

CHINESE THEATRE: AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY THROUGH NUOXI AND MULIANXI

**Volume Two: From Storytelling
to Story-acting**

Xiaohuan Zhao



Chinese Theatre: An Illustrated History Through Nuoxi and Mulianxi

Chinese Theatre: An Illustrated History Through Nuoxi and Mulianxi is the first book in any language entirely devoted to a historical inquiry into Chinese theatre through Nuoxi and Mulianxi, the two most representative and predominant forms of Chinese temple theatre.

Volume Two is a continuation of the historical inquiry into Chinese theatre with focus shifted from Mulian storytelling to Mulian story-acting. Thus, this volume traces the historical trajectory of xiqu from Northern dramas to Southern dramas and from elite court theatre to mass regional theatre with pivotal forms and functions of Mulianxi examined, explicated and illustrated in association with the development of corresponding genres of xiqu. In so doing, every aspect of Mulianxi is considered not in the margins of xiqu but in and of itself. While this volume is primarily concerned with Mulianxi, references are also made to other forms of Chinese performing arts and temple theatre, Nuoxi in particular, as Mulianxi has been performed since the twelfth century as, or in company with, Nuoxi, to cleanse the community of evil spirits and epidemic diseases.

This is an interdisciplinary book project that is aimed to help researchers and students of theatre history understand the ritual origins of Chinese theatre and the dynamic relationships among myth, ritual, religion and theatre.

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Volume Two: From Storytelling
to Story-acting

Xiaohuan Zhao

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This illustration shows a scene from the '2005 Folk Performance of Mulianxi by Tongle Mulianxi Troupe in the "Birthplace" of Zheng Zhizhen's Mulian Drama,' 24 December 2005 in Qiupu, Shitai County, Anhui Province.



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To William Dolby (1936–2015)



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Abbreviations and conventions

Abbreviations

BJCJ	<i>Baojuan chuji</i>
CBETA	Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association
DZ	<i>Zhengtong daoze</i>
ESSS	<i>Ershisi shi</i>
GBXQCK	<i>Guben xiqu congkan</i>
MSQY	<i>Minsu quyì</i>
MSQYCS	<i>Minsu quyì congshu</i>
MZYS	<i>Minzu yishu</i>
QH	<i>Lidai quhua huibian</i>
QH_TSY	<i>QH Tang Song Yuan bian</i>
QH_M1	<i>QH Mingdai bian (diyi ji)</i>
QH_M2	<i>QH Mingdai bian (di'er ji)</i>
QH_M3	<i>QH Mingdai bian (disan ji)</i>
QH_Q1	<i>QH Qingdai bian (diyi ji)</i>
QH_Q2	<i>QH Qingdai bian (di'er ji)</i>
QH_Q3	<i>QH Qingdai bian (disan ji)</i>
QH_Q5	<i>QH Qingdai bian (diwu ji)</i>
QH_J2	<i>QH Jindai bian (di'er ji)</i>
QTS	<i>Quan Tangshi</i>
QTW	<i>Quan Tangwen</i>
SBCK	四部叢刊
SKQS	<i>Siku quanshu</i>
SKQSCMCS	<i>Siku quanshu cunmu congshu</i>
SSJZS	<i>Shisanjing zhushu</i>
TPYL	<i>Taiping yulan</i>
TPGJ	<i>Taiping guangji</i>
WYYJ	<i>Wenyan yanjiu</i>
XBZZJC	<i>Xinbian zhuzi jicheng</i>
XXSKQS	<i>Xuxiu Siku quanshu</i>
XQYJ	<i>Xiqu yanjiu</i>

YSBJ	<i>Yishu baijia</i>
ZGXLJ	<i>Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng</i>
ZHXQ	<i>Zhonghua xiqu</i>
ZZJC	<i>Zhuji jicheng</i>

Conventions

For Chinese Romanisation, Pinyin (without tone mark) is used throughout the book except in direct quotations. No Chinese characters are provided in the main text or endnotes for Chinese terms unless necessary to avoid confusion. Instead, a glossary for them is provided at the end of each volume of the book, where Pinyin is given followed by the *fantizi* (traditional scripts) even if originally published in *jiantizi* (simplified scripts). Likewise, only romaji and romaja are given in the main text and endnotes for Japanese and Korean terms with their form in kanji/kana or hanja/hangul provided in the glossary as are their Chinese counterparts.

Non-English words and expressions are italicised throughout the book except for proper nouns and major genres of Chinese theatre (including Chinese temple theatre), which are in general italicised on their first occurrence only.

For premodern Chinese texts, they are cited by title rather than by author. In such cases, the *juan* (scroll) number is also given, followed by period and page number. Some texts reprinted in traditional folio format, in pages with flattened recto/verso sides (often with more than one to a page), are also given sequential pagination in Arabic numerals. In such cases, the scroll and page number (with recto/verso indication) of the traditional format is cited.

