exchange that serves as a substitute for sexual gratification, Yingying’s veiled desire for Student Zhang, and Hongniang’s confession of her aroused desire for Student Zhang. The first essay is titled “We would banter verses across the wall until dawn”, which fleshes out Zhang’s inner thoughts as he recites a poem across the garden wall and receives a response from Yingying for the first time. The “beginning discussion” section attributes the matching and mismatching of two lovers to Heaven, and points out, however, the situation at present with the lovers separated by a wall is a trick of Heaven that allows them to communicate emotionally but keeps them physically apart. The highlight of the essay lies in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth mini-legs. The first pair of legs uses parallel allusions to foreground that Zhang feels excited rather than disappointed by his poetic encounter with Yingying, a typical scholar-beauty trope.

“I climbed that high wall, to a glimpse of Fu-guan.” There are those who gaze at their lovers from distance and feel sad at heart. Though I now cannot get close to her looks and smiles, we connect through poetic rhythms. So I would rather set my heart on words of metal and jade.

“Beguiled by the smile of a East Neighbor”, “I got over the wall to follow my lover”. There are those go after the persons they desire and indulge in sexual pleasure. Though I now cannot approach her heavenly beauty, we communicate deep love through songs. So why not dally with her for the entire night?
乘彼垝垣，以望復闕３１，固有望之而心傷者。今雖色笑未親，而音律相接，寧致賦金玉之遐心。

東鄰巧笑３２，逾墻而從３３，亦有從之而快意者也。今雖芝頰未近，而歌詠情深，又何妨竟夜之流連。

The allusions set a pair of contrasts between those who are distantly separated and those who traverse the short distance between them to fulfill their desires. Zhang thinks of his situation as neither as hopeless as the former nor as sexually gratifying as the latter. Rather than breaking social protocol, he postpones physical pleasure by resorting to emotional communication with Yingying through poems. The emotional pleasure was such that he wishes to match verses for the entire night.

The following fifth and sixth legs blend Zhang’s sensations with his imagination of Yingying feeling chilly as the night advances. His enjoyment of the moonlit blissful moment is mixed up with his worries that the silk dress of Yingying can hardly resist the night wind, and that her socks turn wet on the icy dew. While he wishes to keep on with the poems, he seems to hear morning bells strike and roosters crow. All the factors, including the wall, are against his union with Yingying. However, such negative thoughts are brushed aside as Zhang plucks up the courage to celebrate his spiritual communion with Yingying:

---

３１ Lines are from the poem “Meng” in “Airs of Wei”, Shijing (詩經·衛風·氓): “I climbed that high wall/ to catch a glimpse of Fu-guan/ and when I could not see Fu-guan/ my tears fell flood on flood (乘彼垝垣，以望復闕，不見復闕，泣涕連連), Book of Songs, trans. Arthur Waley, and ed. with additional translation by Joseph Allen (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 50.

３２ This alludes to Song Yu’s “Dengtuzi haose fu” 登徒子好色賦 (Rhapsody on the Lechery of Master Dengtu): “天下之佳人，莫若楚國；楚國之麗者，莫若臣里；臣里之美者，莫若臣東家之子。東家之子，增之一分則太長，減之一分則太短；著粉則太白，施朱則太赤。眉如翠羽，肌如白雪，腰如束素，齒如含貝。嫣然一笑，惑陽城，迷下蔡。然此女登牆窺臣三年，至今未許也.”

３３ From Mencius (孟子·滕文公下): “Tengwen gong, part II”: “If the young people, without waiting for the order of their parents, and the arrangements of the go-betweens, shall bore holes to steal a sight of each other, or get over the wall to be with each other, then their parents and all other people will despise them.” (不待父母之命，媒妁之言，鑽隙相窺，逾墻相從，則父母國人皆賤之), Four Books, 655-56.
The two legs employ a symmetrical form to reinforce Zhang’s belief of his empathy with Yingying. In the pure and silent night, he and Yingying have spiritually embraced one another despite the barrier of a wall. The celebration of the “bonding of hearts” and “linking of minds” are strongly reminiscent of the language Chinese literati used to talk about soul mates between men. By highlighting spiritual resonance and downplaying sexual pleasure, this essay analogizes the emotional love of man and woman with the qing between literati friends, and adapts the

34 Allusion to the poem “Choumiu” in “Airs of Tang”, *Shijing* (詩經·唐風·綢繆): “Fast bundled was the firewood/the Three Stars have risen/is it to-night or which night/that I see my Good Man?” (綢繆束薪, 三星在天. 今夕何夕, 見此良人). *Book of Songs*, 93.

35 Allusion to the poem “Guanju” in “South of Zhou”, *Shijing* (詩經·周南·關雎): “Fair, fair, cry the ospreys/on the island in the river/loverly is this noble lady/fit bride for our lord (關關雎鳩, 在河之洲. 窈窕淑女, 君子好逑). *Book of Songs*, 5.


37 Allusion to the poem “Jianxi” in “Airs of Bei”, *Shijing* (詩經·國風·邶風·簡兮): “Of whom do I think/of a fair lady from the West/that fair lady/is a lady from the West” (云誰之思? 西方美人。彼美人兮, 西方之人兮!). *Book of Songs*, 33.
specific scene to the author’s “fine taste”. Such a writing seamlessly stitches literary allusions into the parallel legs enacting a thinking process, shaping the image of a learned gentleman with great aesthetic sensitivity and delicate feelings who values emotional union as much as, if not more than, physical contact.

Another essay, entitled “I only hope that you can wipe away five thousand men with the tip of your brush”, dramatizes Yingying’s thoughts as she sees Zhang volunteering to repel the bandits that threatens to kidnap her. The “beginning discussion” section begins with Yingying’s doubts about Zhang’s ability to repel the bandits, but the skepticism soon changes into justification for the scholar’s competence in military affairs. The essay is a little unconventional as it includes ten mini-legs to elaborate Yingying’s mixed delight and worries. The first and second mini-legs show that Yingying happily renews her impression of Zhang as he proves to be a man of literary talent and of prowess. The “transitional” third and fourth mini-legs give those thoughts a twist by turning to Yingying’s worries. She is concerned that a delicate scholar may not be able to resist the violent bandits. The fifth and sixth mini-legs pose two questions about how sharp the writing brush is compared with the swords and spears of five thousand men. As the questions have shown Yingying’s hopes sinking to their lowest point, subsequent mini-legs from the eighth to the tenth show her happiness rising to its highest point when Zhang actually succeeds. Qian Shu here concurs with Jin Shengtan that no one is more proud of Zhang than Yingying at this moment. Zhang’s bravery has made him “the dearest person to her heart”, so Yingying is most afraid of his failure and most expectant for his success. Once her wishes become true, her praise for Zhang is full of hyperbole. The essay ends with a passionate eulogy for the writing brush of Student Zhang, which suggests Yingying’s veiled sexual desire:

I think of his brush is more agile than arrows; I think of his brush is tougher than armors; I think of his brush is more dashing than galloping horses, and sharper than hooks, barbed
poles, and spears. In front of his splashing brush, who dares to oppose? Were it not for him, how could I have regained my life?