Chronology of dynasties and periods

Early China

Xia: ca. 2100–ca. 1600 BC

Shang: ca. 1600–1046 BC

Zhou: 1045–256 BC

Western Zhou: 1045–771 BC

Eastern Zhou: 770–256 BC

Spring and Autumn Period: 770–476 BC

Warring States Period: 475–221 BC

Qin: 221–206 BC

Han: 206 BC–AD 220

Western Han: 206 BC–AD 25

Eastern Han: 25–220

Medieval China

Six Dynasties (220–589)

Three Kingdoms: 220–280

Cao Wei: 220–265

(Western) Shu: 221–263

(Eastern) Wu: 222–280

Jin: 266–420

Western Jin: 266–316

Eastern Jin: 317–420

Northern and Southern Dynasties: 420–589

Sui: 581–618

Tang: 618–907

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms: 907–960

Song: 960–1279

Northern Song: 960–1127

Southern Song: 1127–1279

Liao: 947–1125

Western Xia: 1038–1227

Jin: 1115–1234

Yuan: 1271–1368

Late Imperial/ Early Modern China

Ming: 1368–1644

Qing: 1644–1911

Modern and contemporary China

Republic: 1912–

Peoples' Republic: 1949–



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Part I

Mulianxi

From Northern dramas to
Southern dramas



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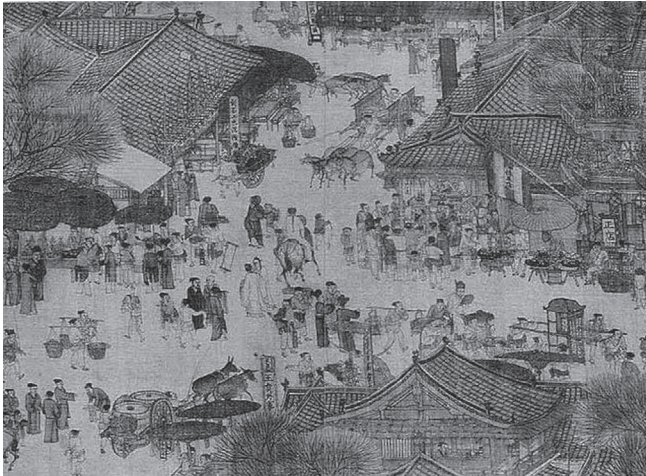
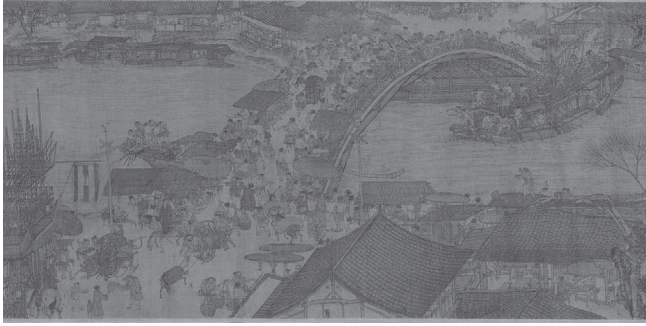
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1 Mulianxi in Northern dramas

The synthesis in the transformation narrative of various elements from Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism facilitated the sinicisation and syncretisation of the Mulian myth (Guo 2005: 94) and helped it reach a wide circulation across all sectors of society in late medieval China. At the same time, popular sūtra lectures, scripture-telling, storytelling and storysinging also contributed to the popularisation of the Mulian myth among the general public. During the Song dynasty, Mulian became a household name in China, and the ritual enactment of the myth of Mulian rescuing his mother from Hell became an integrated part of the Yulanpen/Zhongyuan Festival.

The Song dynasty is noted for a rapid growth of urbanisation and a burgeoning commercial entertainment culture marked by the appearance of the balustrade theatre (*goulan* or *gousi*) – China’s earliest form of commercial theatre – in the entertainment quarters of Song capital cities, Bianliang and Hangzhou. The Northern Song capital Bianliang was the world’s largest city in the eleventh century, with a population estimated at more than one million, as was Hangzhou (renamed Lin’an in 1138 as the capital of the Southern Song dynasty) in the twelfth century. The highly concentrated big population in capital cities and commercial centres brought about an unprecedented prosperity of popular entertainments and entertainment quarters. Take Bianliang for example. In the early twelfth century, it boasted nine entertainment quarters as recorded by Meng Yuanlao in his *Dream of the Splendour of the Eastern Capital* (*Dongjing menghua lu* 2.144–145, hereafter *Menghua lu*). Notable among them were the Entertainment Quarter of the Sang Family, the Central Entertainment Quarter and the Inner Entertainment Quarter. Within the nine entertainment quarters were more than fifty balustrade theatres of various size and capacity. The largest of them were The Lotus Theatre and the Peony Theatre in the Central Entertainment Quarter and the Yakṣa Theatre and the Elephant Theatre in the Inner Entertainment Quarter, each having a seating capacity of several thousand people.