Although the brush might not be consciously recognized as a phallic symbol as it would be understood today, it was obvious to readers then that sexual yearning and literary talent are intimately intertwined in Xixiang ji.38 Yingying’s passion, manifested in the lush rhetoric, is directed at the power of talent as well as the person who possesses it. People slightly familiar with erotic literature of those days can hardly fail to associate the passage with the “battle” metaphor of sexual intercourse, with the brush being compared to a weapon and Zhang to a military general.39 The passage ends with two questions that are very ambiguous. They could be understood as Yingying’s imagination of the enemies’ surrender in front of Zhang’s power, or her willing surrender to Zhang’s charm and symbolic rebirth. It is possible that the author and his contemporary readers had a shared understanding of the sexual implications of the original lyric of Xixiang ji, and they eroticized Yingying’s sentiments through a celebration and worship of the “brush”. The three si (“think”) verbs in the passage add a layer of intimacy to Yingying’s thoughts. The essay illustrates the common technique of dramatic reversal in eight-legged essays through the rise and fall of Yingying’s hopes. It offers a particular vintage point of looking at Xixiang ji, as it depicts tension and clashes from the eyes of a delicate woman and conveys her erotic desire for Zhang in military metaphors.

The role of Hongniang as both an active participant and a detached observer in the Xixiang ji affair has caught the attention of many previous commentators. This character likewise


39 R.H. van Gulik, Sexual Life in Ancient China, 157, 278.
fascinates Qian Shu, as seven essays in the book are from her perspective. I will discuss one essay that unfolds Hongniang’s affection for Student Zhang. The essay is entitled “I, who have always had a hard heart, was smitten as soon as I saw him”. It is a confession of Hongniang about her aroused desire for Zhang, as she invites Zhang to the Cui family’s banquet to thank him for his rescue. The author “breaks open the topic” by pointing out that “a person whose heart is stirred by what she sees is not a person without qing”. Since the “beginning discussion” part, the author adopts Hongniang’s voice and enters her mind with the formulaic phrase “it is as if Hongniang were saying”. Hongniang justifies her feelings for Zhang by saying “some kind of qing is out of one’s own control” (情亦有難以自主者矣). Just like a beautiful woman, a handsome talented young man has the power to attract those around them, including those who are initially indifferent to him, and those who know they should not entertain romantic feelings toward him. The first to the fourth mini-legs talk about the repression of Hongniang’s passion for Student Zhang, as she concedes that Yingying is the perfect match for Zhang and she is only a plain maid. The fifth and sixth follow that by saying she has always resisted romance because she knows it is inappropriate for her position. However, in the transition afterwards she questions herself: “why was I smitten like this after I saw Student Zhang?” The seventh and eighth mini-legs extend her self-exploration, and reveal that she is in fact as responsive to an attractive man as any other women. Zhang’s presence precipitates her realization that qing is sometimes beyond her own control. The ninth and tenth mini-legs show Hongniang reflecting on her changed attitude toward love and desire:

Since I saw him at the Buddhist temple, my feelings have been stirred up. Yet the first moment of encounter was not fitting for a gift of peonies. Now he stands right in front of me, tall and graceful. Even if I had wished to harden my heart, I could not do it. The Hanlin academician Song Hong, quite unexpectedly, took off the crimson silk from Princess Huyang. I used to laugh at her frivolity. There is no need to do so now. When women fall in love, their feelings are not very different.
Since I saw him when the temple was in danger, my feelings have again been stirred up. Then the moment of emergency did not allow for the gift of a red brush. Now he receives me with smiles and words, polite and elegant. Even if I had wished to harden my heart, I could not do it. The handsome Chu Yanhui, quite abruptly, received the jade pendant from Princess Shanyin. I used to sneer at her obscenity. There is no need to do so now. When women find a jade person worth loving, their feelings are rather similar.

自見於梵宮，而此情動矣。然猶以邂逅之間，未便為芍藥之贈。今則覿面而相親，亭亭玉立，雖欲硬吾心焉而不得。夫翰苑儀容，忽下湖陽之絳紗，向竊笑其狎也。而今無庸矣。女子善懷，情不相遠矣。

自見於寺警，而此情又動矣。然猶以倉皇之際，豈暇為彤管之貽。今則笑語相迎，彬彬爾雅，即雖欲硬吾心焉而不得。夫褚郎秀美，忽來山陰之珮璫，向竊嘲其穢也。而今無庸矣。玉人可懷，情略相同矣。

The two mini-legs show Hongniang retracing her feelings for Zhang to the moment of their first encounter, and to Zhang’s rescue of the Cui family. If her feelings were suppressed on those occasions, she can now no longer harden her heart against him. In the context of the play, Hongniang runs the errand for Lady Cui and she believes that Yingying is about to marry Zhang and she would most likely follow her mistress to service as the couple’s maid. Therefore, it is logical that she starts to look at Zhang in a new light, as the future husband of her mistress. The errand also gives her a chance to examine him closely. She is deeply impressed by Zhang’s appearance and manners, to the extent of exclaiming that she was smitten as soon as she saw him.

The parallel passages above capture the key moment when Hongniang succumbs to Zhang’s charm. At the same time, her opinions toward women’s open declaration of their desire for men, as illustrated by two literary allusions to Princess Huyang and Princess Shanyin, also change.

Rather than despising them as wanton women, she starts to understand the heroines because she

---

40 Allusion to the Princess Huyang falling into love with Song Hong, in “Biography of Song Hong”, *Hou Han shu* (後漢書·宋弘傳): “時帝姊湖陽公主新寡，帝與共論朝政，微觀其意。主曰: "宋公威容德器，群臣莫及。"

41 Allusion to Princess Shanyin’s seduction of Chu Yanhui in “Biography of Chu Yanhui”, in *Nan shi* (南史·褚彦回傳): “景陽中，山陰公主淫恣，窺見彦回悅之，以白帝。”
now knows their qing is no different from hers. The essay is an account of Hongniang’s enlightenment to qing, and it reinforces the book’s sympathetic treatment of qing as a universal force that affects everyone. Like the previous essay, it also naturalizes and legitimizes women’s feelings and desire as spontaneous and natural.

Notably, the essay’s portrayal of Hongniang is quite different from her image in the play. In the play she could hardly have passion for Student Zhang, whom she mocks with mixed sympathy and irony. Qian makes Hongniang speak an elegant diction, reduces the uniqueness of her voice and personality as a maid, and draws her closer to her emotional and sophisticated masters. The essay on Hongniang becomes a vehicle for the author to affirm the contagious power of qing that can touch the observer of a romantic affair and turn her into a subject of qing. Despite its sentimentalized account, the essay’s allusions to the sexually active princesses give Hongniang’s qing a strong sexual overtone. In the play as well as in Qian’s book she is portrayed as an advisor and voyeur on sexual affairs. Another essay, entitled “Whether or not to be intimate will depend on you”, shows Hongniang’s advice to Zhang before his sexual consummation with Yingying, in which Hongniang tries to dispel Zhang’s various misgivings that may make him cringe, and encourages him to embrace the sexual pleasure waiting for him. The essay spoke of sex in allusive and elusive language. Hongniang’s perspective makes the details particularly titillating because it adds a layer of imaginative voyeurism.42

After he explores the emotional and physical dimensions of qing from multiple perspectives, Qian Shu concludes his collection with the last essay that expresses the wish, “may lovers of the whole world all be thus united in wedlock”. The highlight of this essay lies more in

---

42 The playful eight-legged essays written after Qian Shu’s collection increasingly eroticized qing. Some were veiled sexual fantasies at the expense of Xixiang ji characters. Only a few that explored the metrical beauty of eight-legged essays through repetition and onomatopoeia could reach the quality of Qian Shu’s essays. Youxi baguwen jicheng, 176, 188.
the initial discussion of the topic than in the parallel legs. The author extols the fulfillment of *qing* as a universal wish and points out that *Xixiang ji*’s appeal lies in its representation of all people’s *qing* through the romance of a single couple. The essay “breaks the topic” by pointing out that the wish from Zhang is a broad one because he recognizes that others may have similar emotional demands.

All people share the same *qing*—this wish from *Xixiang ji* is broad indeed.

人有同情, 西廂之愿溥矣.  

The next paragraph “receives the topic”, reminds the reader of the specific context of this wish and develops the argument. Zhang’s extension of the wish to everyone reflects his deep consideration for the feelings of others in the world.

“Lovers united in wedlock” refers to the affair of Cui and Zhang, yet he wishes lovers of the entire world get the same ending. Shouldn’t we say he with such a wish is good at understanding human feelings?

蓋有情而成眷屬, 崔張之事也. 而愿天下皆然, 可不謂善體人情乎!  

The “beginning discussion” part adopts Zhang’s voice and follows his thoughts. Since he fulfills his love and desire, he genuinely hopes all lovers could experience the same. The basis of this reasoning is that *qing* affects everybody in similar ways.

Besides, a person’s feelings mirror the feelings of lovers in the world. If I am in love but cannot fulfill my feelings, how could I expect that lovers of the world might fulfill their feelings? But if I am in love and already have my feelings fulfilled, how I could say that lovers of the world should not fulfill their feelings? Although they say that marriages are made in Heaven, it is also a result of our concentration on feelings.

且夫一己之情, 天下之情也. 我有情而不獲遂其情, 安敢望天下之共遂其情. 我有情而既已遂其情, 又安敢謂天下之不遂其情. 雖曰天作之合, 然皆此一情之所鐘而已矣.  

(破題)

(承題)

(起講)
What follows are four mini-legs that express Zhang’s unwillingness to enjoy his happiness in face of other lovers’ sufferings. In the “transition” afterwards, Zhang further explicates his intention:

What I mean is, who in the world is not a person with feelings? Among people with feelings for one another, who would not want to be united in wedlock?

所謂者, 天下誰非有情之人哉! 有情之人, 誰不欲都成眷屬哉!

The entire essay calls for Heaven’s fairness to every pairs of lovers, so that Yingying and Zhang’s case becomes not a lucky exception but a good precedent that gives hope to other passionate individuals. The “conclusion” rests on a commendation for the book Xixiang ji:

Seeing that he expresses such a wish, I realize that the book Xixiang ji is peerless in the expression of human feelings.

觀所願若此，而西廂一書，亦極人情之至矣.

This final essay is interesting in that it goes beyond the boundaries of the play and pays tribute to the play itself. Its language echoes that of Qian Shu and Zheng Pengju’s prefaces in treating qing by analogy and connecting characters, author, and readers in a web of relatable feelings. Qian’s book presupposes that the reading process is empathetic: the reader enters the emotional worlds of different dramatic characters, and feels as they might feel. In other words, the reader can enjoy the pleasure of role switching, as long as he acts his part allotted by the author, namely, a reader capable of qing.

The group of playful eight-legged essays on Pipa ji is dated to 1723. They were probably the works of a group of educated men involved with the book trade emulating the practice of playful eight-legged essays on Xixiang ji. The editor Chen Fangping 陳方平 stated in his preface that the essays were conceived as appendix to an edition of Pipa ji. It was a request from his fangyou 坊友 (friends of the book market) who asked him to compile a few essays to form a fascicle. Chen identifies himself as a native of Nanjing and records that he completed his work in
the Enhong Tower at Nanjing’s Yuhua shan in 1723. The edition was first published by the Yingxiu tang, probably a publishing house based in Nanjing, but several extant editions, including the one I use, indicates it was published by the Sanduo zhai of Suzhou (Sanduo zhai zixing 三多齋梓行) on its title page, with the name “Yingxiu tang” still appearing at the “fish tail” of every page inside the book. A line appears inside the book noting that the woodblocks were stored at a place “in front of West Mountain Temple in the Shangjin Bridge-Lower Shantang Alley outside the Chang Gate of Suzhou” (蘇州閶門外上津橋下塘西山廟前藏板).

The group of eight-legged essays on Pipa ji, collectively called Caizi Pipa xieqing pian, consists of twenty-three essays that deal with quotations from fourteen scenes from Pipa ji. The essays adopt the voices of five characters, including nine in the voice of Cai Bojie, five in the voice of his wife Wuniang, four in the voice of his second wife Ms. Niu, three in the voice of Elder Cai, one in the voice of Minister Niu, and one in the voices of Ms. Niu’s maids. Chen Fangping is the author of twelve essays, but the rest eleven essays are the works of four other writers. Profuse praises for the authors appear at the end of each essay; they are from the editor Chen Fangping, a certain Lu Shenyan, and others who identify themselves as the relatives or students of the authors. Chen was possibly a literatus with the lowest degree or without a degree, who associated with book producers, answered their demand for a volume of essays on Pipa ji, organized the Caizi Pipa xieqing pian as a collaborative project among his own classically-educated friends, and possibly also shared with them the profit that came from the edition.

The Caizi Pipa xieqing pian cover a broad range of subject matter and some of them hardly fall into the range of qing. Qing functions as a loose term that groups together all kinds of unclassifiable motivations and sentiments: the affection between husband and wife on the

---

43 See Appendix Two.
occasion of forced separation, a son yearning to return to his hometown and parents, a woman’s vow of chastity, but also a wife’s suspicion of her husband and a father forcing his son to take the civil examination. In general, the editor seems to buy into the idea of *qing* as the feelings foundational to moral behavior, the legacy of some late Ming thinkers that co-opted *qing* for the promotion of public morality. But certain essays among the collection also challenge this ideal by showing that *qing* cannot be fully contained within a moral framework. Our discussion will cover three essays, two of which respectively deal with the feelings of Cai Bojie and his wife Zhao Wuniang at the time of their separation, while the last one dramatizes the thoughts of Ms. Niu’s maids who laughs at their docile and chaste mistress and promotes a wanton lifestyle.

The first essay is based on the line “For every ten steps of the horse, nine times he turns his head”, a quotation from the tearful scene in which Cai entrusts his wife with the duty of taking care of his aged parents and embarks on the trip for the civil examination. The author “breaks open the topic” with a terse statement: “The *qing* that makes separation unbearable is revealed when she watches the horse takes its steps”. The next paragraph “receives the topic”, using a rhetorical question to drive home the point that the person on the horse, Cai, was indeed unwilling to take leave of his wife.

Since the “beginning discussion” section, the author adopts the voice of Wuniang and elaborates on the emotions at the moment of separation:

While Wuniang watches Bojie leaving, it is as if she is saying, “the thing one feels most difficult to cut off from is the *qing* for one’s flesh-and-bone-like family; the thing one feels most difficult to get rid of is the mood of separation at crossroads. Thus, if he already sees the capital in distance, he has no choice but to take leave, because the occasion demands him to do so; if his horse is already on the road, he has no choice but to move on, because the situation demands him to do so. Yet, at this moment when he is about to leave but not quite, when he is about to move and just starts, he turns around and lingers on, his eyes filled with tears, unwilling to make an abrupt departure, that is because of *qing*.
The paragraph explicates qing from Wuniang’s perspective, but it shows her deep understanding of her husband’s feelings on the occasion. The expression not only captures the specific moment of separation in the play, but may also strike a familiar cord among many readers of the day who had similar experiences of leaving behind family duties and loved ones for the civil examinations. It has strong affective power because it addresses a situation common enough in the past, and its insight into the feelings at the moment of separation is not outdated even for readers of today.