Predominant among various forms of popular entertainment in the entertainment quarters were vaudeville revues that featured a mixture of song and dance, all keys and modes (*zhugongdiao*), grand suites (*daqu*), farce skits and comedy sketches, from which emerged Song zaju – the earliest form of Northern drama and also from which emerged the Song zaju play *Mulian Rescues His Mother*



Figures 1.1–1.2 Sections of *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* depicting respectively ‘Bridge Scene’ and ‘Urban Life’ along the Bian River in Bianliang. Handscroll (24.8 cm × 528.7 cm). Ink and colour on silk. Painted by Zhang Zeduan (1085–1145).

Source: Palace Museum, Beijing.

(*Mulian jiumu*) – the earliest recorded Song zaju play *and* the earliest recorded Mulianxi play as well.

Song Zaju

During the Song dynasty, variety show was in general referred to as *zaju*, a word which was also used to refer to any constituent ingredient of the variety show, in particular farce skit and sketch comedy. With the rise of entertainment industry, there emerged the first group of professional actors and entertainers who performed in commercial or cabaret settings rather than provide entertainment on command at royal/princely courts or official residences. Some of them acquired a



Figure 1.3 Part of a Southern Song remake of *Night Entertainment of Han Xizai* (*Han Xizai yeyan tu*). Handscroll. Ink and colour on silk. Size: 28.7 cm × 335.5 cm. Original by Gu Hongzhong (937–975) of the Southern Tang dynasty. Remake by Anonymous (fl. late twelfth century).

Source: Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 1.4 Tomb mural of musical ensemble of variety entertainment (*sanyue*). Size: 250 cm × 180 cm. Excavated from Zhang Shiqing Tomb dated the sixth year (1116) of Tianqing reign during the reign of Emperor Tianzuo of Liao. Xiabali Village, Xuanhua District, Zhangjiakou City, Hebei Province.

big name as *zaju* players in the entertainment quarters of Bianliang for their highly skilled performance, and notable among them were ‘Xiao Zhu’er, Ding Dusai, Xue Zida, Xue Zixiao, Yang Zongxi, Cui Shangshou, etc.’ (*Menghua lu* 7.688).

While *zaju* continued to be used into later dynasties to refer to variety theatre, the word became the common name for Yuan variety play (*zaju*). Also known as Yuan drama (*Yuanqu*) and Northern drama (*beiqu*), Yuan *zaju* is a full-fledged Northern-style *xiqu* that emerged in the early thirteenth century from Song *zaju*, flourished throughout the Yuan era (1271–1368) and dominated Chinese theatre for about one hundred fifty years.

The first recorded use of the word *zaju* appears in the *Standards for Counting and Dealing with Light and Heavy [Belongings]* (*Liangchu qingzhong yi*, T45n1895_001_0842c19), a Buddhist Vinaya scripture compiled in 637 and



Figure 1.5 Song zaju performance featuring two female cross-dressing actors. Anonymous artist (Southern Song). Ink and colour on silk. Size: 24 cm × 24.3 cm.

Source: Palace Museum, Beijing.



Figure 1.6 A group of four pictorial bricks, found in late Northern Song dynasty tomb, represents (from left to right) famous zaju actors of the time, Yang Zongxi, Ding Dusai, Ao Lian'er and Xue Zixiao.

Source: Zhengzhou Museum of Chinese Culture and Art (Zhengzhou huaxia wenhua yishu bowuguan), Zhengzhou City, Henan Province.

revised in 667 by the renowned Tang dynasty monk Daoxuan (596–667) to set out precepts for dealing with the possessions left behind by deceased monks and nuns and other related monastic matters. In the section on ‘Various Implements for Entertainment’ (*zhu zayue ju*) of this Buddhist text, there is an entry for ‘Implements for Miscellaneous Games’ (*zaju xiju*). Listed as *zaju* in the entry are gambling games (*pubo*), chess games, board games (*liubo*), dice games, arrow-throwing pitch-pot games (*touhu*) and the like. Also grouped into this section are three other entries, respectively, for ‘Eight Categories of Musical Instruments’ (*bayin zhi yue*), ‘Costumes and Cosmetics’ (*fushi zhi ju*) and ‘Props that are used’ (*suoyong xiju*) for ‘puppetry, pole dance, lion dance, white horse dance,



Figure 1.7 A group of seven pictorial bricks, 28 cm high \times 14–21 cm wide, depicting zaju performance. Excavated in 1979 from a tomb of the Wei family dated the sixteenth year (1279) of Zhiyuan, in Wulingzhuang Village, Xinjiang County, Shanxi Province.