The second essay is from the same scene, but it takes the perspective of Cai Bojie, as he assures his wife that “from today, longing for each other, though we’ll dwell apart, our tears will overflow the same”, a quotation that the essay builds on. The essay focuses on the “shared feelings” (同情) of husband and wife when they are forced to live in separation. The author impersonates Cai as he imagines how painful life will be after he travels away from home. The discussion makes a fine distinction between one’s feelings of recalling the past and one’s feelings of envisioning a future spent in loneliness:

When one is about to take leave, one often thinks about the time spent before separation. That is because the occasions of farewell are many and the occasions of reunion are rare. Such feelings are already unbearably sad.

Or when one has not yet taken leave, one starts to think ahead about the scenario after separation. That is because the occasions of reunion are rare and the occasions of farewell are too many. Such feelings are even more wretched and pitiful.

人當欲別之時，而還思未別之頃。則分袂時多，聚首時少也。此衷已不勝其淒然。

抑人當未別之前，而逆想既別之後。則聚首時少，分袂時多也。此衷更不勝其慘然傷矣哉。
In other words, the person who projects onto a gloomy future must have strongly resented separation and been extremely pessimistic about his life alone. In this essay as well as in the previous one, the author provides subtle observations on a fairly clichéd topic through his weaving of the fine and varied strands of human feelings in different contexts of life. After describing the shared sorrows of husband and wife, the author gives the topic a twist by making Cai consider conventional beliefs about men’s promiscuity or women’s inconstancy and pose a question to himself, namely, “How do I know that we must be longing for one another, and our longings are the same?”

And he answers the question himself in a set of paralleled mini-legs:

As I think of you, it is not due to the love of men and women that I lose the courage of a hero. I just consider my parents up in the hall, whom I trouble a young wife to take care of. Hence red rains of flowers, green shades of trees—all that meet my eye becomes a heartbroken scene.

As you think of me, it is not due to the “new green of willows by the roadside” that makes you “regret sending me off to seek the title of a marquis”. You just consider your husband of two months who suddenly became a sojourner in ten thousand li. Hence a flight of swallows, a pair of butterflies—all that enters your eye is a moment of pain.

The answer makes it clear that Cai’s confidence in he and his wife’s reciprocal qing lies in his belief in their shared sense of duty toward their parents. They did not fall into the selfish trap of carnal pleasure, but put filial piety in the first place, and their longing for each other is

---

44 This line alludes to Wang Cangling’s (ca. 698-756) poem “Sorrow in the Boudoir” (Guiyuan 閨怨): “Nothing in her boudoir brings sorrow to the bride; She mounts the tower, gaily dressed, on a spring day. Suddenly seeing new green of willows by the roadside, alas, she regrets having sent off her husband to seek the title of a marquis!” (閨中少婦不知愁，春日凝粧上翠樓，忽見陌頭楊柳色，悔叫夫婿覓封侯.) The poem unfolds the thoughts of a young woman as spring fills her with the longing for her absent husband, making her regret having sent him off far away to the battle field. Quan Tang shi, vol. 143, no.25.
grounded on the wish for a reunited family that offers the best support for the aged elders. In other words, the ties between husband and wife are strong because of their shared ethical responsibility toward the parents. The *qing* advocated here originates from morality, nurtures ethical conduct, and maintains social order.

Although the majority of eight-legged essays on *Pipa ji* present *qing* as grounded in morality, it also reveals its playful nature by including an essay impersonating Ms. Niu’s maids that turns female chastity into an object of laughter. The essay is entitled “So laughable—by latticed windows, how many beautiful ladies sit in boredom!” The quotation comes from a small detail in the play where the maids of Ms. Niu pities and laughs at their mistress who quietly shuts herself off from the beautiful spring and refuses to indulge in any merrymaking. The essay starts off in an ironic tone: “As the latticed windows seclude the beautiful ladies, it is only fitting that they sit in boredom.” The next passage laments the fate of gentry women in a tongue-in-cheek manner:

How could anyone be willing to live in boredom? Yet the beautiful ladies are locked up behind latticed windows. Even though they do not wish to spend time in boredom, is that possible? Alas, how painful it must be for beautiful ladies of this world!

夫人孰甘無賴哉?乃玉人而竟瑣窗中也。欲不無賴，得乎?可痛哉普天下玉人! 45

The “beginning discussion” section adopts the voices of Ms. Niu’s old servant and maid and continues the irony:

Imagining the old woman and Xichun laughed together and said: “Without a reason, we are born with ugly looks and mediocre intellect, and we always resented heaven for not making us born as beautiful ladies. Yet today we feel lucky that heaven did not make us born as beautiful ladies. Why do beautiful ladies make one unwilling to join their class? Since they regard themselves beautiful ladies, they naturally deserve to suffer this pain

---

45 *Yuren*, literally “jade person”, first appeared in “Biography of Wei Jie”, *The Book of Jin* (晉書·衛玠傳): 
“(玠)年五歲，風神秀異…總角乘羊車入市，見者皆以為玉人，觀之者傾都.” In Liu Yiqing’s *A New Account of the Tales of the World*, “Appearance and Manner” section (世說新語·容止): “(裴楷)麤服亂頭皆好，時人以為玉人.” Later the phrase is especially used to refer to beautiful women.
[of seclusion]. How could that be explained away as not allowing the infatuation of bees and the stirring of butterflies? \(^{46}\)

也不想老姥姥惜春同笑曰： "吾徒穢形陋質,常恨天不生余為玉人也.今而幸天不生余為玉人也.夫玉人何令人不肯與之同類也?以玉人之自處,固宜受此苦耳.即安得以不許蜂迷蝶採為解哉?"

In the following paragraphs the two characters use several legs of parallelism to portray the lonely and sequestered life of gentry ladies who actually yearn for a companion or lover to appreciate her beauty and talent. And they end the essay with a bold exclamation:

We wish that women of the entire world could all mess up their hair, soil their faces, and wear their clothes upside down. You must not choose to walk in the steps of the beautiful ladies!

吾愿普天下女兒,盡蓬其首,垢其顏,顛倒其衣服,淫邪其性情,毋自蹈玉人之覆轍也.

The comments after essay regard it as a vivid portrayal of the preposterous thoughts of the wanton servants, implying that it effectively mocks the servants by drawing a caricature of them. However, the playful essay is a sword that cuts both ways. As it mocks the promiscuity of servants, it also subverts the ideal of female chastity through the mouths of the servants. The message the readers take home depends on their own ideological positions. Just like the playful eight-legged essays on Xixiang ji, this playful essay on Pipa ji illustrates the danger of ventriloquism underlying the eight-legged essay form. As a matter of fact, scholars such as Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797) and Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763-1820) disapproved the indiscriminative use of the technique of speaking in the voice of another person in the eight-legged essay. Yuan thinks that essays speaking in the voices of some ancient philosophers often ended up slandering Confucius and Mencius and the impersonation of lustful women and treacherous ministers caused the degeneration of the genre. Jiao also believes that essays should not be written in the

\(^{46}\) "The infatuation of bees and the stirring of butterflies" are metaphors for the seduction and flirtation of men, allegedly the dangers that wellborn women should avoid by living in seclusion.
voices of bad characters such as Yang Huo 陽貨 and Zang Cang 臧倉. Their demand to regulate the use of the genre precisely reflected that the essay was being appropriated for various parodic and subversive uses. The playful eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* employed the prose form to expound *qing*, but as we have shown, the essays reveal *qing* to the readers as a web of crisscrossed feelings: Sentiments and desires, private and altruistic love, wantonness and restraint, are in constant flux and tension.