Source: Shanxi Museum.



Figure 1.8 Rubbing of a three-panel stone carving depicting from top to bottom scenes of music and dance, *liubo* game and man feeding horse with a *yaoche* (chariot-style carriage) behind him, respectively. Size: 108 cm long \times 58 cm wide \times 60 cm thick. Excavated in 1944 from an Eastern Han tomb. Gusihui, Peixian County, Xuzhou City, Jiangsu Province.

Source: Xuzhou Art Museum of Han Stone Carvings.

and entertainers doing impressions, impersonations and magic', which are also frequently referred to as *zaxi* or variety games in Sui (581–618)-Tang (618–907) Buddhist texts such as the *Scripture on the Great Dharma Torch Dhāranī* (*Dafaju Tuoluoni jing*,¹ T21n1340_015_0731a01) and Monk Mingkuang's (d. 623) *Commentary on the Tiantai Bodhisattva Precepts* (*Tiantai pusajie su*, T40n1812_002_0595b25).

Clearly, neither *zaju* nor *zaxi* in the Buddhist scriptures refers to any form of performing arts but instead a miscellany of games that constitutes a varied programme of monastic entertainment together with musical performance, theatrical performance and circus performance such as acrobatic shows and animal dances. Unsurprisingly, Monk Daoxuan denounces the ‘variety entertainment’ (*zayue*) as ‘dissolute and voluptuary’ (*dangyi*), stipulating a mandatory confiscation of the listed implements (*Liangchu qingzhong yi*, T45n1895_001_0842c24). These Buddhist texts, however, reveal the popularity of variety entertainment among



Figure 1.9 Part of Transformation Tableau of the Western Pure Land (*Xifang jingtu bian*, also known as *Amituo jing bian* or Transformation Tableau of the *Amitābha Sūtra*), depicting a scene of music and dance in Buddhist Monastery. Dunhuang Grotto No. 112. Tang dynasty.



Figure 1.10 A small section of Transformation Tableau of *Sūtra on the Previous and Future Lives of Maitreya* (*Mile shangsheng xiasheng jing bian*), featuring a female entertainer dressed in red performing the *Green Waist Dance* (*Lüyao wu*), a popular dance of the Tang dynasty. Dunhuang Grotto No. 445. Tang dynasty.



Figure 1.11 Xiqu performance in Wuyemiao, a temple dedicated to Dragon King of Universal Salvation, Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (Guangji longwang Wenshu pusa, locally called Wuye or Lord the Fifth). Built in the Qing dynasty at the foot of Mt Wutai, one of the four most famous sacred mountains in Chinese Buddhism.

monastics in late medieval China – not to mention lay people, and also suggests an important role that monastics may have played in fostering the development of variety entertainment in the Tang dynasty.

It seems that not until the ninth century did *zaju* become a term for stage performing arts as evidenced by a memorial to the throne submitted in 829 by Li Deyu (787–850), the then Chancellor of the Tang dynasty. In the memorial, Li offered a brief account of southern barbarians plundering the counties of Huayang and Chengdu under the jurisdiction of Chengdu Prefecture in Sichuan and capturing eighty people. Among them were ‘musicians, entertainers and artisans’ (*yinyue jiqiao*), including two ‘male *zaju* actors’ (*zaju zhangfu*). As they were all employed by the local government to provide entertainment, the word *zaju* here cannot be understood as referring to a gameplay but a form of variety entertainment, as they were commonly referred to as in Song dynasty sources. It is not absolutely clear as to whether *zaju* meant ‘variety show’ or ‘variety skit’ or both in the memorial, but one thing is certain: there had been official *zaju* performances in southwestern China by the early ninth century. And we may further infer that there had also been *zaju* performances in Chang’an the capital city and elsewhere in the Tang Empire by the early ninth century or even earlier.

Now we know that the term *zaju* was used in at least four senses in late medieval China. Aside from denoting a variety of playing, gaming and gambling activities in the Tang era, *zaju* referred to variety show in general and farce skit or sketch comedy in particular, performed as part of the variety show in the Song-Jin court and entertainment quarters, and also referred to as Yuan *zaju*.

Somewhat confusing as it is, the multiple use of the word *zaju* is strongly suggestive of a close historical link between *baixi* and *zaju* and also a close relationship between Song *zaju* and Yuan *zaju* (West 1986: 15). At the same time, it

demonstrates clearly that the development of *zaju* as a theatrical tradition was limited neither to the Song court nor to the commercial theatre in Song capital entertainment quarters (West 1981: 456). Unfortunately, not a single Song *zaju* play has survived except for 280 titles of the so-called ‘official *zaju* scripts’ (*guanben zaju*) recorded by Zhou Mi (1232–1298) in *Bygone Events of Hangzhou* (*Wulin jiushi* 10.245–250).²

Jin Yuanben

The Northern Song dynasty came to an end in 1127 when the Jurchens took Bianliang. The Song court was forced to move its capital south of the Yangtze



Figures 1.12–1.13 A group of four reliefs carved on two pieces of rough natural stone, each measuring 51 cm × 43 cm, depicting scenes of Song *zaju* performance in Sichuan. Three of them show a duet face-to-face *zaju* show and one of them feature three musicians (from left to right) playing the double-headed hourglass drum (*zhanggu* or *xiyaogu*), the *bili* pipe and the big drum (*dagu*), respectively. Excavated in 1975 from a tomb dated the fourth year (1204) of Jiatai during the Southern Song dynasty.



Figure 1.14 Scene from Song zaju play *The Eye Doctor* (*Yanyao suan*). Anonymous (Southern Song dynasty). Ink and colour on silk. H. 23.8 cm, W. 24.5 cm.

Source: Palace Museum, Beijing.

to Hangzhou and continued as the Southern Song dynasty. From that time onwards, China was divided between the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) in the North and the Song dynasty in the South until 1279 when China was reunited under the rule of the Mongol Yuan (1271–1368). However, the dynastic changes seem to have had little damaging impact on entertainment quarters in Bianliang. Rather, they continued to develop and remained popular places for variety show under the new Jurchen regime. In 1169 or forty-two years after the Jiankang Incident, which marked the end of the Northern Song era, Lou Yue (1137–1213), a Southern Song dynasty envoy to the Jurchen Jin court, stopped at Bianliang en route from Lin'an to Zhongdu (modern Beijing), finding to his surprise that the entertainment quarters had grown so large over these years that they even encroached upon the famous Daxiangguosi Temple,³ as noted in his *Daily Records of My Journey to the North* (*Beixing rilu*) (*Gongkui ji* 111.16a-b).

While surviving evidence about Jurchen Jin theatre is meagre, existing records show that banquet music, court ritual music and variety entertainment remained popular and that Song zaju continued to be performed as somewhat of yuanben.

The Chinese word *yuan* means 'court' or 'courtyard', *ben* means 'text' or 'script', hence the literary translation of *yuanben* as 'court text', which, however,

hardly makes any sense without context. In the *Formulary of the Correct Sounds of Supreme Harmony* (*Taihe zhengyin pu*, hereafter *Zhengyin pu*), the early Ming Prince Zhu Quan (1378–1448), a theatre enthusiast and a playwright himself, interprets *yuan* as ‘guild’ (*hangyuan*) and *yuanben* as abbreviated from the longer phrase *hangyuan zhi ben*, meaning ‘scripts from the guild [of actors]’ (*Zhengyin pu* 1.90), which is further interpreted by Wang Guowei (2007: 56) and Hu Ji (2008: 12–13) as scripts from the guild of courtesans, entertainers, prostitutes, minstrels and beggars who made a living in entertainment quarters in Song and Jin capital cities.



Figure 1.15 Mural depicts five actors (including a drummer) performing *yuanben*. Ink and colour on brick wall. East wall of Tomb M1 from the Jin dynasty. Xiguan Village, Pingding County, Shanxi Province.



Figure 1.16 Brick sculpture shows five actors performing *Yuanben* onstage. Stage dimensions: 66 cm wide × 80 cm high × 10 cm deep. Unearthed in 1982 from a tomb dated the twenty-sixth year (1186) of Dading during the Jin dynasty. Jiangcun Village, Anyang County, Henan Province.

Song Zaju/Jin Yuanben

In a mid-fourteenth-century collection of anecdotal accounts and research jottings titled *Nancun's Notes upon Rest from the Plough* (*Nancun chuogeng lu*, hereafter *Chuogeng lu*),⁴ Tao Zongyi (b. 1316) lists a total of 711 titles (exclusive of two duplicates) under the 'Catalogue of Court Texts' ('Yuanben minglu') and offers a brief yet very important explanation of *zaju* and *yuanben*:⁵

The Tang dynasty had marvel tales (*chuanqi*), the Song dynasty had opera songs (*xiqu*), risqué singing (*changhun*) and prosimetric storytelling (*cishuo*), and the Jin dynasty had *yuanben/zaju* and all keys and modes (*zhugongdiao*). *Yuanben* and *zaju* were actually one and the same. Not until our [Yuan] dynasty did they begin to be named distinctly from each other.

(*Chuogeng lu* 25.306)

Thus, we know that *yuanben* was, in fact, an alternative name of *zaju* and that Song *zaju* as a form of *xiqu* continued to be performed into the Yuan period when it started to be named *yuanben* so as to be distinguished from each other in terms of the era in which they were produced.