**Conclusions**

Playful eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* signaled the plays’ deeper penetration into the lives of educated readers in late imperial China. Playing with two sets of conventions, the essays are a form of parody that combines creative expression with critical commentary. It loosened the ties of the eight-legged essay with Confucian orthodoxy, and transformed it into a genre for the expression of subtle and complex *qing*. The essays are sophisticated interpretations of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* with rhetorical force, literary elegance, and affective power. At a time when *Xixiang ji* and Pipa ji were already fairly old texts after several hundred years of circulation, and even the Sixth and Seventh Books of Genius a common cliché, playful eight-legged essays on *Xixiang ji* were likely a vital factor in broadening readers’ imaginative horizons and sustaining their interest in those old plays.

---

Epilogue

All my poetry, prose, and miscellaneous writings are not measured by rules or regulations, nor do they fit any set conventions or styles. I do not follow methods of the past, I do not wish to emulate writers of the present, and I do not long for the transmission of my works in the future. I just create my own school of thought, saying what I want to say. And that is all there is to it.

凡余所為詩文雜著，未經繩墨，不中體裁，上不取法于古，中不求肖于今，下不覬傳于后，不過自為一家，云所欲云而止。

—Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1679/1680), “Yijia yan shiyi”一家言釋義¹

In this assertion of a unique, personalized school of thought, Li Yu shows himself as a “fervent apostle of the new”, who is as much in favor of artistic originality as were his late Ming predecessors.² Li Yu wrote most of his fiction and drama during the early Qing, a period that largely continues the momentum of renewal and development in first half of the seventeenth century. However, the early Qing is also a period of critical reflection on the late Ming legacy, and many works introduced a new satirical edge and formal innovations to existing literary and cultural genres. For instance, while commentaries on fiction and drama in the late Ming focus on different extratextual responses to the text, Li Yu turned commentary into an integral part of his stories and a component of authorial voice.³ Likewise, although the attempts to innovate upon the printed editions of plays such as *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* had been continuous across the Ming-Qing transition, there seemed to be a shift in the areas of innovation and in the patterns of

---

reading. While this study examines the ongoing search for the new in the printing of paired editions of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji*, here I will take a long-term view of the appropriative use of artistic originality in the late Ming and early Qing printing of drama, and the decline of this practice. In the early twentieth century, book connoisseurs rediscovered the legacy of the seventeenth century publishers. They collected the earlier fine editions as cultural relics of a bygone era and produced facsimiles out of profound nostalgia.4

The pursuit of originality in the context of printing was intertwined with such complex issues as imitation, informational excess, authority, and parody. The configuration of *Xixiang ji* and *Pipa ji* as paired imprints is a unique invention of the late Ming. Those editions challenge the notion of what a book is by creating a distinctive textual pair or grouping of existing texts. The multi-layered reading experiences across boundaries of text and text, text and image are a result of the vision, coordination, innovative spirit of all parties involved in the production of these editions. When originality as a carefully guided elite ideal encountered the various players in the publishing industry, a nice irony was generated as various elements of the artistic genres became objects of appropriation, with the final products a hybridized mix of convention and novelty, derivation and inventiveness. The primacy of the original text was challenged and displaced to a certain extent by commentary and illustration that augmented the size of the book and enriched its content through multiple, conflicting, and occasionally far-flung interpretations. While the play text was thought to derive its authority from the innate talent and sensibilities of the playwright, the commentator(s) replaced such authority by imposing another structure and significance over the text. Slow, focused, and interactive reading, imaginative viewing, hearing,

---

4 Cynthia Brokaw, “Commercial Woodblock Publishing in the Qing”, *From Woodblocks to The Internet*, ed. Cynthia Brokaw and Christopher Reed (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 45.
and writing are the major ways of approaching these editions as embodiments of original qualities.⁵

Among the books discussed in the four chapters above, the editions of the late Ming reflect a double emphasis on commentary and illustration. The RYT edition even consciously shapes commentary, play text, and illustration into a meaningful triad with multiple responses to the play text that contrast and complement one another. The Jin and Mao commentary editions and the subsequent editions of “books of genius” seemed to have shifted their emphasis to commentary and supplementary texts such as the playful eight-legged essays. Visual images remained an important component of the book, but the pictures did not reach the level of refinement, complex organization, and ingenious transformation of borrowed visual elements that characterize the fine Ming editions. Among the editions of the Sixth and Seventh Books of Genius printed after 1700, some still contain illustrations with a distinctive design, such as the 1708 Boya tang edition of the Guanhua tang xiuixiang diliu caizi Xixiang ji 貫華堂繡像第六才子西廂記 (Guanhua tang’s Illustrated Sixth Book of Genius), the 1733 Chengyu tang huixiang Diliu caizi shu 成裕堂繪像第六才子書 (Chengyu tang’s Illustrated Sixth Book of Genius), and the 1735 Huixiang Diqi caizi shu 繪像第七才子書 (Illustrated Seventh of Book of Genius), but the size of the pictures is generally small and many details in the pictures are not carefully worked out.⁶ Most of the extant editions from the mid- and late Qing are the compact jinxiang

---

⁵ For a discussion of different ways of looking at a picture (guan, kan, du), see Clunas, Pictures and Visuality, 111-120.

⁶ A reprint of the Guanhua tang xiuixiang diliu caizi is found in Budeng daya wenku zhenben xiqu congkan, vol.1, ed. Beijing daxue tushuguan (Beijing: Xueyuan chubnahse, 2003). The illustrations of the other two editions are considered representative of the Sixth and Seventh Books of Genius printed after 1700 and collected in Wu Xiaoling zhengang su banhua quanbian, vol.5, ed. Ma Wenda (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003), 242-69, 310-46. The 1733 Diliu caizi shu and 1735 Diqi caizi shu were probably conceived as a pair by the same publishing house Chengyu tang and the editor Cheng Shiren. They both feature images that have a half-folio representing a scene in the play and another half-folio of poetic lines written in various calligraphic styles.
In the case of dramatic texts, the trend of smaller editions with limited space on the page led to cramped characters and pictures. The change in physical attributes of editions seems to coincide with the decline of printed vernacular fiction quality. The decline of drama illustrations was due to many factors, including the change in reading patterns. In his study of fiction, Robert Hegel notes that novels were often identified with commerce, making them vulgar during the Qing period. They were printed cheaply and consumed quickly, making graphic arts irrelevant. Illustrations declined as reading patterns evolved.

A shift from literati-playwright dominated drama to actor-dominated commercial theater occurred during the Kangxi and Yongzheng periods (1662-1735). While drama remained an important public art, performances by professional troupes made it vulgarized. Meanwhile, the readership for dramatic texts continued to grow, but it did not encourage innovation in print appearance.

A look at other visual imprints, such as portrait albums from the late Ming painter Chen Hongshou, suggests that not all types declined. High-quality portraits were common, as seen in Gai Qi’s ‘Honglou meng tuyong’ (1879). In landscape, finely-printed pictorial albums were available.