Interestingly, in the preface to his *Green Bower Collection* (*Qinglou ji*) – a collection of anecdotal accounts of 116 singing girls and courtesan-entertainers who were active from the late thirteenth century to the mid-fourteenth century – Tao's older contemporary Xia Tingzhi, a native of Huating in modern Shanghai where Tao lived in retirement, expressed a very similar comment on *zaju/yuanben* (*Qinglou ji* 469). Xia's comment was later quoted by Zhu Quan (1378–1448) Prince of Ning, as evidence to support his view that Song *zaju* and Jin *yuanben* were one and the same genre of theatre (*Zhengyin pu* 1.90).

Clearly, Tao's catalogue, categorisation and comment reflect the performance and perception of *yuanben* in the late Yuan and the early Ming eras, but Tao makes no mention of the period in which the *yuanben* plays on the list of the *Chuogeng lu* were produced. To make matters worse, not a single Song *zaju* or Jin *yuanben* text has survived except for a few fragments preserved in Yuan and Ming *zaju*,⁶ so it remains debatable as to whether they were Song, Jin or Yuan products. Basically, there are three different views on this issue. Wang Guowei (2007: 56), for example, dates them to the Jin era, describing them as a more sophisticated form of Song *zaju*; Aoki Masaru (2010: 21), a leading Japanese expert on Ming-Qing *xiqu*, agrees with Wang in principle except that he does not exclude the possibility of some Yuan *yuanben* finding their way into Tao's catalogue of Jin *yuanben*. Unlike Wang and Aoki, Zheng Zhenduo (2005: 260) regards the *yuanben* catalogue in the *Chuogeng lu* more or less as a continuation of that of the Southern Song 'official *zaju* scripts' recorded by Zhou Mi on the grounds that *yuanben* and *zaju* were one and the same, differing only in name. Accordingly, he considers those listed in the *Chuogeng lu* to be products of the Jin-Yuan era. In contrast, Liao and Liu (2013: 1.264) declare that what was called *zaju* in the Song dynasty was still referred to and performed as *zaju* in Jurchen-controlled northern China

and that it was not until the Yuan dynasty that Song-Jin zaju was renamed *yuanben* to avoid confusion with Yuan zaju. They further claim that the *Chuogeng lu* list of *yuanben* is actually a catalogue of Yuan *yuanben* rather than that of Song-Jin zaju.

So far, no agreement has been reached on the issue among historians of Chinese theatre, but none of them denies the closeness between *zaju* and *yuanben* in style, structure and subject matter.⁷ In the earliest extant catalogue of Yuan playwrights and their works titled *Register of Ghosts* (*Lugui bu*, prefaced 1330), Zhong Sicheng (ca. 1279–ca. 1360) hardly makes any mention of *yuanben* writers or their works. This helps to strengthen Wang and Aoki's belief that the *yuanben* pieces listed in the *Chuogeng lu* were mostly works produced in the Jin period.

Role types

The role-type or role-category (*jiaose*) system is one of the most distinctive features of xiqu. A role type is not a role (*juese*) played by a character, nor is it a functional category defined in terms of the sphere(s) of actions of dramatic personae such as 'hero', 'villain', 'helper', 'donor', 'initiator', and so on (Zhao 2005: 166–167), but instead a symbolic one characterised by highly stylised yet recognisable costuming, vocal technique, body language, facial expression and make-up that are conventionally associated with a particular type of role or character. The two earliest established role types are the Adjutant (*canjun*) and the Grey Hawk (*canghu*) in Adjutant plays (*canjun xi*) (Wang 2009: 6, 13) – a form of farce skits with its roots traceable to court entertainment (*youxi*) performed by professional entertainers (*changyou*) such as jesters (*paiyou* or *youren*) and female entertainers (*nüyue*) in early China. A typical Adjutant play would involve two characters played respectively by



Figure 1.17 Green-glazed pottery *canjun xi* figurines of the Adjutant (on the left) and the Grey Hawk (on the right). Unearthed in 1957 from the tomb of Xianyu Tinghui (660–723), a powerful military officer during the reign of Tang Xuanzong (r. 712–756). Hecun Village, Sanqiao Town, Xi'an City.

Source: National Museum of China.



Figure 1.18 Tang tri-coloured (*Tang sancai*) figurines of the Grey Hawk (on the left) and the Adjutant (on the right). Unearthed in 1991 from the tomb of Princess of Jinxiang County (Jinxiang xianzhu), dated the twelfth year (724) of Kaiyuan..

Source: Xi'an Museum, Xi'an City, Shaanxi Province.

canjun and *canghua* with the former dressed in a green official robe to impersonate an official (*jiaguan*) (possibly corrupt) and harangued and humiliated by the latter (*Yuefu zalu* 28–29), hence its alternative names of ‘impersonated-official play’ (*jiaguan xi*) (*Yinhua lu* 1.2a) and ‘the Adjutant in Green’ (*lüyi canjun*) (*Yingshi* 10.13b).

Song-Yuan written sources

Compared with the two-actor/character Adjutant play of the Tang dynasty, Song *zaju* has a larger cast of characters, numbering four to five on average, and correspondingly requires a larger role-type system. The number of role types thus increases from two in the Adjutant play to five in Song *zaju*/Jin *yuanben*, hence the ‘five role types of comedians’ (*wuhua cuanlong*).

Tao Zongyi provides a brief description of this system in his research jottings:

There are five people in *yuanben*. One is called the second clown (*fujing*), who was called in ancient times the Adjutant; one is called the second male lead (*fumo*), who was called in ancient times the Grey Hawk. A hawk can strike fowls and birds and the male lead (*mo*) can strike the second clown, hence their names. One is called the play usher (*yinxi*); one is called the male lead (*moni*); and one is called the act-official (*guzhuang*). They are also called *wuhua cuanlong*. Some say that Emperor Huizong of Song saw some people from the country of Cuan⁸ come to court, wearing robes, shoes, head clothes as well as face makeup. They behaved and dressed up in such a manner that the Emperor had his court jesters imitate them in drama to make fun of them.

(*Chuogeng lu* 25.306)

Among the ‘five role types of comedians’, the *fujing* and the *fumo*, which are direct descendants of the Adjutant and the Grey Hawk respectively, are the two central role categories and have the major parts in the performance.

Xia Tingzhi gives a very similar account of the role-type system in a preface dated 1379 to his *Green Bower Collection* (*Qinglou ji* 469). Similar discussions and descriptions of role types in Song *zaju* also appear in the earlier Southern Song nostalgic memoirs about the urban life of Lin’an, such as Guanpu naideweng’s (pseud. fl. 1235) *Record of the Splendours of the Capital City* (*Ducheng jisheng* 113–114), Wu Zimu’s (fl. 1264–1274) *Record of a Golden Millet Dream* (*Mengliang lu* 126) and Zhou Mi’s *Bygone Events of Hangzhou* (*Wulin jiushi* 4.109–119). Especially interesting to us is a detailed account provided by Zhou Mi of the Three Variety Skit Groups (*zaju sanjia*):

One group, headed by Liu Jingchang, has eight people: Li Quanxian the play leader (*xitou*); Wu Xingyou the play usher (*yinx*); Mao Shanchong, Hou Liang and Zhou Tai the second clown (*cijing*); Wang Xi the second male lead (*fumo*); and Sun Zigui the cross-dressing female lead (*zhuangdan*).



Figure 1.19 A set of five figurines carved onto bricks, each measuring 37 cm long × 17 cm wide × 4.3 cm thick, representing from left to right five types of characters in Song *zaju*, i.e. *fujing*, *fumo*, *zhuanggu*, *moni* and *yinx*, respectively. Unearthed in 1991 from a Northern Song dynasty tomb in Xiguan sanjie, Wenxian County, Jiaozuo City, Henan Province.

Source: Henan Museum.



Figure 1.20 Rubbing of brick carvings in high relief of a set of five Song *zaju* figurines representing from left to right *moni*, *zhuanggu*, *fumo*, *yinx* and *fujing*, respectively. Size ranging from 35 cm to 36 cm in height and from 21 cm to 23 cm in width. Collected in 1967–1968 in Wenxian County, Henan Province.

Source: Wenxian County Museum.



Figure 1.21 Rubbing of a group of five figurines carved on three bricks, featuring (from left to right) *moni*, *fumu*, *fujing*, *yinxi* and *zhuanggu*. Excavated in 1958 from a Northern Song dynasty tomb west of Jiuliugou Reservoir, Yanshi County, Henan Province.

Source: Henan Museum.



Figure 1.22 Brick carvings of five *zaju* figurines representing (from left to right) *yinxi*, *zhuanggu*, *fumo*, *moni* and *fujing*. Unearthed from a Northern Song dynasty tomb in Wenxian County.

Source: Zhengzhou Museum of Chinese Culture and Art..

One group, headed by Gai Menqing, has five people in its Band for Offering Incense: Sun Zigui the play leader; Wu Xingyou the play usher; Hou Liang the second clown; and Wang Xi the second male lead, and this group has five people in its Band for the Inner-Court Command Performances: Sun Zigui the play leader; Pan Langxian the play usher; Liu Gun the second clown; and Liu Xin the second male lead. One group, headed by Pan Langxian, has five people: Sun Zigui the play leader; Guo Mingxian the play usher; Zhou Tai the second clown; and Cheng Gui the second male lead.