---

7 Hegel, Reading Illustrated Fiction, 288.
Fancha tu 泛槎圖 (1819) and Hongxue yinyuan ji 鴻雪因緣記 (1838) continued to appear.\(^{10}\)

However, it is noteworthy that all the exquisite pictures fall outside the territory of fiction and drama. Even the Honglou meng tuyong was printed as an independent album separate from the novel Honglou meng 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Mansion). With the low regard for fiction and drama since the mid-Qing and the subsequent lack of demand for expensive and aesthetically beautiful editions, to invest in improving the physical appearance of novels and plays made little sense commercially. For lack of further evidence the discussion here cannot be more than speculative, but fiction and drama illustrations also seemed to have little interaction with other professional and commercial image-making of the same period. In addition, the mid-Qing literati painters shifted focus to normative practices of pre-Ming masters. They no longer championed “the new and the different” and stopped acting as a stimulus to innovation in fiction and drama illustrations.\(^{11}\)

It is not until the early twentieth century that we see a resurgence of interest in the fine editions of the late Ming and early Qing periods. The small number of them that survived to the late Qing and Republican era were considered “rare editions” and were sought after by wealthy book collectors and often reproduced as facsimile editions. Although those are usually small-scale publications, they are significant to the preservation of rare editions and to the tradition of woodblock printing. By the late nineteenth century, lithography (shiyin 石印, literally “stone printing”) and letterpress (qianyin 鉛印, literally “lead printing”) had entered China and the spread of new ideas via new printing techniques soon generated new forms of print, with the modern newspaper as the most obvious example. Shanghai rapidly became the dominant center

\(^{10}\) Zhu Chongshou, Chatu yishu shihua, 141-43.

\(^{11}\) Burnett, Dimensions of Originality, 306.
of the new publishing industry. However, within this transition to new printing technologies and a new text culture, woodblock printing did not by any means disappear. As Cynthia Brokaw points out, woodblock publishing persisted in the hinterland and even in major cities well into the Republican era. For commercial publishers, woodblock publishing remained profitable because of its relatively low initial investment, portability of printing equipment, and flexibility of print format. For the handful of wealthy book collectors who turned out facsimile reproductions of the fine Ming editions, the preference for the old method of woodblock printing was more expressive of an elite nostalgia for traditional cultural forms in face of the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the end of imperial reign in China. The fascination with the Ming editions coincides with a renewed interest among the elite to study and preserve the Kun opera, as well as other forms of cultural preservation. This cultural nostalgia is symptomatic during the transitional period from imperial rule to the modern era, especially among those who identified themselves as “remnant subjects” (yimin 遺民) of imperial China.

The cultural preservers paid homage to their Ming predecessors not only in the final products but also in the process of production. Two notable figures, Liu Shiheng 劉世珩 (1875-1926) and Dong Kang 董康 (1867-1947) spent their fortunes on reprinting rare editions, sparing no money or effort in selecting of the best wood for printing boards and ink and paper of the highest quality. Liu Shiheng was an Anhui native known for his Nuanhong shi 暖紅室 series of reproductions of Ming editions of plays. Predictably, Xixiang ji and Pipa ji herald this series of over thirty imprints. He published facsimiles of Ling Mengchu’s edition of Xixiang ji and the

---

SJT edition of *Pipa ji* with “Chen Meigong” commentary. Dong Kang and his Songfen shi 誦芬室 reprinted a 1676 edition of *Xixiang ji* and a Ming edition of *Xinkan jinxiang Cai Bojie Pipa ji* 新刊巾箱蔡伯喈琵琶記, *Sheng Ming zaju* 盛明雜劇, and a series of works of drama criticism, etc.15 Although the reprinting often involves meticulous collation, in general the connoisseur-publishers took pains to make the imprints resemble the Ming originals. Without looking at the names and seals of the Qing publishers, the reader would have difficulty telling the facsimiles apart from the Ming editions. Liu named his series of dramatic texts *Nuanhongshi huike chuanju* 暖紅室匯刻傳劇 (Nuanhong shi’s collection of *chuanqi* plays), and the first page of the main text of every book carries the name of Mengfeng lou 夢鳳樓 and Nuanhong shi, the residence and studio names of Liu Shiheng. The illustrations are precise imitations of the Ming images by Liu’s wife Fu Chunshan 傅春姍. Except for her seals, they are simulacra of the original pictures.

As the Qing publishers inscribed their names onto the facsimiles of Ming books, they seemed to enjoy a momentary illusion of crossing temporal distance, transcending the decay and fall of the Qing, and reconnecting with the culture of the glorious Ming. For them, the Ming editions we discussed in this study were no longer products of a derivative nature, they were primary traces of a vibrant cultural past, objects of original aura worthy of being copied and preserved for the future.

---

Appendix One

Selected Playful Eight-Legged Essays on *Xixiang ji*

This table is based on *Youxi baguwen jicheng*, 163-64. All the translations of titles are based on *The Story of the Western Wing*, West and Idema, ed. and trans., 1995. The symbol “x” means a later version copies Qian Shu’s essay on the same topic with some degree of variations. The scene title marked with “*” is different from the scene titles created by Jin Shengtan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yaqu cangshu 雅趣藏書 (Book for Fine Taste)</th>
<th>Caizi 西廂文</th>
<th>Liu caizi 六才子文</th>
<th>Shi mingjia 十名家文</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Encountering Beauty 驚豔</strong></td>
<td>“How can I withstand that one shift of her autumn ripples as she left” 怎當他臨去秋波那一轉</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Borrowing Room 借廂</strong></td>
<td>“Even if I wanted to rid myself of love-longing now, how could I?” 待飈下教人怎飈</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Matching Verses 酬韻</strong></td>
<td>“Bantering verses across the wall until dawn” 隔牆兒酬和到天明 x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disrupting Ceremony 鬧齋</strong></td>
<td>“How can my body that is full of grief and full of sickness/Stand a face that can topple cities and topple states?” 我是個多愁多病身, 怎當你傾國傾城貌 x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temple Alarm 寺警</strong></td>
<td>“I only hope that you can wipe away five thousand men with the tip of your brush!” 筆尖兒橫掃五千人 x x x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

245
<p>| Banquet Invitation | “I, who have always had a hard heart, am smitten as soon as I see him”&lt;br&gt;我從來心硬,一見了也留情 | x | x | x |
| Breaking Betrothal | “Who would have thought that “under the moon, in the western chamber” / would change to “the southern branch in a dream”&lt;br&gt;他誰道月底西廂,變做夢裡南柯 | x | x | x |
| Zither Expressing the Heart | “It’s just a single thickness of red paper /And a few wide-apart stiles-- /But isn’t it the same as being separated by myriad screens of cloudy mountains?”&lt;br&gt;中間一層紅紙,幾眼疏槅,不是雲山幾萬重 | x | x | x |
| First Waiting | “Now I believe that poets and beauties really exist”&lt;br&gt;這叫做才子佳人信有之 | x | x | x |
| Squabble over the Love Letter | “Today in the upper room where you make your evening toilet, apricot blossoms fade”&lt;br&gt;晚妝楼上杏花殘 | x | x |
| Denying the Love Letter | “her golden lotuses trample sprouts of peonies”&lt;br&gt;金蓮蹴損牡丹芽 | x | x |
| Second Waiting | “whether or not to be intimate will depend on you”&lt;br&gt;親不親,盡在您 | x | x | x |
| Answer for the Love Letter | “I still believe you’ve come in last night’s dream”&lt;br&gt;難道是昨夜夢中來 | x | x | x |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Columns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interrogating the Maid</td>
<td>“Standing on the dark green moss until my embroidered slippers were frozen through”</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farewell Banquet</td>
<td>“Last night and today pare away the small round of my waist”</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awakening from Dream</td>
<td>“Pained by feelings of separation: half of the forest is yellowed leaves”</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report of Success</td>
<td>“How can a single inch of brow’s peak/withstand those, those many furrows there because of him?”</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending Love Tokens*</td>
<td>“But to cure love-longing, I have neither herbs nor pills”</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting over the Beauty</td>
<td>“You’re fit only to steal the ashes of Han Shou’s perfume”</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Reunion</td>
<td>“May lovers of the whole world all be thus united in wedlock”</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Can I Withstand that One Shift of her Autumn Ripples as She Left?