(*Wulin jiushi* 4.116–117)

Earlier on in the journal entry for the Variety Skit Group (*zaju se*), a troupe of *zaju* actors based at the Palace of Virtue and Longevity (Deshougong) under the supervision of the Court Entertainment Bureau (*Jiaofangsi*) during the Qian-Chun period (1162–1189) of the Southern Song dynasty, Zhou Mi introduces Liu Jingchang as the Envoy (*shichen*) of the Variety Skit Group; Wang Xi as the Head Gentleman for Protection of Justice (*baoyilang tou*) and the Overseeing Envoy

Table 1.1 Role types in Song zaju/Jin Yuanben.

<i>Mengliang lu</i>	<i>Ducheng jisheng</i>	<i>Wulin jiushi</i>	<i>Chuogeng lu</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
<i>moni</i>	<i>moni</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>moni</i>	<i>male lead</i>
<i>yinxi</i>	<i>yinxi</i>	<i>yinxi</i>	<i>yinxi</i>	<i>play usher</i>
<i>fujing</i>	<i>fujing</i>	<i>cijing</i>	<i>fujing</i>	<i>second clown</i>
<i>fumo</i>	<i>fumo</i>	<i>fu/ci/fumo/cimo</i>	<i>fumo</i>	<i>second male lead</i>
<i>zhuanggu</i>	<i>zhuanggu</i>		<i>guzhuang</i>	<i>act-official</i>
		<i>xitou</i> ¹⁰		<i>play leader</i>
		<i>zhuangdan</i>		<i>act-female</i>

(*duguan shichen*); Mao Shanchong as the Head of Grass Sprouts (*maoya tou*); Gai Mengqing as the male lead (*mo*); Hou Liang or Big-Headed Hou (Hou Datou) as the second male lead; Li Quanxian and Wu Xingyou as the Play Usher and the Dancer of the Dance of the Three Daises (*yin jian wu santai*); Pan Langxian as a play usher, a male lead and a section leader (*yin jian mo butou*); Zhou Tai as the second clown; Guo Mingxian as the play usher; Liu Xin as a second male lead and a section leader (*fu butou*); and Cheng Gui as a second male lead (*fu*) (*Wulin jiushi* 4.109).⁹

From the records in the aforementioned Song and Yuan sources, which is represented in Table 1.1, it is clear that a five role-type system had been firmly established in Song zaju by the early thirteenth century at the latest.

If we accept the descriptions in the quoted Song and Yuan sources as a veritable account of Song zaju/Jin yuanben, we may make the following inferences with reasonable certainty: (1) the role-type system of xiqu first appeared during the Tang dynasty in the Adjutant play with the *canjun* and the *canghu* as the two earliest role types; (2) the *canjun* and *canghu* evolve respectively into the *fumu* and *fujing* in Song-Jin zaju/yuanben; (3) the *fumu* and the *fujing* are the two primary role categories, whereas the *mo/moni*, *yinxi* and *zhuanggu/guzhuang* are secondary; (4) a Song zaju/Jin yuanben performance group usually consists of five to eight actors and each of them is assigned to one or more role types apart from some administrative or service roles.

Tomb murals and brick and stone carvings

We may further reasonably infer that the development of the role-type system must have started in the Northern Song before becoming firmly established in the South under the Southern Song and in the North under the Jurchen Jin, although there is no mention of role types in the memoir written by Meng Yuanlao shortly after the fall of the Northern Song in 1127.

Stone and brick carvings and murals from tombs provide valuable archaeological evidence for the development of zaju role types in the eleventh century (Yan 2006), as shown in Figure 1.26 in a mural found in a late Northern Song tomb.

The tomb mural depicts a theatrical performance scene. Among the seventeen people in the mural, twelve are musicians, who are arrayed in an upside V-shaped



Figures 1.23–1.24 Miniature stage built into north wall with five sculpted and coloured Jin yuanben figurines standing in a row performing onstage. Stage dimensions: 65 cm (frontal width) × 18.5 cm (depth) × 101 cm (height). Figurine heights from left to right: 20.6 cm, 21.4 cm, 22.1 cm, 20 cm, and 19.4 cm. Excavated from Dong Family Tomb dated the second year (1210) of Da'an in the Jin dynasty. Houma County, Linfen City, Shanxi Province.

Source: Shanxi Museum.

formation with ten men standing in three rows on the left side and two women standing side by side on the right side. At the far left are six male musicians, each holding a double-reed bamboo flute (*bili*). In the front row close to the centre are four male musicians: two of them are each holding an hourglass-shaped drum (*jiegu*); between them is a drummer; the rightmost man in the front row is holding a wooden clapper (*paiban*) on his right shoulder.¹¹ The two female musicians are standing at the far right opposite their male counters, each holding a vertical