怎當他臨去秋波那一轉

You Tong

This translation of You Tong’s essay is from Stephen H. West’s unpublished handout for his presentation “The Afterlives of the Story of the Western Wing” at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, Toronto, 2012. The essay was later presented under a different title, “In the Voice of Other’s: You Tong’s Eight-Legged Essay on the Story of the Western Wing” at Voicing Authority: International Conference on Voice and Ventriloquism in Chinese Literature, UC Berkeley, 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breaking open the topic</th>
<th>Imagine how understanding was completed in the eyes of Doublet and how passions were shifted by that and thereby given full access/were communicated.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>破題</td>
<td>想雙文之目成，情以轉而通焉。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the topic</td>
<td>Now, autumn’s ripples are not things in themselves capable of this shift—passion is what effects this shift. This being so, although Doublet is leaving, there remains behind something that has yet to depart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>承題</td>
<td>盖秋波非能轉，情轉之也。然則雙文雖去，其猶有未去者存哉。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning discussion</td>
<td>It is as if Student Zhang were saying, I certainly know about those in this world who are fond of beauty/sex—they come and there is shared affection, they depart and there is mutual abandonment. It is nothing more than this: passion stirs and they come together, passion stills and they part from each other. But, in those struck with love’s passion, it is precisely when they are about to come to the end [of the meeting and the glance] that they reveal the outward appearance of its slight stirring—and this is enough to provoke the longing of the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>起講</td>
<td>張生若曰：世之好色者，吾知之矣。來相憐，去相捐也。此無他，情動而來，情靜而去耳。鐘情者正於將盡之時，露其微動之色，故足以致人思焉。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing out topic</td>
<td>Is there anyone [in this regard] the equal of Doublet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>出題、領題</td>
<td>有如雙文者乎？</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What can be pondered were “the sound of an oriole beyond the flowers,” the time that “passes before she speaks” . . . and now the lingering echoes have died away. So in these things that the mouth cannot relate, the eyes seem capable of relating.

更可念者,囀鶯聲於花外,半晌方言,而今餘音歇矣。乃口不能傳者,目若傳之。

What is even more lovable is how her jade toes are set against/borne on the “tattered red,” “a little more distant with each step”; and now the fragrant dust is gone . . . And yet, where those feet could not stop and linger, it is as though it remained stilled there in her eyes.

更可戀者,襯玉趾於殘紅,一步漸遠,而今香塵滅矣。乃足不能停者,目若停之。

I now note “what is full and clear are the waves,” and the “what is gazing longingly are autumn’s ripples.” And what suddenly parts, suddenly meets, is the single shift of these autumn ripples. I have never seen them before, and never suspected that I would encounter them now, just as we were parting . . .

惟見盈盈者波也,脈脈者秋波也; 乍離乍合者,秋波之一轉也。吾向未之見也,不意於臨去時遇之。

I do not know, before she left, where those “autumn ripples” attached themselves. . . perhaps she let her gaze trail over courtyard and portico, or swept her observing eyes over flowers and willows—really no more than an accidental brush with “fine hours and lovely scenes.” But courtyard and portico are now things of the past, those flowers and willows are moving out of view—yet this “lovely clear lilting gaze” suddenly lingers and hovers as though sending off a loved one—to what purpose this? This is what is called “the winsome glance that accords with laughter”—the shift/turn itself precisely possessed “shifting” within the laughter. Even had I witnessed her loveliness face to face, it would lack the soulstealing power of this moment.

吾不知未去之前,秋波何屬。或者垂眺於庭軒,縱觀於花柳,不過良辰美景,偶而相遭耳。猶是庭軒已隔,花柳方移,而婉兮清揚,忽徘徊其如送者奚為乎? 所云含睇宜笑,轉正有轉於笑之中者。雖使靦修於覿面,不若此際之銷魂矣。
I do not know where, after she leaves, those autumn ripples will go. I suppose she will fix her stare in the deep courtyard, or wipe away tears behind the pearly curtains—no more, really, than a worried and resentful beauty, sad in her solitude. She is about to return to this deep courtyard, and pearly curtains are half closed—yet this fine seductive gaze suddenly flashes as though she is about to receive me as her lover—to what purpose is this? This is what is meant by “eyes earnestly gazing, she saddens my heart”—The shift/turn itself precisely possesses “shifting” with sadness. Even if she closed her eyes for shame before the lamp, it would not match my heart’s racing at this moment.

吾不知既去之後,秋波何往。意者凝眸於深院,掩淚於珠簾,不過怨粉愁香,淒其獨對耳。惟是深院將歸,珠簾半閉,而嫣然美盼,似恍惚其欲接者奚為乎?所云渺渺愁余,轉正有轉於愁之中者。雖使闔羞目於燈前,不若此時之心蕩矣。

This single “shift”: can we say it is without passion? That this “shift” cannot forget passion/the passion of this shift is unforgettable is clear. May we take it to possess passion? That the “shift” is not impeded by passion is also clear. The other sees how I experience this “shift” of autumn’s ripples, but cannot see how the mind of this other is complicit in making that “shift.” Should I want to set my own gaze free to meet hers, what is that compared to the difficulty of receiving this single “shift”?

此一轉也,以為無情耶?轉之不能忘情可知也。以為有情耶?轉之不為情滯又可知也。人見為秋波轉,而不見彼之心思有與為之轉者。吾即欲流睞相迎,其如一轉之不易受何!

This single “shift”: can we say it is full of passion? I begrudge that it is just this one “shift.” Can we say it lacks passion? I regret that she had this one “shift” left over. She knew to effect that one “shift” of autumn’s ripples but did not know that my dreaming soul had the wherewithal to effect a thousand, ten thousand shifts. Even if I close my eyes and not peek, what could I do about the impossibility of retreating from that single “shift”?

此一轉也,以為情多耶?吾惜其止此一轉也。以為情少耶?吾又恨其餘此一轉也。彼知為秋波一轉,而不知吾之魂夢有與為千萬轉者。吾即欲閉目不窺,其如一轉之不可卻何!

Oh. Alas!
噫嘻！
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concluding Comparison</th>
<th>7th leg 第七股</th>
<th>“Summoning the ‘wayfarer from/in Chu’ after three years”—it appears we knew each other before.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th leg 第八股</td>
<td>“Toppling the Palaces of Han in a single glance”—I am helpless against it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion 總結</td>
<td>With this one “shift” of Doublet’s autumn ripples, it is only fitting that the student should have been dazzled and stunned senseless. Or as in the case of the old monk who had murals of scenes from the Western Wing on all four walls—the sudden realization of Chan was right there. Now, this “one shift” was a Chan of passion—you who meditate on study, append your own “shifting words” to this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

有雙文之秋波一轉，宜小生之眼花撩亂也哉！抑老僧四壁畫西廂，而悟禪恰在個中。蓋一轉也，情禪也，參學人試於此下一轉語。
Appendix Two

Playful Eight-Legged Essays on *Pipa ji*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Titles of Eight-Legged Essays</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating Parents’ Birthday 高堂稱慶</td>
<td>“Pour the spring wine; listen--under the blossoms our voices raise in song” 酌春酒看取花下高歌</td>
<td>Gao Yunfeng 高雲鳳</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Zither beside the Lotus Pond 琴訴荷池</td>
<td>“Locust tree shadows move through the quiet courtyard, lotus fragrance fills the secluded garden” 閒庭槐蔭轉 深院荷香滿</td>
<td>Gao Yunfeng 高雲鳳</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating Parents’ Birthday 高堂稱慶</td>
<td>“Ten years now I’ve kept company with a study lamp” 十載親燈火</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating Parents’ Birthday 高堂稱慶</td>
<td>“I only wish that we as young husband and wife can always serve our aged parents” 惟願取年少夫妻長侍暮年姑舅</td>
<td>Zhang Liucun 張柳邨</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Niu Disciplining the Servants 牛氏規奴</td>
<td>“Could that compare to our screen of willow down, or this courtyard of pear blossoms?” 怎如柳絮簾櫳梨花庭院</td>
<td>Zhang Liucun 張柳邨</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Niu Disciplining the Servants 牛氏規奴</td>
<td>“Though the cuckoo cries itself into old age, red flowers fly till trees are bare, there is no course for spring depression” 任他啼老杜鵑飛盡紅英端不為春閑愁</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cai the Elder Forces His Son to Take the Exam 蔡公逼試</td>
<td>“The emperor has summoned all wise scholars; every graduate seeks to pass his test” 天子詔招取賢良秀才每都去科試</td>
<td>Li Chuanshi 李傳詩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cai the Elder Forces His Son to Take the Exam 蔡公逼試</td>
<td>“There will be three meats and five tripods … my spirit will still rejoice” 三牲五鼎……是喜</td>
<td>Zhang Liucun 張柳邨</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation at Nanpu 南浦囑別</td>
<td>“Even if you have no care that it will be cold within my flowered bed curtains, remember at least that dusk is falling in the mulberry trees” 不念我芙蓉帳冷, 也思親桑榆暮景</td>
<td>Zhang Liucun 張柳邨</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation at Nanpu 南浦囑別</td>
<td>“Remember at least that dusk is falling in the mulberry trees” 也思親桑榆暮景</td>
<td>Li Chuanshi 李傳詩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation at Nanpu 南浦囑別</td>
<td>“For every ten steps of the horse, nine times he turns his head” 馬行十步九回頭</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation at Nanpu 南浦囑別</td>
<td>“From today, longing for each other, though we’ll dwell apart, our tears will overflow the same” 從今後相思兩處, 一樣淚盈盈</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Niu Instructing His Daughter 丞相教女</td>
<td>“Laughing by latticed windows, how many beautiful ladies sit in boredom!” 笑瑣窗多少玉人無賴</td>
<td>Zhang Liucun 張柳邨</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister Niu Instructing His Daughter 丞相教女</td>
<td>“[Ladies] must have virtue enduring as pine and bamboo, sentiments pure as orchids” 當有松筠節操蘭蕙襟懷</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting Scholars 文場選士</td>
<td>“How delightful it is to pass the exam and to be promoted to the first place” 喜得登科擢上第</td>
<td>Che Hu 車濩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sighing by the Dressing Table 臨粧感歎</td>
<td>“My gaze cut off from the distant horizon past clouds and mountains” 目斷天涯雲山遠</td>
<td>Zhang Liucun 張柳邨</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Title</td>
<td>Chinese Title</td>
<td>Poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasting at the Apricot Garden</td>
<td>春宴杏園</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“His one pen is like a rainbow a hundred thousand feet high”</td>
<td>一筆掃萬丈長虹</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleading at the Crimson Stairs</td>
<td>丹陛陳情</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“As the moon pales and stars disappear, in Jianzhang palace dawn breaks at a thousand doors, smoke curls up from imperial braziers”</td>
<td>月淡星稀建章宮裡千門曉御爐香裊</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Loathing of the “husk wife”</td>
<td>糟糠自厭</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Today for the first time I believe that there really are ‘husk wives’”</td>
<td>到如今始信有糟糠婦</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Zither beside the Lotus Pond</td>
<td>琴訴荷池</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve railing—with nothing to do, I lean on each one</td>
<td>十二欄杆無事閑憑遍</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gazing at the Moon on Mid-Autumn Night</td>
<td>中秋望月</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Longing for his wife in her secluded chamber, and blaming the moon for shining so bright on those who are separated”</td>
<td>深閨思婦怪他偏向別離明</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiring about Hidden Emotions</td>
<td>瞧詢衷情</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It must be he has a sweetheart in the pleasure quarters; depressed and heartsick, you can’t get her out of your heart, 因此上悶懨懨常掛懷</td>
<td>過只是楚館秦樓有箇得意人兒也,因此上悶懨懨常掛懷</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encounter of Two Virtuous Wives</td>
<td>兩賢相遘</td>
<td>Chen Fangping 陳方平</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Adorned with simple dignity, demeanor worthy of an artist’s brush! Graceful manner, beautiful and rare!”</td>
<td>看他梳粧淡雅, 恁丰姿堪描堪畫</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography

Works in Asian Languages


Dingjuan Chen Meigong xiansheng piping Xixiangji 鼎鑄陳眉公先生批評西廂記. Shijian tang
師儉堂, ca.1618. Reprinted in Guojia tushuguan cang shanben Xixiang ji congkan 國家

Dingjuan Chen Meigong xiansheng piping Pipa ji 鼎鐄陳眉公先生批評琵琶記. Shijian tang 師

Dingjuan Chen Meigong xiansheng piping Yougui ji 鼎鐄陳眉公先生批評幽閣記. Shijian tang

Dingjuan Chen Meigong xiansheng piping Xiuru ji 鼎鐄陳眉公先生批評繡襦記. Shijian tang
師儉堂, ca.1618. Taiwan National Central Library.

Dingjuan Chen Meigong xiansheng piping Yuzhan ji 鼎鐄陳眉公先生批評玉簪記. Shijian tang
師儉堂, ca.1618. Dalian Library.

Diliu caizi shu Xixiang ji 六才子書西廂記, Diqi caizi shu Pipa ji 第七才子書琵琶記, edited

Dong Jie 董捷. Ming Qing kan Xixiang ji banhua kaoxi 明清刊西廂記版畫考析. Shijia zhuang:

Fan Ye 范暉. Hou Han shu 後漢書. Reprinted in Wenyuange Siku quanshu 文淵閣四庫全書,
vols. 252-253.

Fang Bao 方苞, ed. Qinding sishu wen 欽定四書文. Reprinted in Wenyuange Siku quanshu 文淵
閣四庫全書, vol. 1451.

quanshu, vols. 255-256.


*Huifeng ting ping diqi caizi shu Pipa ji* 繪風亭評第七才子書琵琶記. *Yingxiu tang*, ca. 1723. Yale University Library.


*Pipa ji*, 4 vols, 琵琶記四卷, edited with commentary by Ling Mengchu 涼濤初. 1621-1627. Liaoning Provincial Library.


Qiyan Tangshi huapu 七言唐詩畫譜, edited by Huang Fengchi 黃鳳池. Jiya zhai, ca. 1616.


Works in European Languages


——. “Discourse, Examination, and Local Elite: The Invention of the T’ung-ch’eng School in Ch’ing China.” In *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600-1900*, edited by


———. “Performing Li Zhi: Li Zhuowu Fiction Commentaries.” In *The Objectionable Li Zhi: Fiction, Syncretism, and Dissent in Late Ming China*, edited by Rivi Handler-Spitz, Pauline C. Lee, and Haun Saussy (in preparation).


——. Desire and Fictional Narrative in Late Imperial China. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000.


Ma, Meng-ching. “Fragmentation and Framing of the Text: Visuality and Narrativity in Late-Ming Illustrations to *The Story of the Western Wing*.” Ph.D dissertation, Stanford University, Stanford, 2006.


